****

**SHCG Conference 2018**

**A True Reflection? Displays, stories and exhibitions**

**Thursday 19 July — Beamish: The Living Museum of the North**

**Keynote with Q&A session**

**Jenny Mabbott**

**Head of Collections and Engagement, People’s History Museum**

As museums everywhere strive to better reflect their audiences is co-curation the answer?

Do co-curated exhibitions really create a ‘true reflection’?

Jenny Mabbott will share her experiences of strategically leading the co-curated programmes at the People’s History Museum, highlighting examples from PHM’s 2017 programme ‘Never Going Underground: The Fight for LGBT+ Rights’ and 2018 programme ‘Represent! Voices 100 years on’. She will also look ahead to PHM’s 2019 programme marking the bicentenary of the Peterloo Massacre.

Jenny will use these examples to reflect on the shifts in curating practice that have taken place during her career. She will conclude by evaluating the ‘opportunity cost’ of not striving to create a ‘true reflection'.

**Biography**

Jenny has been Head of Collections and Engagement at the People’s History Museum (PHM) since February 2017 and has been working in the museum sector since 2007. Jenny began her career as Collections Assistant and later became Collections Officer at the Museum of Wigan Life. In 2012 Jenny became Manager of the Rochdale Pioneers Museum, overseeing its re-opening and the transitional years of operation following its redevelopment. At PHM Jenny’s role encompasses strategic leadership of the learning programmes, events, engagement, exhibitions, collections, conservation and archives.

Jenny has a BA in Modern History from the University of Oxford and an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester. Jenny held board positions with the Social History Curators Group 2010-2013, completed her AMA in 2012 and undertook the Clore Emerging Leaders Programme in 2013.

**Museums in the context of the fixed mindset**

**Thanh Sinden**

**Museum Detox and Culture Coventry**

We are dealing with a world where change is continuous, where the future is less predictable, where the options are multiple and solutions are complex. Museums are under pressure to attract an increasingly diverse, complicated and changing population. We’re under pressure to make decisions faster, represent better, processing large amounts of information (or working with a shockingly lack of data), and where everything is more interconnected than ever before.

What are the qualities and preparation we need in place to deal with this complex and uncertain world? How can museums develop their workforce and their organisational culture to be relevant and resilient?

Through the lens of Museum Detox with some case studies, this talk will explore museums in the context of fixed mindset. How we nurture a growth mindset to be forward looking and flexible. How museums can look at widening their interpretation and participation practice.

**Biography**

Thanh has worked with engaging audiences in the museums and heritage sector for the past 10 years. She worked to build resident participation on a £1 million lottery project to redevelop a community area. Using creative audience development activities and with multiple partners.

Thanh project managed and developed an innovative project of its time, the Arts and Social Care Project at Wolverhampton. Establishing a new programme and audience, leveraging in strategic commissioning from the health and social care sector. Thanh’s interests have led her to explore more widely the role of a 21st century museum in society and the power museums have to create social change.

**Faith, hope and fear**

**Isabelle Lawrence**

**Science Museum, London**

The Science Museum is currently developing five new permanent galleries exploring historical and contemporary medicine, due to open in 2019. One of these galleries will be called ‘Faith, Hope and Fear’, and will explore the human experience of ill health and medical care. Importantly, it will incorporate several objects from a variety of different religious traditions, which are on permanent loan from the Wellcome Trust.

These are not objects that have not traditionally fallen within the Science Museum’s remit, the curatorial team has been faced with the question of how to develop our collections knowledge, and sensitively interpret the deep personal meanings that many of the objects on display hold. This presentation will address the theme of interpreting collections where there is a lack of specialist knowledge, and how to produce a ‘true reflection’ of the beliefs and experiences of ordinary people. It will discuss our approach to developing relationships with subject specialists, hospital chaplains, and individuals whose experiences of health and medical care have been influenced by their beliefs.

Delegates will therefore be offered an insight into how the curatorial team at the Science Museum is currently approaching the development our collections knowledge, the problems encountered, and how we plan to incorporate non-curatorial voices into the gallery. It will also be a chance to discuss one of the approaches museums can use to interpret objects that sit outside of the traditional remit of the museum’s collections, whilst remaining true to the overall mission of the museum.

**Biography**

Isabelle Lawrence is an Assistant Curator at the Science Museum in London, currently supporting the development of five new Medicine Galleries, due to open in 2019. Between March and November 2017, she was employed as a Project Assistant by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, assisting with the OPS Move Project. She gained an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester in January 2017, producing a postgraduate dissertation entitled ‘Revealing Hidden Histories: Collections Development and Re-presenting Disability.’

**Exploring museum hashtags and the power of social media**

  **Rachel Cooper**

 **Birmingham Museums Trust**

In September 2017 Rachel created the Twitter account @MuseumHashtag, with the intention of helping museum professionals keep track of museum-related social media days, such as #MuseumSelfieDay and #AskaCuratorDay. It soon occurred to her how the use of hashtags and museum celebration days online affects the ways in which social history is remembered and documented. Longer celebrations such as Museum Week, which promotes a different hashtag each day, offer the opportunity to tell stories which may not otherwise be shared. The use of the hashtag has also expanded hugely over the past few years, beginning on Twitter and since expanding to Facebook and Instagram. Social media has proven to be a valuable resource for museums because many platforms are free of charge to use. Rachel became interested in the ways in which museums and cultural organisations use social media and museum hashtags.

This interactive workshop will see participants explore how their organisations’ offering has changed and evolved thanks to the use of social media and hashtags. Using research conducted through social media, Rachel will explore which hashtags prove to be the most engaging and whether they broaden an organisation’s reach. She shall seek to identify why the museum hashtag causes so many unheard stories to be told, and the different opportunities they accord to museums and cultural venues.

This will allow delegates to discuss the ways in which they share their stories both in their physical displays and in their social media feeds, and to consider whether physical displays and social media feeds can (and indeed should) offer differing stories.

**Biography**

Rachel Cooper is a Midlands-based emerging museum professional with an academic interest in the popular remembrance of early modern history. She decided during her academic studies that museums are a great portal in which to develop this interest further, and currently works at the heritage sites of Birmingham Museums Trust. She also works as Volunteer Support Assistant for Kids in Museums, promoting their projects and mission. When not at work in a museum, Rachel can often be found on Twitter with her attempts to help fellow early career museum professionals, from her community handles @MuseumHashtag and @MuseumSkills.

**Representing communities – finding time and resource**

 **Roz Currie**

**Islington Museum**

Drawing on her experiences as curator at both Islington Museum and the Jewish Museum, Roz will examine how those museums represented different communities in their temporary galleries. Through a series of case-studies, she will share the questions she asked (or forgot to ask), which elements were crucial, and where she had to let things go as unmanageable. Roz will also look at how cross-departmental working was crucial to create a holistic level of engagement, and ensure participants were properly cared for. And finally, how she presented plans to management in order to make them happen!

Roz will discuss the concept of approaching different community groups, including connecting, safeguarding and ethics. She will share critical thinking around the subject such as drawing a line between what groups want or need to represent, against what can actually be delivered. Other aspects will include cross-departmental working, fighting museum management for your community group, and how to install on a tiny budget.

All of the case studies were presented on tiny budgets, and Roz will share how she managed certain elements which elevated the exhibitions and ensured that each display was given the space and dignity it deserved.

Roz hopes to include the following case-studies:

* Memory quilts –The story of child Holocaust survivors in Britain
* Spanish Civil War – Uncovering the local story of the International Brigade and working with Marxists
* Festa! – An art show working with vulnerable adults in the local community
* Holloway Prison – This project is up-and-coming but Roz will give a flavour on the issues reached by this point in the project.

**Biography**

Roz Currie has worked in heritage and engagement for nearly ten years. As curator of the Jewish Military Museum for 5 years, she led the merger with the Jewish Museum London, integrating the collections, stories, learning and volunteer programme, while curating a major exhibition on the First World War. Currently curator at Islington Museum, she works very closely with the local community. She is currently part-way through delivering an ACE-funded Ready To Borrow GIS programme, is managing delivery of interpretation for a joint £1.8 million HLF project in a local park, and has just been awarded HLF funding for her Holloway Prison project.

**Benny Lynch; the little king of the Gorbals. A community display by and for the people**

**Kevin A Kerrigan**

**Glasgow Museums**

Kevin A Kerrigan will tell the story of how this unique community project came together with the help of a grassroots campaign that was flagging and looking for guidance and a new way to have their subject matter interpreted and displayed.

He will share how this unique project became a new model for how *The Open Museum* work with future community groups and how they interpret and display collections from both the museum and of those held in the community by members of the public. Kevin will include how the team set about to successfully engage a much wider audience from what was a small community project with a limited budget.

The presentation will explore the impact that this unique display had and how the museum supported the group with public engagement and in targeting specific venues whilst creating high impact events around the exhibition. This includes how it caught the attention of the media. It will also touch on the legacy of this project, including plans to upscale it to permanent exhibition in one of Glasgow Museums’ venues, the introduction of a trust scheme to help young people in deprived areas achieve through better access to sporting scholarships and programmes, and the raising of awareness and funds towards a statue in the city for the boxer Benny Lynch. This project is ongoing until July 2018.

**Biography**

Kevin A Kerrigan has worked for Glasgow Museums for 15 years as a Research Assistant, in education and now in the Outreach department, The Open Museum. He has a degree in Scottish History and a Masters (MLitt) in Museum and Gallery Studies. Kevin runs his own exhibition company called Touring Exhibitions Scotland (TES), providing pop culture and family exhibitions to museums and galleries across Scotland and Northern England.

Kevin is a keen historian and gives regular talks on numerous topics relating to Glasgow history, as well as the occasional bit of writing for publications. He is married with two children and lives in Glasgow.

**Friday 20 July – Great North Museum: Hancock**

**Keynote with Q&A session**

 **Caroline McDonald**

**Museum Manager, Great North Museum: Hancock**

**Which Way North?**

At the time of the 2018 SHCG Conference, the Great North Museum will be hosting an exhibition *Which Way North* as part of NewcastleGateshead’s wider Great Exhibition of the North.  As a project that intends to represent art, design and innovation from across the north of England, challenge visitor perceptions about the north and support inward investment to the region, the GNM’s manager, Caroline McDonald, will discuss the background to this Government backed project, the challenges of producing the exhibition and the successful – and not so successful – outcomes. With the exhibition in situ, delegates will have a first-hand opportunity to compare notes with Caroline.

**A new look at the history of the slave trade**

**Claire Simmons and Sue Giles**

**Bristol Culture**

Claire Simmons and Sue Giles will reflect on the challenge of working with the uncertainty that comes with a project like this, and why they think it's worth it. It will discuss how Sue and Claire supported a group of young people to work as social historians – re-examining Bristol Culture’s archives material from a young, Black and/or working-class perspective.

It will examine how Claire and Sue worked with young people to turn concepts into a museum display and how they used new material such as film, photography and sculpture, alongside archive material. There will also be discussion about how they selected professionals from outside their organisation to engage young people from diverse backgrounds in the project.

Claire and Sue will also talk about how this small project is opening doors for the young people as future museum professionals, and the impact this is having on Bristol Culture.

**Biographies**

Claire Simmons – Engagement Officer: Young People, Bristol Culture (Bristol Museums)

Claire has been leading the Young People's Engagement Programme at Bristol Culture for just over two years, with a focus on providing more opportunities for under-represented groups and diversifying the future workforce within the museums sector. She runs a Youth Panel within Bristol Culture, as well as additional projects for partner youth organisations. She shall be giving a presentation to delegates at the Museums + Heritage Show at London Olympia about developing diverse youth partnerships in museums in May.

Sue Giles – Senior Curator World Cultures, Bristol Culture (Bristol Museums)

Sue has worked in the Collections team at Bristol for many years and knows the World Cultures collections inside out. She led on the three displays on Bristol and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which were done with the help and support of community advisors.

**Engaging new audiences at Newstead Abbey**

**Simon Brown**

**Newstead Abbey**

Newstead Abbey is famous at the home of the notorious poet Lord Byron. In 1818 he sold Newstead to his friend Thomas Wildman. Wildman owned the Quebec sugar plantation in Jamaica, worked by over 300 enslaved Africans. The wealth generated was directly spent on purchasing and refurbishing Newstead, a link that has never been explained in the Abbey’s interpretation.

In 2016 Newstead Abbey was approached by the University of Nottingham, who had obtained a grant from AHRC to research links between the slave trade and heritage sites in the UK. They were working with Bright Ideas, a community agency, to capture a contemporary response to these histories for display at the sites themselves.

Bright Ideas engaged a group of volunteers of Nottingham residents, of largely African or Afro-Caribbean descent, to see Newstead and to consider their response. The result is a film that was made at Newstead, and will form part of a new gallery exploring the overall history of the site. The gallery will open in summer 2018.

The process has occasionally been difficult, particularly in balancing the competing needs, timescales and expectations of the different partners. It has however ultimately benefitted all partners and refreshed and enriched the interpretation at Newstead.

Each partner has a unique motivation and perspective. Newstead Abbey is administered by Nottingham City Museums and Galleries. The city council has identified engagement with BME communities as a priority, and this was an opportunity for Newstead to meet that need with no cost to the council.

This presentation will be a valuable case study for delegates wishing to find ways of using their collections to engage audiences whose experiences are not currently portrayed, working with new partners and opening new funding streams to do so.

**Biography**

Simon Brown is the Curator at Newstead Abbey in Nottingham, appointed in January 2017. He has worked in museums across Nottingham for 10 years in a variety of positions- in community engagement, front of house, education, exhibition install and documentation. He has managed the handling collection at Nottingham City Museums and Galleries, and was most recently Curator of Social History and World Cultures.

He was elected to the board of the Museums Association in April 2017, having served as regional rep for the previous 3 years. He has written about museums for Museums Journal, the SHCG newsletter and other publications.

**Museums have never been neutral**

**Gemma Ashby, Sarah Cotton and Michael McHugh**

**Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums**

How does a public museum respond to a world that is experiencing rapid and increasing change?

How do we tell new stories and build a greater emotional connection with audiences beyond the static display of objects and collections?

How can museums challenge the expected and traditional heritage experience?

Multi-disciplinary staff from Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums will present three examples of public programmes which have presented, discussed and displayed social history in innovative, collaborative methods. The programmes involved collections enhancement, contemporary collecting and public engagement.

Delegates will learn about the ambition, aims and objectives for the programmes; the methodological approach, the public response and the experience of staff.

**Women on Tyneside**

Esmée Fairbairn funded curatorial project and public programme empowering community participants to reinterpret objects and challenging the representation of women in museum collections and displays.

**#IfYouLivedHere**

Responsive museum intervention displays using language, simple design and communication to provoke debate with audiences around inequality, intolerance and global issues.

**Ali On Tour**

Innovative public engagement where local attitudes and stories were collected through sound recordings addressing ethnicity, religion, disability and gender in South Shields and South Tyneside 40 years after boxer Muhammad Ali’s visit.

**Biography**

Sarah Cotton has been Keeper of Contemporary Collecting at TWAM for almost 10 years.

She has previously worked in collections and engagement roles at Beamish, The Bowes

Museum, and museums and historic houses in Stockport.

Michael McHugh is a producer at TWAM working across disciplines through community programmes, design, curatorial, collections and public engagement. He has worked for TWAM for 12 years.

Gemma Ashbyis Project Co-ordinator for the Tyneside Women’s Collective Project at TWAM, working on collections and curatorial work, alongside engagement with a variety of local women’s groups.

**Innovative ideas on inclusion in museums**

 **Rachel Thain-Gray and Dr Adele Patrick**

**Glasgow Women’s Library**

Museums are facing mounting pressure from government directives, the enactment of the Equality Act 2010, emerging funding restrictions; and critique of sectoral engagement approaches from activist practitioners. By uniquely drawing on GWL’s grassroots, community-led expertise this interactive session offers analysis and practical solutions to longstanding sectoral inequality.

This workshop will help practitioners to embed representation of marginalised communities (of place and identity) in their institutions. Through three social history objects from GWL’s collections, Rachel and Adele will facilitate the sharing of innovative ideas on seven areas of inclusion in museums – governance, leadership, recruitment, programming, collections and interpretation, audiences, visitors and participants, and communications.

The session will examine how to integrate diversity and inclusion into our leadership structures and how to develop values-led and equality-driven leadership frameworks.

By *reading* social history objects, the aim of this workshop is to understand the social structures of our institutions and to illustrate how issues of equality of access are enacted.

**Biography**

Dr Adele Patrick is GWL’s co-founder and Creative Development Manager. Published widely and a regular conference speaker, Adele gained a PhD by research in 2004 and Honorary DLitts from Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities in 2017. She was the Evening Times’ Scotswoman of the Year in 2016.

Rachel Thain-Gray has worked in the equalities for the past 20 years and is the Project Coordinator of Equality in Progress, which benchmarks GWL’s grassroots practice to address strategic needs in current sectoral approaches and the lack of embedding representation, access and inclusion of people with protected characteristics in organisational structures.

**Autism awareness**

 **Ian Smith**

 **Amgueddfa Cymru, National Museum Wales**

In 2017 the staff at the National Waterfront Museum completed training in ‘Autism Awareness’. A number of ideas came out of this training, but specifically:

* create an ‘Autism Champion’
* make the museum ‘autism friendly’
* create a ‘chill out’ room
* a small group of four members of staff was set up to explore these ideas

The group of four were Leighton (visitor services manager), Suzanne (gallery assistant), Zoe (community engagement learning officer) and Ian (a curator).

Suzanne’s son Osian is on the autism spectrum so she was the ideal candidate to be the ‘champion’. Zoe and Ian have worked with an autistic volunteer Rhys, so they already had a small insight into the challenges he faces on a daily basis. In fact this was how the autism awareness training came about in the first place.

Suzanne and Rhys came up with ideas for what they would like to see happen in the museum, and the group looked at what was desirable and what might be achievable.

A ‘chill out’ room became the goal. The group learned that many children (and adults) became overwhelmed at times triggered by crowds, noises, lights – in fact, a variety of reasons. When this happens, children in particular are said to have a ‘melt down’ and can end up rolling on the floor, screaming and crying. If they could then have access to a space away from the trigger, somewhere safe where they could calm down and relax, this would be perfect.

This presentation will show how the group completed the ‘chill out’ room, and share some of their mistakes and successes. Delegates will get a taster of how to go about this process and how they might apply it within their own organisation. They will see the benefits of being autism friendly by opening up our museums to groups who have difficulty with the social spaces that most of us take for granted.

**Biography**

Ian took a 'Gap Year' at 18 which lasted 20 years, and he worked in various industries in South Wales including Human Resources, JCB Driver and self-employed builder and landscaper.

Ian returned to education at 39 years of age in 1994 and graduated in 1997 with a BSc Hons in Heritage Conservation & Archaeology, and MA in Heritage Tourism in 2004.

Ian worked in the Swansea Museum Service from 1995 to 2005 when he transferred to National Museum Wales, holding down a variety of posts eventually becoming Curator of Modern and Contemporary Industry in 2009. Based at the Waterfront Museum, Swansea, Ian is also part of the Public History Team at Amgueddfa Cymru.

**Interpreting historic houses**

 **Catherine Goddard**

 **AHRC Consortium**

This conference comes at a time when visitors to country houses are at their broadest yet. This means house interpreters must be ever more innovative when interpreting their historical communities to their entire audiences. Country house interpretation evaluation is currently a limited field, with no definitive evidence or trends yet fully discovered between interpretation methods and their impact on the visitor experience for different visitor types (new/repeat/members and age groups). Does more interactive interpretation appeal mainly to families? Do retired couples prefer room guides? Are younger audiences seeking more technological-based interpretation?

The research to be presented is focused on how different methods of heritage interpretation (written, technological, room-guides, displays and interactive) impact the visitor experience for country house visitors. Catherine Goddard will discuss which interpretation methods are preferred by which audiences, and within that highlight the methods visitors find most impactful in what Freeman Tilden (1957) believes to be the foundation of ‘good’ interpretation and what Catherine calls the 3Es: engagement, education and entertainment. These results are the product of 1000 visitor surveys conducted at ten historic houses across the Midlands, consisting of National Trust, English Heritage and privately-owned properties.

As country houses become more forward thinking in planning future interpretation, the ambition to be more technologically savvy in the digitally-obsessed 21st century may not in fact be as engaging as professionals believe. This presentation will provide a deeper understanding of how technology and interactive-based interpretation methods really compare with the traditional written and room-guide approach when engaging a magnitude of different types of visitors. This presentation aims to aid future development of interpretation methods for the multitude of stories and collections country houses can show and tell to overall improve the Visitor Experience for all visitors.

**Biography**

Catherine Goddard is a third year PhD candidate with the AHRC Heritage Consortium, studying Evaluations of Heritage Interpretation at Leeds Beckett and the University of Hull. She has completed an MA and PGC in Heritage Education and Heritage Research before beginning her PhD. She has completed interpretation evaluations at ten historic houses across the Midlands for the National Trust, English Heritage and privately owned properties. She led an extensive two month research project at Hardwick Hall to evaluate entire site interpretation and has been invited to return and evaluate new interpretation for 2018.

**The trouble with women artists – working with Jacky Fleming and Katch Skinner on “A Woman’s Place?”**

**Kitty Ross**

**Leeds Museums and Galleries**

This was the first time Kitty had worked with artists on a social history exhibition, but both were critical for the success and feel of the resulting show. Leeds Museums and Galleries commissioned the feminist cartoonist Jacky Fleming to help illustrate the exhibition, and she allowed them to use drawings from her 2016 book “The Trouble With Women” as well as producing new images. Looking at Leeds’ collections through Jacky’s witty and acerbic lens helped shape the exhibition and prevent it from seeming preachy or over earnest (which seemed a danger with this subject). The team also wanted to look much more broadly at women’s rights and social change – not just concentrating on the centenary of the suffrage victory.

Alongside this, the museum also commissioned four portraits of pioneering Leeds women from the local ceramic artist Katch Skinner as a way of including their stories in the display, despite having no existing collections relating to them.

The experience of working with both artists has been very exciting, and with Jacky Fleming in particular it proved very collaborative and Kitty would certainly recommend working with artists to help enhance and interpret social history collections.

**Biography**

Kitty Ross is the Curator of Leeds History/Social History and has worked for Leeds Museums and Galleries for over 20 years and has worked on several major capital redevelopments first at Abbey House Museum (2001) and later Leeds City Museum (2008). Abbey House Museum hosts a new social history exhibition each year, and “A Woman’s Place?” opened on 20 January 2018

**An inclusive approach to audio recordings**

**Steve Ford**

**Smartphonic**

This session will illustrate how an inclusive approach to audio recordings could be used to complement a traditional audio described guide. It's something that can be created on a low budget with community participation at every stage of the process: choosing what kind of 'art' to include, interviewing local residents, and then editing the recordings and making digital assets that have a lasting value.

Let’s say you are standing in front of a sculpture or painting and listening to conversations that are going on around you. It’s a very natural way to pick up information in an almost incidental manner, and that makes it ideal for people who have sight loss, or literacy issues, or who don't normally go to museums.

By overhearing other people, you experience their surprise and enjoyment at discovering something for the first time. This means including all the Ooh's and Aah's that would be edited out of a traditional vox pops recording; the quirky ways that people talk and the sound of their laughter. This would capture how the public responds to art, just two people chatting, noticing things for the first time and expressing their ideas.

Then you'd move on to the next object and overhear another conversation, as though wandering around a Voice Gallery. Instead of an audio described tour being an underused, little-known and somewhat unwanted resource, we could build up a collection of recordings that would demonstrate a commitment to all parts of the community and act as a legacy that would be of real value to sight-impaired visitors for years to come.

**Biography**

Steve Ford established the audio description department at a post-production facilities house in London back in 2004 and was the manager in charge of Access Services. Their clients included the British Film Institute, BBC Four and Masters of Cinema.

Recently, Steve established a company called Smartphonic which licences a mobile app that connects exhibits in a museum collection with the people and places in their community. It can be used as a low-cost alternative for small museums who want to make their social history recordings accessible.

**Protest and activism in Sheffield’s collections**

**Louisa Briggs**

**Museums Sheffield**

Sheffield has a long and important history of protest and activism yet this was not significantly represented in Sheffield’s museum collections. This project sought to address this and also to consider how museums can present these often challenging ideas without losing their independence. The centenary of the Representation of the People Act in 2018 and the fact that Sheffield has a claim on the formation of the Women’s Suffrage Movement, have given impetus and a sense of timeliness to this project but the ideas explored through it stretch beyond.

The main resource in this project has been staff time and this has given Museums Sheffield the opportunity to focus thinking to plan and make change. This was the first project to look at the collection as a whole; protest and activism are as relevant to Social History as to Visual Art or Natural Science. Museums Sheffield considered how they define their collections and how they embrace human history in its widest sense. Most importantly though, the team talked with people and listened to how they saw museums and collections and learnt what they thought they weren’t as well as what they thought they could be. This presentation will share learning from the project. Museums Sheffield do not have all the answers, but they are on a path that encourages them to challenge their approach, their role and their legacy and they would like to encourage further debate on this topic.

**Biography**

Louisa Briggs has over 15 years of experience working in museums and galleries. She is a specialist in Visual Art and has held curatorial positions at the National Museum Wales and the Brontë Parsonage Museum as well as at Museums Sheffield. Louisa has curated many exhibitions including significant projects with the Blk Art Group.

**Developing the Postal Museum**

**Emma Harper**

**The Postal Museum**

This presentation will explore ways to interpret what is considered a specialist collection in an engaging way for a broader non-specialist audience through the case study of the new Postal Museum and Mail Rail experience.

Until 2017 the majority of the museum’s collection had been in storage, with limited display space and a small, core audience of adults over 60 – primarily philatelists and family historians. The new museum is aimed at a family audience with children aged 3-11 and aims to reveal the untold story of how the postal service shaped Britain and changes lives today. The team wanted to create a lively, dynamic and entertaining experience that attracts new non-specialist audience. In particular, they aim to display their collections in a social history and communications context rather than as purely postal history.

This case study will highlight some of the ways they have achieved this from creating physical and digital interactives to bringing to life objects and stories from the collection, to focussing on the people rather than the process of the postal service. Taking a people-focussed, community approach was also a new method of interpreting the collections and the team undertook specific contemporary collecting, particularly of oral histories of Mail Rail workers to include this authentic element.

Emma Harper will explore how you can use graphic design and tone of voice to engage and inspire visitors and present an integrated, object rich, social history interpretive approach. In addition, how museums can present an authentic and passionate approach using the real life stories of people behind the objects. Emma hopes that delegates will learn not to be afraid, that less can be more, and have faith in this type of approach.

**Biography**

Emma Harper has worked at The Postal Museum for 9 years first as Cataloguer, then Curator (Move Planning) and currently as Exhibitions Officer. As such she has a thorough knowledge of the museum’s collection and has been involved in the creative design process for the museum from both a curatorial and interpretative perspective. This has given her a unique view of the different approaches you can take to interpreting objects for different audiences. Emma has also been an active member of SHCG and is a past trustee. She is keen to share her experiences with the SHCG membership.