

SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

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Social History in Museums

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Front Cover Illustration
Stooks being loaded onto a cart at Kittochside
(Museum of Scottish Country Life)

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.

SHCG is a point of contact for other organisations, as well as its own members. It represents the interests and concerns of members liaising with Regional Agencies, Federations, the Museums Association and Re:source.

The Group organises seminars throughout the 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. There is also a SHCG website and the Group is responsible for the firstBASE database.

Social History in Museums is produced annually and is issued to all members. Back issues are available via the Editor. Articles, reviews and books for review should be sent to the Editor c/o Littlehampton Museum, Manor House, Church Street, Littlehampton, West Sussex BN17 5EW. SHCG does not accept responsibility for the opinions expressed by the contributors.

In many ways, all the articles in this edition of the Journal are concerned with identity and the communities, lifestyles and beliefs that people do, and have based their sense of identity on. They seek to celebrate local distinctiveness as is the case with the paper from Sue Clifford, and understand local experience in places like Rotherham (Ceryl Evans) and Staffordshire (Chris Copps). However, they also aim show how those specific experiences fit into a wider picture. Brenda Jones' article on contemporary collecting in the countryside shows how the Museum of English Rural Life has been documenting rural life at a national and local level.

The majority of the articles in this volume derive from the 2003 Annual Study Weekend when delegates looked at regional identity, and in particular how urban and rural museums contribute to a sense of place. Many of the papers look at specific projects that sought to engage with diverse city and regional identities and with the changing face of the countryside.

These papers make clear how museums are seeking to identify and celebrate the experience of communities and individuals, whilst also aiming to empower those involved and increase tolerance towards those communities through better understanding. In the current climate of fear about immigration, the work of projects such as those described by Catherine Rew, Linda Rosen and Helen Coxall is indeed timely. Moreover, at a time when the division between town and country over issues such as hunting seems very stark, the work of Kittochside, outlined by Elaine Edwards, to build a bridge between urban and rural living seems perhaps more important than ever. The Garden City movement sought to bring town and country together in a very different way as Robert Lancaster explains.

These articles also celebrate the wealth of material culture and other sources that are available to museums to build a picture of people's lives and in Crispin Paine's paper, beliefs. The work of the Geffrye Museum (Kathy Haslam and Annabelle Campbell) in reconstructing some very different domestic interiors testifies to this. They ultimately challenge us to portray all aspects of the lives of the communities we represent, both past and present.

Rebecca Fardell
Editor

Contributors

Annabelle Campbell is Assistant Curator at the Geffrye Museum, London.

Sue Clifford is Director of Common Ground.

Chris Copp is Museums Officer for Staffordshire Arts and Museum Service.

Helen Coxhall is a museum language consultant and researcher at the University of Westminster.

Elaine Edwards is Curator of the Museum of Scottish Rural Life, Kittinghside.

Ceryl Evans was Community Curator of Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham and is now Head of Museums and Arts in Harrogate.

Kathy Haslam is Assistant Curator at the Geffrye Museum, London.

Brenda Jones is Project Officer at the Museum of English Rural Life.

Robert Lancaster is Curator of The First Garden City Heritage Museum, Letchworth.

Lloyd Langley is House Manager of Wallingford House, Northumberland and formerly worked on the Freemason Hall project at Beamish Museum.

Crispin Paine is a museum consultant and editor of the journal 'Material Religion: the Journal of Objects, Art and Belief'.

Catherine Rew is Curator of the People's History Museum, Manchester.

Linda Rosen was the Assistant Curator (Moving Here) at Leeds Museums and Galleries. She is now the Moving Here Outreach and Community Officer.

SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

CONTENTS

Sue Clifford	Celebrating Local Distinctiveness	1
Ceryl Evans	Collections, Communities and Memories: Making Rotherham's Heritage Accessible	9
Brenda Jones	Contemporary Collecting in the Countryside 2003	15
Chris Copp	<i>Pastures New?</i> Recording Contemporary Rural Concerns	25
Elaine Edwards	Education or Entertainment: Interpreting Rural Issues to a Mixed Audience	31
Robert Lancaster	The Third Alternative: Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City Movement	39
Kathy Haslam	Reinhabited Spaces: Putting Pensioners Back in their Place	47
Annabelle Campbell	From Almshouse to Warehouse: Research at the Geffrye Museum	53
Linda Rosen	<i>Moving Here:</i> the Leeds Experience	61
Catherine Rew	Work and Migration Across Europe: an International Collaboration	67
Helen Coxall	<i>A Home from Home:</i> Empowering a Community	79
Crispin Paine	'It Works for Me!' Presenting Popular Religion in Museums	89
Lloyd Langley	Book Review <i>Craft and Conflict: Masonic Trench Art and Military Memorabilia</i> Mark JR Dennis and Nicholas J Saunders (2003)	99

Celebrating Local Distinctiveness

Sue Clifford

Creating the circumstances for local knowledge and professional expertise to inform each other, Common Ground pioneers imaginative ways of reweaving the local world. We try to inspire people to join in the exploration of richness of everyday places, popular culture, common wildlife, ordinary buildings and landscapes, to revalue our emotional engagement with places and all that they mean to us and to go on to become actively involved in their care.

Common Ground coined the term *Local Distinctiveness* which is about differentiating our everyday surroundings and the meaning that places have to us. It is an expression of the accumulation of story upon history upon natural history that results as we work with (or against) nature to shape the land, make a living and live our lives. It is about buildings and landscapes, city streets and farming patterns, recipes, language, customs and festivals and more. By focussing attention on significance in our surroundings and helping build courage to be demonstrative about our attachment to place, then perhaps we can do better for both nature and culture.

Our work promoting Parish Maps has provided ample evidence of the importance of detail. We pose the question - what do you value in your place? - and suggest people work communally on the charting of things that have significance to them. In Selsey, West Sussex, the Lifeboat Shed with its long piered structure, the watchtower, the many mallards which waddle across roads leading their ducklings, railway coaches turned beach dwellings, thrift, memories of tornadoes and of Lobby Ludd on the beach. In Sunderland cranes and starfish, '*haway the lads*' and housing estates fill the many maps created by the city schools. Of course much is achieved in the making of the Parish Map: broadening of tolerance to other's preferences; sudden understanding of what something is or means - the bollard which really is an old cannon; the dialect words for streams and the sharing of stories which reinforce one's attachment to the place. Many Parish Maps continue to be created since the classics of the 1980s such as the 25 foot 'tapestry' wall hanging in the library in Thirsk in Yorkshire

which goes on outings to public inquiries, printed posters exhibited in the pub and sent to relatives in Australia as at Chideock in Dorset.

In addition to detail, continuity is important to people. There is recognition that being able to sense how a place has accumulated helps ground people, hence the upsets when an area of the city or a piece of farmland is totally cleared for development. Is it capitalism which thrives on 'progress' being marketed and interpreted as wiping the slate clean to create the new? It is one of the unnecessary and offensive modes of the *grands projects* of Modernism and now globalisation.

There is an unhealthy pushing away with the categorising of old things into *heritage* and the *past*. We have tried to help people focus on the notion of continuing history, with the jostling of things of many ages on the stage of the present giving us constant touchstones and fragments through which to tell our stories and feel embedded.

Orchards emerged as one exemplar for demonstrating richness and difference. Traditional tall tree orchards vary greatly and subtly from place to place. They offer great examples of how well we and nature can work together. They were once associated with every farm and many towns as well as stately home gardens. As ordered woods they enliven the landscape with blossom and fruit, as wood pasture they link birds, bees and butterflies, they are celebrated in song and wassailing, food and drink. They focus much knowledge about growing, grafting and pruning and have prompted the creation of machinery and buildings for storage and drink making. Cherries, pears, nuts, damsons, plums are associated with actual places as well as hundreds of cider varieties and more than 2,300 culinary and eating varieties of apples. Since our orchard work began in 1988 local activities have resulted in 'extinct' varieties being rediscovered (the Red Rollo and White Transparent apples in Cornwall for example), community and school orchards being created, a wider range of varieties being demanded and planted again. Worcester city is taking care of its Black pears, emblems in the coat of arms; Yorkshire is searching for its home grown varieties; the damson is making a come back in the Lythe Valley in Cumbria; the Kent cob is undergoing an economic resurgence and on a domestic level Turkish people from London are building relationships with cob platt owners and returning annually to pick nuts and enjoy the freedom of a place out of the city. Apple Day,

which we initiated in Covent Garden in 1990, is now celebrated on or near to 21st October by hundreds of places and thousands of people.

People are using fruit to re-establish identity, rebuild connections with the land.

In our current work we are, in a sense, quarrying our own history and aiming to help people to get under the surface of their place.

We are researching and writing a big book, *England in Particular*, to be published by Hodder & Stoughton in 2005. It will be a celebration of detail from apples and bricks, cars and coes to winterbournes and zawns. We have chosen to disaggregate, using the alphabet to organise us, rather than to explore geographically. This allows us to compare things whilst encouraging the reader to move towards a way of looking and a philosophy which will enable them to fit things together in their own context. Why England? The rich range of peoples and places is more than enough to start with... we hope to see the world in this grain of sand.

Back lanes, Eid mela, factories, fairs, ferries, gasometers, granite, horticultural shows, inn signs, knitting patterns, lighthouses, lost villages, mumming plays, paraging, pele towers, potholes, power stations, public loos, quays, ridge and furrow, salt mines, seamists/frets, suburbs, swifts, wind farms - we are ranging wide and deep and looking forward by seeking for examples of the best of the new, things to aspire to which reinforce the identity of the place rather than dilute and homogenize. We are interested in country, city, suburb and of course in continuing history. I offer an example entry:

Pit Tips

At Underwood in Nottinghamshire small conical hillocks covered with conifers speak of a flurry of beautification long before planting trees as carbon sinks and the Kyoto Protocol became the talk of global warming. Only when you scramble up the steep slope do you realise through your fingernails that shaley coal lies just below the surface.

"Along the ridge of the great pit-hill crawled a little group in silhouette against the sky, a horse, a small truck, and a man. They climbed the incline against the heavens. At the end the man tipped the waggon. There was an enormous rattle as the waste fell down the sheer slope of the enormous bank." (DHL Sons and Lovers

p152) Later in the 20th Century small collieries getting rid of coal spoil would deliver it from a high moving belt, both ways made for steep slopes and rounded or long hills. These punctuate the horizons of so many northern villages and towns. Many are now part of the loved landscape, naturally regenerated or planted. Local people know what they are underneath - they are a memory of the hard work of many grandfathers.

It was not unusual in the 1950's to see pit heaps smoking, spontaneous combustion leaving them burning dangerously for years; the fumes and the tales stay with you, of children lost whilst innocently playing on a thin crust above a fiery inferno. As the M1 was cut through Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire many tips, long quiet, cooled and colonised by grasses and birch scrub were suddenly quarried for burnt shale for roadstone: bright red-orange scars appeared and then were gone, whole hills removed. A further form of repeated radical and lucrative landscape exploitation, for many have since become industrial enclaves and business parks.

Nationalisation, postwar economics and new technologies began to encourage greater output from fewer men and fewer mines. Collieries closed, men started to commute to deeper mines further away where their underground journey might take them a further 5-10 miles (under the North Sea in the case of County Durham). Huge spoil heaps began to rise on the flanks of hills, out of valleys. A hill the size of Silbury could be created in a few shifts, but we are speaking of years of dumping. The bulldozers shifting and grading the massive whalebacks, homage to drivers not colliers, take away the horizon altogether. Travelling along the M1 in south Yorkshire one watches the changes. Giant earthworks, some now covered in grass with cattle grazing (after much experiment), unsettle the seasoned eye - neither fish nor fowl, not natural, not simply functional, but a rude attempt to make things fit in.

Whilst unseemly haste in removing all trace of a mine's existence has worsened the blow for many whose lives were bound up with the pits, there are times and places to agree with Fred Reed's 'Hurrah! They've teun the blot away'. A walk along the beaches between Hartlepool and Sunderland, for 50 years, was like trudging through Hades. Whilst aerial conveyors ceaselessly tipped spoil over the cliffs into the thick black tide, sea-coalers, with expert eye, filled bags with slack worth burning. So much for so long, a new geological formation called minestone had consolidated feet thick along Blast Beach: a terrible midden.

*Here lie fossils, classified
In the museum of the tide,
Unseen, unvisited: bones, guts
Of great endeavours; bolts, nuts,
Cables, roof props, transport belts;
And trapped and mangled in between,
A dinosaur – some vast machine
Crushed in sludge; from whence the waves
Now liberate a boot, a blade,
A pick, a glove, a grey string vest,
A pony's breast plate – forlorn ghosts.*
Katrina Porteous from Turning the Tide

But transformation again, since the last pit closed in 1993 locals and professionals have worked to bring 12 miles of coastline back into their lives. 1.3 million tonnes of spoil have been removed - the underworld has been redeemed to the extent of achieving Heritage Coast status in 2001. Golden sand to black beach for 2 generations and back again.

The hope here is to provoke time and place comparisons, to intimate the importance of the dark side of hard work to culture, identity and place and to raise the dynamic and the positive.

Recently we have launched a virtual moot - the Corrugated Iron Club. It may be thought that sheets of *the galvanise, corrugated, tin, corrugated iron* would make for standardised buildings. Far from it. The material has not had an homogenising influence mainly because it lends itself to small scale, self-build enterprises which reflect a precise functional response to need. The result is simplicity, functionally dictated, locally tempered with idiosyncrasy and sometimes high style playing a part. Colours often carry or create local resonances - red, black, white, grey - whilst sympathetic deterioration leads to the soft rusty patinated walls and roofs which feel such a part of the landscape. One feels that John Clare would have loved corrugated iron buildings in the way that he loved old stiles: "it seemed so akin to nature and the spot where it stood as tho it had taken it on lease for an undisturbed existence it hurt me to see it was gone for my affections claim a friendship with such things".

The most mundane of materials, workaday actions and weeds are what make a place stand by and stand out from its neighbours.

Ecological identity is grounded in the mass of the common place species and interactions which form the backdrop to a place, cultural identity, its dynamism and vitality, rest on a bedrock of ordinary things that everybody takes for granted.

We seek your help

1. *England in Particular* - we want the book to resonate with the richness of local voices. We know you know or know how to know many things and we should be delighted if you wished to inform us about your area of knowledge or place based things. We have, for example recently received *Liquorice* by Briony Hudson and Richard Van Riel – for our purposes a perfect exploration of this plant, its social and cultural impact on Pontefract.

2. If you are seeking ways to engage the people around you, perhaps you would like to join with us in encouraging people to create ABCs of their own place, to help demonstrate what they care about in the everyday and to learn more about it. The ABC gathers what people feel is significant, so everyone is an expert, anyone can join in. The simple format levels everything, reshuffles things and juxtaposes them in ways that surprise and make you think. This can make things we take for granted seem new to us, help us articulate our feelings of attachment to places. It may encourage us to take action. Beautiful posters can be made which become ambassadors within and for the locality, to be sold to tourists, offered as evidence in public inquiries, laid before professionals and developers. They can help us get together and begin a dialogue about what we want our places to be.

We shall be happy to send our leaflet which shows how communities can start their own local actions with an ABC. Send stamped addressed envelope for free copies.

Common Ground

Common Ground is a small charity working to encourage new ways of looking at the world, to excite people into remembering the richness of the commonplace and the value of the local. Linking nature and culture, we help people take more care of their own places by promoting innovative projects and producing publications. These include the campaigning original *Holding Your Ground - an action guide to Local Conservation* Temple Smith 1985;

Local Distinctiveness, place particularity and identity, essays for a conference Common Ground 1993; *Celebrating Local Distinctiveness* Common Ground for Rural Action 1994 (£4 include p&p.) and the classic poster - *Common Ground Rules for Local Distinctiveness* (A2 full colour) are available @ £7 and £6 including p & p respectively. The most recent title is *The Common Ground Book of Orchards* Common Ground 2000 (£25).

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Collections, Communities and Memories: Making Rotherham's Heritage Accessible

Ceryl Evans

"Collections, Communities and Memories – Making Rotherham's Heritage Accessible" was a partnership between the Friends of Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council museum staff and, most importantly, the local communities. The two year project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), to enable Clifton Park Museum to get to know the varied communities it serves within the Borough, and to get some of those communities involved with the Museum through hands-on involvement in exhibitions and oral history recording.

The Collections, Communities and Memories project (CCM) began in November 2000 and over two years made a significant impact on the way the Museum and its sister services of archives, libraries and community arts interacted with local communities. Running the innovative project raised as many issues as it fulfilled previously identified needs. Those involved, both staff and volunteers, consider the project to have been a steep but valuable and enjoyable learning curve.

The two year project was intended to forge strong, long lasting links between Clifton Park Museum and the many individuals and groups interested in Rotherham Borough's heritage. We ensured that the contacts and goodwill generated by the project were embedded into core Museum provision from the very beginning of the project, and were later able to introduce these into the Archives' work as well.

The project was run by one member of staff, the Community Curator, with strong support from both colleagues and managers. The title of Community Curator was a good choice as it had the authority of the curatorial but also the approachability of community without seeming patronising. When the post was originally advertised under the title of Project Manager there was little response, so it was re-advertised as Community Curator and a much higher number of more relevant applications were received. The Community Curator was responsible for running the project, involving and enthusing colleagues and training the voluntary

Community Curators. The project encompassed exhibitions, basic collections care and oral history recording and the creation of a network of people in Rotherham Borough who could help and support each other in their interest in their own and local history.

The CCM project aimed to create a well trained yet free standing network of people interested in local history who will work in partnership with Clifton Park Museum and the Friends of the Museum for many years after the end of the original project. An increase in numbers and types of museum visitors was considered a welcome side effect of the project, but was not be used as a measure of the project's success. Clifton Park Museum began a major refurbishment and redisplay in the summer of 2003 and this has been heavily influenced by the findings of the CCM project, including the introduction of community history display areas in the new galleries.

The number of local history and heritage related groups in the Borough now stands at 40. We were aware of eighteen when we originally started the project, and helped two groups set themselves up. The networking between group members on training courses was wonderful and we decided, on the suggestion of one of the volunteers, that we should formalise it to ensure it survived the end of the project. To this end, we set up an umbrella group called the Rotherham Heritage Association, which has become constituted in its own right and is able to raise grants to support the work of its members. We have held two very successful Local History Fairs to support the groups and the Fair has become part of the Council's Libraries, Museums and Arts department's annual events calendar.

Our project brief was to work in all areas of the Borough, helping and training local people to create exhibitions and oral histories within locally based venues, preferably council owned and run facilities such as community libraries. We held two exhibitions in the Museum itself, and repeated another there as the community groups were keen to receive this validation to their work. We also held exhibitions in libraries, village halls and a country park visitor centre, and put participants in touch with other local bodies who have continued where we began.

Contrary to the popular perception of Rotherham, 75% of the Borough is rural, with many small mining villages and a cluster of wonderful Anglo Saxon and early Norman churches in the south. Many areas of the Borough look to places other than Rotherham

town as their local base and have different local free newspapers and telephone codes, so there was a lot of communication and bridge building needed to encourage disenfranchised areas to get involved.

The CCM project was deliberately not centred on the Museum site, but reached out into the community, recruiting and training volunteer Community Curators in many aspects of museum and heritage work. Museum and archives staff ran training courses on object and photographic care and handling, oral history recording, documentation and archiving, exhibition and display, local and family history research, and tour guiding. We bought in basic fundraising and media handling courses from specialists as we discovered that for a local group to put on an exhibition they needed and wanted to learn about the whole picture, not just the museum specific aspects of it. We felt that if we could increase the pool of skills available in the community it could only be of benefit to everyone.

We had a budget of £84,000, which supported a post for two years and bought the equipment we needed to run the project. We spent £17,000 on seven demountable (portable) high security display cases that can be used in a variety of locations. These remain available to groups after the end of the project, to ensure that these exhibitions can carry on and links are retained with the community. Similarly, portable mini disk and tape players were also purchased and will continue to be lent out (this time through another project funded by a different external agency) to enable oral history recording to continue indefinitely.

Training days were made into entertaining occasions with lots of coffee breaks, biscuits, the odd bit of gossip and behind the scenes tours to make participants feel welcomed and special. The ethos of the project is that local people have the opportunity to research and display aspects of their history, rather than the more official version often displayed by museums.

The project has been very successful at developing and nurturing community links, although in just two years we have probably only scraped the surface of the demand there is in the Borough. We have started to break down many of the barriers that exist between people visiting museums and asking for advice as well as sharing their knowledge with us. Many institutions are wary of the amateur and self-styled 'local historian', sometimes with good cause, but if

we can train people in better methods of research and break down the parochialism and unwillingness to share that often surrounds the subject, we will be improving our communities' access to their history.

The CCM project has been able to act as a bridging zone between the community and the Museum and to some extent our Archives and Local Studies service too, demystifying heritage research and encouraging people to come forward with their questions as well as stories and artefacts. The project's success lay in the fact that it was a conduit for two-way communication. Museum staff learnt as much from the volunteers as the volunteers did from us.

As a result of the project, Clifton Park Museum knows where at least some of the collections of heritage material existing outside the official collections are located. We hope that the training given to the Community Curators will ensure that these independent collections will receive the care needed for their survival, whilst remaining in their original community. The importance of retention and, in some cases, repatriation of objects and information to the original town or village within the Borough was mentioned in the research for the Borough's original cultural strategy. Whilst repatriation is a logistical impossibility on a permanent basis, taking artefacts back to where they were originally collected from, albeit on a short term basis, has been appreciated by many local inhabitants.

The project was not intended as a collecting drive, and we were very cautious in accepting anything new into the collection as a result of the project. Therefore staff were at pains to emphasise that the project is in no way an attempt to plunder family heirlooms. The project *had* to be seen as a partnership of trust by everyone involved.

We knew from the start that we had to evaluate the project for it to have any major impact on future planning. We asked everyone on the training courses to fill in evaluation sheets and recorded comments and feedback as the project progressed. We also commissioned an external evaluation report to ensure that our findings were accurate and that people could express themselves freely. This report was very positive about the project and has been very useful for forward planning and for backing up the Museum's cause in fundraising bids and awards applications.

The icing on the cake for the Museum staff and the CCM project

participants was getting shortlisted for the 2003 Gulbenkian Prize. We involved as many of the volunteers as possible in the visits from the Judges, which were televised on BBC4 and some volunteers were interviewed for Radio 4's *Front Row* programme. We catered for the visits with lunch or afternoon tea and made them into real occasions. This was a wonderful way in which we could reward the hard work of the volunteers and the staff. It also helped raise the profile of Clifton Park Museum within the Council and in the regional and national consciousness.

The *Collections, Communities and Memories* project has been something of an experiment. We have been very lucky in that the experiment has been very successful. We freely admit that we have had problems with some aspect of the project, but if something did not work we changed our angle of approach, often following suggestions from participants. HLF have been supportive in that they wanted our end product to be successful, and so they have been willing for us to run the project in the best way to achieve those targets. Staff in the Libraries, Museums and Archives Department have bent over backwards to help deliver the project, and as a result Rotherham Borough Council now has a good cross sectoral working relationship that is leading to many more projects, big and small, that can deliver what our communities want from us.

CONTEMPORARY COLLECTING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE 2003

Brenda Jones

Introduction

Over the past fifty years significant changes have taken place in the countryside. There have been considerable technological advances in the science of agriculture and its application, as well as social change within rural communities. The outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 thrust rural issues into the spotlight, and they have continued to remain high on the media and political agenda. Rural life museums have generally remained static in the face of this change, both in terms of collection practice and exhibition scope and have thus become increasingly removed from a contemporary audience. This is reflected in a national decline in visitor numbers as identified by R. Shorland-Ball in *Farming, Countryside and Museums 2000*, and *Seizing the Opportunities*, 2001.

The challenge for rural life museums today is to record the relationship between people and the land, and the increasing diversity emerging in the rural economy, environment and society. Part of my work as a Designation Challenge Fund Officer, has been to implement a programme of contemporary collecting to address some of these issues. In order to record rural life in 2003, three specific objectives were outlined:

- To identify and document current rural issues
- To establish links with key rural organisations
- To compile a register of major non-museum sources of material relating to rural life

Websites and publications were tracked weekly and a number of conferences attended in order to identify rural issues, how they have been publicised and by which sources of media. This information was then compared with feedback obtained from local rural related organisations and individuals to see if what was expressed in the media, was reflected at the community level. It was anticipated that this personal contact would facilitate the compilation of the register of the archival and object material held by these organisations.

Documenting Rural Life at the National Level

A wide range of websites were selected to cover government, scientific, social, economic and environmental sectors of rural England including: Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Royal Agricultural Society, National Farmers Union, Council for the Protection of Rural England, Country Land and Business Association, The Countryside Agency, Soil Association, Wildlife Trust, Women's Food and Farming and Farming and Countryside Education, to name a few. Publications investigated included: Farmers Weekly, Country Landowner, Country Life, Landscape and Ten26, the Young Farmers Club magazine.

Environmental issues are reported across all sectors, particularly the production of genetically modified crops, the hunting debate and the impact of farming on wildlife. Government and economic focused media have highlighted the success of rural tourism, encouraging farmers to diversify their businesses and make the most of the fact that the British public are choosing to holiday at home.

As anticipated, nearly all the sites and publications document government policy - the implications of proposed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms, Lord Haskins investigation into rural service delivery and the challenge of social exclusion of the young, elderly and ethnic minorities in rural communities.

2003 has seen a proliferation of conferences and seminars pertaining to rural life (Genetic Modification (GM) Nation Debate, Rural Affairs Forum,

Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) Rural Life Conference, Black Minority Ethnic People in Rural Areas, Rural Social Enterprise and Profitable Farming and Practical Conservation) with speakers agreeing on the following:

- The concept of 'the good old days' in the countryside is a myth that people need to move on from
- Agriculture is vital to the countryside but farmers must be willing to diversify
- The key to a sustainable rural future is through partnerships at all levels
- Countryside issues are not generic – different areas face different challenges

Documenting Rural Life at the Local Level

Local organisations involved in the project included the Shinfield and Poundgreen Women's Institute, Berkshire Conservation Volunteers, Reading Young Farmers Club, Thames Valley branch of the National Vintage Tractor and Engine Club and the School of Agriculture at the University of Reading. By working with these organisations (as well as a local farmer and large animal vet), we have gained a wonderful insight into the attitudes and experiences of those living contemporary rural life.

Following introductory contact with club representatives, a presentation was made to the groups concerned outlining the proposed project and the key objectives. Members of the organisations were initially surveyed for background information on age, ethnicity, and length of membership with the group and reasons for joining their respective organisations. The members were then accompanied and photographed at typical club events during the course of the year including a craft show, ploughing match, karaoke competition at the Royal Show and thistle clearing on an organic farm. This interaction enabled members to become more comfortable with the aims of the project before proceeding with the second survey, which drew on more personal responses. Official representatives were also interviewed for background information about their respective organisations and to discover if these clubs held objects or archives of their history.

A number of common themes became apparent through the surveys and interviews. Many of those involved in the project are concerned with service delivery in rural areas. The availability of public transport is considered unreliable and the closing of rural post offices and village halls is high on the agenda of Women's Institute members. The cost of housing was also a key concern, as people believe countryside dwellers are being forced from their location of choice by commuters able to pay high real estate prices. Elder members of the clubs are concerned that traditional rural skills are declining, particularly evident amongst the Young Farmers, Women's Institute and Berkshire Conservation Volunteers who believe that people are no longer interested or do not have the time to spare to learn new skills.

Although the majority of members do not live in rural areas they are well informed on current rural issues sourcing their information from their own club meetings television, radio, and the Internet.

Members have a negative perception of the countryside in 2003 with pollution and encroaching urbanisation being the two key reasons for this attitude.

"It is being overrun with commuters who ruin the community spirit and out price the locals from their homes. I am not that old yet, but the country was definitely much better when I was a child. There are so many people that put in their opinion and have no idea what they are on about".

Reading Young Farmers Club Member 2003

"The countryside has been severely damaged over the last fifty years by the intensification of farming, and urban sprawl. If things go much further, it may not recover. The loss of rural amenities has damaged the rural community".

Berkshire Conservation Volunteer 2003

Some members of the groups were concerned that decisions are made by those with no experience of the countryside - an opinion frequently expressed with regards to the hunting debate.

"I think that there should be the freedom of choice and I think that it should be for the people in the countryside to decide. Not people in the towns because they don't really have anything to do with it... it's bound to work out the way the towns want it because there are more of them".

Reading Young Farmers Club Member 2003

"At the end of the day, we are not all vegetarian in this country and there are animals being killed every single day. I think people should make more of abattoir conditions".

Reading Young Farmers Club Member 2003

Interestingly, most people sympathised with the plight of the farmer in rural England, and felt farmers were getting a raw deal from government, and other businesses.

"The way agriculture is run in this country is different from the rest of Europe and it's so unfair because all the farmers are scraping by. Its horrible because you go to the farm and you chat

to the farmer, and they are lovely...its just horrible to take their accounts and see that most of them are overdrawn, scraping each penny together."

Agricultural Investigation Officer 2003

Our representative of the farming community was more nonchalant about the responsibility of the government and current agricultural conditions commenting,

"They have got an impossible job to do to keep everyone happy. I don't know if they dream up all these rules and regulations that keep getting piled on us or if its comes from Europe and its just their job to apply them. Farmers are always complaining anyway. They are never desperately happy".

Berkshire Farmer 2003

The farm is situated on the cusp of the motorway and surrounding countryside and has been farmed by the family since the early 1950's. Over the years, it has changed from a large business combining sheep, cows, pigs and a wide range of crops, to a mostly arable farm with a few cows. They have had to diversify their operations by letting a cottage and renting out a converted dairy to a local carpentry business. The property is also involved in the government's pilot Entry Level Environmental Scheme with land being managed to specific environmental regulations in order to gain subsidies.

2003 has also been documented from a community perspective. Once a rural idyll, the village of Shinfield has changed irrevocably with the development of the motorway in the early 1970s. Today, it is a thriving commuter base with the construction of approximately 900 houses planned over the next few years. Community leaders have expressed their concern at the transition, as locals cannot afford to buy housing in the area and the village struggles to cope with the increased traffic flow. The current church leader believes that the church can no longer be considered 'rural' as none of the congregation engages in rural activities and Rogation Sunday is not celebrated.

One resident who has lived in the village since 1911 is saddened to see the encroaching property development and no longer recognises people on the main street. Many in the

community feel that the village identity and community spirit has disappeared.

Academics in the School of Agriculture at the University of Reading are primarily concerned with climate, population changes and food production, and the global implications of these factors, as agriculture must supply a growing population using limited land and water resources. Despite these challenges, they are positive that students and agricultural businesses should have a positive outlook as:

"It should provide opportunities for innovative, independent bright young people to go and do different things...you could argue that current problems provide them probably with the best opportunities in thirty years or more, to actually get into the industry"

School of Agriculture Lecturer 2003

Students were also approached and asked to respond to questions concerning their chosen course, their future plans; their view on the countryside today and what they thought of its future.

"The countryside is a dynamic place shaped by the changes in farming. With increasing education and understanding, farmers are able to look after the countryside and act as stewards of the landscape. The diversity of wildlife is in my opinion, one of the most important aspects of the countryside today."

University of Reading Agricultural Student 2003

"The state of the countryside largely depends on how the state of agriculture changes in the future. However, with increasing knowledge, funding and help through countryside organisations, the prospects for the countryside in the future could be good. But there will also be an increased threat to the countryside from the development of the land...."

University of Reading Agricultural Student 2003

A large animal vet was interviewed on a seasonal basis and offered a different perspective on the countryside in 2003. His principal concerns have been with the effects of a hot summer on animal welfare, and the prescription drug debate (where vets will

charge higher rates for their services, as medicines are made more cheaply available from other sources) and the concern that farmers might neglect sick animals in order to avoid the fee increase. He is not confident about the future for upcoming vets in the face of the current decline in the number and size of farms, commenting:

"It's going to be hard for the young graduates – it takes a long time to get farm experience and the work is just not there."

Berkshire Veterinarian 2003

An invitation to participate was extended to the Vale of Aylesbury with Garth and South Berks Hunt, but was declined. The Reading Hunt Saboteurs were also approached and a preliminary meeting held with a club representative. However, despite efforts to progress with this group, they have chosen not to be involved in the project. It was disappointing not to have gathered feedback from either party on this topical issue as we felt we provided an opportunity to present their opinions anonymously through an objective facilitator.

The Future of the Contemporary Collecting Project

The project has been a labour intensive but rewarding experience, creating opportunities for future collaboration at national and local levels. Many of the organisations were intrigued that a museum was engaging in contemporary collecting and were also curious as to how rural life museums were tackling the issues, in particular social exclusion, fox hunting and genetically modified foods. Perhaps one of the most exciting results to come from the project has been the development of a partnership with the local National Vintage Tractor and Engine Club. Members are engaged in inventorying their collections and will be participating in the Museum's annual Spring Spectacular event for 2004. Having initiated contact with the local community, the Museum will be aiming to maintaining these links through involvement in activities days and exhibitions and developing a register of archives for each of the groups involved.

Conclusion

Rural issues have appeared regularly in all forms of national media during the course of 2003, with all sources agreeing that services in the countryside could be more appropriately delivered through

consultation with rural communities. In general, despite conflicts over genetically modified food production and the hunting debate, the media presents a positive future for the countryside providing agricultural businesses are willing to adapt. The same issues are also evident at the local level as indicated by the views held by members of countryside organisations. However, the majority of these individuals do not feel confident that the environment, or social aspects of country life will be able to be retained in the face of proposed economic changes and the continual spread of urban development.

The Museum of English Rural Life has gained a comprehensive archive of photographs, documents and oral recordings, forming a valuable resource for future exhibitions. Perhaps most importantly, we have developed new (and strengthened existing) relationships with the local community and discovered ways in which we can make our museum more relevant to contemporary rural life.



Figure 1

Berkshire Conservation Volunteers working on the organic farm at Beale Park.



Figure 2

2003 provided a good harvest for one Berkshire farmer.



Figure 3

The village of Shinfield is facing considerable change as property development flourishes.

Pastures New? : Recording Contemporary Rural Concerns

Chris Copp

This is a brief case study of work in progress to produce *Pastures New?*, a touring exhibition undertaken by Staffordshire Arts and Museum Service, based on oral history testimony, looking at contemporary rural life in Staffordshire.

The project's main aims are:

- To create a small-scale touring exhibition featuring the lives, contributions and associated artefacts of members of Staffordshire's rural communities.
- To develop a parallel on-line exhibition as part of our New Opportunities Fund (NOF) supported Staffordshire Past Track website (www.staffspasttrack.org.uk)
- To encourage the representation of Staffordshire's contemporary rural communities through the County Museum Collection.
- To raise the profile of some of the current problems and opportunities facing Staffordshire's rural communities and explore the historic roots of these issues.
- To develop new audiences for the County Arts and Museum Service.
- To establish new links and ways of engaging with and representing people from Staffordshire's rural communities.

Why did we choose this subject?

Contrary to popular belief, Staffordshire does not just consist of the Potteries and somewhere for you to sit in a traffic jam whilst driving on the M6. It is largely an agricultural county, with livestock farming being particularly predominant. Dairy cattle dominate the marls and clays of lowland mid-Staffordshire, while sheep and cattle farming is typical of the millstone grit and limestone of the Staffordshire Moorlands in the north. Cereals occupy only 19% of the County's agricultural land and these areas of arable farming are concentrated in the south east around Lichfield and Tamworth.

The County Museum collections reflect this aspect of Staffordshire's social and local history. Our existing agricultural collections have been identified as being regionally important (in the

Museums and Galleries Commission report *Farming, Countryside and Museums* by Rob Shorland-Ball, March 2000 and West Midland Regional Museum Council's 'Fast Forward' collections' mapping publication, 2002), and Shugborough Park Farm is one of only two specialist agricultural museums in the West Midlands, with Shropshire's Acton Scott Working Farm being the other. However, our agriculture and rural life collections are very limited after the 1950s, so a need for contemporary collecting has been identified and is part of our Acquisitions and Disposals Policy. There are problems in contemporary collecting in the field of agriculture: most modern agricultural equipment is generally too large to store and display, and in any case often lacks any local distinctiveness. Therefore a decision has been made to collect small objects, oral history recordings, photographs and ephemera.

In common with many agricultural and rural life museums, the displays at Shugborough Park Farm's agricultural museum fail to interpret farming life and rural society over the past fifty years. As a first step towards updating the museum, one gallery has recently been devoted to some key contemporary rural concerns: animal health, genetically modified (GM) crops, organic farming, country sports and wildlife conservation. Interpretation takes the form of presenting two (or more) sides to the arguments these subjects provoke, with the intention of instigating some level of dialogue and letting visitors make up their own minds.

To continue this work, *Pastures New?* is the latest in a regular programme of small-scale touring exhibitions Staffordshire Arts and Museum service run as part of our outreach work. They are designed to be flexible enough to fit into a wide variety of venues: as well as the more usual museum and library spaces, we have over the past four years developed a network of a wide variety of community venues, including hospitals, sports centres, car showrooms, country parks, schools, churches, supermarkets and village halls. Recent oral history based exhibitions have included *Case Histories*, looking at the experiences of members of Staffordshire's ethnic communities, and *Birth Rights* on the subject of midwifery and health visiting.

The *Pastures New?* exhibition

In February 2003 we sent out requests for volunteers to participate in oral history sessions. We enlisted the help of community bodies,

including the Community Council for Staffordshire, Staffordshire Agricultural Society, and the Staffordshire Federation of Women's Institutes. We also targeted requests to other individuals and bodies, such as the County Council's Trading Standards Animal Health section, Rural Emotional Support Team, National Farmers Union and organic farms, to get a greater cross section of respondents.

It was anticipated that we would hold an informal group session to select broad themes and identify individual participants. However this proved to be a logistical impossibility due to the geographical spread and work arrangements of the participants. Therefore we interviewed people separately in their own homes or, on a few occasions, over the telephone. The completed interviews (twelve in total, with fourteen individuals) are providing the basis of the interpretation and themes for the exhibition. We have tried to cover as wide a cross section of people as possible: from different parts of Staffordshire, various types of farming, land owners and tenants, people involved in support services, policing and so on.

The interviews have been carried out using a digital recorder with a high quality condenser stereo microphone. The tapes have been copied onto standard audio cassettes and full transcriptions have been made. The interviews are loosely constructed, but aim to eke out the same basic information: the respondent's working life; the type of farming or line of work they have been involved in; training for their working life; a typical working day and year; the impact on their lives of the recent outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Bovine Tuberculosis; country sports; organic farming; genetically modified crops; European Union and government policies; rights of way; services to rural communities; the good and bad aspects of their jobs; and their thoughts on the future of farming and the countryside. A clearance form is used to ascertain in what form the interviewees are prepared to let their words be used, for instance in exhibition text, for public broadcast, or on a website.

The completed exhibition will consist of a set of portable panels, a case of objects, and one or two simple interactives. The panels will include photographs taken during the research process and from the museum collections, and interpretation mostly consisting of extracts transcribed from the oral history interviews. Selecting objects for the case has required a bit of lateral thinking, but it will

include objects and ephemera relating to the cattle movement scheme, animal tags, protective clothing and disinfecting equipment, fox hunting costume and ephemera, and organic and 'GM free' food packaging. The interactives will include a push button 'chatterbox' featuring two short oral history extracts, and a simple practical activity such as a jigsaw. The exhibition will be launched in January 2004 and will run throughout the rest of the year. The venues will include Country Park visitor centres, museums and libraries in the County's small towns and villages, a church and a school. At the end of the exhibition's tour the collected material will be fed into the permanent displays at Shugborough Park Farm.

Some general conclusions

The majority of the interviewees to have come forward have been from the farming community. Is this because we didn't communicate the aims of the project well enough, or is it because villagers not involved in agriculture don't regard themselves as 'rural'? Perhaps the village is only somewhere they sleep in and commute from to reach their town lives?

The interviews took much longer to complete than other oral history projects we have undertaken. Why was this? Perhaps in starting the interviews in May we chose a particularly busy time of year for the agricultural community, with hay and silage making well underway, and today's farmers don't generally have any staff to do work for them to take time off to chat to museum curators and volunteers. Some of the people we contacted were suspicious of what we were up to, possibly seeing us as representing local government and, by implication, the state! Members of farming communities can be reticent, perhaps because farmers today spend the bulk of their time working alone. Agricultural work forces are now very small and the old social networks centred around livestock markets and pubs have greatly reduced over the last thirty years, so perhaps the farming community is less used to communicating their thoughts and concerns than other groups the Museum Service has worked with. The project also took place at a time when we were somewhat short staffed. If we were to run a similar project again we would attempt to carry out the research in winter.

A common theme in the interviews was pessimism about the future of farming and the countryside; one respondent came up with term 'Farmageddon' to express his fears! Agriculture does have an

ageing workforce, and unlike previous generations it is no longer guaranteed that sons and daughters will take over the running of a farm. Some interviewees feel that farming as a skill is in decline as a lot of specialist work on farms nowadays tends to be carried out by contractors, skilled in operating machinery. Many farmers feel that agriculture is misrepresented in the media, and blame this for the apparently low esteem in which the public holds them. They all voice a dread of the increasing amount of bureaucracy and paperwork they face, although many acknowledge that some of it is a necessary evil in the wake of the animal health scares of recent years.

Not surprisingly animal health is a concern for everyone involved in agriculture in Staffordshire. Most suffered, directly and indirectly, through the recent outbreaks of FMD and BSE. There were 47 cases of FMD in Staffordshire between February and October 2001, widely spread across the County. A further, less publicised problem is that the concentration on controlling FMD during 2001 meant that checks on Bovine TB were not maintained. This disease is now felt to be a major threat and is a serious problem in parts of Staffordshire.

On a more positive note, most farmers enjoy what they do, have few regrets, and many hope that the future is not as black as they fear and that the economic hardships of recent years are not long term.

Rural services are perceived to be increasingly thinly spread, with a familiar pattern of reduced policing, fewer schools and shops. However, a couple of interviewees felt that this was largely offset by increasing car ownership, and that many non-drivers could cope by using reasonable public transport networks and home deliveries services provided by the larger supermarkets.

From a social history curator's point of view, there are the usual pitfalls of relying on oral history as the main source of information. The sex, age and background of the interviewer will affect the response of the interviewee. Also, the interviewer and interviewee cannot fail to be influenced by public and media opinion. This is particularly so in the case of emotive 'newsworthy' subjects such as FMD, BSE and hunting with dogs that the media tend to pick up on. This problem is almost impossible to disentangle. We are well aware that basing the exhibition's interpretation on oral testimony does not result in an unadulterated 'truth', and that the end result

does not have any greater level of 'ownership' by the participants than any other museum-led exhibition. In the process of selecting quotations we are putting the interviewees' words into a new and different context. Even so, the hard work in carrying out this project and the invaluable contributions from members of Staffordshire's rural communities should produce a more interesting and better informed exhibition than one drawn purely from Staffordshire Arts and Museum Service's limited experience!

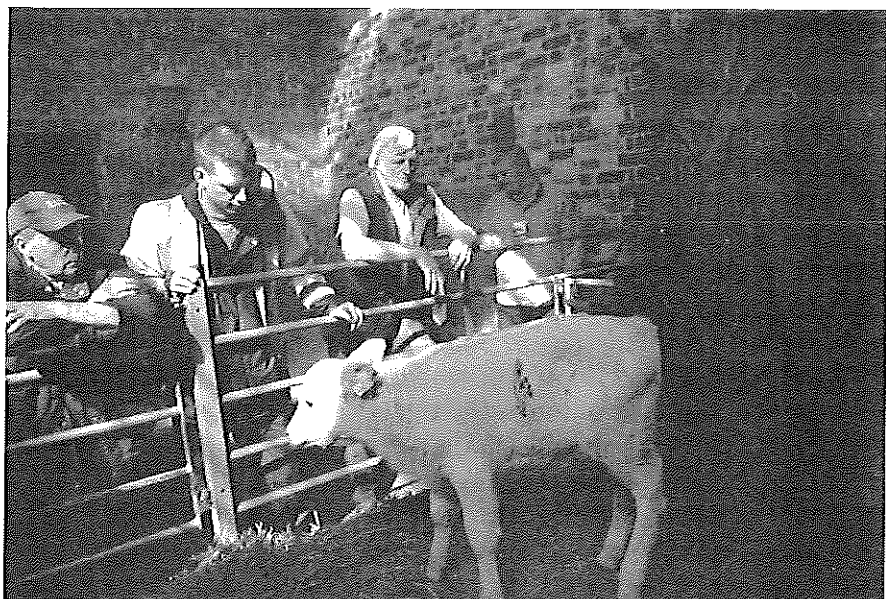


Figure 1

Leeds Livestock Market, April 2003. This is one of only two livestock markets now operating in Staffordshire. If these close, farmers will have to travel to Bakewell or Shrewsbury, or have their animals collected from their farms by dealers at less competitive prices.

Education or Entertainment: Interpreting Rural Issues for a Mixed Audience

Elaine Edwards

The Museum of Scottish Country Life at Wester Kitchochside is the first joint project between the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) and the National Trust for Scotland (NTS).

Mrs. Margaret Reid donated the farmhouse, steading and 110 acres of land to the NTS in 1992. The farm being an unusual type of property for the Trust to accept, time was taken to decide upon its future. In the meantime the NMS were looking for a site on which to build a new museum in order to upgrade the Scottish Agricultural Museum at Ingliston, near Edinburgh which housed the National Working Life Collection (Scotland). Once both parties had heard of each other's situation they joined forces and embarked on this unique partnership. Following the purchase of an additional 60 acres of land on which to build the Museum, car parks and events field, The Museum of Scottish Country Life opened to the public in July 2002.

The Reid family has lived and worked the land of Wester Kitchochside since 1567 when the land was purchased by John Reid the first laird. Kitchochside, as it is now known was passed from father to son from the first to the seventh laird. From the eighth to the tenth (and last laird) the land was passed from uncle to nephew. However, it is the sixth laird (John Reid, born 1760) that made the improvements to the land, farmhouse and steading that we see today (Figure 1). Little has changed since he made these improvements during his lairdship between 1770 and 1850. This was one of the primary reasons why the NTS were interested in accepting Kitchochside as a gift.

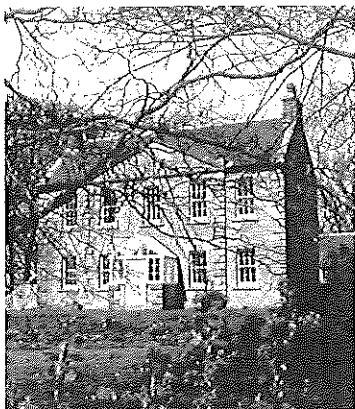


Figure 1

Interpretation of the Museum and site

The Museum was built by Glasgow architects Page and Park. Part of their remit was to design a building that took inspiration from agricultural buildings and this is best reflected in the main entrance to the Museum which has the suggestion of the barn doors (Figure 2).



Figure 2

The interior is a simple plan, easily oriented as the visitor is taken to the three levels of the building by a spiralling ramp. The building is fully accessible to wheelchair users. At each corner of the building and in the main exhibition gallery large glass walls give magnificent views over Killochside land and surrounding area. The Museum has three main galleries - Land, Tools (Figure 3) and People - and several open storage areas including the Tractor Shed and the Combine Harvester store, in addition to a theatre. The Museum building tells the story of agriculture in Scotland over the past two hundred years.



Figure 3

Interpretation within the Museum takes several forms: written and visual through panels and archive photographs; three multi-media terminals, one in each of the main galleries; some guided interpretation either from Museum Staff or volunteers.

The site/farm

The aim of the whole site is to help to build a bridge between urban and rural living and between the present and the past and also to demonstrate how the past informs the present. We are very fortunate in that the site is located right on the edge of a busy new town, although this does draw some comment!

We have aimed to interpret farming and country life in the 1950s so capturing a time of change; a period too that enables us to demonstrate horse-power and traction power.

However, we do not simply wish to provide a nostalgic wander down memory lane. We want Kittochside to inform people and dare I say 'educate' them about the importance of the role of farmers both past and present and living with the land and provide an insight into a different and often difficult way of life.

The audiences we address either formally or informally include:

- nurseries, primary and secondary schools and colleges of further and higher education.
- We also hold an academic conference every two years (the next one is in April 2004, its theme being 'The current situation in farming set in an historical context'.
- NMS Friends lectures series
- Specialist Groups (e.g. tractor enthusiasts)

In addition we use the wonderful natural resources here at Kittochside and run bat walks, and herb and meadow walks and encourage bird watching.

So how are we going about this and are we achieving our aims?

It can be argued that rural museums, such as Kittochside, are attempting to bring in an audience that on the whole doesn't want to come in! Obviously we have something of a ready-made audience in the farming community who seem to enjoy what we have to offer, but how do we bring in and make a positive impact on an urban community?

One of the initiatives has been the Partnership for Action against Wildlife crime, known as PAW. Such schemes help to inform the general public that issues of the countryside are as much an urban issue as a rural one.

One of the ways we attempt to inform is through the working farm. At present we have twelve Ayrshire cows, 40 Blackface sheep and six chickens - stock typical of the Lanarkshire area which have the additional bonus of being cheap! We are also hoping to have a pig and piglets once our 1950s style pigsty has been built for them.

Adults and children alike enjoy the tractor-trailer ride up to the farm where visitors have the opportunity to view sheep shearing (depending on the time of year of course) and the daily milking which takes place in the traditional byre using 1950s style equipment. A viewing gallery has been set up and obviously there is formal interpretation, along with written information regarding births and yields.

Other formal methods of interpretation are the farm tours that are offered to nursery, infant and primary school children. However, working just as well if not better in some ways is the informal method of learning whereby the farm manager, Harry and stockperson Maggie - being accessible due to the high visibility of their work - are frequently questioned and engaged in conversation by an interested audience.

Although the work of Harry and Maggie is not staged to be entertaining it does actually achieve this. However, they are of course running a fully-functioning farm. Once Maggie has milked the cows the milk goes into the food chain; when the sheep have been sheared whether by hand or again using 1950s style equipment (Lister shearing unit) the wool is sold, as is silage, cereal, calves and lambs. One of the main aims and indeed achievements of the Kitchside farm is that it demonstrates to the public the scale of a farm in the 1950s. However, being in the 21st century some concessions have to be made - staffing for example. The farm is now run by two people (Kitchside actually had three or more members of staff depending on the requirements of the season). This sometimes means that plastic wrapped bales of silage can be seen around the fields as no matter what period we're operating in the livestock have to be fed over the winter. Some concessions also have to be made regarding health & safety: the byre for example, does not have straw on the floor as it would have

done. Nor do our poultry wander around the site but are housed in a pen during the day and luxury accommodation (The Grosvenor Twelve) at night, to avoid the threat of e-coli. Such compromises do draw comments but on the whole if the reasons are explained then the public generally understand.

Educational tours take several forms such as role play e.g. 'Evacuees!' A freelance educational facilitator is brought in to interpret the 'Evacuees' program which links directly to the school curriculum and involves the children undertaking role play for an hour pretending to be urban evacuees in the country during World War II. Also ongoing are farm tours, mentioned above; ranger tours and geography sessions for secondary school children. The secondary-style sessions were supposed to be teacher-led but we have found difficulties in running them largely because the schools find it hard to get out of the classroom (due to timetable constraints) and the lack of teachers' willingness to take ownership of the group once they are in the Museum. We also have available teachers' packs and handling boxes again sessions which are teacher-led.

Events – we hope these are entertaining – but are they educational?

Some are simply for enjoyment such as the Easter Sunday Fun day when children can join the Easter Bunny on the egg hunt. Others we hope are more educational.

Our events begin in April with the Easter Sunday Fun day and for the next eight months we hold one event per month. The biggest events are the Vintage Vehicle rally, the Heavy Horse Show (the biggest crowd puller) and the Country Fair.

The Heavy Horse Show is certainly spectacular with demonstrations of horse trials and competitions for show harness etc. However, we have found that the audience is passive, simply observing what's going on and being entertained. When we offered other activities such as ploughing or harrowing displays little interest was shown in them suggesting that gaining an understanding of the mighty Clydesdale horse and their work was not a priority on a day out.

The Country Fair on the other hand offers much more opportunity for interaction and learning. The event obviously covers a much wider topic and includes demonstrations and presentations on gardening, butter making, natural dying techniques, lace-making,

beekeeping, cartwheel making, chair bodging, basket weaving, cookery, walking stick making, dry stonewalling and sheepdog trials amongst other things. It is here that the Clydesdales at work prove more popular too. In addition, the public are encouraged to 'have a go' at various activities and information is available should they wish to pursue any new skills.

The Country Fair also provides an opportunity to link the Museum's collection with its true purpose particularly with regard to the larger machinery. We are very lucky in having the services of a couple of really active enthusiasts who bring in machinery such as a mobile threshing mill and square baler or the three-horse binder for demonstration (Figure 4). Examples of these exist within the collection and are in open storage but obviously we have the sometimes conflicting challenges of interpreting the collections (the best way to do this I feel is to see the objects employed in their original purpose) yet at the same time protect and preserve the objects for future generations (obviously duplication is not an option when dealing with objects as large as these).

As with any museum we do not simply want to stand still. Further developments have to take place not only to encourage the public on return visits and to increase visitor figures generally but also to allow the staff to continue to develop skills and knowledge of their own and to ensure that skills required in the 'traditional' way of life are not lost completely. To go someway to achieving this a medium-term development plan for Kitchside is focussing on the



Figure 4

development of the site where we will be able to construct buildings to allow demonstrations and understanding of life in the past but with specific reference to the 1950s, suggestions so far are for a sawmill, grocers shop, blacksmiths, joiners, bakers and community hall.

Both the General Manager, who happens to be a farmer and myself would also like to tackle some of the more contemporary issues effecting country life today such as hunting with hounds, access to the land, countryside planning and subsidies. We have tackled the issue of fox hunting by basically trying to put both sides of the argument forward and posing questions to encourage visitors to decide for themselves. However, such topics can be difficult to address, are museum's the forum for such issues? By raising public awareness in such areas are we politicising the museum environment? Should we politicise the museum environment? Perhaps this brings us full circle back to the question of museums as providers/environments of 'Education or Entertainment?'



The Third Alternative: Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City Movement

Robert Lancaster

"Town and Country must be married and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope a new civilisation"

Ebenezer Howard *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, 1902

Driving rain and howling wind was the backdrop to a momentous occasion in north Hertfordshire on 9th October 1901. Over a hundred people had congregated in a muddy field just off Letchworth Lane near the tiny village of Letchworth to witness the opening of the first Garden City, an event that was to have a profound effect on urban living throughout the 20th Century.

The background to this momentous occasion lies in the latter part of the 19th Century when there were two major social problems. The first was the uncontrolled growth of the towns with the attendant problems of pollution, over-crowding, slum housing and poor health. The second was the de-population of the countryside due to agricultural recession, unemployment and poor housing that led to migration into the towns.

Throughout the 19th Century social reformers had made considerable efforts to improve the health, living and working conditions of the population. However it was Ebenezer Howard (Figure 1) who pulled together the many strands of social, housing, health and land reform and from these ideas created the Garden City idea. Howard, who was born in 1850, was not particularly well educated but read widely and developed his ideas that were to lead to the Garden City Movement from the 1870's onwards. The result of this work was the publication in 1898 of his book *Tomorrow – A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Here he set out very simply his proposals for "A new hope a new civilisation", the Garden City.

Briefly, the Garden City was to be a marriage of town and country where the population could enjoy the benefits of both with none of the disadvantages of either. This was cleverly demonstrated in the famous, in town planning circles, Three Magnets Diagram (Figure 2). Garden Cities were to be built away from the existing

towns and would cover an area of 6,000 acres (2430 hectares): 1,000 acres (405 hectares) would be the urban area, the remainder would be the green belt containing farms, allotments, convalescent homes etc. The Garden City was to be an industrial town with bright homes and gardens for the workers, quite different to the polluted slums of London, Manchester or Sheffield. The population would be socially mixed and there would be a full range of social and recreational facilities.

A development company would be formed to build and develop the Garden City and as land values increased, called the unearned increment by Howard, and profits accumulated, any profit, above the 5% dividend paid to the shareholders, would be put back into the Garden City for the benefit of the residents.

Reaction to Howard's book was mixed. There were those who thought that he was a utopian dreamer and his ideas had no practical application whatsoever but, fortunately, there were others who could see the benefits of his proposals. Among his supporters were industrialists, including Edward Cadbury who had developed the Bournville industrial village just outside Birmingham that had, together with the other industrial villages, served as a prototype for the Garden City. Others included The Hon. Justice Neville and Alfred Harmsworth, proprietor of the Daily Mail.

Such was the support that in 1899 the Garden City Association, now the Town and Country Planning Association, was formed to promote the Garden City idea. An intensive programme of lobbying, publicity, conferences and meetings took place. In 1902 the second edition of Howard's book was published with the title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. In the same year the Garden City Association decided to form a company called the Garden City Pioneer Company to acquire the land and to construct a first experimental Garden City.

The search for a suitable site started almost immediately with numerous sites considered. In spring 1903 land at Letchworth in Hertfordshire became available and eventually 3,818 acres (1,545 hectares) was purchased from fifteen separate owners. The great social experiment had begun.

One of the advantages of the Letchworth site was the distance from London, only 35 miles, and it was considered that manufacturers would be persuaded to relocate in the Garden City where they could take advantage of the space, environment, better houses and competitive rents. In addition both road and rail

communications were good.

The Garden City Pioneer Company was wound up and a new company First Garden City Ltd. formed. Investment in the company was slow and the lack of capital hampered development. However before work commenced a design for the town was required. Two architects, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, were commissioned to produce a layout. Their plan was for a zoned town with the industrial area in one part surrounded by housing for the workers, the town centre and central square occupying the highest land and houses for the middle classes occupied the edges of the town. The idea of zoning was continued in the early post-war New Towns, especially Stevenage, where the Garden City influence is very strong.

Having adopted Parker and Unwin's plan in February 1904 work started on building the Garden City. Development was slow for the first few years apart from the "Cheap Cottages Exhibition" of 1905. This was held to demonstrate that a house for an agricultural worker could be built for a maximum of £150. These houses could therefore be let to rural labourers for an affordable £8 per year. 116 houses were built using a variety of materials including concrete, wood, man-made materials and conventional brick and over 60,000 people visited the exhibition. This exhibition was a marketing coup for the Garden City idea as there was very extensive newspaper and magazine coverage.

Good housing set in a pleasant environment was one of the major pillars of the Garden City idea. 1906 saw the building of the first housing estate, The Birds Hill estate (Figure 3), built for the co-operative housing association Garden City Tenants to a design by Parker and Unwin. The Birds Hill Estate and the later Rushby Mead development (1911 - 12), built for the Howard Cottage Society, became a standard for many subsequent housing developments both in this country and abroad.

Industrial development was slow, partly because an electricity supply was not provided until 1907. However the printers J M Dent and Sons relocated from London in 1907 and W H Smith and Sons moved their bookbinding works to the Garden City in the same year. Both companies brought their workers too although they were not impressed with the houses available because they did not have a parlour. Dents had to build a small estate, Temple Gardens, for their workers.



Figure 3
The Birds Hill Estate.

Of course, any town or city, particularly a Garden City is more than a collection of houses and factories, town plans and electricity supplies. People are the most important part of any town. The pre-1920 population of Letchworth Garden City falls into two main groups. First, and by far the largest group, were the working people who came simply because the company they worked for re-located to the Garden City or because there were jobs available. The second group were those, mainly middle class citizens, who saw the Garden City as an opportunity to change life for, as they saw it, the better. They included a small group viewed as cranks and eccentrics such as Theosophists, vegetarians, and socialists, looked at as smock and sandal wearing 'simple lifers' by a puzzled, scandalised and intrigued conventional Edwardian society.

Social engineering was practiced with the result that Letchworth Garden City did not have licensed premises in the town centre until the early 1960's. This was not due to any religious conviction, and certainly not due to Quaker influence, but because Ebenezer Howard had proposed what he called the 'Local Option'. The local option was simply that the residents would be able to vote on whether or not to allow licensed premises in their Garden City. The

first vote was in 1906 and the final vote in 1958 when a majority voted for a licensed hotel in the town centre. Of course fifty years of opposition to pubs did not mean that there was no drinking in the town. Many went to the pubs of nearby Hitchin and Baldock or to the three village pubs within the Garden City estate. Others joined the Conservative Club that had a license from 1907 or simply had their beer delivered to their doorstep. It was not unusual to see the milk float and the brewers dray pulled up outside many houses.

Soon after the Garden City was started a vigorous social, recreational and educational life was established. Clubs and societies flourished, pantomimes lampooning the directors of First Garden City Ltd. and poking fun at the, somewhat primitive and uncomfortable, conditions of the fledgling Garden City were performed. In the field of education the first Elementary School was set up by the residents to provide a far higher standard of education than that provided by the County Council. Unfortunately this failed through lack of funding.

The conventional view of the early Garden City is basically one of a middle class suburban idyll. This was not the case as the Garden City was an industrial town, albeit one where environmental and living and working conditions were far better than many other towns, and with a majority of working class residents. There were many problems such as poverty, and crime including child abuse and murder so, in many ways, the Garden City was no different from other places.

What was different, of course, was that Letchworth Garden City, the world's first Garden City, demonstrated that it was possible to build an industrial town where many of the advantages of town and country could be combined and where the residents could benefit from the unearned increment and through the re-distribution of profits to the community. This is still the situation today for the majority of the Garden City estate is owned by Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable aims that manages the estate and receives a considerable income mainly from industrial and commercial rents. Every year over £1,000,000 is spent on its charitable objectives.

From the beginning the Garden City idea has been enthusiastically adopted all over the world. In the United Kingdom, Letchworth was followed in 1919 by Welwyn Garden City and by a myriad of 'Garden City' developments, most of which, it must be said, have lit-

tle resemblance to the true Garden City idea. They are often no more than attractive, or sometimes not so attractive, residential estates. Abroad 'Garden Cities' have been built throughout Europe, the Americas, Australasia and Asia. Ebenezer Howard's vision remains just as relevant today and town planners continue to be inspired by the Garden City idea.

Re-inhabited Spaces: Putting Pensioners back in their Place

Kathy Haslam

Two years ago we embarked on the restoration of the sole Geffrye almshouse to have survived without major architectural intervention following the conversion of the building from almshouses to museum in 1914. This paper concerns one aspect of the project's research process, the furnishing of an 18th Century period room.

Recently I attended a conference devoted to the consideration of the exhibited interior, at which manifold discussions arose relating to issues surrounding authenticity. The restoration of the Geffrye almshouse has meant that we have met just such issues head-on. Uniquely for the museum, the almshouse period rooms present the actual living spaces of Geffrye pensioners, whilst our permanent galleries represent the living room or parlour of the urban middle classes in three-sided generic roomsets. Furnishing the almshouse rooms as inhabited spaces belonging to a different social class than that with which the Museum usually deals has therefore necessitated the twofold reconsideration of some complex issues.

The Geffrye almshouses were built in 1714, the final scheme consisting of fourteen houses, or 'staircases'. Each house contained four self-contained rooms (fifteen feet square), each one of which would have been allocated unfurnished to a single pensioner, married couple, or family. In the restored Almshouse 14 two of these rooms were to be furnished as period rooms, whilst the other two were to act as interpretation spaces. The almshouse period rooms are really social history in microcosm: because the Geffrye almshouses did not incorporate a communal refectory, the pensioners' rooms were also used to cook as well as sleep, wash and store food in. Again the Geffrye found itself on unfamiliar ground in dealing with sleeping and cooking arrangements.

Faced with a blank canvas, we had first to decide on the dates at which we wished to set the two period rooms. Despite the attractions of pitching one room at 1714, we instead decided to capitalise on the fact that we had access to two surviving lists of Geffrye pensioners dating from the 1780s. Placing the room at this date would allow for the display of a greater proportion of original

objects, whereas an early 18th Century room would necessitate incorporating more replica material. The issue of replica versus original was discussed within the project team at great length, and it was ultimately concluded that a predominance of replica material may perhaps impair the 'period' ambience of the space. The first room was accordingly fixed at the 1780s.

The second period room was pitched as being a pensioner's room inhabited during the 1880s. It has been furnished as a former governess' room – we know from census returns that at this date, of the former occupations of Geffrye pensioners, those of governess and schoolmistress predominated.

With copious amounts of evidential material available for the late 19th Century (including census returns and diaries relating directly to Geffrye residents, and photographs of other almshouse interiors), establishing an accurate social profile of a typical Geffrye pensioner from the 1880s, and therefore her likely preferences and furnishing choices, was relatively straightforward. Not so with the 18th Century pensioners, and it is the challenge of furnishing a room for which evidential sources are scant that I would like to expand on a little.

There are no other historic English almshouse interiors set within a museum context, and from the outset of the project this lack of comparative interiors dictated that our discussions with other museum professionals and specialists about Almshouse 14's 18th Century room would be focused on specific aspects or object types rather than being holistic.

Initial research soon made it evident that any material relating to 18th Century almshouse *inhabitants* rather than *architecture* would be worth its weight in gold. We soon resigned ourselves to the fact that the criteria informing the furnishing of the room would have to be based on a broader raft of sources than we had at first hoped would be the case.

The relative lack of research relating to the 18th Century urban poor as a whole, and the 'black hole' concerning pensioners in particular, was both liberating and rather daunting. It soon became apparent that conjecture (a dirty word to all curators) would indeed have its part, however grudgingly, to play.

The research process

Geffrye pensioners were by definition elderly (over 56) and

impoverished, so visual and written sources relating to homes of the old or poor, such as the painting *Cottage Interior with an Old Woman Preparing Tea* by WR Bigg and multi-functional interiors, like Hogarth's *The Distressed Poet* were therefore targeted in the first instance.

Published inventories of persons who on their decease left household assets amounting to £20 or less were trawled. Although these indicated quite clearly that certain core items of furniture were common to almost all households (bed, chairs, table and a coffer or chest), they are not recorded with the same level of detail as the chattels of the more well-off. In addition, objects relating to some of the areas in which we were particularly interested (personal hygiene, for instance) were consistently dealt with in inventories under the tantalising but uninformative umbrella category of 'lumber'.

With the research into interiors ongoing, and in a bid to formulate a more focused social profile for the 18th Century Geffrye pensioners, we commissioned a genealogist (to whom we are greatly indebted) to research the two lists of names of those living in the almshouses during 1785 and 1786, referred to above.

It was evident from his findings that the Ironmongers' Company held good to the foundation's rule that Freemen of the Company, or their widows, were to be given preference over other applicants for places at the almshouses. A number of wills for the 1780s pensioners were located, and these indicated that the majority of the pensioners in question had continued in trade during their working lives. This gave us the key to formulating a social profile for the archetypal Geffrye pensioner. Although it could never hope to be as well-informed as that for the 19th Century period room's supposed 'occupant', we could at least establish the core facts that our 18th Century pensioners would have lived in London prior to their admission to the almshouse, and were likely to have been modestly successful in trade and have inhabited a live/work environment but were poverty-stricken by the time they applied for a place at the almshouse (regular payments to pensioners from the poor box testify to this). They were also likely to have attained a certain level of literacy.

With the Geffrye collections holding few objects of relevance to this social profile, we pooled the research results we had gleaned so as to begin the commissioning and acquisition process.

When furnishing the room we had to bear in mind not only our

social profile and the notional timeline ascribed to its occupants, but also the three key indications regarding domestic arrangements which arose from the research into written and visual sources: Firstly, that there was a high level of improvisation in poor or modest households, such as the recycling of bottles for use as candleholders, clothes being hung to dry on strings slung across the fireplace or from wall to wall, and improvised window dressings. Secondly, that they are characterised by little alteration in style over a protracted period of time. Thirdly, that in many cases there appeared to be some marked similarities between regional and urban interiors at this social level.

Key to our decision-making was the apparent confluence of urban and provincial furnishing types. But did this hold true in London? In the absence of previous research we aimed to try and find an answer by using as a case-study perhaps the most regionally-specific furniture-type, the chair.

Dr Bill Cotton (author of *The English Regional Chair*), writes that during the first half of the 18th Century 'in many parts of England, a spontaneous and progressive need for common chairs grew steadily, and by the middle of the century vernacular chair making traditions had emerged in many, if not all geographical regions.' These traditions often persisted for a number of generations. However, Cotton continues: 'Whether the first rush and willow-seated ladder and spindle back chairs and Windsor chair varieties displayed regional characteristics is not clear, or indeed, whether all regions produced prototype common chairs.'

The accuracy of the depictions of chairs in visual sources spanning the period 1710 - 1800 was open to question: ladderback chairs were depicted with many variants not dictated by date (with cabriole, shaped or straight legs, with or without finials, and with a varying number of rungs).

From this arises the question of the detail with which some interiors are depicted: there appears to be a visual 'short-hand' at work in some of them, with furniture being simplified to a degree contradicted by surviving examples. This is particularly the case with works of a satirical or didactic tone in which generic types rather than truly representational examples are depicted as being sufficiently suggestive of class or calling.

The ladderback form, appears, however, not to have been confined to the regions, and does seem to have been as much a

part of the furniture industry in London as elsewhere. The trade card of one Isaac Astley, an upholsterer from the 1750s with premises at The Ship and Rising Sun at Fleet Ditch, states that he 'maketh and Selleth all sorts of...Leather Chairs, Cane-Chairs and Matted (or rush-seated) Chairs'. Likewise, the trade card of John Stubbs' Manufactory in the City Road and Brick Lane between 1790 and 1803, show that Stubbs specialised, as did other tradesmen, in making and retailing furniture with a vernacular flavour. The manufactory was advertised as offering 'all sorts of Yew Tree, Gothic and Windsor Chairs, Alcoves and Rural Seats, Garden Machines, Dyed Chairs etc'. It is illustrated with a rush-seated ladderback chair with top rail.

Such tradesmen as Stubbs, it could be argued, however, represented not an element of continuity within the London chair-making trade, which evidently existed elsewhere, but rather a response to the mid- to late 18th Century *penchant* for the whimsical and rustic.

However, other illustrative material relating to London-based people does depict ladderback chairs in everyday use, making the point that whether or not this chair type was widely manufactured in the capital, it was widely used. An instructive plate engraved for the Universal Magazine entitled *The Art of Stocking-Frame-Work Knitting*, 1750 and *The Several Stages of a Man's Life from the Cradle to the Coffin*, 1797 which follows the rise of an aspiring draper to magistrate and then Lord Mayor of London, illustrate the point. In addition to these, *The Cries of London* confirms that ladderback chairs were commonplace in the capital over a prolonged period. In at least three versions published between 1795 and 1837, the chair-mender is depicted bearing a bundle of rushes and a ladderback chair.

Images of provincial or geographically unspecific interiors containing ladderback chairs make an interesting comparison with the above. They serve to demonstrate that the level of variation between the forms of London-made chairs (or those evidently in use in London) and regional chairs is comparable with that evinced between products of the regions themselves. In other words, some of those chairs depicted in locations either stated or interpreted as being London-based, such as Plate Three of *A Harlot's Progress*, 1732 in which the young prostitute is on her way back down the social scale, could equally well be the products of the

metropolis or the provinces.

Furniture with vernacular overtones was evidently assimilated into the melting-pot that was Georgian London, with its itinerant hawkers and second-hand markets. However, attempting to confirm London-specific ladderback chair permutations, if in fact they ever existed, would entail extensive research beyond the scope of the Geffrye almshouse project. Our case study had confirmed, however, that this generic chair form was found in London during the 1780s, and that it is likely to have been a chair form in common use by tradesmen of ordinary standing.

Similar criteria have been applied to the other contents of the 18th Century period room, the result being a space which is openly accepted by the Museum as being organic in nature. What can be said for all the objects in there is that until new research undermines or contradicts the furnishing choices we have made, this is the closest approximation to an English 18th Century pensioner's room currently open to the public.

From Almshouse to Warehouse: research at the Geffrye Museum

Annabelle Campbell

Introduction to the Museum and the research projects

Over the past couple of years there have been two major research projects undertaken by the curatorial department in the Geffrye Museum. These projects are firstly, the restoration of Almshouse 14 and the development of a contemporary documentation strategy for the domestic interior.

The first project involves working towards the restoration of the almshouse in order that it could offer access to the public to the space and its history; the second had the initial culmination of a temporary exhibition, which served dually as an introduction to the documentation process and an exhibition looking at a defined aspect of domestic interior style, in it's own right.

Although perhaps seemingly dissimilar in purpose and result, there are core similarities shared by these projects:

- both projects pick up where museum displays end
- both deal with actual spaces
- both have no current research base to underpin the work:
- both result directly in future curatorial policy.

The Museum is housed in the former almshouses of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers¹ on Kingsland Road in East London. These buildings are historically and architecturally important buildings, which are Grade I listed.

The almshouses were built in 1714 with a bequest from Sir Robert Geffrye, a former Master of the Ironmongers' Company and Lord Mayor of London and comprised of fourteen houses each with four rooms providing homes for up to 56 pensioners, and a Great room, which was quickly to be redesigned as the almshouse chapel.

In the 18th Century the Shoreditch area was largely rural, but as London expanded in the 19th Century this became one of the most heavily populated areas, which posed problems of overcrowding, sanitation and crime. In 1910 the Ironmongers' Company decided to sell the property, relocate the residents and so built new

accommodation in Hook in Hampshire.

The Geffrye Almshouses were bought by the London County Council (LCC) and initially served as a valuable public open space. The Council was subsequently persuaded by leading members of the Arts and Crafts movement to convert the buildings into a museum relating to the local furniture industry. This duly happened and was opened in 1914.

By the 1930s much of the local East End furniture industry was relocated in the suburbs and the Museum's focus shifted to providing services for local schools. From 1935 the education committee of the LCC managed the Museum and the collections were re-organised into a series of period rooms to provide London schools with a unique resource for learning about history of domestic life. The Museum earned a reputation for its pioneering and innovative education programmes.²

In 1965 the Greater London Council (GLC) replaced the LCC and by 1980s responsibility for the museum had transferred to the inner London Education Authority (ILEA). Following the 1989 abolition of the Metropolitan Authorities the Museum was became an independent trust funded by central government.

The Geffrye Museum Trust was established in 1991, which launched a new phase in its history. Following a complete review of its purposes and aims, a programme of improvements was implemented, most significantly the Lottery funded extension which equipped the Museum with new education rooms, a temporary exhibition gallery, a smaller exhibition space called the *Design Centre* and new galleries for the permanent collection, allowing four new room displays to present the domestic interior of the 20th Century.

From Warehouse to My House: Contemporary documentation and loft style

The Geffrye Museum has concentrated on the display of the history of the urban domestic interior through an arrangement of chronologically presented period room sets since the 1930s. Although the content has changed over time, these rooms have mainly been concerned with portraying identified shifts in style through the representation of genre as opposed to the reconstruction of documented and specific locations.

The early incarnation of the Museum displayed furniture as

examples for the local industry of East End cabinetmakers and furniture manufacturers. The early collection and displays included large amounts of architectural fittings such as doors, panelling as well as ironwork, furniture and tools. The collection included objects acquired from the London County Council who were in the process of demolishing large properties in order to redevelop areas of new housing.

In the 1930s the furniture trade was moving out of East London and under the care of Marjorie Quennell the Museum shifted its purpose towards being an educational resource for local schools. The period room method of display was developed to tell stories about the history of the English domestic interior.

It was in the 1950s under Molly Harrison that the architectural displays were removed and much of the material was handed back to the LCC, whose archive and collection was under the care of English Heritage. The Museum retained its educational focus as its was funded by the ILEA and most of the staff were seconded teachers.

During this period the Museum displays included the kitchen, the cottage and the woodworker's workshop. However, the period rooms were organised chronologically to present a story. At this time there was a clear illustration of the Museum's dedication to engaging with and displaying style of the contemporary domestic interior. There was also the introduction of the modern period room. The modern room was constructed from objects that were borrowed or donated by London designers and manufacturers, as well as drawing on any suitable objects in the collection. The displays were regularly updated and actively attempted to represent the character of the contemporary domestic style of the time. As the Museum handbook of 1948 stated:

'A display of contemporary furniture and equipment is shown in the last gallery in the Museum. From time to time, when supplies are more easily obtainable, this display will be changed to show trends and improvements in modern design.'³

The 1972 Museum Handbook showed a room and kitchen, designed by Carol Tabernor, which again was designed to be modified periodically and so to be kept 'up to date'.

These period 'modern rooms' marked a commitment by the Museum to include display of contemporary style, and to show current styles alongside historical rooms. Molly Harrison, as an

active mover in design circles in post-War London, was also keen to show contemporary design and planned to rebuild part of the Museum to include a gallery which would face onto the Kingsland Road and show exhibitions and interiors of modern style and objects. Harrison's plan never came to fruition due mainly to a lack of funding.

It was on the occasion of the diamond jubilee of the Museum in 1974 that the first 20th Century rooms were opened to the public. These were two rooms which illustrated contrasting styles in interior design in the 1930s.⁴ Later displays took period up to the 1950s and included displays of the higher and lower end of the urban middle class interior. One was a living room typical of the period found in a house, and the other illustrating the style found in a council flat of the day. By 1991 the Museum displays reached as far as the 1950s.

Inhabited room aspect of the project

A key concern for the warehouse project was to record the inhabited room. At present all the room displays are uninhabited as were the rooms that formed the subject of the installation of photographs by Etienne Clement that would show in the Museum at the same time, as the exhibition *From Warehouse to My House*.

The education bias of the Museum that underpinned the room displays through to the late 1960s did include figures that while perhaps seemingly naïve and clumsy today attempted to show the domestic interior as a place that was lived in.

As primary research is the source of the documentation for the warehouse project, our aim was to include the people who both designed and constructed their domestic interior environment. This increases the information gained about each location, we can make connections about the people and the home, and it brings the scene to life to see it in the way that it is intended to be used, i.e. lived in.

Existing research base at the Geffrye Museum

It is important to understand what existing research is in place at the Geffrye. This is primarily in three different practices: Firstly, the Museum has for many years developed a visual archive of the middle class English urban domestic interior. This involves the seeking out and documenting of images that show provenanced interiors. The images date back to pre-1600, and the archive

includes records of paintings, prints and illustrations and for the later dates into the 20th Century photographs sent in by the public or obtained through primary research. The archive has relied heavily on secondary sources, and one major aim of the contemporary documentation project is to add a body of primary research to the archive that can establish a methodology and be built upon.

Secondly, when acquiring objects we request information on where and when it was bought, what room it was used in, when and how it was used, and request images of object in situ at time of purchase or use, together with socio-economic profile of owner (profession, marital status, type of property lived in). Often this information is fed into object history files as well as the visual archive. If an object is offered that the Museum may not want to acquire, we will reply to the donor and request information about the social profile and domestic style in the home of the person or family, and the loan of contemporary images for reproduction for the archive.

Thirdly, with the opening of the new wing extension to the Museum designed by Branson Coates in November 1998 a new body of research was undertaken. This research focused on the urban middle class with the purpose of identifying shifts in economic, social and stylistic patterns, which in turn have affected the appearance and use of the domestic interior.

The resultant research identified themes that became the four displays dedicated to the domestic urban living room in the 20th Century. These are titled: The Edwardian Room; The 1930s Room; The Mid-century Room; and concluding the chronology; The 1990s Loft Apartment Room.

A fundamental aim of the Warehouse project was to build on this existing research and present people in real locations.

There were a number of issues that needed consideration for this project: there was an initial need to identify a theme for this stage of the project. As the research for the new wing identified warehouse conversion as the overwhelming genre shift of 1990s interior style, this was revisited and found to still be a major influence in urban, particularly London homes. Loft style was no longer tied to redeveloped warehouses or industrial buildings; but was an aesthetic that could be identified in a broad range of properties: from Victorian houses to new builds to the original industrial

building, which was now also commercial buildings. It was the undefined and free use of space that primarily defined and identified the style, along with a predominance of largely blank walls, key pieces of modern furniture and a feeling of space.

Properties were located through a variety of sources which included utilising the London Open House event, contacting architects who specialised in conversions, scouring the media for interesting properties and approaching locations through residents committees such as Bankside.

The mode and levels of documentation were going to be the essential decision for the project. As the exhibition element of the project was important, photography would play a large part. However, as a medium itself both photography and portraiture have their own sets of discourse and questions: so how can the photographs be used? And what value will they have as historic documents in the future?

In contrast to both the room displays and the photographic exhibition programmed to run alongside the exhibition related to this project: it was decided that an important factor was to include the residents in the spaces.

Photographs produce a voyeuristic approach to a subject, viewpoint explored by Susan Sontag⁵, a view through another's eye. In this case we commissioned a photographer who was a specialist in both portraiture and documentary photography. He was given a brief which specified that there was to be no styling of the space or extra lighting used beyond what was available in the space. The people could be positioned in the shot, although they were asked to sit or stand in a position that they normally inhabited in their day-to-day living.

The notion of the portrait itself is imbued with its own set of theories, histories and methodologies. Ludmilla Jordanova has written about formal portraits that they do "social and cultural work through a range of visual devices for endowing an individual with heroic qualities". This was not our intention; although the representation of the individual was important, it was in terms of being an integral part of the interior, as a home designed to be lived in and those in the image were those who made the set of decisions about the space depicted. As a lone object the photograph can take on the role of a potent icon and symbol of the interior. For this reason a wide selection of photographic images can perhaps better

supply a rich and varied context and the appropriate set of anecdotes.

For each location shoot I accompanied the photographer and took another set of photographs which were more snapshot in nature but served to show the location through 'another set of eyes'.

The exhibition displayed each location through a group of shots that formed a panorama. A variety of layouts were considered, but it was decided to show the locations as a group of individual images, each of which stands alone, but together the full scope of the interior can be felt. This also resulted in the production of sets of pictures for archive and exhibition with no hierarchy and of equal value as documents. Further levels of information were gathered through the use of a specially designed questionnaire for the occupants, which give comparative information within the scope of the themes of the questions. Included in the form there is an 'extra information' section which some used for more anecdotal material. This has then been followed up with more personal oral history recordings.

So what is the value and use of this research? The most immediate use has been in providing the material and research for the exhibition. Prints, both those commissioned and the snapshots taken by myself have been added to the visual archive and for any future research there is now in place a rich body of information which can be built on and extended. Finally this project forms part of the development of a research base and methodology for the much overlooked area of the study of the middle class domestic

Notes

- 1 Robert Geffrye was bound apprentice to a Mr Richard Peate and in 1637 he was admitted to the freedom of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers. In 1667 Robert Geffrye was appointed Master of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers. In 1685 he was declared Lord Mayor of London and Master of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers for the second time. For the remaining fifteen years of his life he turned his attentions away from politics towards charity. In 1689 he became President of Bethlehem and Bridewell Hospitals and left substantial amounts of money to both and established a third in his will. He died a wealthy man and left a fortune of £13,000, part of which he left to the Ironmongers Company.
- 2 Molly Harrison(1909 - 2002) is acknowledged in particular for her work with the Museum and education. Harrison was curator of the Geffrye Museum, East London, from 1946 to 1969, and had clear ideas and revolutionary opinions about the purpose of museums and the place of children in them. She pioneered what is now accepted as standard in museum education in terms of engagement with the public, use of displays and activities, and was supported by a team of experienced teachers and part-time craft instructors.

- 3 London County Council, The Handbook to the Geffrye Museum (1948) p.17
- 4 London Education Authority, Geffrye Museum Diamond Jubilee leaflet (1974)
- 5 Sontag, Susan, On Photography (1973)

First published in 1973, this is a study of the force of photographic images, which are continually inserted between experience and reality. Sontag develops further the concept of 'transparency'. When anything can be photographed and photography has destroyed the boundaries and definitions of art, a viewer can approach photography freely with no expectations of discovering what it means. This collection of six lucid essays, the most famous being 'Plato's Cave' makes up a deep exploration of how the image has affected society.

MOVING HERE: The Leeds Experience

Linda Rosen

Moving Here (www.movinghere.org.uk) is a website looking at migration to England over the last 200 years. It focuses on the migration and settling of four specific communities - Caribbean, Irish, Jewish, and South Asian. The site contains over 160,000 digitised images (documents, newspapers, photographs, objects, sound and film clips) from 30 heritage partners round the country. This figure may reach 200,000 by the time the project ends. The lead partner is the National Archives (formerly the Public Records Office). This is where a core central team is based as well as the servers which run the website. Other partners include national, regional and local museums, archives and libraries. Specialist centres such as the Black Cultural Archives and the Jewish Museum London are included along with local authority institutions such as the Luton Museum Service and the Lancashire Records Office.

Moving Here has a total grant of £2.65 million from the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). It started in January 2002 and is due to end on 31st March 2004. From then on the National Archives will begin funding the basic maintenance of the Moving Here site for a further three years or until subsequent grant funding is obtained.

The website contains a number of sections:

Migration Histories gives an overview of migration and settling to England. It includes a timeline for each community and substantial text on the following: Origins, Journeys, Settling, Growing Up, Working Lives, Culture and Festivals and Politics. Within these sections there are specialist in-depth articles. Under Jewish Working Lives there is an extended account of the life of Montague Burton prepared by the West Yorkshire Archive Service as they hold important documents relating to his life and business; Caribbean Journeys describes the life of Mary Seacole; South Asian Growing Up describes the Education of Indian Princes in Britain; and Irish Origins has an article on the poverty and disease found in Schull and Skibbereen in the 19th Century with an additional option to listen to an interview with singer Joe Heaney discussing Irish songs of that period.

Tracing Roots shows you how to research your ancestors, where to look and lists useful contacts. It also contains links to many external sites which family historians will find of use as well as case studies. These demonstrate how others have found their own relatives or which records they used to trace the history of somebody.

The Gallery is a shop window showcasing visual highlights from the *Moving Here* database. The items are arranged by topic, rather than by community or contributing heritage partner. Topics include Food, Identity, Childhood, Celebration, and Sport. Each theme contains about twenty images, and clicking on an image will bring up a larger version of the image and a description of it. From here it is possible to send that image to family and friends as an e-postcard. You can also select that image to illustrate a story that you may want to contribute to the site.

The **Stories** section is open to anyone with an experience of migration and its impact to send in their story, not just people from the four communities. A story or reminiscence can be typed directly into a computer using the online story form. The person can then select up to ten of their own digital images to illustrate it or select up to ten images from the website to accompany their story. Once it is received by the Moving Here team the Webmaster will check it and then mount it onto the site where any user can read it. To date there are about 200 stories from people of all ages, communities and experiences. Some of the stories on the site have been collected as a result of community outreach work undertaken by the *Moving Here* central team.

Using the **Search** facility you can search any of the 160,000 images as well as across all other areas of the site described above. It is useful to put in names or key words to narrow the search and to specify the contributor, the community or dates. Clicking on the catalogue reference of an item will bring up a description of it - it is hoped that in future a thumbnail can be seen - and the image can then be downloaded to be viewed. Stories can also be found using this method as they will be added in all the time.

You can also play a game based around dishes eaten by the four communities, offer feedback to the *Moving Here* team, find out the latest events and articles related to migration and take part in the site survey (this only runs at certain times). Comments are welcome

as to the ease of navigation, clarity of information and usefulness for school curricula. It is always nice to hear from users. The *Moving Here* team have received many over the last few months since the site was launched nationally in July 2003 including ones from people who have found people they know in the records.

Substantial collections have been digitised by partners and all can be downloaded. Passenger lists relating to the Caribbean and South Asian communities for 1948-1960 have been loaded and these can be searched by name. The Jewish Free School admission and discharge registers from the London Metropolitan Archives are available and can also be searched by pupil name. The Irish Reproductive Loan Fund records from the National Archives for some Irish counties has 35,000 searchable names. There are also Exemption from Internment Certificates during World War II and copies of newspapers such as *The Keys* and the *Jamaica Times* from the British Library.

Why did Leeds Museums and Galleries (LMG) get involved? Leeds has a substantial number of items relating to the Jewish Community including a large collection of photographs from the Burtons tailoring company and artwork by Jewish artists in the Art Gallery (for example Jacob Kramer). There were also items from the Caribbean, Irish and South Asian communities. This was seen as a pilot project for getting museum collections digitised and on the web. Migration to the city and the diverse make-up of the population are important themes in the new city centre museum which will open in 2007. LMG had to inform the *Moving Here* team of the number of images which would be sent, at the time about 1,100, and grant aid of £47,000 was approved. It was decided to do the project in-house and this enabled the Museum to employ me as a Project Officer for a year and a digitisation assistant for six months. Suitable equipment was bought from the budget - digital camera and lighting, scanner, laptop, computer - as well as archival storage materials for the 10,000 Burton photos. Some specialist assistance was bought in, for example, professional photography for the fine art collections, audio/visual recording (for film strip and gramophone records) and translation of leaflets in Urdu. Many fascinating items were uncovered through research and contacts within the various communities, especially to identify local Jewish businesses which had anglicised their names. Members of the Leeds Irish community mentioned the names of prominent people of

Irish descent, the result being that a book of writings by Tom Maguire, a leading Socialist in the late 19th century was found. A photograph of Bertie Robinson, a black servant at Harewood House in the early years of the 20th century was also found by chance and the Leeds Barbados Society set about trying to find any of his descendants since he returned to his native Barbados. Research in the gramophone record collections brought up a number of 78 rpm discs by Jewish bandleaders such as Joe Loss. A local sound engineer was able to play them and to digitise them to a high standard. The result of a year's work was that LMG was able to send about 1,000 items which totalled nearly 2,000 images. Taking part in *Moving Here* enabled the Museum to identify gaps in the collections but also to build up good relationships with local communities. The project was not without its problems as copyright clearance was necessary for any printed or published items, photographs, records or artwork within the legal time frame. Permission to digitise items was also obtained from donor organisations and it was courtesy to ask descendants (if known) for permission to submit photographs.

The National Archives has produced a manual on Using *Moving Here* in Information Technology (IT) Learning Sessions. This developed out of a training workshop for branch librarians in Leeds. The librarians were keen to use *Moving Here* in IT sessions during Adult Learners Week and people from the four communities were especially encouraged to take part. The users were enthused by the wealth of material and one woman was delighted to find the name of a relative on a Windrush passenger list. The manual clearly sets out how to navigate the site, and how to search for images of interest. It will be launched in January 2004 and loaded on to the *Moving Here* site as well as the People's Network site run by Resource.

The primary audience for *Moving Here* is currently lifelong learners. This is a stipulation of the New Opportunities Fund. However, it is undeniable that the website contains a lot of information that can be used by schools. If *Moving Here* is successful in obtaining additional funding after March 2004 then it is planning to develop education packs for teachers with guidance on how *Moving Here* material can be used for History, Geography and Citizenship courses. The December issue of Internet magazine has already voted *Moving Here* the best history website of 2003. Chapel Allerton library in Leeds ran a workshop for a group of

fourteen-year-old pupils who quickly became absorbed by the images. Objects from Leeds Museums were also on display which emphasised where the images on the screens had come from. This is a good example of cross-domain working where libraries and museums can work together on delivering a project to the community.

Now that the website is complete, the publicity will centre round particular dates in each month, anniversaries of documents and events, and religious festivals. Specific images on the site have already been highlighted for Black History Month, Remembrance Day and the Rugby World Cup win. Promotion and publicity over the next few years should engage schools and communities in the *Moving Here* site and stimulate people to look for other material. There is a great interest in family and community history and genealogical research, and *Moving Here* can provide the leads for this. The West Yorkshire Archive Service has produced *Moving Here* display boards which have been taken to Black History Month events, libraries, museums, family history days and conferences.

The sustainability of *Moving Here* is of key importance. The second phase of the project is to employ Outreach and Community Coordinators to work with communities and the existing partners to develop a number of sustainable projects with a specific outcome. I was appointed the Community Coordinator in the North (from September 2003 to March 2004) and there are three others based in London. Projects with partners include: an oral history group commenting on photos of the Caribbean from the Royal Geographic Society which are on the website and which will lead to an exhibition; a reminiscence project with a Bengali Day Centre in Kings Cross with the possibility of a site visit to the British Library; and a booklet of stories by volunteers at the Manchester Jewish Museum, stimulated by photos digitised for *Moving Here*. Other projects, such as a stories one with the Irish Centre in Camden, are running with community groups and organisations round the country. The aim of all these projects is to generate stories which will be added to the website and enrich the existing content. In this way *Moving Here* remains dynamic, and community groups benefit by being able to have a small amount of funds to mount an exhibition which they get to keep.

Why is *Moving Here* so important? Heritage organisations need to ensure that their collections are accessible to as many people as

possible. One barrier to access is physically getting to an institution. Putting content on the web makes it available to anyone, anywhere. The project has also been providing the opportunity for institutions to explore and understand what they hold in their own collections that relates to minority ethnic communities. People are beginning to appreciate what 'their' local museum or archive contains that is relevant to their lives. Finally, for education purposes, *Moving Here* can engage and stimulate people of all ages with images and information, and present a positive view of the communities that have made their homes in this country.

Work and Migration across Europe: an international collaboration

Catharine Rew

At the end of three years, we are looking back on our experiences as a partner museum in a European Culture 2000 Funded project called *Migration, Work and Identity*.

The project

The People's History Museum got involved in the bid through membership of WORKLAB, the International Association of Labour History Museums, of which the Museum is a founder member. The aim of the project was

'to contribute to the European debate on cultural diversity with the expectation that greater knowledge of the different migrant communities within Europe will improve understanding and tolerance'

and we were to achieve this aim through exhibitions, research and education programmes.

More specifically we committed ourselves to organising exhibitions, educational activities and events in our own museums, to collaborating on a travelling exhibition which would tour to each partner, to arranging three conferences, to setting up a website and to undertaking research.

The emphasis was to be on migrant workers rather than refugees.

The partners

The project was led by the Workers' Museum, *Arbejdsmuseet*, in Copenhagen and other participants, as well as the People's History Museum, were:

Museum of Work, *Arbetets Museum*, in Norrköping, Sweden,

Museum of Work, *Museum der Arbeit*, in Hamburg,

Museum of the World of Work, *Museum Arbeitswelt*, in Steyr, Austria,

Museum of Science and Technology of Catalonia, *Museum de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de Catalunya*, in Terrassa

and four museum organisations in Berlin,
Museum of European Cultures, *Museum Europäischer Kulturen*,
Neighbourhood Museum, *Nachbarschaftsmuseum*,
Museum Education Services, *Museumspädagogischer Dienst*,
and
German Museum of Technology, *Deutsches Technikmuseum*.

Representatives of the different organisations met properly for the first time in the summer of 2001 in Norrköping and discussed fully what was actually feasible in the time available. In the original timescale the first conference in November 2000, in Manchester, would have marked the beginning of the collaboration and in many ways it did, but the news that the bid had been successful only arrived on the eve of the conference. It was possible to announce the news then but the conference itself had had to be planned without knowing the outcome. By the time we all met in Sweden we were already two thirds through the first year of the project, as reckoned by the European funders, though we had actually only received notification of the funding arrangements a few months previously.

In effect we had all had to anticipate what might happen and fit it round plans already in progress. In some cases this meant modifying our aspirations – in Manchester we had originally intended to do an exhibition on a number of different migrant communities but this was not possible. All the partners were at different stages in their development of migration themes and under different pressures of time and funding. The key elements at that planning meeting were getting to know each other, discussing how the joint projects like the travelling exhibition and the website were to be organised and, of great importance and great complexity, how the money was to be distributed and accounted for. English was the common language of the project so the two of us who went from the People's History Museum were at a great advantage but it was a lengthy process.

The effect of negotiating everything in English was interesting and something to which we have adjusted over the length of the project. There have been many occasions when we have acted as interpreters and many others when some of us from Manchester have been more difficult to understand than those speaking English as a second or third language. Written texts were usually checked

by Myna Trustram, Secretary of WORKLAB and formerly Keeper of Collections at the People's History Museum.

It was decided at that first meeting that Norrköping staff, who were already working with graphic artists on their own migration project, would be responsible for the website and the publicity leaflet. Two months later, at a one day meeting in Hamburg specifically to discuss the travelling exhibition, Steyr's offer to organise what was eventually entitled *Crossing Borders, Migrants in Europe* was accepted.

There were further meetings over the next two years and in these, and through the yearly reports and frequent e-mailing, we learnt more about each organisation and the different approaches we were taking with our own exhibitions and events programmes.

The following paragraphs highlight key features of these approaches but do not do justice to the range of activities undertaken by the partners.

Different perspectives

Copenhagen

Museum staff were very involved in the overall administration of the project and they also organised the second conference in November 2001.

For their exhibition they planned to look at families, mainly from Yugoslavia, Turkey and Pakistan, who had come to work in Denmark in the 1960s and 1970s and were now second or third generation. Oral histories were conducted and the approach was through an initial discussion of people's homes and the changes in what rooms looked like between first and later generations. The exhibition opened in September 2002 and was followed by the launch of the travelling exhibition *Crossing Borders* in the following February.

Denmark was one of several countries in the partnership where there was a move to the right politically during the course of the project and a greater backlash against migrants. This seemed to make museum colleagues in Copenhagen, Hamburg and Steyr particularly conscious of the relevance of the work going into the preparation of their exhibitions but also, perhaps, rather pessimistic about its influence on prevailing opinion.

Norrköping

When the *Migration, Work and Identity* project started Norrköping appeared to have the most advanced plans for examining migration. They had already started a project called *Dreaming of a Better Life*, co-ordinating the work of smaller Museums of Work across the country and encouraging contacts with local community organisations. There was a particular emphasis on Finnish workers who had come to Sweden in the last 50 years but they also worked with groups originating from a number of different countries including Bosnia Herzegovina and Slovenia. Exhibitions were produced in the different localities, though some groups chose to produce a book or a film instead, and an exhibition celebrating all these projects was shown in Norrköping itself in 2003. As they are not showing *Crossing Borders* until the end of 2004 the connection with *Migration, Work and Identity* continues.

Hamburg

The main exhibition in Hamburg comes at the end of the project, from October 2003, and has been researched and developed throughout the three years. As a port Hamburg has always had a large number of migrants and traditionally saw itself as the 'Gateway to the World'. Archive and contemporary photographs will be used and migrants from many different communities, including Turkish, Greek, Ghanaian and Iranian, have been involved in telling their stories. Young people have been encouraged to interview their elders as well as to take part in a variety of workshops, displays and activities, including the production of a CD, a result of a series of music workshops.

Steyr

In Steyr the museum has close links with the University of Linz and worked with academic Michael John to develop the travelling exhibition as well as the exhibition in the museum itself. This is a long-term display, from March 2003, of the complete ground floor on the theme of migration to Austria, reflecting on a country which is at the European crossroads, receiving migrant workers from far and wide, but which does not always recognise the changes in self image this may make necessary. Steyr, a manufacturing town in Upper Austria, has less than half a million inhabitants and 13% are non-Austrian citizens coming from 50 different countries.

Terrassa

The museum in Terrassa was the only south European partner in a predominantly north European group. Catalonia, and the rest of Spain, has had a different experience of migration from the countries of the other partners. In the past their workers were likely migrate to other countries. More recently, however, the movement has been the other way with people from North Africa and South America wanting to come to Spain. The reactions this has roused will be among the issues examined in the final conference of the project in October 2003.

As an associate partner Terrassa did not produce its own in-house exhibition but is organising the third conference when *Crossing Borders* will also be shown.

Berlin

Four organisations in Berlin took part and individuals and groups from many different communities across the city were contacted and involved in interviews, photography, workshops and other activities. One of the exhibitions held at the Museum of European Culture in 2002, *Heimat Berlin? Photographic Impressions*, showed work by eight photographers from different countries of origin who were commissioned to look at how people see themselves and how they see others.

The Berlin partners formed the *Berlin Platform* a group aiming to ensure that the links made through the *Migration, Work and Identity* project became part of a longterm strategy for museums in the city.

Manchester

In Manchester we had our own priorities around outside issues, one of which was the Commonwealth Games, with its associated cultural programme, which was going to be happening in the summer of 2002. This meant the migrants with whom we were interested in working were going to be from Commonwealth countries. We had to explain what the Commonwealth was. We were unlike the other partners in dealing with migrants from former colonies who had a right to claim citizenship of the country to which they were coming.

We decided to look at communities of two specific kinds and do an exhibition, with associated education and events programme, for

each. We aimed to start with the Caribbean communities where we already had links and would be able to produce an exhibition, *Moving Lives*, in time for the Commonwealth Games. We would go on to work with South Asian communities to produce an exhibition, *Moving Stories*, and associated activities programme following on and running over autumn/winter 2002 – 2003 (Figure 1). This would be part of the Commonwealth Games legacy.

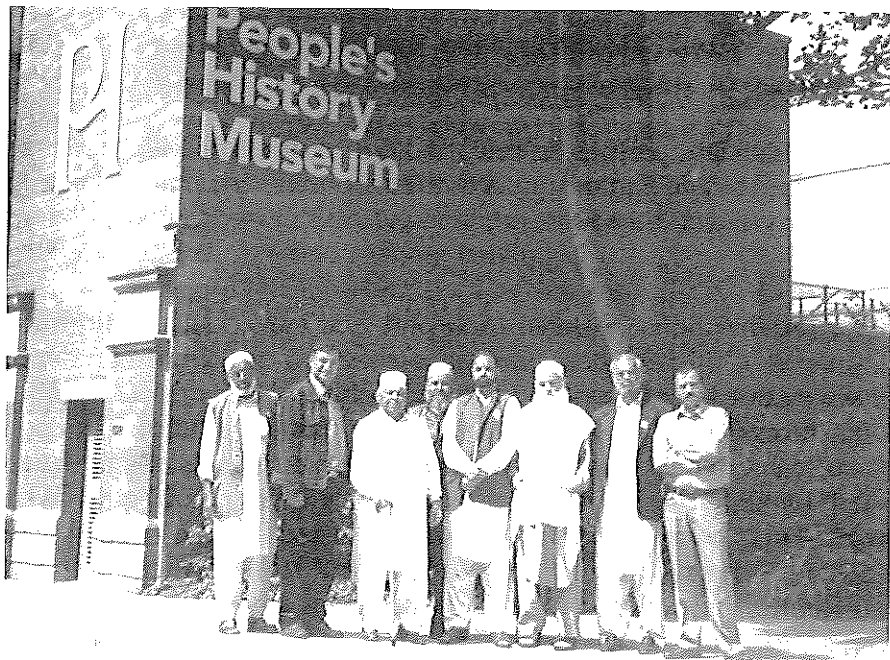


Figure 1
Visit to the Museum by Asian elders

We employed an Outreach Officer and worked on re-scripting a Living History character Gabrielle, who was already part of the regular education service provision for school groups coming to the museum, so that we could run actor-led workshops for groups of all ages in community venues. The character is based on the experiences of three Manchester women who migrated from the Caribbean to England in the 1950s. These women had taken part in a Hulme Adult Education Centre project *Mapping Our Lives*, the results of which were displayed at the Museum in 1998. The Outreach Officer followed up contacts she made through the

Gabrielle performances and through other routes and she encouraged people to get involved in contributing their ideas and, in some cases, personal items to the exhibition. An advisory group of about ten people was set up and met at the Museum to discuss the themes and text. Regular newsletters kept the other contacts in touch with progress.

Over the same period we were having initial discussions with photographer Tim Smith, who was already involved in a South Asian photography project, about the *Moving Stories* exhibition. It was clear we would not have the time or resources to build up the same relationships with South Asian communities, which are very different and with whom we had not previously had much direct contact, as we were doing with Caribbean communities. However we were developing a new Living History character as part of a Heritage Lottery funded Access Project. This was Nahid, arriving in Britain from Pakistan in the late 1960s at the age of twelve to join her family in Britain. The piece was scripted by writer Anjum Malik for performances in the main galleries for the general public. We were fortunate that thanks to funding from the Race Equality Unit of the Home Office we were able to have this character re-scripted for performances to school and community groups both in the Museum and at outside venues. We were also able to employ another Outreach Officer in 2002/3, who built up contacts and introduced actor-led workshops both before and during the run of *Moving Stories*.

Moving Lives – migration, work and identity in Manchester's Caribbean communities opened in April 2002 and ran until October. The main themes of the exhibition came from the project title but the way these were addressed came from suggestions by the advisory group and other people contacted by the Outreach Officer. Subject headings included slavery, religion, carnival, hair, food, health, dominoes and role models.

Display techniques varied – from oral histories related to hair and listened to through adapted hair dryers, to carnival costumes suspended from the ceiling. There were personal photographs and papers but also work by photographers such as Clement Cooper and Nudrat Afza. Of particular interest to many visitors were the items, lent by first generation migrants, which held particular memories of their journey to Britain.

Moving Stories – South Asian communities in Manchester and beyond opened in November 2002 and ran until April 2003. The major part of the exhibition was a selection of photographs by Tim Smith, a photographer known for his work with different migrant groups in Britain but with a particular interest in South Asian communities. He took additional photographs in and around Manchester and a commentary on his work came from a series of interviews with individuals by oral historian Irna Qureshi, recordings of which were available on handsets in the exhibition.

The exhibition had to be planned knowing that contributions from individual community members would only come in at a fairly late stage, if at all, but there were contributions from people who provided personal items on loan. They were photographed with the items and interviewed about them. The exhibition as a whole was used by the Outreach Officer, when interacting with groups, to show how the museum was encouraging ongoing contact with different communities. Newsletters were produced to keep this contact going.

The exhibition was opened by a Government official from the Home Office and attended by contributors.

Crossing Borders, the international travelling exhibition was shown directly after *Moving Stories* and ran from May to June 2003 (Figure 2). It was opened by the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, which was a coup for the Museum and raised the exhibition's profile in the local media (Figure 3). All the new contacts, made by the two Outreach Officers, were invited to the opening and also to the first Saturday when there was free admission and performances by different music groups.

The exhibition itself was mainly photographic with minimal large print text (in English). It introduced the subject of migration in Europe and explained that the exhibition provided a collage of various experiences, which were illustrated with about ten images from each partner museum. A later section posed questions about identity and used issues around headgear – different hats and scarves were displayed throughout, on the poles connecting the exhibition. This theme was picked up by David Blunkett, who had the exhibition described to him and responded to the juxtaposition of two particular images. He remembered that most women in his youth routinely wore headscarves and he contrasted that with the

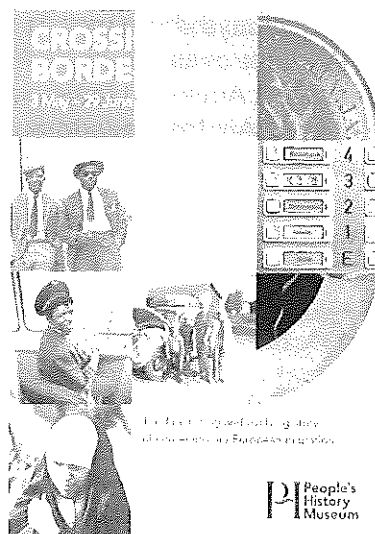


Figure 2
Exhibition Poster



Figure 3
David Blunkett opening the international travelling exhibition

criticism which can nowadays be levelled at Muslim women covering their heads. Another example he picked up on was of an Austrian student with a Black American father who was criticised for wearing a traditional Upper Austrian headdress. The final section asked 'Where are we going – Fortress Europe or Multicultural European Union?' Computers included extracts from a Gabrielle Living History performance.

Compiling and then touring the travelling exhibition was not a straightforward process but it was probably the element of the project which provided the most discussion and collaboration among the partners.

Reflection on the experience

It has been interesting to compare the different ways we have all worked in our respective organisations. Manchester provoked interest with our use of Living History characters and of outreach workers as a means of developing aspects of the exhibitions. We were also the only partner to include our Exhibitions Officer and Education Officer in the group meetings. There is a strong emphasis, in Germany and Austria in particular, on the academic credentials of the curators working on the exhibitions and associated programmes. Are our exhibitions less academic and more populist? It was difficult to judge as we did not see the in-house exhibitions.

There have been other benefits. We have found out more about the countries we have been working with and about migration patterns in different parts of the European Union while realising that what we have seen is only the tip of the iceberg. The complex issues around each country's legislation, particularly where right-wing parties gained power, were only touched on in discussions at conferences and seminars though it was often headline news at the time and related to the subject matter of the project. This was probably because the knowledge we, as individual delegates had of other countries varied considerably, as well as the ability to speak about such matters in English.

We have made friends with colleagues we were able to meet on a number of occasions over the three years. Five different members of staff at the People's History Museum have made one or more visits abroad and on several occasions three of us went at the same time which made it a more shared experience than is usually

possible. Colleagues from the partner museums have visited us and we provided a month's work placement to a young member of staff from Hamburg.

We were careful to make sure that the project was integral to what we wanted to achieve in the long-term rather than a source of funding which we could find ways to exploit for something extra. In fact that was a key lesson we learned as we worked with a funding structure which, in this case, was 80% from the project partners and 20% from Culture 2000. The introductory video in the Museum states our awareness that we do not adequately cover the role of ethnic groups in our main galleries and that we are looking at ways of remedying this. *Migration, Work and Identity* provided a good way of addressing this gap and it was also a catalyst for developing other partnerships. We had funding from North West Arts Board (as it was then) towards a pilot project using Gabrielle in outreach work and, from the same source, funding for a creative writing project using Gabrielle again and working with groups of children and adults. We had funding from North West Museums Service (another out of date name) towards the costs of the first Outreach Officer and from the Home Office for the second. We were also able to extend the use of our Heritage Lottery Access funded project by developing the Living History character Nahid.

Importantly we have a legacy from the project in Gabrielle and Nahid – they are two of the six regular characters currently available for groups to book as part of the Lifelong Learning programme. And we have contacts in the Caribbean and South Asian communities with whom we intend to keep in touch and to include in discussions of future plans for the Museum and its main galleries.

Future collaborations?

It seems likely that we will keep in contact as well with our European colleagues. Some of the partners are already working together on a separate European project looking at interpretation of migration issues for adults and there is discussion of another Culture 2000 bid in the autumn for a project which would run from 2004 - 2007.

The conferences, in Manchester, Copenhagen and Terrassa have widened/will widen the contacts in universities, museums and other arts organisations and there have been invitations to conferences to discuss ideas for museums of migration in Switzerland and Germany.

'A home from home' – Empowering a community

Helen Coxall

This is a very brief account of a collaborative reminiscence and oral history project with Bangladeshi elders that resulted in a fascinating exhibition entitled *A home from home*. Its purpose is to celebrate and publicise this kind of work in the hope that it will inspire others to take on similar projects.

A home from home was at the Ragged School Museum in the Borough of Tower Hamlets, East London during 2003. The exhibition, its photographs, objects and text panels all tell the stories of seven Bengali elders who moved to Britain - some in the 1960s and others more recently. It recounts amazing stories of arrival at the airport with only £2.50, speaking no English and with nowhere to stay. It highlights memories of Bengal's colonial past and of perspectives of Britain in the 21st century. It tells of work, of children, of families and of respect. *A home from home* tells human stories that are relevant cross-culturally.

The exhibition is the climax of a collaboration with Age Exchange who originally set up a reminiscence project with Bengali elders at St Dunstan's Bangladeshi Resource Centre on the Ocean Estate in Stepney. The Ocean Estate was one of several inner city estates identified by the Government as a poor area for housing, low employment, poor health and education to be funded by 'New Deal for Communities' (NDC). This fund aims to set up projects to encourage people to take pride in where they live and to benefit health care and education. NDC funds many things - from arts projects to housing wardens - is a ten year programme and is in its third year. The funding is an incentive to get diverse organisations to commit to the area and then continue the momentum after this period of funding has ended.

The Ragged School has a history of working closely with its local Bengali community on educational projects, workshops and exhibitions and has won two awards for this and other community focussed work: 'Most valuable community work' category of the Gulbenkian Awards for Museums and galleries in 1999, and the special category for Community Heritage for the 'Interpret Britain

Award' in January 2000.

Age Exchange was set up as a cross-generational charity that blends Arts, Health and Education in 1983. Their policy was to work with pensioners devising theatre programmes around their reminiscences and their current concerns and to use theatre skills as a bridge between old and young in the form of creative and enjoyable activity. They have since produced numerous plays based on reminiscence work both here and in Europe with minority ethnic elders, people with dementia and their carers, and people with special needs. Many productions have been collaborations between elders and the young people who are members of Age Exchange's established youth theatre. They also work on collaborative projects with museums and health authorities.

When David Savill, Age Exchange's Arts and Education Co-ordinator, was approached to become involved with the work on the Ocean Estate with Bengali elders he welcomed the opportunity - it was to be the first time Age Exchange had engaged in reminiscence work through an interpreter. The aim with projects such as this is to train the community worker(s) involved so that they may continue with reminiscence work after the funding for the project has run out and Age Exchange have left.

The funding of only £5,000 encouraged creative approaches to this project as a pilot for bigger, future ones. The money was to cover all training, reminiscence workshops, interpretation, translation and the final exhibition. Both Age Exchange and the Ragged School Museum rely substantially on volunteers who receive training for the work and can become very skilled over time.

For the first reminiscence session, David and his co-worker Bernie Arigho took in five slides of maps showing Bengal/Bangladesh over the last 100 years. The men reminisced about how Bangladesh had changed and talked positively about relations with other British people. They also wanted to talk about the present and the kinds of challenges all young people encounter with drugs, and their concern to combat this by maintaining their children's sense of culture and faith and knowledge of their heritage.

'We were immediately aware that there had to be an educational angle with some kind of exhibition where their stories could be used to teach their own grand children about their experiences, so they could learn from that. So we

approached the Ragged School Museum.'

David Savill

Two Age Exchange female workers, Annie Evason and Caroline Baker, worked on a creative project with the women. Although the men were happy just to talk, the women were more used to being occupied, so it was quickly decided that they could use their sewing and other creative skills to record their memories. As soon as they were occupied they went from being silent to being very keen on the project. The textiles and objects they made were displayed in the centre of the exhibition.

'They made all the clay models too. That was another issue for the exhibition. There were no objects. They could describe things they had used back home, but had not brought them with them.'

Liz Braby,
Curator Ragged School

Age Exchange do not have a Bengali reminiscence box for the same reason, so to begin with they used their Victorian school days box as education in Bengal during colonial times was British. This revealed the men's strong feelings about the role they played in World War Two and how their contribution had not been acknowledged: there is no monument or cenotaph to the thousands of men who lost their lives.

'They talked a lot about being under British rule but always came up and shook my hand and said how proud they were to be British - which always surprised me.'

David Savill

Doing reminiscence work with an interpreter was a real challenge. Although many of the elders had been in Britain for a long time and spoke quite good English, they were more comfortable speaking in their first language. David recounts that in the first session he asked a simple question, whereupon the translator spoke at great length when translating it, which made it was clear that he was putting his own interpretation onto the question. It became immediately obvious that interpreters had to be trained in reminiscence

work too. However, on such a tight budget it was not possible to employ a professional translator. The community worker Syed Shahriar who worked as interpreter in the sessions and later translated the interviews to produce text for the exhibition, was trained in reminiscence work by Age Exchange. Working through an interpreter gave the elders an opportunity to reminisce in their first language, which meant they were more relaxed and more forthcoming. This facility, which is often not possible in museums due to staff constraints, proved to be a significant factor in the success of the project as a whole. Now that the project is over, he is keen to do more work at the community centre that might involve an activity programme for children looking at these memories.

The purpose of the initial reminiscence sessions was to get the trust of the elders, therefore none of these sessions were recorded. For example, when the men traded stories from the Qu'ran and the Bible with Bernie and David. On this occasion they talked a lot about the role of elders and their own role when they were boys and how Islam had informed every aspect of their education. Similarly when the men's group taught Bernie and David how to play Cabardi (which is a bit like contact Rugby, but much harder) they did not video the results. Liz Braby, curator of *A home from home*, says that had they had more money they would have liked to include video in the final exhibition, but of course would never have been permitted to film Muslim women. However, such sessions were essential to gain the trust of the participants and the end result was that they were happy to be interviewed about their memories for the exhibition itself.

As well at reminiscences, the exhibition shows several photographs taken by Alex Schweitzer during the workshops and a few by Rehan Jamil. The final oral history project generated the text for the exhibition. Certain members of both reminiscence groups who volunteered to answer specific questions talked about their life in Bangladesh, their journey to Britain, their experiences when they arrived, finding work and how life is for them now.

Liz Braby's contribution to the project really started when she received these translated transcripts. She had to edit them in the English version to a format suitable for the nine text panels and then, after consultation with her colleagues, pass them back to the translator to check them and to get the final agreed edited version translated into Bengali. Here is a brief example of some of the text

from panels to show how some of the themes the interviews dealt with encouraged the elders to talk about various aspects of their lives.

Memories from Home: My village

'I used to help my mother cooking – cutting fish, processing vegetables. She used to get up early to start cooking. We pray five times a day, so it was natural for my mother to wake up early in the morning to do morning prayer. After making breakfast, she used to start cooking the main meal.'

Memories from Home: School and Work

'We used to lend out our paddy fields to other people. The agreement was that they would grow rice and take half of it. And we would take half. The land was very fertile. It was very easy to grow anything. We had everything. We did not need to go to market.'

Memories from Home: School and Work

'The Second World War started in 1939...I was 18 years old then... The Japanese came to Asham and bombed... All the trees in the jungle were burned, it was very scary...There was an American Muslim pilot based at Asham...He told me they were recruiting people in the army, 'Am I interested?' ...I did not tell anyone in the family, I just went...I joined the 682 Battalion. It was an American Battalion. America fought against Japan from this end and the British fought against Germany.'

New Home: Finding a job

'When we came here, not many jobs were available. Finding a job was a real crisis. Once we heard that a factory in Birmingham was offering jobs, so we went there. I used to get £15 per week but then they cut down our hours. I left Birmingham and started a job in East Ham Hospital.'

A New Home: A New Generation

'Some children are OK and others are not. To some extent we are responsible for this. They did not go through any of the hardships we went through. Children come home from school and find everything is ready for them – food accommodation,

gas, electricity. To them it is like father's hotel.'

All panel text was in both Bengali and English. This was vital as it was the Bengali elders' exhibition and the Museum was keen to encourage its local Bengali community to return as they have for others and for on-going events at the Museum. Liz had worked with younger members of the Bengali community on the Ocean Estate before but due to language difficulties had never worked with the elders. Therefore, she was delighted when David approached her to do this project. Working in collaboration has empowered both the elders and their own community by focusing an exhibition on their lives and it has also enabled both organisations to maximise their potential. Liz was impressed by the enthusiasm she met from the community and says she learned from the experience: for example she found that it may not be appropriate to invite the male group to the Museum on the same day as the women's group. An awareness of cultural beliefs and sensitivity to them is very important in projects like this.

Liz feels that the value of the exhibition was that it was relevant cross-culturally and that it broke down cultural stereotypes:

'You feel like you are getting into someone's mind...There are so many things you can relate to like arriving at the airport with so little money or worrying about the younger generation. These things are common to everyone.'

Liz Braby

Voluntary workers at the Museum were responsible for activities around the subject of the exhibition with school and other groups and also for working as explainers with visitors. Volunteers are trained for this work by Bridget McKernan - part-time volunteer co-ordinator. The Ragged School is one of the few museums to use Bengali-speaking volunteers. These are mainly school and college students who work at the Museum in the holiday times and this has been essential in encouraging particularly Bengali adults into the Museum. It is also important to have a co-ordinator in a museum that relies so heavily on its volunteers. The Museum has four full-time staff, three part-time and 50 volunteers of different ages and cultures.

'People do acknowledge you are trying, even if you don't get it spot on every time.'

Liz Braby

'We stuck to our code of practice as reminiscence workers. There is a lot of goodwill towards our organisation because we have made attempts to go about this in the right way.'

David Savill

It was always intended that *A home from home* should tour in order to reach people who do not visit museums, and for reasons of physical access. (The exhibition at the Ragged School is on the first floor and there is no lift in this old Victorian warehouse building.) It is going to Age Exchange in Blackheath, St Dunstan's Community Centre on the Ocean Estate and then the plan is to move it to the Ideas Store (the library in Roman Road, Islington) and to the Brady Community Centre in Tower Hamlets.

David feels that future projects would be ideal for Health funding to complement the Arts funding. He would like to work with the local doctor's surgery and to take reminiscence work into the homes of isolated housebound elderly. For the Ragged School it was a great achievement to see the Bengali elders joining the younger members of their community who already visit the Museum, and to see them so proud and excited by their own exhibition. The opening was an occasion of great celebration, which demonstrated just how much the project had achieved.

Since the opening of *A home from home*, it has created much interest locally. The Ragged School and Age Exchange have been running collaborative educational events around the exhibition. The 'Mother Tongue' group at St Dunstan's community centre is a Saturday class for local children of mixed ages to learn to write, read and speak in Bengali. This group came to the Museum for three weeks to make responses to the exhibition with art and drama. Their teacher translated their thoughts into Bengali so that they could write them in script and incorporate it into their artwork. The exhibition gave them the opportunity to work directly from the Bengali text.

An After School Club with two very different schools from local estates has used the exhibition to look at ideas about identity and respect with an art worker from Age Exchange who also worked

with the 'Mother Tongue' class. The Museum's Summer holiday programme was based around the themes in the exhibition and looked at peoples' sense of home. The Museum has also done extra work with their partner, the Islamic Art Society, to provide culturally relevant activities in the space. A local English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) group is also using the text for several weeks in preparation for a visit.

The collaboration between the Ragged School Museum and Age Exchange has been beneficial for both of them and will be useful when putting in future funding bids. Even after the exhibition is over, the oral history interviews in both languages remain as a resource for the future. More funding would also have enabled an in depth evaluation of the project. Nevertheless, for the time being, this article will hopefully be of some help to those embarking on a similar project and will bear witness to how enthusiasm and drive on the part of organisations, coupled with community collaboration can create worthwhile results on a low budget.

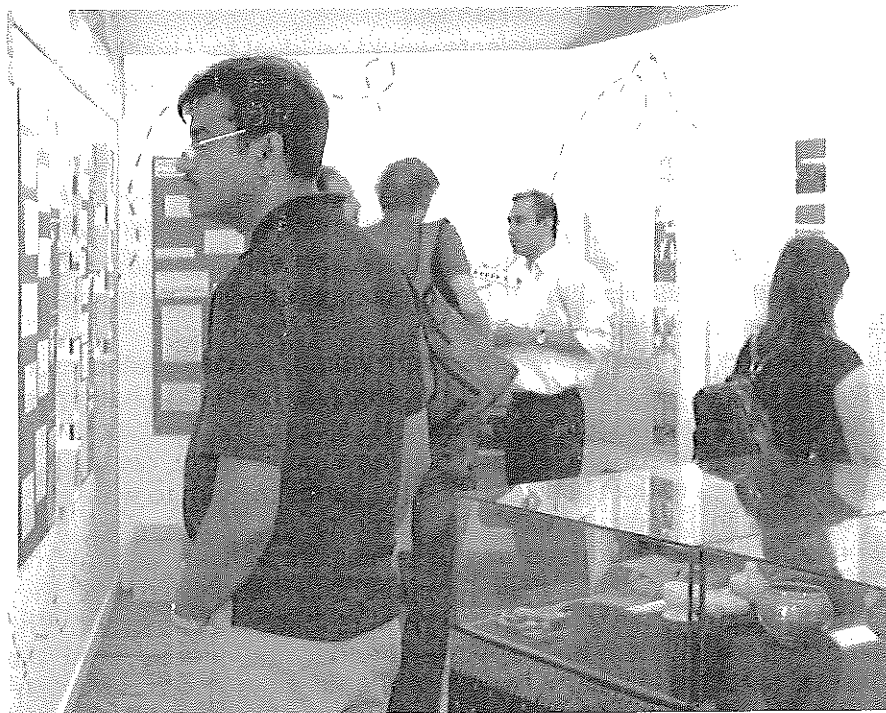


Figure 1

Visitors to *A Home from Home* at the Ragged School Museum.

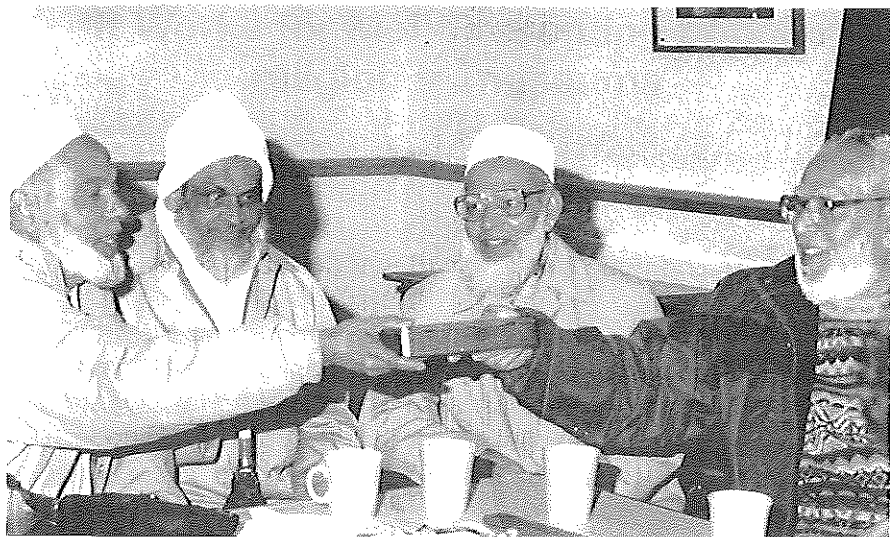


Figure 3

Four Bengali Elders at a reminiscence session at St Dunstan's.



Figure 2

Objects made by women at the reminiscence sessions for *A Home from Home*.

'It Works for Me!' Presenting popular religion in museums

Crispin Paine

I should like to try to do three things in this short article:

- Firstly, to argue that religion can be about, or can do, at least seven different things, and that we need to think about what it is that we want museums to try to tackle.
- Secondly, to argue that popular religion has not declined, just changed a bit, and it is this that museums should mainly be concerned with.
- Thirdly, to look very briefly at how museums nowadays are dealing with religion – those that are.

Classical secularisation theory claims that 'in the face of scientific rationality, religion's influence on all aspects of life - from personal habits to social institutions - is in dramatic decline'. For Weber, who originated the term, 'secularisation' comprised at once *rationalität* (the process of the rationalisation of action) and *entzauberung* (disenchantment, or de-magification). He saw it as concerned with knowledge and reason: religion no longer provides authority for action.

More recent writers have used the term for what they perceived as the decline of some or all the manifestations of religion in modern society. For Peter Berger (1967, 107), secularisation is 'the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols'.

Hugh Mcleod¹ has pointed to the two quite distinct traditions and understandings of secularisation: that which emphasises intellectual development, and the crumbling under secular rational onslaught of the intellectual underpinning of religion, and that which concentrates on economic and social change, and which points particularly to the alienation from religion of the working class. The second has been the more virile approach, involving a whole range of different understandings of the process of secularisation, and particularly of its timetable and association with the different stages

of modernisation. Callum Brown (2001) has claimed that religion in Britain peaked at the beginning of the twentieth century, and underwent a powerful but temporary revival in the 1950s.

A third approach developed in the 1980s when American scholars, in particular, began to stress the role of local political situations, especially the effect of over-rigid state churches. Much of this discussion is presented in overtly political terms, for example explaining the difference between the decline of religion in Western Europe and its flourishing in North America by the invigorating effects of a free market compared to the stultifying effects of state control.

Thus the secularisation debate is continuing and ever more complex. It no longer simplistically links 'religion' to pre-modern outlook and society, 'secularism' to modern, but stresses the varied experiences of different countries and regions, and of the different aspects of religion. In becoming more sophisticated, however, students of secularisation are failing to answer the question the public at large is asking of them: *why* does religion appear to have collapsed in much of the industrialised world?

To argue that religion has declined or is declining, we need to define it, and one can perhaps identify seven distinct dimensions.

1. Belief
2. Religious practice: ritual and devotion
3. Religious experience ('a direct, subjective knowledge of ultimate reality', 'some sense of contact, however fleeting, with a supernatural agency')
4. Religious knowledge ('some minimum of information about the basic tenets of their faith and its rites, scriptures and traditions')
5. Consequences of religion (i.e. 'works')
6. Self-image (the individual's definition of him or herself)
7. Religious institutions

Belief in God seems to be holding up well: at least one researcher gives a figure of 71% believing in God in the 1990s, compared to 81% in the 1940s (Brierley & Wraight, 2000). A survey commissioned by *Fortean Times* in 2001 even found that 37% of women and 29% of men believed in the physical resurrection of Christ (*Guardian*, 4th April 2001).

Assertion of belief contrasts strongly with actual practice.

Weekly churchgoing has declined dramatically, from 24% in 1851, to 19% in London in 1903, 15% in 1948, 11.7% in 1979 and 7.5% in 1998 (Brierley, 2000, 9). For other aspects of religious practice there seem to be no figures. We simply do not know the prevalence of, for example, private prayer and meditation, Bible reading, fasting, retreats and pilgrimage, religious reading, or attendance at religious discussions and lectures.

The next three dimensions of religion – experience, knowledge, and consequences – are equally difficult to measure. We do know that traditional Christian sexual morality has almost disappeared, even among Christians: a 2001 survey found that 'An overwhelming majority of young Anglicans and Catholics reject their churches' teachings on family values...' (*Independent*, 14th March 2001).

A crucial role of religion is its contribution to defining the individual's self-image, to the way he or she defines their identity. Brown (2001, 2) describes 'the death of Christian Britain' as 'a story not merely of church decline, but of the end of Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities and their sense of 'self''. Among the ways in which personal identity is defined is allegiance; in 1983 40% said they belonged to the Church of England; in 1999 the figure was 27% (British Social Attitudes Survey 2000).

Despite the inadequacy of the data, it is clear that for most of our 'dimensions' of religion, there has been a dramatic decline in the past two generations. The one exception, in England, is in the institutional dimension. From Bishops in the House of Lords to the oath in Crown Courts, the State in England retains the forms of official Christianity. One-third of all schools in England are church schools.

Popular Religion

What we have been looking at though, is the decline of the 'official' religion of England. Beneath this there has always lain a popular religion comprising a vast and ever-changing mish-mash of heterodox beliefs, superstitions, magical practices, calendar customs, domestic and community rites and personal spiritualities that draws in many ways on official religion, is sometimes persecuted and sometimes tolerated, but remains always independent. Official religion tends to be identified with the intellectual, cognitive and dogmatic aspects of religion, popular

religion with the affective and pragmatic aspects.

Academic study of popular religion has been inhibited and distorted by an 'official' perspective that has relegated much of it to the realm of 'magic', and retained as 'religion' only those practices which official religion approves.

Perhaps it is more helpful to consider all those aspects of human behaviour and belief that can, in the widest definition, be regarded as 'religious'. The boundary between official and popular religion is anyway both very pervious and very fluid. Popular religion makes great use of official religion, and frequently colonises large parts of it. Official religion tries its best to absorb, direct and control as many of the practices of popular religion as, in conscience, it can.

Traditional popular religion, in England at least, had nothing to do with adoration, redemption or the afterlife. Nor did it seek to explain the meaning of life or the origins of creation. It was entirely pragmatic, concerned to acquire for the individual or the community benefits in this life.

At times popular religion comes to élite notice, as in the Reformation or the witchcraft scare of the 17th century, but normally it is *sub rosa*. It emerges only in local studies, of which an outstanding example is Obelkevich's 1976 study of South Lindsey.

Obelkevich shows in what a variety of ways 19th century Lincolnshire people expressed their religiousness. He shows, for example, how Holy Days 'were sometimes dechristianized but not yet desacralized. They formed, along with the rites, clergy, churches, and churchyards, a vague reservoir of spiritual potency which was no longer specifically Christian and which could therefore be tapped and directed to non-Christian ends. Paganism was parasitical on Christianity, but it had grown larger than its host' (Obelkevich, 1976, 270). Good Friday had no particular significance, but a Hot Cross bun, kept in a house, could protect it from fire for a year.

Popular religion (Obelkevich calls it Paganism) made similar use of the Church's rites and ceremonies. Baptism gave a baby a name and entitled it to proper Christian burial; Churching removed impurity from the new mother, and prevented her conceiving again for a year. 'Christianity provided the ritual, but paganism gave it its meaning.' Popular religion made similar use of the clergy, casting 'the clergyman as exorcist, caster of spells, and wielder of power over the pagan world of spirits'. But it was the villagers, not the

clergy, who were closer to the mythologized outlook that had prevailed in the early Christian centuries – and to whom the Bible still spoke with force and immediacy, as the Methodists had discovered.

Popular religion had no clear unifying principle, but was 'a treasury of separate and specific resources to be used and applied in concrete situations' (*op cit*, 281). However, while divination, healing, magic and ceremony were mostly for the benefit of the individual, the family or the farm, popular religion in Victorian Lincolnshire also had a crucial community role. Indeed, 'religious' rites shaded into those community rites that Bushaway (1982) showed played such a crucial role in sustaining 'traditional', customary, pre-capitalist society.

For Obelkevich and writers like him, popular religion characterises (and grew from and served) a pre-capitalist, traditionally-based community (*Gemeinschaft*), rather than a more impersonal and contractually-based social order (*Gesellschaft*). However, his own evidence shows that it thrived in a rural capitalist society, and other scholars have shown that it flourished in urban, industrial, society too. Sarah Williams (1996: 27), for example, in a fascinating oral history study, found it very much alive in early 20th century Southwark². I shall next try to show that it continues to flourish – indeed, really comes into its own – in our late-modern or post-modern society.

Religion for the Post-Modern World

This popular religion, which has always been there, is as flourishing today as ever. Indeed, it is more flourishing than ever, because it is no longer crushed under official religion, and finds itself eminently suited to our individualist society.

Modern (or 'post-modern') late-capitalist economy depends on occupational flexibility, mental flexibility, high levels of education and skill and above all a 'consumer mentality' that concentrates on benefits to oneself or to one's immediate family. Our age thus requires a new consciousness and a new philosophy. This consciousness is characterised above all by individualism, relativism and pluralism. In philosophy it is post-modernism, reasserting affective as against cognitive understanding. In religion it is a 'pick-n-mix' spirituality, regarding all religious approaches and techniques as equally valid. What matters is not *the truth* but *my*

truth, 'what works for me'.

This consumerist religion is most clearly apparent in New Age spirituality, New Age expresses itself in a huge variety of forms; its individualism militates against any orthodoxy, and the best the student can do is to identify tendencies and foci of interest, such as healing, the goddess movement, Gaia, or para-science. New Age seekers drift happily from one to another, always looking for 'what works for me'.

(It is true, that though New Age often seems to have become mainstream and indeed sometimes to dominate religion in the West today, in fact this is something of an illusion. The numbers of people actively involved are, compared to the traditional churches for example, tiny, and are overwhelmingly young and middle class).

However the New Age is only one quite small part of modern popular religion. Much more widespread are all those beliefs, attitudes, and practices that are commonly characterised as 'the paranormal', and 'superstition'. They include divination, science fiction, belief in ghosts, and the use of 'luck'. These, I suggest, are equally valid aspects of popular religion today, and are in direct succession to the popular religion of the past. Their main characteristic is individualism: 'it works for me'. That is what popular religion has always sought.

People have always made use of religion to help them to understand and (especially) to manage the world. Whereas in the past English people picked what they would from official Christianity, and mixed it with folk beliefs and practices, today they build on that tradition by adding ideas drawn from all religions and all periods.

Popular religion in museums

So if popular religion has been of great importance to ordinary people, and continues to be today, perhaps we should be more concerned with it in our museums. There is a special reason, too, why museums should worry about it. That is because religion is for most people something you *do* rather than something you *think* and because it is something you do, you usually do it with objects. From Shinto temples to rosary beads, thangka paintings to missionary tracts, mass-produced posters to gravestones, religion is a material process. You do religion with *things*. Because the special genius of museums is to work with objects, and through objects to

illuminate the ways and aspirations of humankind, museums should get involved in celebrating and recording religion.

A few years ago I visited most of London's museums, to look at how they dealt with religion. I had to conclude that they did very little. As Mark O'Neill (1996: 188) put it 'The most obvious and important thing to be said about making histories of religion in museums is that they don't do it very often'.

However things are changing. For one thing, the current generation of young curators does not have the hang-ups that perhaps previous generations had. Militant agnosticism seems to have given way to a much more sympathetic understanding of religion – even if people still try to avoid the R word by talking about 'spirituality'.

This change is most obvious in temporary exhibitions. *Acts of Faith: Brazilian Contemporary Photography* at the Ashmolean; *Meeting God* at Leicester; the new displays at Chester Beatty Museum in Dublin; *Faces of the Gods* at Croydon Museum; *Heaven and Hell* at the Royal Museum of Scotland; and perhaps above all the great *Seeing Salvation* exhibition at the National Gallery.

Though St Mungo's is still the only museum specifically devoted to religion in this country, there are plenty of museums belonging to particular faith communities and groups, or associated with churches, monastic sites and so on. And worldwide the new Museum of World Religions in Taipei has opened.

However, it is less clear that mainstream museum displays have yet seen much change, particularly in social history museums. There is certainly not yet much sign of museums trying in their displays to *analyse* religion as an aspect of local society in the way that, for example, the best of them do social class or family structure.

Another huge development is the growth of interest in academia in the material culture of religion. This is where the principal sources of help for curators planning displays or programmes concerned with religion will be found. Brent Plate's new reader *Religion, Art and Visual Culture* is probably the best way into this whole field. John Harvey's two books on the visual culture of Welsh Nonconformity are well worth reading. I hope the volume of essays I edited a few years ago, *Godly Things*, may be useful. And from 2005 there will be a new quarterly journal devoted to the material culture of religion, and particularly to religion in museums: *Material*

Religion: the Journal of Art, Objects and Belief.

So what should museums be doing? I hope that social history museums, in particular will begin to pay much more attention to popular religion. If our aim is to help people understand how our communities came to be the way they are, religion as *people actually lived it* is an important part of that story. Too often when we do present religion it is a text-based story about building big churches, leading local figures, and famous official events.

Too often we only notice religion when it's a defining characteristic of particular ethnic communities. (WASP curators are particularly tempted by what they see as exotic). Two things result from this: minority religions get more attention than, in terms of numbers, they deserve, and we tend to turn to the official sources. For a curator wanting to do an exhibition on Sikhism, for instance, it is far too tempting to turn for help to "the Sikh community", and to find oneself repeating the views of the dominant caste, *Khalsa*, middle-class males.

Instead, let's try to be brave. Let's face up to the complaints, the row in the press, the pressure that will be put on us by all the self-appointed guardians of all the various orthodoxies. Let's make sure that the religion we present in social history museums really is the religion that local people, in all our heterodox muddle and uncertainty, have actually lived.

Notes

- 1 Hugh McLeod, seminar at University College Chichester, 28.2.01.
- 2 Williams shows the ambiguity and overlap between official and popular religion. Thus a woman had to be churched before she could be welcomed back into the family home after childbirth, both because it was 'unlucky' not to be, and because she should be giving thanks to God. Similarly, it was unlucky not to have a Bible in the house.

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Book Review

Craft and Conflict: Masonic Trench Art and Military Memorabilia

By Mark J.R. Dennis and Nicholas J. Saunders

**Published in association with the Library and Museum of
Freemasonry**

Savannah publications

The booklet, 'Craft and conflict' goes some way towards unveiling some of the mysticism of Freemasonry by linking it with the common experience of mankind: warfare and memorabilia.

Social history curators need to be able to interpret the material culture they care for and interpret and in recent years Freemasons have come out of their self-imposed shell, to share a few, but not all of their secrets.

This short booklet was designed to accompany a temporary exhibition which has now closed, but it can be read on its own as an introduction to this interesting subject. Readers unfamiliar with even a basic background knowledge of Freemasonry, may find that it raises more questions than it answers. In recent years, Freemasons have tried to define their role in the 21st Century and have made more information available to the general public in order to aid understanding.

Essentially, Freemasonry has routes in the Medieval building trade where lodge secrets were used to protect the trade from impostors. Then there was a surge of interest during the Enlightenment, when Freemasonry broadened out to embrace different social classes and trades. It was largely an all male society, though there are several examples of all female lodges. There was, and is a long tradition of religious and race tolerance. Freemasonry went 'underground' during the 1930s when Hitler persecuted the Craft and many European Freemasons were imprisoned or died in the Concentration Camps.

The booklet makes a brave attempt to look at the story of Trench Art, with the added dimension of linking it to the material culture of Freemasonry. In some ways the treatment is rather superficial, but as a short guide it provides sufficient information to encourage further reading.

The authors refer to three kinds of Trench Art. The authors - a

curator and an academic - share a passionate belief in their subject matter. Purchased or exchanged by soldiers or civilians, the production of Trench Art, helped alleviate the boredom and suffering of wartime life. Ironically, objects of great beauty could be made from recycled bullets and shells, showing perhaps that the human spirit could still persevere under even horrendous circumstances. During World War I, soldiers' trench art could be functional whereas civilians would use trench art for ornamental purposes. For example brass shell case flower vases! Some Trench art was actually made for sale to soldiers.

In the post World War I period, when the bereaved toured the trenches, they would buy Trench Art as a token of their lost loved ones. Such items held a deep significance beyond a mere souvenir and we have only to think of the thousands of names of the missing, listed on the Menin Gate in Ypres to understand the communal and individual grief.

The booklet is divided into four sections: Trench Art an overview, Freemasonry at War, Masonic Trench Art and the lost world of Trench Art. Each attempts to outline the principle history of Trench Art and reveals something of this hitherto neglected subject.

Examples of trench art can be found amongst all nationalities, in prisoner of war camps over the past three hundred years and beyond. Trench art is broken down into three categories:

- The first category is cigarette lighters and matchbox lighters made from scrap metal, decorated artillery shells, carved wooden objects, things carved from bone stone and chalk, embroidery or beaded objects such as postcards. Handkerchiefs, decorative cushions etc.
- The second category is civilian items. These include, memorial plaques, textiles, items salvaged from ships or airplanes and inscribed items such as letter openers.
- A third category is items sold commercially. For example, clocks made from shells, inkwells made from grenades, lamps and candlesticks made from shells.

Having established the broad categories the authors go on to specify Masonic links eg decorated regalia such as aprons, lodge tools and commemorative jewels

The booklet informs us about a philosophy of life (or death) which

is perhaps difficult to comprehend with our 21st Century mind set. As a starting point for research into either Trench Art or Freemasonry the booklet could prove a useful guide and hopefully it will stimulate further interest and research into these subjects.

Lloyd Langley

Notes for Contributors

The Editor will be please to consider articles for inclusion in Social History in Museums. The article should be supplied on disc along with a printed copy. Articles should be in the region of 2,000 - 3,000 words, but longer articles will always be considered.

References (Footnotes)

Contributors may use either of the standard conventions:

(a) In text citation of sources

Give author's surname, date of publication and page references (if any) in parentheses in the body of the text, e.g. (Dyer, 1994, 179). 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 the author's surname, should be typed at the end of the article in the form:

Dyer, C. 1994, *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London)

Give place of publication, not the publisher. Titles of books 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 on separate pages at the end of the article. Full publication details should be given at first mention, a short form thereafter:

Colin Platt, *King Death: The Black Death and its aftermath in late-medieval England* (London), p. 18.

T H Ashton and R H Hilton (eds), *The English Rising of 1381*, pp. 9 - 24

SAC Penn, 'Female wage-earners in late fourteenth-century England', *Agricultural History Review*, 35 (1987), pp. 1 - 14

Short forms:

Platt, *King Death*, p. 102

Ashton and Hilton (eds) *English Rising*, p. 25

Penn, 'Female wage-earners', p. 12

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.

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SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

CONTENTS		Page
Sue Clifford	Celebrating Local Distinctiveness	1
Ceryl Evans	Collections, Communities and Memories: Making Rotherham's Heritage Accessible	9
Brenda Jones	Contemporary Collecting in the Countryside 2003	15
Chris Copp	Pastures New? Recording Contemporary Rural Concerns	25
Elaine Edwards	Education or Entertainment: Interpreting Rural Issues to a Mixed Audience	31
Robert Lancaster	The Third Alternative: Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City Movement	39
Kathy Haslam	Reinhabited Spaces: Putting Pensioners Back in their Place	47
Annabelle Campbell	From Almshouse to Warehouse: Research at the Geffrye Museum	53
Linda Rosen	Moving Here: the Leeds Experience	61
Catherine Rew	Work and Migration Across Europe: an International Collaboration	67
Helen Coxall	A Home from Home: Empowering a Community	79
Crispin Paine	'It Works for Me!' Presenting Popular Religion in Museums	89
Lloyd Langley	Book Review Craft and Conflict: Masonic Trench Art and Military Memorabilia Mark JR Dennis and Nicholas J Saunders (2003)	99