

ISSN 2055-6977

Social History in Museums

Volume 38



Social History in Museums

Journal of the Social History Curators Group

Edited by Helen McConnell

Published by the Social History Curators Group 2014
ISSN 2055-6977

© SHCG and contributors

Volume 38 (2014)

Contents

Helen McConnell	Editor's Foreword	3
Conference		
Catherine Littlejohns	Revealing Stories: A Case Study in Co-Curation	4
Brian Walsh	Walking Forwards, Looking Backwards: Using New Technology to Put Local History on a Global Platform	11
Zelda Baveystock	An Ellis Island for the UK? The Migration Museum Project	16
Exhibitions		
Meredith Greiling	Energy Exploration at Aberdeen Maritime Museum: A Case Study	22
Elizabeth Edwards	Colonial Visibilities? The PhotoCLEC Project	27
Collections		
Owain Rhys	How Can Local Museums with Reduced Resources Approach Contemporary Collecting and Interpretation of Local Objects and Issues in an Increasingly Mass Global Environment?	34
Nick Booth	Jeremy Bentham's Big Day Out	40
Training and Development		
Leah Mellors	A Foot in the Door? Heritage Lottery Fund 'Skills for the Future' Curatorial Traineeships in Practice	46
Exhibition Reviews		
Alex Patterson	Encounters: Photograph Albums and Their Stories, Royal Engineers Museum	53
Leah Mellors	The Cheapside Hoard: London's Lost Jewels, Museum of London	55
Jack Ord	Destination Tyneside, Discovery Museum	59

Editor's Foreword

Following an interesting and varied Conference in Northern Ireland last summer, we reproduce here several papers on the theme of 'Local Stories, Global Identities'. Catherine Littlejohns shares a case study of co-curating an exhibition with an LGBT group at M Shed, Bristol. Brian Walsh gives an insight into the possibilities of using digital technologies to connect the local with the international. Zelda Baveystock provides an update on the Migration Museum project, and shares their ambitions for the future.

The articles focusing on exhibitions in this issue both consider how to engage with sensitive issues of identity and representation. Meredith Greiling shares an insight into working with partners and sponsors in the development of the new Energy Exploration galleries at Aberdeen Maritime Museum. Elizabeth Edwards critiques the ways in which museums display and engage with the colonial past, focusing on their use of photographs.

The collections-focused articles engage with the realities of current museum practice. Owain Rhys considers how smaller museums can approach contemporary collecting and offers suggestions for getting started. Nick Booth presents a fascinating account of moving one very unusual object, and the unexpected scale of the public response.

Similarly practical, Leah Mellors examines the growth in funded traineeships and considers how useful they really are to those hoping to enter the sector and to their host museums.

The diverse exhibitions reviewed in the final section encompass the photograph albums of the Royal Engineers, a big budget display of the entire Cheapside Hoard, and a permanent gallery looking at migration which aims to change prevailing local attitudes.

Helen McConnell

Editor

Helen.McConnell@bristol.gov.uk

Revealing Stories: A Case Study in Co-Curation

Catherine Littlejohns is Senior Collections Officer for Public History at Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives. Here, she shares her Conference presentation on her recent experience co-curating an exhibition at Bristol's M Shed.

In February 2013, following around 18 months of planning, the *Revealing Stories* exhibition opened at M Shed in Bristol for LGBT History Month.

The project was a partnership between OutStories Bristol, a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history group,¹ and staff at the museum comprising one archivist, one learning officer and one curator. In addition to the exhibition, there was a lengthy and still running oral history project, a Hidden Histories Trail encouraging visitors to think about the hidden LGBT stories of objects in the permanent displays and a busy public programme of events and lectures. Four local schools worked on the exhibition and hidden histories, and we were supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund who awarded us £20,300.

In this article I would like to share with you some of the successes, panics and one or two funny moments from our endeavours.

Co-curation or Working in Partnership

M shed has a rigorous process of evaluating project proposals but for this one it really came down to three key questions: What are our motivations for doing this? Can this project appeal beyond the LGBT community? And what exactly is co-curation anyway?

Co-curation, or shared or guest curation, is a term often used but rarely defined. It's sometimes referenced when community groups are invited into museum stores to help choose objects for displays, or to describe the relationship when a museum invites a group to take over a dedicated community space. While these are positive steps, it quickly became clear that co-curation in our case meant handing over much more of the control, and that the museum would be relying on OutStories to lead on many aspects of the project.

My museum colleagues and I sat down early on to ask ourselves how we were going to approach such an ambitious exhibition. Between us we had limited direct knowledge or experience of the issues and few relevant collections, but we were keenly aware of the trust visitors place in museums to know what they are talking about. In this instance, fulfilling our obligations to museum visitors would be partially beyond our control and we would be relying on OutStories to carry out a large percentage of the work.

While it's daunting to be so reliant on an external group we also knew that this was one of the best reasons for partnership working. OutStories brought knowledge and experience that was not available within the museum, and they did so with a seemingly inexhaustible amount of enthusiasm and professionalism. From their side, the OutStories committee felt strongly that they wanted to work with the museum service to reach an audience beyond the LGBT community, and this was a good fit with the museum aims and objectives.

In most practical senses the exhibition was curated by OutStories, with museum staff supporting and guiding them through the exhibition development process and with all decisions discussed and made jointly. OutStories were incredibly well organised, with roles assigned early on. They also enlisted a large number of volunteers who gave their time and skills for free, including a professional oral historian, journalist, press officer and sound editor.

Oral Histories

I think it was a year or so before I eventually went up to the Oasis and I remember the first time I went up...it was a long corridor, turns left, you go past a booth and that was a pound or two pound to get in... go on a bit further, down a set of steps because it was in like a basement. I opened the door and the first person I seen, standing straight in front of me, was my French teacher.

Gary, talking about a visit to a gay club in Bristol around 1990 when he was aged about 20.

The oral history project was one of the first elements to begin and it helped to inform the content of the final exhibition.

A list of interviewees was put together through personal contacts and appeals through Facebook. The fact that OutStories were already an established group with many members and their own social media was especially helpful in this respect. Most, though not all, of the volunteers working on recording and transcribing were from the LGBT community. We could have recruited more widely, since we were offering free professional training, but it made sense to have interviewees who would understand and empathise with their interviewees and who had a strong personal commitment to the project.

As a result, interviewees were astonishingly open, with only a handful requesting any degree of anonymity, and the results ranged from the funny to the ordinary to the heartbreaking. From the museum perspective, we were hopeful this would help to ensure the wider appeal that we wanted for the exhibition.

By the time we were finalising exhibition content we had so much oral history material that most of it didn't even make it into the exhibition. However, all of the recordings were added to the permanent collections and this will continue for all future recordings made by OutStories.

Then we bought a house over in St Anne's and suddenly it was like everyone thought we were there to take their husbands or something because we were two women on our own, you know, sort of young women, and it was very odd and very anti and just... very unfriendly. [] eventually we came out to one or two people and then I think they thought we were going to leap on all their children. It was a very sort of odd experience and we didn't stay there very long. We realised quite quickly we were in the middle of suburbia and it just wasn't going to be an ideal place to live.

Polly (not her real name), discussing the reactions of her neighbours in the late '70s and early '80s

Hidden History Trail

The Hidden History trail was one of two school projects. It was undertaken by students aged 14 – 18, who attended two local schools. Some had identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, but the majority had not. The project was not part of their set work and all the students had volunteered to work on it.

Their brief was to write alternative labels for objects already on display that would fit in with the exhibition themes. We identified a few possible objects, but the students also came up with many of their own examples, such as those here.

With around 5000 professional footballers in Britain, not one has publicly come out as gay. Attitudes towards homosexuality have changed, but we think that football lags behind the rest of society in accepting openly gay people. In rugby and cricket, there are high profile internationals who are openly gay. The FA's four-year plan²

has come 14 years after the death of Britain's only openly gay footballer, Justin Fashanu. Only another player publicly coming out can change the situation in football.

A Level students, Backwell School

Hidden Histories label placed next to a display of football shirts, tickets and memorabilia

In the 1930s the word "gay" was not in common circulation as a term for homosexuality. However, in the 1938 film 'Bringing up Baby', Cary Grant's character was found wearing ladies clothes. He exclaimed 'Because I just went gay all of a sudden!' This ad lib was possibly the first use of the word "gay" in mainstream media, although it may be interpreted as "Because I just went happy" or "frivolous". This was certainly a dramatic move by Grant.

Year 10 students, Redland Green School

Hidden Histories label placed next to a statuette of actor Cary Grant

Overall the schools did a fantastic job. There was just one label we didn't use where the students had suggested that "dungaree" was a collective noun for a group of lesbians. I could find nothing to support this and so I tentatively mentioned it to the OutStories group. They absolutely loved it but sadly they were also unable to corroborate it!

Exhibition

The majority of the objects shown in the exhibition were sourced by OutStories through personal collections, friends and contacts. They also undertook much of the research and all of the writing. The museum role became more about facilitating formal loans from other institutions, and logistical aspects such as providing access, tools and equipment. Early on there was a research element, particularly for the archivist on the team, and as writing progressed there was a proof reading and editing role.

Although the museum could theoretically have vetoed anything, final sign off was very much a collaborative process. We were cautious not to interfere too much, with the result that, for example, the text is longer than we would normally recommend, giving the exhibition a different feel and tone to the rest of the displays.



Opening Day, 2nd February 2013 (Copyright Sam Gilmore)

Of course, when we started out we didn't know exactly how it was going to work and there was always a danger that we had committed to something we might not be able to deliver. However, the roles on both sides developed naturally over the course of the project and for the most part everything ran smoothly.

That's not to suggest there weren't some moments of panic. In spite of several passing deadlines and my continuous cajoling, many of the objects did not actually arrive at the museum until the opening week. This meant that in some instances I was completing retrospective loan agreements after the exhibition was open, and that conservators were trying to carry out assessments even as objects were required for installation, but at least we had an exhibition.

More than that, we were extremely lucky to have many of the objects and I am quite certain that we would not have been loaned them at all were it not for the personal relationships between lenders and the members of OutStories.

For example, Malcom Ashman, a professional artist, offered to draw portraits of three members of the Bristol LGBT community especially for the exhibition and worked with OutStories to determine who the sitters should be. They chose Daryn Carter, Director of Bristol Pride, Dale Wakefield, who set up the Switchboard helpline from her spare bedroom in the 1970s, and Peggy Hancock, a barmaid and friend to many in the lesbian and gay community at a time long before gay bars were openly talked about.



Daryn Carter, Peggy Hancock and Dale Wakefield with their portraits by Malcolm Ashman (Copyright Matthew Seow)

We were also able to borrow a copy of the copy of the seminal book, 'Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin', first published in English in 1983, which led to a ban on promoting homosexuality in schools enacted by the infamous Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act.

Other objects featured were extremely personal but in many instances the lenders even allowed us to show photographs and reveal identities. We displayed the baby toys of the son of a lesbian couple, Gemma's long hair, cut off as a symbol of her rejection of traditional notions of gender, and the seaman's discharge papers of a transgender lady who successfully took her former employer to Employment Tribunal for harassment by colleagues.

Collecting was one of my big aspirations for this project, even though it's very difficult to know what you're looking for until you see it. Working with OutStories helped to raise many possibilities and offer guidance on representing the LGBT community. Once the exhibition was open I wrote to every lender asking if they would consider donating their items permanently and I'm pleased to say that many did so.

Two examples are a table from which Dale Wakefield ran the *Switchboard* helpline in her spare bedroom in the late 1970s, and a champagne bottle opened after the first edition of Shout Out, a local LGBT radio show, and signed by every member of the crew and guests.

Young People's Voices

For the second of the two schools projects, the museum learning officer and a member of OutStories worked with two more local schools. All four of the schools involved in the projects were recruited in collaboration with CYPS (Children & Young Peoples Services) and Stonewall. Students were aged 12 – 18, mixed LGBT and straight, and as with the first project, all the students had volunteered to work on it. The brief for this project required the students to work in pairs or small groups to record each other's stories and experiences of growing up and relationships. They then wrote labels from their recordings to be incorporated as an additional layer of interpretation within the exhibition.

Their labels mirrored the design used for the Hidden History trail in the galleries, so no names were revealed but the age of the student and their school name were given. Most were positive experiences and really helped to highlight the differences between today's teenagers and previous generations.

I came out when I was 13 or 14 and I just blurted it out to some girls in a playground near where I lived. They did the really annoying thing of asking if I would be their gay best friend and go shopping with them!

Year 13 student, St. Brendan's Sixth Form College

The other week I was the only gay person in the room and someone suggested that being gay was a political choice. And I just came out to my entire tutor group and went off on a massive rant about it. I felt really good about it because I never usually do things like that! ... And I was really proud of myself after! And he did come and apologise afterwards.

Year 12 student, St. Brendan's Sixth Form College

Visitor Response

Adding the experiences of young people coming out today ended up being one of the strongest, and in many ways most poignant parts of the exhibition. We received many pieces of feedback from older members of the LGBT community outlining their relief at how society has changed and their regret that it was not so for them.

'Brilliant exhibition. Very interesting, charting the change of attitudes since I was young. Particularly moved by the testimonies from younger people who have a freedom of expression I could never have had'.

Visitors were able to feedback through a number of mechanisms including a comments box and questionnaires in the gallery, though many emailed their comments after their visit. Volunteers from OutStories were regularly available in the gallery to chat to visitors, and to observe how people responded to the exhibition.

Generally speaking, although we were prepared for a more mixed reaction, the response was overwhelmingly positive, including many comments similar to these:

'Fab exhibition. It made me well up with many emotions; sadness, nostalgia as well as huge love and admiration'.

'Absolutely beautiful, thought provoking exhibition, there should be more like this'.

The only real criticism, and I have pondered whether to include this, related to the audio, which was delivered through PenFriends. These are a handheld audio device, originally developed as an aid for blind and partially-sighted people, and which look a little like a thick, oversized pen. The response went along these lines:

'... Surely there's an alternative to having a load of dildos hanging around?'

'Not many people are using the audio pens, do they need more signage, or is that they look JUST LIKE VIBRATORS?'

While we did add more signage, there wasn't much we could do about how they looked! Overall it didn't seem to detract too much and during the six week run we welcomed around 14,000 visitors to the exhibition, some of whom had come especially from far flung places to see it.

Lessons Learned (Or What We Would Do Differently)

Although we had around 18 months to complete the project, it really wasn't long enough. There was a perhaps naïve sense at the beginning that being in the support role we (the museum staff) might not have so much to do. The reality is that working in this kind of close partnership actually takes more time than a purely in-house exhibition because everything requires much wider input and any decisions and agreement involve more people.

Communication between all parties was excellent but it can always be improved. We held regular meetings, monthly to begin with and fortnightly during the last few months, and were in almost daily email or telephone contact. However, with hindsight I think holding fortnightly meetings from the beginning would have created a faster pace throughout, and perhaps have saved me the worry over an empty exhibition space!

Both OutStories and the museum compiled individual evaluation documents and the main recommendation from both is that next time we will write everything down. This might include, but not be limited to, exhibition design guidelines, text writing guidelines, what equipment is available, how and when to access buildings, contact names and numbers and a written outline partnership agreement at the beginning. It isn't enough to have covered this verbally because so many different people need to have that information.

Something we couldn't have planned for but were able to make the most of were one or two extremely lucky external occurrences.

It was perfect timing that Peter Main, Bristol's first openly gay Lord Mayor, was in office. He was extremely supportive throughout, already being deeply involved with the LGBT community, and was the perfect person to officially open the exhibition.

Additionally, the equal marriage debate was taking place in the House of Commons and Stephen Williams, Liberal Democrat MP for Bristol West, referenced the exhibition in some detail. He also repeated many of his points on twitter, so we had only to wait for the word to spread via social media and suddenly we had gone from being a brilliantly supported local exhibition to having national interest, including a visit from Culture Secretary Maria Miller.

As a project legacy, OutStories now have a set of display banners to tour around local libraries, with several sites already signed up. Additionally there have been enquiries as to whether this part of the exhibition could tour local schools, something that all of the team are very hopeful will come about.

As a result, unlike other exhibitions that come and go, any early aspirations for the exhibition that have not been realised thus far are still very much in the running for the future. For example, one thing we were aware was missing was the BME element of the Bristol LGBT community. We discussed this during early planning and several contacts were followed up but for different reasons were unable or unwilling to get involved. While homosexuality may be legal today, it's important not to forget the individual context that forms each person's experience, and the particular issues that religious and cultural backgrounds can place on individuals. While the exhibition was intended as a celebration of LGBT culture and history today, it was also incredibly important to all involved to recognise the hardship and triumphs that have come before, and therefore, those that still continue.

In Summary

Working in partnership on this project allowed all parties to achieve things they could not have done alone. The investment from the museum side of three members of staff and a free venue opened up many hundreds of hours of volunteer time, and both OutStories and the museum gained a unique opportunity to reach out to new audiences. Going forward, the relationships formed have already ensured we will continue to work together, particularly in terms of hosting talks and events, and we're all looking towards LGBT History month next year and what we might collaborate on.

The opportunities and contacts made through this exhibition have helped me as a curator to improve the balance of the collections, which can only be a good thing for all our visitors. The new acquisitions mean that as we create new displays in the M Shed permanent galleries we have material to include a case focussing on Pride celebrations in the city, and the oral history project continues to produce new material for deposit within the museum.

Working with the school students has not only brought the organisations closer (M Shed, the schools themselves, CYPs, Stonewall) but reached the friends and families of the students too. One or two of the older students reported discussing their involvement in the project during university interviews, and how positive the response was from interviewing panels.

All of these links help to raise the profile of M Shed and of the museum service, but more importantly, they do so particularly among some of the groups we most wanted to reach, including those who might previously have felt that the museum service did not represent their lives and interests.

References:

- 1 Bristol City Council (and many others) now use only LGB on the basis that Trans people don't consider themselves gay or lesbian and therefore don't identify as part of this community. However, with several transgender members, including their co-Chair Cheryl, OutStories had a very strong take on this. Cheryl explained that she felt that T had become the last unacceptable part of LGBT and so, conveniently, was split off. Personally she felt a strong identity with the LGB members of the community because of a shared history of marginalisation. So from the start we were very clear that the exhibition would include transgender individuals.
- 2 *Opening Doors and Joining In* was launched by the FA in February 2012.

Walking Forwards, Looking Backwards: Using New Technology to Put Local History on a Global Platform

Brian Walsh, Curator of the County Museum, Dundalk, gave Conference an insight into the museum's recent experiments with digital technologies.

History

The County Museum, Dundalk is a Local Authority-run museum located in the border town of Dundalk in the north-east of Ireland. Though financed by Dundalk Town Council, the Museum's collection policy covers the entire county of Louth. Opened in 1994, the Museum has three galleries of permanent exhibition focussing on the area's archaeological and industrial development. As a Designated Museum it is the sole institution in the county to exhibit items from the National Collection. Presently it has a collection of some 60,000 items ranging from the proverbial (Viking) needle to (modern-day) anchor. This collection is bolstered by the presence of three temporary exhibition spaces as well as a 72-seater AV and lecture theatre. Over time it has won several awards including two Gulbenkian prizes for Best Small Museum in 1994 and 1999.

Philosophy

Philosopher and dramatist George Bernard Shaw, famously once observed 'you see things; and you say "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say "Why not?"' Over the last number of years this simple musing has become the over-arching and probably defining philosophy of the Museum. From a professional perspective it has become an enabler, an attitude which recognises the difficulty of a project but allows us to embrace and stretch our collective skills in ways and directions not previously envisaged. More importantly, it facilitates the incorporation of an imaginative approach to work which rewards endeavour and experimentation; generating a greater sense of realisation and accomplishment when a project is completed.

Developing a Web Presence

On the Trail of the Arctic Fox

In discussing the Museum's use of technology all analyses must commence with the exhibition on Arctic explorer, Sir Francis Leopold McClintock. Born in Dundalk in 1819, McClintock is best known for his involvement in the various searches for the ill-fated Franklin expedition of 1845. A renowned innovator, McClintock pioneered new ways of negotiating the Canadian Arctic, most notably in the use of kites with sledges as well as the deployment of search teams and even man-management techniques.

Entitled *On the Trail of the Arctic Fox*, the exhibition focussed on McClintock's life and the events that helped him rise through the Navy ranks from the position of First-class Volunteer to Rear Admiral. The exhibition featured several magnificent pieces including a silver replica of his ship, the *Fox*, as well as his sledge and flag, not to exclude several ethnographic pieces collected on his expeditions. These pieces were remarkable in their own right, but it was the desire to do something beyond this that characterised the project. All of the work was to be done in-house apart from the design of the panels. As such, the project developed a dual-objective – to showcase the life and achievements of one of Dundalk's greatest sons but also to provide a *legacy* which would last beyond the four month lifetime of the exhibition. Thus came the idea of developing a website to complement the exhibition.

Once the idea of developing the website had taken hold, a variety of possibilities immediately came to the fore – it was now possible to highlight the progression of each of McClintock's four expeditions to the Arctic. As a result, the actual physical



Screengrab from Arctic Fox website using Google maps to locate voyage progression (Copyright County Museum, Dundalk)

pressure on space available in a gallery setting required to illustrate these journeys was reduced. Complicated explanations of treks, voyages, encounters and other observations could be simply identified through the incorporation of Google maps via the website. Secondly, here was an opportunity to highlight the work and worth of the museum through the preparation of an exhibition and gallery space.

Thirdly, a conference on the Arctic had been planned, now not only would the website provide another marketing channel for the event, it could also be used to broadcast a selection of papers from the conference itself.

Thankfully, the entire project was hugely successful and, perhaps more importantly, hugely enjoyable for all involved. In one fell swoop, the exhibition provided the Museum with a template from which it has scarcely departed. It provided the inspiration for exhibitions to come, not only in style, substance and development, but also scale and ambition. Having identified what could be achieved, we began to look for the next challenge.

ASI: Louth – Archaeological Scene Investigations in County Louth

Following on from the Arctic fox exhibition, came a project based on the discovery of archaeological items during the construction of the western by-pass around the town of Dundalk. Funded by and developed with the National Roads Association, this project represented the opportunity to further explore the possibilities of the web design and technology in a Museum setting. In doing so, six objectives were identified:

1. Develop another legacy project.
2. Understand the art of archaeology.
3. Express this in a familiar language.
4. Use Google maps to locate sites/finds.
5. Access to archaeological reports.
6. Interactive –video, activity sheets etc.

As ever, the manner in which information is presented and made available was critical. To a degree, presenting the story of Arctic exploration is relatively straightforward – images tend to be readily available, the notion of a search presents a simple and familiar narrative; the question of how something not as immediate and recognisable could be achieved in relation to the work of an archaeologist required a little more thought. At some point, we realised that the parallels between the work of an archaeologist and a forensic detective could be implemented to good effect. By borrowing on the premise of television's CSI programmes, the work of an archaeologist could be examined via a visual and technical grammar with which the general public was familiar and comfortable. Once this realisation was made, the project became a manageable proposition.

Screengrab from the ASI homepage (Copyright County Museum, Dundalk)



In some respects, the ASI and arctic fox websites were similar. The same company was used to build both, thus a familiarity with the core objectives and abilities of both organisations was known. Secondly, the Google maps device was again incorporated, but this time to highlight the location of the various archaeological sites along the motorway development. In this instance, the archaeological reports for each site were made available via the site, thus the possibility of progression and comparison was made available to those interested in reviewing such information. The ASI website did differ from its predecessor – it included a downloadable version of the exhibition brochure as well as an activities book for national schools. More poignantly, it also included a short featurette entitled *A Grave Secret*, which retold the story of a skeleton found on site. Over the course of five minutes, the video described the identification of a body and the gradual realisation that the body was that of a woman who had died in childbirth, as had her baby. Though harrowing, the inclusion of this footage both in the exhibition and website allowed the Museum to present a personal tragedy in an affecting manner. This, I hoped, allowed the Museum to make the events of history a more involved activity as opposed to an emotionally detached event. Again though, the exhibition proved to be successful, attracting schools and the general public; most significantly though, the website won an award at the international Museums and the Web 2011 Conference held in Philadelphia.

A Tale of Two Dundalks

The ongoing issue of relevance is something that I feel is hugely significant in this time of economic uncertainty. In a Local Government context, museums are often perceived as being a Cinderella activity and are often seen as low hanging fruit in budget pruning exercises. To provide spin to this project, it was decided that the Museum would approach some schools located in Dundalk, Maryland on the American east coast. Here were two places linked by name and ironically a common history, where both towns' industrial bases had been devastated over the last number of years. Contact was made to teachers through a variety of social networks that had been built up between the Museum and visitors from the American Dundalk over previous years. It was planned that six broadcasts would be made from the Museum on the areas of:

- Education.
- Brewing.
- Tobacco and cigarette manufacture.
- Shoe manufacture.
- Printing.
- Entertainment.

Over the course of these programmes (each lasting about 60 minutes in total), a series of guests would be invited to give a flavour of what life and work was like in the town. It was intended that a convivial, discursive/conversational format would be adopted. A series of worksheets was also made available for download on each topic.

Result

Over the course of the broadcasts, schools in both Ireland and America tuned in, as did people in the UK, California, Argentina and Pakistan! Programmes were made available as podcasts, with well in excess of 35,000 downloads recorded. At a time when concepts such as audience and community are hotly debated, the realisation that participants in a Museum project could be located on a separate continent is a timely reminder of the importance of the emigrant community.

Love History? App-solutely

Some years ago, the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism announced details for a funding scheme for Museums. Designed to assist Museums to improve access for visitors, the scheme represents a welcome opportunity to realise plans that might not otherwise be possible. In this instance, the Museum had identified the burgeoning app market for smartphones as having potential. Here was the opportunity to link artefacts on display in the Museum with specific geographical locations and vice versa. Thus the plan was developed to facilitate interaction with the Museum collection and an artefact's place of origin.

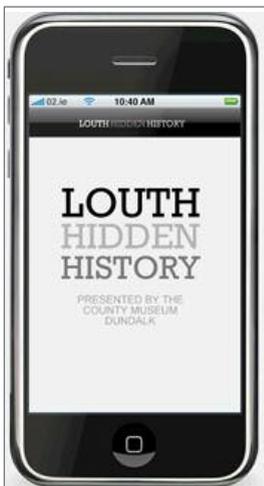
Having identified the nature of the project, several issues had to be addressed:

- Should the app be iPhone or Android compatible?
- What should the price be?
- How would items be selected?

The selection of developing an iPhone app was based on the public's familiarity with smartphones. At that point, iPhones were the dominant player in the market place and it was decided that, to achieve the greatest levels of publicity and familiarity with the app, the Apple product was the only direction to take. With respect to the price, given that the Department's funding would cover the cost of developing the app, it was decided that the app should be available free of charge. Finally, with respect to the actual content, it was decided that items which could be associated with recognisable geographical locations would be best suited, thus providing a "double whammy" effect and arguably maximising the impact of the app for tourists not based in the Museum environs.

To date, the app has been generally well received, with many positive comments:

Picture of app homepage on iPhone
(Copyright County Museum, Dundalk)



'Informative, functional & dynamic. A really innovative app. Brilliant'

'Excellent app for finding out about Louth's hidden wonders'

'Excellent! Great way to explore Louth.'

It is hoped that we will be in a position to add to the existing app with more items and locations, as well as developing Android apps, but this is entirely contingent on monies becoming available from new sources.

Though, given the economic constraints which we are currently labouring under, the likelihood of this occurring in the foreseeable future may best be described as doubtful.

Conclusion

I've described the 'why not' philosophy that has basically informed much of major projects over the last six or seven years. Over this time, we've embraced the principle of legacy projects, looking to ensure that the work done on temporary exhibitions still has a relevance to our various audiences beyond the actual lifetime of the exhibition. The use of Google maps as used in the McClintock exhibition was repeated and developed to feature archaeological sites in the ASI exhibition. The incorporation of the *A Grave Secret* was used in both the exhibition and website whilst the development of a brochure and workbook brought both an emotional and intellectual edge to the experience. A similar such engagement was achieved via the radio broadcasts which in turn highlighted the variety of ways in which the Museum collection and reflections on the past can be transmitted to different audiences in ways that are immediate and familiar but fresh, in which the past can be accessed and, ultimately, relevant in a personal/personable manner. Again, this latter approach was realised via the app linking artefact and location in a way which had not yet been done by another Irish museum.

Taken *in toto*, the lessons from the use of technology in the museum setting may be described as facilitating the opportunity to present the past not as a foreign country where things are done differently but as a place which is current and relevant. Technology is merely the facilitator to elaborate on the past, it is merely the medium. Given the rapid rate at which technology develops, cost is no longer the off-putting factor it might once have been. Ultimately, the chief consideration is that of relevance and how we as museum professionals can harness its power in an imaginative way. By building technological features into exhibitions and similar projects, we enhance our ability to relate the past in ways that are rewarding, educational, instructive and ultimately relevant. As George Bernard Shaw might ask, 'and why not?'

An Ellis Island for the UK? The Migration Museum Project

Zelda Baveystock is a trustee of the Migration Museum Project and Lecturer in Arts Management, Cultural Policy & Museum Studies at the University of Manchester. Here, she sets out the case for a national museum of migration and details the work of the Migration Museum Project.

The UK's social history is intrinsically bound up with stories of migration. Local history museums have sought to integrate these narratives in recent years in two ways: by stressing the global influences of past major migrations on the locality, and through ethno-specific community-based projects, particularly linked to late 20th century waves of immigration. Rarely, if ever, though, is a national tale told that gives equal emphasis to both comings and goings. This paper will argue the need for a broader and less localised approach to migration history, through the creation of a national migration museum for the UK. It will describe the thinking behind the Migration Museum Project (MMP), starting with a brief summary of who we are and how we came into being, before exploring why we believe there is a need for a migration museum, and how we think we can meet this need.

The Migration Museum working group was formed in 2006, following discussions between the Institute for Public Policy Research (which has a core research strand into migration and communities) and Barbara Roche, a former Immigration Minister and MP, who remains our Chair. It was a coming together of a diverse mix of people with interests in migration and immigration from a number of different angles, but principally public policy, law and research. It is noticeable that the project has *not* been principally driven by the museums or heritage sector, which has perhaps learnt to be wary of new national initiatives and is often innately defensive about potential competition for limited resources. My own personal interest stems from a Winston Churchill Memorial Fund fellowship I had undertaken in 2004 on how museums represent multiculturalism. This had led me to explore cultural diversity work in museums in Australia, New York and Canada with a focus on migration museums in particular. I became involved soon after the first discussions, to share this learning with the rest of the group, and have remained on board ever since.

Over the last seven years, we have progressed from general debates on the need for a new museum and a sense of its potential, to commissioning scoping research (Stevens, 2009), to the formation of a charitable company with a director, three members of staff and a board of trustees with backgrounds in museums, heritage, migration, law, education, literature, finance and public policy. We've been testing the water for the concept with people from all corners of public life and have found it to be warm – more than 80 of these people are listed on the MMP website as our 'Distinguished Friends'. We also have a substantial education committee and a fundraising committee, involving highly experienced experts in their respective fields. We have obtained significant funding in the last two years from the Esmée Fairburn Foundation, the Baring Foundation, the Rayne Foundation, the Rothschild Foundation, Unbound Philanthropy, the City Bridge Trust, the Migration Foundation and the Alfred Caplin Charity Settlement. The full story of our beginnings as a formally constituted charity is described in full in our own publication, *How We Got Here: the first three years* (MMP, 2013).

But given that we are working at a time of severe recession when museums of all sorts are suffering from budget cuts and even threats of closure, why on earth do we think we need another museum? Despite the fairly dire economic situation, we believe

there is both evidence of a clear need for an additional initiative, and a substantial gap in the market.

In the UK, the immigration narrative has become so completely problematised in contemporary politics as one of the top policy concerns (Jordan, 2013), that there are strong grounds for believing that we, more than any other European country, need a space to contribute to a more reasoned, and more nuanced, public debate about migration. Multiculturalism has become a dirty word in recent years, tarnished by party politics and sporadic moments of social unrest. Although in the day-to-day we appear to rub long together reasonably well, racism is an ever-present reality in some people's lives, and immigration levels a constant easy target for cab-driver debate & *The Daily Mail*-style exposés. Whilst the character of the ethnic make-up of Britain has undoubtedly changed extensively in the last 50 years, our ability to absorb the culturally diverse nature of contemporary society into a sense of our national identity remains a source of deep contestation.

As a consequence, immigration is consistently perceived to be a problem rather than an opportunity – and a specifically contemporary problem at that. British Social Attitudes surveys and Ipsos MORI polls show that more than 70% of people think that immigration should be reduced – and that this percentage is steadily rising (Ford, Morrell and Heath, 2012; Blinder, 2012; Ipsos MORI, 2011). Whilst a recent report from the Migration Observatory has demonstrated that people have always wanted fewer immigrants since polls began in the 1960s (Blinder, 2012), The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study suggests that young people's attitudes in particular are getting increasingly intolerant as they get older, and tougher than their counterparts in other European countries. This longitudinal study was carried out by the National Federation for Education Research on 24,000 11-18 year olds over a nine year period, to look at the impacts of citizenship teaching. It revealed that young people got more hard-line over the period surveyed, not just about refugees and immigrants, but also benefit payments and jail sentences (Walker, 2010). Although comparable data for previous generations is not available, it appears that young people are absorbing the consistent barrage of negative messages about societal challenges without being given sufficient opportunity to examine broader and longer historical contexts.

So it seems that more of us are getting more concerned about who lives alongside us than ever before. What is more worrying, is that the UK in particular appears to be responding negatively to the global population shifts that are impacting on any number of countries in the developed world. The yearly Transatlantic Trends survey, which compares data from the US and several European nations, shows that the UK has the strongest pessimism of all countries surveyed: 68% of the British respondents believe immigration presents more of a problem than an opportunity compared to 53% of the Americans (Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, 2011: 2). Whilst the majority of those surveyed (58% in Europe, 55% in USA) saw immigration as culturally enriching (fears for unemployment and the economy aside), only 42% of British people did, with half actually emphasising its *negative* effect on culture (ibid: 20). Similarly, the 2012 British Social Attitudes Survey showed that negative judgements about the cultural impact of migration have significantly increased from 33% to 48% since 2003 (Ford et al, 2012: 26).

In short, we have a fundamental problem with immigration. This is despite the fact that migration is an essential part of our national character: our language, our food, our architecture, our faiths and our intellectual lives have all been indubitably shaped by our prolonged contact with other cultures (Winder, 2013). At MMP, we believe that all of us have a migration story to tell – it just depends how far back we have to go. Migration is also an undeniable strand throughout the world's history (King, 2007). Whether rampaging for new territory, seeking a better quality of life, escaping from persecution or simply looking for adventure, the desire to up-sticks and move is as old as mankind.

Of course, members of SHCG will be more aware than most of the complexity of this history. Cultural diversity work has been a mainstay of all good social historians in museums for many years now, and there have been many excellent projects generated from individual communities as well as from museums, libraries and archives which have sought to foreground the history of diversity in the UK. A notable web presence was created through the National Archives' Moving Here project (Moving Here, n.d.), whilst the Black Cultural Archives has grown over 30 years from small-scale volunteer efforts to a fully formed heritage centre in Brixton, due to open in 2014. Many of these projects have, however, had a tendency to concentrate predominantly on the post-1945 migrations, with a strong emphasis on oral history. There have been countless small projects with individuals and groups around their personal identity and sense of belonging to one particular ethno-specific group or another, but this work remains discrete and not joined-up. The long-term legacy of these projects sometimes remains with the community, or might be made publically accessible on the internet (see, for example, the work of the Northamptonshire Black History Association, or the Bangla Stories website), but they are rarely mainstreamed in the museum's permanent displays in any meaningful manner. There have even been occasional temporary exhibitions focussing exclusively on migration, kick-started in the 1990s by the *Peopling of London* at the Museum of London, and repeated in exhibitions like *Destination South Shields* at Tyne and Wear Museums, but long term exhibits are virtually non-existent. Honourable exceptions include the Hackney Museum, which takes migration into and out of the London borough as a central narrative, and *Destination Tyneside*, which opened in Discovery Museum in July 2013 with a focus on the population changes to Newcastle over the 19th and 20th centuries.

MMP does not want any of this work to stop going on. There is, however, nothing which tells a national tale, and nothing which really adequately looks at the flip side of the same coin – outwards migration – although you might get the odd object or temporary exhibition here and there, particularly around museums focussed on maritime themes. This is despite the fact that some 60m people worldwide claim to be of British ancestry. Although the British Museum could ostensibly be in a position to tackle such a grand narrative, this seems unlikely to happen as long as it positions itself as an universal museum rather than a national history museum for Britain. And although the previous government's proposal for such a museum of British history never got beyond an initial report, there is clearly still scope for public expressions of a broader national narrative focussed on migration history. The lack of public understanding of our shared history of migration is a concern that needs to be addressed by as many different routes as possible. Sitting alongside the basic need to continue to challenge this limited understanding is also, somewhat ironically, a high degree of public appetite for exploring personal roots, as evidenced from the enduring trend of *Who Do You Think You Are?* types of investigations.

So MMP believes there is a gap in the market. This is despite the fact that migration museums as a form are well established in many other nations: Australia has two, there are Ellis Island and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York, and significant museums in France, Denmark, Spain and Italy, as well as parallel plans to create new museums in Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands. It is definitely a rising trend. But the MMP is different to many other initiatives in that Britain does not have an indigenous narrative which stands in conflict or opposition to a migration narrative – very much the case in Australia, the USA and Canada. Equally, migration is not part of our national mythology, in the way in which these nations have sought to promote through formal policies of multiculturalism. The UK is also fundamentally different to some of the European migration museums in having relatively stable borders but nonetheless containing a complicated set of relationships between the different home nations: the interplay between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would necessitate careful consideration and sensitive handling. But internal

migration between these nations and outwards migration away from them is central to the UK's story of industrialisation and urbanisation on one hand and parallel depopulation on the other. Indeed, the complex interrelationship between the home nations is one of the principal reasons why we have always felt that this should be both a truly national museum in its ambitions, and one that concentrates on migration and not just immigration.

So as the title to this paper attests, we say in our funding applications and advocacy documents that we wish to create an Ellis Island for the UK. But of course, in actuality, we don't want this at all. Firstly, because there is no one single historic site in the UK which can adequately communicate the nation's complex migration history. There is a multiplicity of sites which reference some of the major cultural shifts. For example, an examination of the UK's 25 designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites swiftly reveals that many are explicitly or implicitly part of a migration narrative. This might be through invasion and colonisation (the Antonine Wall, Hadrian's Wall, the Tower of London, the medieval castles on the north Wales coast), through trade, Empire and Britain's role as a maritime nation (Maritime Greenwich, the Liverpool waterfront), or through the industrial history that occasioned substantive work-based migrations in the 18th and 19th centuries (Ironbridge Gorge, Saltaire, New Lanark, Derwent Valley Mills). Even the great religious sites of Canterbury Cathedral, Durham Cathedral and Fountains Abbey have stories to tell of the introduction and spread of an imported religion which had a profound impact in shaping the nation. None of these places, though, would be a suitable home for MMP, precisely because of the power of their particular histories.

Ellis Island itself has always recognised the difficulties of balancing the need to interpret the heritage of a site relating to a very particular period of the United States' history, with the need to tell a wider and more inclusive tale of the United States' ongoing formation. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has criticised the tourist complex for the ways in which a relatively narrow period of history and a distinct set of migrant experiences is made to stand as a "master paradigm" for all American immigration (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998:180). While the power of place creates an emotionally resonant visitor experience, it also restricts the museum's ability to take a critical approach to the range of attitudes the state has variously taken towards foreigners considered desirable or undesirable at different times. There are other migration initiatives around heritage sites in the UK which run into similar issues. The marvellous 19 Princelet Street, for example, has a fascinating domestic and architectural history inclusive of Huguenot silk weavers in the 18th century and Jews in the 19th century in an area branded today as London's 'Bangla Town'. While it has the potential to become an equivalent of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum for London's East End, it would be a struggle to integrate an interpretation of the historic site with a longer narrative tale. Closer to Ellis Island in conceptualisation is the Cunard Building in Liverpool. Here Liverpool Vision – Liverpool's economic development company which has led on many of the urban regeneration projects of the last 10 years – has been looking at the feasibility of turning the old first class passenger waiting rooms of the Cunard Shipping Line into an International Migration Centre, with a particular focus on the 19th century mass migrations, when some 9 million people from across Europe passed through Liverpool en route to the "New World". Again, the evocative nature of the building (built between 1914-17) has the potential to conflict with the story to be told. For these reasons MMP does not believe that there is a perfect heritage site for what it wants to do.

But Ellis Island is also the wrong analogy for the type of organisation we wish to be – not a monumental institution floating on its own little island but rather something more porous and open: a network of relationships and partnerships. We call ourselves a museum, but critically we don't intend to collect. We don't want to tether ourselves to any one particular building or site. We'd like to work with others to re-purpose existing

collections, to join the dots between all those excellent small scale projects, and to tell a national story whilst remaining responsive to local needs.

So what is our solution? We propose a migrating migration museum, potentially using recycled and upscaled shipping containers. These could come to your city, town or museum with both a fixed display element, potentially featuring a range of core central narratives, and adaptable space for local content. Or if we are really clever, we'll find a way to integrate the two, so that local responses speak to and enhance the national tale. In this way, we would see the museum as more of an ongoing, iterative process, which shapes, grows and alters as it moves around; a safe space in which to discuss and address concerns whilst focussing on personal experiences and stressing the common humanity of the migration experience.

At the moment, the shipping container idea is just that – an idea. It is not a wholly crazy idea as it might sound: it is a model already utilised commercially by Starbucks and Puma with pop-up shops, and it has been used in arts / heritage contexts, such as Gregory Colbert's Nomadic Museum or The Museum of Copenhagen's WALL initiative. It has the huge and significant advantage that it is a relatively low cost method of delivering a new museum compared to the major capital builds. MMP is in the midst of commissioning a feasibility study to explore more fully if this idea will work – especially with regards to the logistics of creating a secure, environmentally stable and attractive space, and the challenges of striking, moving and reinstalling at different sites. We are also seeking potential partners who might be willing to host a venture of this sort and developing the business model. Until we get those basic foundations laid, we won't even start to work on the really difficult matter of what goes in the museum and how these stories might be interpreted. Obviously, we recognise that there would still be all sorts of challenges and complexities to be negotiated – of which or whose stories would be foregrounded, and which would be integrated or subsumed into the whole. Even though the project has come a long way in a relatively short period, we know there is a long road yet to be travelled.

In the meantime, we are growing the organisation through other means. We've recently gained funding for and appointed our first Education Officer, who will be focussing on the schools market in the coming year: assessing what migration history resources are already out there and forming a teachers' network of advocates and advisers to develop new resources. We have also appointed a Projects Manager to develop our many strands of activity. We continue our seminar series, which has run successfully over the last year and a half with support from CARA (the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics), and are starting to seek ways of taking this out of London. We have funding applications in to develop our website, and hope to make this a major hub of work in the future – again, we'd like to resurrect the outputs from the myriad small scale local projects which are languishing in drawers and stores, and join them all up. We are also developing multiple academic partnerships: for example, we are working with Daniel Conway of the Open University on some ESRC-funded workshops on current research on the British Abroad, which will result in further web resources. We are working on some introductory temporary exhibitions. Our first exhibition, *100 Images of Migration*, launched successfully at Hackney Museum in June 2013, and we are developing proposals for follow ups. And last but by no means least, we are developing our cost base and business model, and seeking to broaden the range of our fundraising, and the scope of our partnerships.

So that is the Migration Museum Project. We are new kids on the block, but we think we've come a long way in a relatively short period. In conclusion, we believe there are compelling reasons to highlight the long term narrative of migration and its influences on forging a wider British culture. We want to work towards an improved public understanding that our shared history is a history of migration, to open up

conversations about Britishness and belonging. But we don't want to do this on our own, nor do we wish to stand in isolation. We hope that SHCG and its member museums in particular will be sufficiently keen to come and join us on the journey, as we won't be able to do it without you.

References:

Bangla Stories (2013) LSE/ Runnymede Trust

<http://www.banglastories.org/> [accessed 27 September 2013]

Black Cultural Archives (2013)

<http://www.bcaheritage.org.uk> [accessed 27 September 2013]

Blinder, S. (2012) *UK Public Opinion Towards Immigration: overall attitudes and levels of concern* The Migration Observatory Briefing (Oxford: COMPAS).

Ford, R, Morrell, G and Heath, A (2012) 'Immigration: "Fewer but better"? Public Views about Immigration', *British Social Attitudes 29* <http://www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/immigration/views-of-immigration.aspx>

Jordan, W. (2013) 'Immigration Concerns Hit Three Year High', *YouGov Issues Tracker* May 2013

<http://yougov.co.uk/news/2013/05/08/immigration-concern-hits-three-year-high/>

King, R. (ed.) (2007) *The History of Human Migration* (New Holland).

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1998) *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press).

Ipsos MORI (2011) *Too Many Immigrants? Ipsos Global Adviser Wave 22: Attitudes to Immigration, July 2011*

<http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2833/Too-Many-Immigrants.aspx> [accessed 22 October 2013]

Migration Museum Project (2013) *How we got here: the first three years* (London: MMP)

http://issuu.com/rivalpm/docs/museum_migration?e=4053101/3564933

[accessed 27 September 2013]

The National Archives (n.d.) *Moving Here*

<http://www.movinghere.org.uk/> [accessed 22 October 2013]

Stevens, M. (2009) *Stories Old and New. Migration and identity in the UK Heritage Sector. A report for the Migration Museum Working Group* (London: ippr).

Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (2011) Key Findings 2011

http://trends.gmfus.org/files/2011/12/TTImmigration_final_web1.pdf

Walker, P. (2010) 'Teenagers "harden views on immigration as they age"', *The Guardian*, 22 November 2010

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/nov/22/teenagers-harden-views-immigration-age>

Energy Exploration at Aberdeen Maritime Museum: A Case Study

Meredith Greiling, Curator at Aberdeen Maritime Museum, presents a case study in response to one of the questions in the SHCG conference call for papers: how are museums working with local partners in order to develop new ways of delivering services? Here she charts the development of the new Energy Exploration galleries and discusses partnership working with sponsors.

At Easter this year, Aberdeen Maritime Museum opened the new Energy Exploration galleries. The project was entirely funded by companies from the oil and gas industry based in Aberdeen, with expertise, collections, stories and knowledge gathered from many other sources bringing a range of perspectives on the collections and the wider topic of North Sea Energy. There was input from many quarters, offers of objects and oral history interviews from people who had worked in the early days of the North Sea oil and gas industry as well as invaluable insights from people who continue to work offshore.

The result is a varied, up to date, engaging interpretation, without fear or favour, of a fast-paced, controversial and contemporary subject within a specific historical and geographical context.

The partnership with the city's industries has created a lasting sustainable resource of immense public value as a venue for learning, cultural centre and visitor attraction for the city and the wider visiting audience.

A Collaborative Approach to Fundraising

In the spring of 2007 Aberdeen Maritime Museum was celebrating its 10th birthday; ten years of being the leading UK museum collecting, among other things, the history of the North Sea oil & gas industry. The museum in 1997 boasted the cutting edge of that industry's technology, showing a progression from the ancient maritime trades of the city's harbour to the latest technological innovations.

At the centre of the museum is the modern glass-fronted Link Building, which was designed around the 9 metre high Murchison oil platform model, and is the hub for the displays on the history of North Sea oil and gas.

However, ten years is a very long time in such a fast-paced world as the energy business, and already the museum's most up to date displays were looking dated and out of touch.

Over the next three years the inevitable conclusion was reached that the museum must upgrade the oil and gas displays, not least because in that time marine renewable energy technologies had evolved and now wave and tidal power had also become part of the energy story of the North Sea.

In 2010 the museum employed a design team to develop a feasibility study showing what could be done with an estimated sum of £200,000 and put the proposal to the museum's Oil Panel. The Oil Panel is a semi-annual meeting of representatives from Aberdeen's oil and gas industries, held with an informal lunch at the maritime museum. The panel have met regularly since the museum opened in 1997 with the purpose of maintaining the link between the museum and the dominant industry in Aberdeen; the offshore oil and gas companies.

This was an ambitious proposal by Aberdeen Maritime Museum; to redisplay three floors and approximately one third of the museum, but the response from the Oil Panel was overwhelming and very soon we had far exceeded our initial estimate. In all, the

museum received £315,000 sponsorship from 27 companies who were given the option to sponsor at one of three levels; Gold £20,000, Silver £10,000 or Bronze £5,000. By spreading the sponsorship amounts in this way the project was able to include many of the smaller businesses in the city; those companies who supply to the big players in the industry and who very often have roots in the city's older maritime industries such as fishing and shipbuilding. These smaller companies would not otherwise have the capacity to support community initiatives to the same degree, but would nevertheless want to contribute.

Unexpected Extras

During this stage of the process we were contacted independently by two firms who were looking to support over and above the three tiers of sponsorship, and wondered if there might be any particular areas that they could take on.

These enquiries lead to the much needed refurbishment of the Education Suite. The complete overhaul of the room included the installation of a new "switchable" glass wall to open the space up for visitors, as well as installing sinks and cupboards and generally making the room fit for the purpose of hosting hundreds of school visits and many other events and lectures.



Helipad cinema space (Copyright Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections)

The second company provided a 3D film tour of one of their North Sea platforms as well as the cinema and equipment to show it. Any concerns we may have had about receiving a PR film for their company were overcome by their agreement to allow the museum to retain editorial control over the script and involvement in every stage of the filming and editing process.

The result is a cinema space, designed to look like the helipad of an oil platform, surrounded by the sea, where visitors can take a virtual tour in 3D through an actual platform, see people at work and have the various processes explained by the people who work there. For most visitors this is as close to travelling offshore as they will ever get, and it doesn't require any specialist safety training either.

For the museum this is an element of interpretation that simply could not have been achieved, either financially or practically (in terms of access to the platform and the ongoing maintenance of the specialised cinema equipment and supply of 3D glasses), without the co-operation of the sponsoring company.

Between them, these two companies contributed £250,000 to the museum, vastly improving the visitor experience and the working environment in the museum, and bringing the overall sponsorship total to more than £550,000.

Once the funding had been secured for the wider project it was then possible to approach a museum design studio to start work on the look and content of the new galleries.

Visitor Expectations & Experiences

The oil and gas industry offshore, for all it is worth billions to the UK and world economies, is essentially a hidden industry. It is not possible to see an oil platform from the land, there are no tourist helicopter rides available from which to view the oil fields in the North Sea. All access is entirely mediated and controlled by the oil firms.

This presents a challenge to a museum; how to tell a neutral, unbiased account of an industry when the only available information comes from that industry.

One of the other and perhaps unique considerations that Aberdeen Maritime Museum had to factor in to the interpretation of the galleries is the high level of local knowledge, and indeed expertise, on the topic to be displayed.

It is not possible to live in the city and not know someone working for one of the oil and gas companies. Everyone in Aberdeen has some link, either personal or professional to the industry and a great many of the city's foreign visitors have come to the city because of it.

Unlike most museums who can present information on historic displays from a presumed position of subject expertise, Aberdeen is a city very much at the centre of the oil and gas industry, and many of the museum's visitors are employed in the business.

Many of our family visitors are parents who bring their children to the museum to explain their jobs and time spent away offshore. These visitors want to see their experiences of life offshore accurately represented.

This is reflected in the museum's comments sheets:

Excellent display of the industry from someone who works in the industry offshore – Melbourne, Australia

Have been offshore since 1974 Nigg, Sullom Voe, Subsea Mayo. Numerous rigs. Excellent portrayal of oil industry – Edinburgh

As an offshore worker I'd like to thank you to show how we live and work – very realistic! 😊 – Barcelona

What a fantastic visit. Tony works offshore & what a fantastic way to show our son what his dad does. Thank you x – Laurencekirk

If possible show more well drilling material. Thank you. Nice place! – Portugal

I work on AGBAMI FPSO, you actually give a perfect account of what we have offshore – Nigeria

It was imperative, therefore, to get not only the factual information, but the tone of the displays, absolutely right.

The answer was to speak to as many people involved in the industry as possible. We spoke to people who worked offshore in the early days, some of the first women to work offshore as medics in the 1970s and drillers in the 1990s, offshore survival training experts, divers, helicopter pilots, and many people who are still working offshore. Whether Offshore Installation Managers (the boss) or lowly sparkies and roustabouts, we made scores of recorded interviews and asked about personal experiences and stories. The museum now engages with the families of workers and deepens the connections between the museum and communities, providing a space for families to talk about their working lives and experiences.

Again, the partnership approach to working with the industry made this process much easier. Several of the companies, even those that were not sponsoring the project, made their personnel available to the museum and gave permission for crew to take photographs of their platforms and give their time for interviews.

When specialist information was required, such as the need for a very high resolution image of a geological survey map of the North Sea for a wall panel, or photographs of decommissioning platforms, the personal contacts made via the Oil Panel were invaluable.

Other partnerships were developed too. Both the local universities were enthusiastic supporters of the project. Robert Gordon University's Department of Engineering provided working ROVs (underwater robots), which are displayed in a large cylindrical tank for visitors to practise their piloting skills on. Aberdeen University's Oceanlab department provided the expertise and content for the Marine Biodiversity displays including donating some polystyrene shrunken heads to illustrate the effects of water pressure, and film footage of sea life in the deeps.



ROV Tank (Copyright Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections)

Many of the areas had been covered to some extent in the former 1997 displays, but there were some glaring omissions which needed to be addressed this time around; namely the environmental consequences of the oil and gas industry, the economic dimension to the subject and the new developments in marine renewable energy.

Contrary to what might be imagined, the old impasse of decades ago between oil companies and environmental campaign groups such as Greenpeace had moved on considerably. Following the Brent Spar campaign in 1995, which resulted in changes to legislation relating to the disposal of equipment and structures at sea, many oil companies include the campaign group in their

decommissioning consultations. Any anticipated problems arising from the inclusion of the Greenpeace campaign film 'Go Beyond Oil' were unfounded and none of the companies sought to influence the content of the displays or expressed concern about including dissenting voices in the museum.

Similarly, it was acknowledged that the existing displays about the Piper Alpha disaster would need to be expanded. In 1997 when the original Piper Alpha area was written the details of that disaster were still fresh in the public consciousness, however, 2013 was the 25th anniversary of that event and the name Piper Alpha is almost unknown to the new generations visiting the museum. By including personal testimony from survivors and objects that have subsequently been gifted to the museum it is now possible to give a detailed account of the tragedy that includes the lessons learned.

The end result is a museum that attempts to engage with a science and technology story as well as a social history story. The broad spectrum of companies involved provided a wide resource for information and content on different topics, tapping into specialisms to enhance the displays. This was an innovative approach to creating a vibrant, authentic visitor experience using partnerships with industry to provide access to expertise for oral history recordings as well as for additions to the collections and to finance the work.

The new Energy Exploration galleries use digital technologies to present collections to the public in new and engaging ways combining photography, film and oral histories from people currently working on the Murchison platform to interpret the existing permanent collections.

The outcome is a unique insight to the working lives of these platforms, in the voices and photographs of the people who work on them, far out of sight from land and their families.

Colonial visibilities? The PhotoCLEC project

Elizabeth Edwards is Director of the Photographic History Research Centre at De Montfort University, Leicester, and was previously Curator of Photographs at the Pitt Rivers Museum. She writes here about a recent international project investigating museums' engagement with the colonial past, particularly through photographs.

In this short paper, I am going to give an overview of a major European-funded project examining the role of the photographic legacy of the colonial past in a postcolonial and multicultural Europe. The project, entitled PhotoCLEC, was funded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) and EU Framework 7.¹ The project involved three European partners, the UK (De Montfort University), the Netherlands (Free University Amsterdam) and Norway (University of Bergen). While this was an academic project, it was significant that all of the team had curatorial experience of some sort, two of us at a senior level: Susan Legêne who had been head of collections at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam and myself who had been Curator of Photographs at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. This collective "inside knowledge" had a considerable influence in shaping the project because we had a strong sense of the very real and practical challenges that faced museum curators on a daily basis, not only an analytical take on museum practices.

We were interested in the extent of an apparent lack of engagement in museums, with a colonial past. This past has saturated European society and European history for at least the last 200 years, and its threads form a significant part of the weave of contemporary European societies. We were not looking only for the representation of the major tropes of the colonial – the trans-Atlantic trade, the East India Company – but the micro-levels of connections which shaped everyday experience and social relations of the colonial.²

These ubiquitous forms reach beyond the official record to the very experience of colonial encounter. Indeed, in many senses, photographs are paradigmatic products of colonial relations, and it is significant how as a body of historical sources, such photographs have attracted a massive and ongoing critique which again underpinned our work. The research therefore clustered around comparative themes on "national" practices in narrative construction, the visibility of the colonial past, and concepts of contemporary relevance in post-colonial and multi-cultural societies.

These micro-levels of the colonial past have shaped the macro-levels of experience of populations and topographies, of national dispositions, and the micro-levels, food habits and fashion for instance (Gilroy 2004). Within this we were especially interested in levels of photographic visibility, because photography offers some of the most direct, articulate and expansive records of colonial encounter. While a short piece like this will inevitably skate over the surface of some very major historical strands, we were interested in how histories are told and how, and which histories are not told and why. What was the level of recognition and engagement with a sense of a complex and difficult past in public narratives of history? And did it matter?

As cultural and visual historians, not sociologists or political scientists, we were interested in representation, and chose to look at museums, as major vectors of public histories with major educational roles, and photographs as sources that were often used to convey information in museums. The project comprised three parallel projects in the partner countries. As such, it explored three very different colonial and postcolonial experiences. The comparative and European scope was very important because it threw into sharp relief the specifics of national narratives and the place of a colonial memory within them. The UK and the Netherlands, of course, had major

territorial empires and associated infrastructures, developed from at least the seventeenth century, followed by extensive postcolonial migration. Norway was perhaps a less obvious choice, not fitting the assumed shape of “a colonial power”. However, this was the point of interest, because the colonial as a discourse, mentality, a set of power relations and a way of acting in the world is not confined to territorial domination. In addition to the internal colonial relations with Sami people in the north, Norway was very active in exploration, science, emigration and settlement, and particularly missionary activity across the globe. It offered a different perspective on what it was to be “colonial” and how this past might be articulated within national narratives of the past and within museums.³

Obviously this is a huge and sprawling subject which is entangled with specific styles of colonial relationships. Yet there is a tendency to talk about the colonial as a homogeneous, dominating, and instrumental entity rather than marked by heterogeneity, and sometimes fragility (Roque and Wagner 2012). In many ways it is the latter which makes styles of colonialism and their concomitant styles of decolonialisation and of postcolonial migration.⁴ These styles are entangled also with local political structures, with styles of state managed multiculturalism and the definition of both local and community.

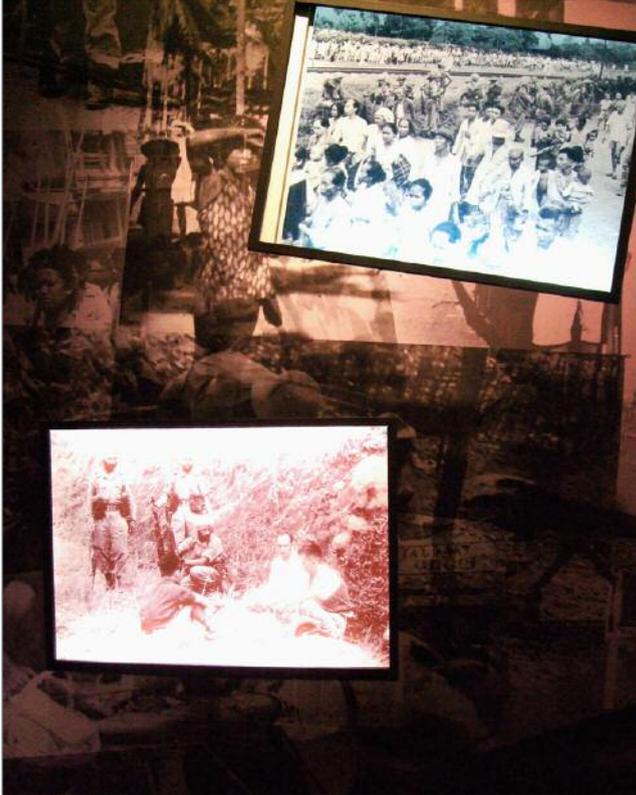
However, these highly problematic intersecting histories, ranging from the tolerable to the intolerable, the peaceable to the violent, the reflective to the dominating, were, we found, largely absent from museum narratives of the past, deemed too shameful and problematic. However, while there is enormous interest in these histories in academic circles, this does not filter down into public narratives where, to quote Stuart Hall, the rawness of its legacy is still under negotiation, and is ‘subject to widespread, selective amnesia and disavowal’ or ‘safely sequestered on the distant fringes of national narratives where they ... may violently register the tensions of the moments in which they are recalled or slip surreptitiously into the faded patina of irrelevance’ (Hall 1999/2000: 7; Stoler 2011: 121).

In museum spaces there were tensions, in particular, between the visibility and invisibility of photographs emerging from colonial relations, which is both a symptom of and metaphor for the (in)visibility of the colonial past more generally. Given that historical narratives are profoundly visual these days, under what conditions was it possible to, or indeed desirable to, engage with this visual legacy of a disturbing, troubled and contested past, or was photography too volatile a source to be allowed to function in an equally volatile history (Edwards and Mead 2013).

The largest concentration of image use was in anthropology museums/departments, with their historical holdings of objects of colonial collection. This is important because it places the colonial past as something outside home or domestic histories. This was certainly so in the UK, where, beyond the specific historical engagement with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the colonial past was seen largely as a problem for anthropology museums. The same pattern emerged in Norway, where the country’s colonial tentacles were made visible only in the contexts of anthropology. Even then photographs are used illustratively as an ‘economy of truth’ rather than analytically (Porter 1989).

Interestingly, the pattern in the Netherlands is somewhat different. Whereas in the UK the focus has been framed largely by recuperative and restorative histories in the face of the continuing trauma of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, in which later colonial pasts are elided, the shape of Dutch decolonisation and the dynamics of colonial memory have meant a different visibility in public histories. But of particular note here is the role of dynamic engagement with those of Indo-Dutch heritage in the telling of the colonial past (Pattynama 2014).

What emerged were different patterns of the critical claiming and owning of the past, a retelling of that past, and above all the use of photographs, and a visualised thinking in the articulation of those pasts. There are specific galleries on colonial experience in the TropenMuseum in Amsterdam and photography is positioned as central in the making of colonial knowledge which is integral to the Museum's history. It is heavily dependent on the visual image, both photography and film, and although complex power relations are visible, the violence of encounters is not.



Photographs used at Indisch Herinneringscentrum, Bronbeek. (PhotoCLEC)

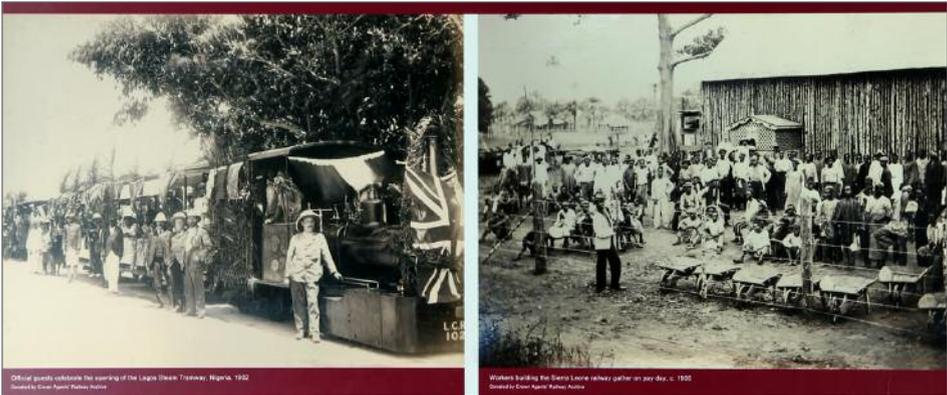
This was not so uniformly; an important case study with which we worked was the Indies Memorial Museum in Bronbeek, near Arnhem. This museum, which is saturated with photographs and has a largely Indo-Dutch staff, emerged out of a military museum. It charts the history of Dutch empire in Indonesia, its dislocation during the Second World War and the subsequent war of independence. They were not afraid to use violent imagery, but significantly, although the most graphic images have been cropped, the photographs of dead bodies were Indonesian dead bodies, not Dutch dead bodies, a point we discussed during our visit there (Pattynama 2014).

This raises more general interesting questions

about the limits of visibility in a museum, visible to whom and under what conditions. To what degree is it desirable or necessary to address these pasts in a newly figured and multicultural Europe?

The level of visibility found in Dutch museums was not found in UK museums. There was one exception in UK, the now-closed British Empire and Commonwealth Museum (BECM) in Bristol. There have been many complex questions around this museum and its closure which are beyond the scope of this paper (see Edwards and Mead 2013). However, its particular interest for the project was the way in which its displays, which involved continuous community input, tackled the complexities of colonial relations and their aftermath in the historical trajectory of empire to commonwealth to multicultural society. Above all, photographs were used to move the narrative into more complex and challenging issues – colonial science, race, state surveillance, colonial violence, inter-racial marriages. And given the assumptions that often cluster around such attempts, they tackled equally problematic themes such as the role of education and medical care, friendship and affection (Edwards and Mead 2013).

What was significant, as I have suggested, was that the major thrust of this museum's narrative was carried by photographs. They were presented usually four to a panel, not as illustrations of the text, or as "context" for other classes of objects, but specifically to expand the text in different directions, and to introduce a saturating directness into the representation of the nation's past. To quote one of the curators, 'there's something about the immediacy that means that you can talk without having to have all the words or the terms in place.' What worked so well, then, was that the archive of the colonial past was used actively to complicate histories. For instance, on the panel on infrastructure and railways, there were, side by side, the elaborate opening festivities and a stark indication of the conditions of African labour in the building of colonial infrastructure (Edwards and Mead 2013).



Panel detail: "Railways" BECM, 2011. Craig Madden, reproduced with permission)

But interestingly, while these histories and their visual collections emerge within specialist museums, whether the National Maritime Museum or BECM, they are almost uniformly absent in social history museums. This is very significant because, as I have already suggested, a colonial past cannot be compartmentalised, it saturates everything from raw materials and objects to street names and food habits. Despite its formative quality in modern Britain, for instance, many curators we spoke to see the colonial period as too difficult to be expressed within a public narrative of history. In particular, they were very concerned that any exploration of the colonial past might be seen as condoning or reproducing colonial values, with serious repercussions within a multicultural paradigm. The topic was seen as too difficult to integrate into narratives even where the colonial past was formative.

Although we were unable to interview curators in this specific case, a good example is the recently opened M Shed museum in Bristol. There is a strong display on Bristol's major part in the trans-Atlantic slave trade contained in a circular enclosure by the entrance to the gallery, then a gallery of nineteenth century industries in Bristol – soap, chocolate and tobacco. Yet a sense that all the raw materials for this subsequent industrial wealth are entirely dependent on colonial trade networks, many of which mapped onto those of slavery, is absent. The abolition of the trans-Atlantic trade acts as a closure to Bristol's difficult past and its colonial connections. Yet this is exactly where photographic visibility could so complicate the narrative – a plantation to illustrate sources and labour conditions, perhaps. Finally, the visitor goes round the end of the gallery to displays of celebratory and ludic multiculturalism (Matušík 1998:101-2) – music, food and festivals – in a contemporary diverse city, with no indication that all these elements are historically linked. This is a pattern mirrored in Birmingham Art Gallery and Museum's new gallery of a multiply-owned social history of Birmingham, where again the colonial is absent, despite the city being, in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries, “the workshop of the world” – that is Empire – and a distinguished board of imperial historians being involved.

Where local histories are connected to the colonial, they are often channelled not through local history but, again, through the ethnographic or anthropological. In many museums, the address of the colonial, and its photographic traces, is articulated through the personal stories of donors of ethnographic material. Global/local connections are often used to frame objects in ethnographic collections in order to establish the “relevance” of ethnographic collections by connecting the local, such as in the displays at Manchester Museum or Birmingham’s Gallery 33 (Poulter 2013; Peirson-Jones 1995:231-5). But they do not destabilise, challenge or displace a narrative of locality, because they do not function as integral or formative to local histories but a tangential adjunct to them.

Whatever the particulars of the museums we studied, all faced similar dilemmas around photographs and their use in the museum space. Photographs vastly complicated the face of colonial relations. They always far exceed the intentions of the photographer, they are full of incidental detail which can derail curatorial intention. They shift meaning constantly, according to the cultural knowledge brought to their reading. Yet at the same time, with their reality effects, they focus attention in ways that other sources cannot. The photographs we encountered ranged from the violent and disturbing to the outright racist, to the profoundly ambiguous, and can bring a disturbing multitude of possibilities to the surface. Above all, photographs inscribe the banality of colonial relations. This is where the great paradox lies in relation to their use in museums, or indeed other publically visible histories: that while they might complicate a narrative and perhaps present a more honest yet challenging historical trajectory, at the same time, the banality and everydayness of the vast majority of photographs risks normalising the power relations and casual racialism of the colonial past in very disturbing ways.

While colonial desire and colonial expansion emerged from a broad common European cultural moment carrying sets of similarities in power relations, economic and cultural expansion, the project found, as I’ve suggested, marked differences in postcolonial responses to this history in museums and more generally.

The measure of the “speakability” of a colonial past might be gauged through the different national responses to the PhotoCLEC project as our major public interface – our website – was launched in 2012. It is almost an inverse relationship between colonial legacy and interest. The greatest interest was in Norway, where the Norwegian team did news features, interviews, keynotes at museum conferences and so forth. The Netherlands had a similar although not quite as extensive response with a steady flow of specialist media interest. In the UK, nothing; from newspapers, specialist press and particularly not the *Museums Journal*, despite the best efforts of the AHRC press office. This takes us back to questions of speakability, for conversely the UK is the largest user of the website by a long way,⁵ followed by the Netherlands and third, interestingly, Indonesia. And this is absolutely consistent. This suggests that the colonial past is perceived as relevant, but, as I’ve suggested, not speakable.

The distancing of the colonial is borne out by the fact that whilst we were doing this project, the National Archives in the UK launched a website of all their African photographs.⁶ What is significant is that this project is positioned as African history, not as British history, despite the fact that much of the material was from the files of the Colonial Office in London. It is treated as almost an absent-minded African accrual to state governance. Again, what we see is that the colonial past is separated out from a British past.

If pushed to answer our original research question, ‘what is the role of the photographic legacy of the colonial past in a postcolonial and multicultural Europe?’, our answer would be that it can only have one in the political conditions which allow a frank and

confronting debate about the complexity and challenges of that legacy, in ways that do not simplify colonial history and effectively shut down the debate. Our project suggested that this confrontation is happening very unevenly, and especially in the contexts of social history. It is significant that most discussions of the colonial past in social narratives address major institutions of colonial relations – trans-Atlantic trade, the East India Company, ethnographic collections and repatriation – not the saturating presence of the colonial in the historical, and indeed present, social fabric.⁷ The particular photographic invisibility is also entangled with an uncertainty of the status and power of the work of photographs in museums more generally, something I have not been able to address here (see Edwards and Lien 2014 forthcoming), and because of the difficult histories and ideologies implicit, or at times explicit, in photographs which were seen as too volatile for use in the public sphere.

What emerged from the project was a sense of very notable differences in the shape of visibility in museums, photographic or otherwise, not only in different kinds of museums, but also in national modes of remembering and forgetting. In Norway, there was a clear sense of amnesia, the colonial past has simply been forgotten. In the Netherlands, the situation was more complicated. There was a much greater visibility and an overt engagement with the colonial past, a visibility that looked in two antithetical directions, that of nostalgia and that of reclamation. In the UK there was a clear sense of an aphasia, an unspeakability, of what is very consciously felt (Edwards and Mead 2013). As I have noted, all the curators we spoke to in the project were fully aware that the colonial past was integral to the stories they were telling, but from a fear of controversy, a fear of causing offence, and a fear of replicating colonial values, such narratives remained present but unspoken in museum practice. This, of course, is a generalisation, and there are small pockets of successful engagement.⁸ What was important in PhotoCLEC was that by thinking photographically, thinking literally, about how histories come into visibility, what can be seen and under what conditions, we have been able to bring these questions into a much clearer debate on which we hope others can build.

References:

Edwards, E. and S. Lien (eds) (2014 forthcoming) *Uncertain Images: Museums and the Work of Photographs* (Farnham: Ashgate).

Edwards, E. and M. Mead (2013) 'Absent Histories and Absent Images: Photographs, Museums and the Colonial Past' *Museum & Society* 11(1) 19-38.

Gilroy, P. (2004) *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge).

Hall, S. (1999/2000) 'Whose Heritage? Unsettling "The Heritage"', Re-imagining the Post-nation', *Third Text*, 24, 3-13.

Macdonald, S. (2009) *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London, Routledge).

Matušík, M. J. B. (1998) 'Ludic, corporate, imperial multiculturalism' in C. Willet (ed.) *Theorising Multiculturalism: a Guide to the Current Debate* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Pattynama, P. (2014 forthcoming) 'The Story of the Netherlands-Indies: the Use of Photographs in the Centre of Indies Remembrance' in E. Edwards and S. Lien (eds) *Uncertain Images: Museums and the Work of Photographs* (Farnham: Ashgate).

Peirson-Jones, J. (1992) 'The Colonial Legacy and the Community: the Gallery 33 project', in I. Karp, C.M. Kreamer and S.D. Levine (eds) *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington DC. Smithsonian Institution Press).

PhotoCLEC (2012) *Photographs, Colonial Legacy and Museums in Contemporary Europe* <http://photoclec.dmu.ac.uk> [Accessed October 2013].

Porter, Gaby (1989) 'The Economy of Truth: Photography in the Museum' *Ten-8*, 34: 20-33.

Poulter, E.K., (2013) 'Silent Witness: Tracing Narratives of Empire through Objects and Archives in the West African Collections at the Manchester Museum', *Museum History Journal* 6 (1): 6-22.

Roque, Ricardo and Kim Wagner (eds) (2012) *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Stoler, A.L (2011) 'Colonial aphasia: race and disabled histories in France', *Public History* 23 (1) 121-56.

-
- 1 The material drawn on here is synthesised from PhotoCLEC's fieldwork, including some 120 hours of curator, facilitator and focus group interviews across the three partner countries. We should like to thank all the curators who talked to us and gave of their time so freely and generously and we respect their need for confidentiality. Details of the project, its make up, objectives, methods and some of its outcomes can be found at <http://photoclec.dmu.ac.uk/>.
 - 2 There is a huge technical archive from, for example colonial forestry or industry, which we did not address more than incidentally as traces of those social relations.
 - 3 This discussion intersects with wider debates on museums and challenging histories e.g. Macdonald 2009.
 - 4 I am using postcolonial here largely in a political sense rather than a critical or discursive sense although the two cannot of course be neatly separated.
 - 5 This does not appear to be simply a linguistic matter.
 - 6 Since we finished, they have added Asia and the Caribbean. The latter is very differently premised, with strong community involvement. I am grateful to TNA staff for talking to me about this project.
 - 7 There are exceptions, e.g. Leicester Museums *Suits and Saris* (2012) which attempted a critical engagement with the colonial (<http://www.dresstheworld.co.uk/leicester/>).
 - 8 For some examples, see <http://photoclec.dmu.ac.uk/framings/>.

How can local museums with reduced resources approach contemporary collecting and interpretation of local objects and issues in an increasingly mass global environment?

Owain Rhys is Curator of Contemporary Life at St Fagans: National History Museum, part of Amgueddfa Cymru, National Museum Wales. He discusses the challenges and opportunities of contemporary collecting and suggests practical approaches for smaller museums.

When I talk to curators from smaller museums, I often hear that they can't engage with contemporary collecting because of scarce resources. They argue that the need to concentrate on historical collecting, day-to-day costs and ongoing projects tend to consume all the finances and staff time, leaving little aside for planning and instigating a contemporary collecting policy. When this is coupled with a fluid definition of "contemporary", the breath-taking array of objects to choose from, and the fact that most of those objects are no longer produced locally, it becomes understandable why many curators are put off the idea. In this article, I attempt to rationalise some of the fears, and offer some guidelines as to how museums, especially small, localised ones, can engage with this important strand of museum work. Firstly, I'll attempt to define "contemporary". This will be followed by examples of objects that could be collected, according to the specific needs of different museums. I'll then explore how small, local museums can approach representing relevant events happening today, before finishing with a case study of a community project, a model which could be adapted to suit the resources and objectives of other museums keen to engage in this kind of work.

Definitions

I have discussed the problem of defining "contemporary" before (Rhys 2011, 13-14). Essentially, it could be defined as anything along a spectrum of meanings, from "within our lifetime", to "the here and now". In practical terms, it depends on the personality of the curator, the type of collections, guidance or pressure from above, and the collecting policy of the museum. At St Fagans: National History Museum, it was decided to define it on a rolling basis as the last five years. That means I only deal with objects, events and issues from the last five years, although it has also given me the opportunity to be involved in representing aspects of near contemporary Welsh life which have not been collected or recorded by the museum – pop music, LGBT history, graffiti, and refugees, for example. In the long-term, it might be an idea for the Museums Association (MA), ICOM, or even the SHCG to instigate a discussion on this, and issue some guidelines on defining "contemporary collecting", although that might open a whole different can of worms. In the meantime, rather than being daunted, curators should embrace this ambiguity, and adapt the meaning to suit their needs.

Why Collect?

These needs can be summarised as one or more of the following: "filling in the gaps", updating a collection, reflecting older objects, or collecting objects to represent current trends. If, for example, you work in a specialised museum, collecting specific objects, "contemporary" could mean "filling in the gaps", or updating a dated but strong collection. The Museum of Rural Life was highly successful in this regard when they embarked on a project called Collecting 20th Century Rural Culture, a Lottery funded, four year project (WWW1). Whilst they were strong on the traditional rural equipment and tools used pre-1950, they wanted objects that reflected the context and influence of rural England on 20th Century Life. They collected over four hundred objects,

including a Greenham Common poster, Corgi toys and various arts and crafts. The legacy of the project is still being felt, and debate continues as to how far this collecting can and should go – should the museum collect a brand new combine harvester, for example (Douglas, forthcoming publication), or toy representations of one?

If, on the other hand, you work in a local museum with strict guidance to only collect objects with a local connection, then “contemporary” could mean objects that reflect or complement historical ones already in the collection, or objects that represent local events or situations. If, for example, you have traditional baking equipment, you might want to collect a modern bread maker from a local person, recording associated stories – where and how it was obtained (perhaps it was a wedding gift?), ingredients used, different breads baked, meals remembered. It doesn’t have to be made locally (and invariably won’t be). It just needs that local connection. This method would be just as valid for any category of social history collections – leisure, trade, textile, furniture, and so on. A mobile phone or a smartphone would be examples of other objects which could be collected. And you wouldn’t have to collect another one for ten years, maybe – one object like that, presented in a holistic manner, is enough, in my opinion, to represent a range of different aspects of our lives at the beginning of the 21st Century – communicating, socialising, entertaining, being entertained, working, newsgathering, timekeeping, not to mention our worrying dependence on electricity and digital equipment to survive. Everyone uses them – a local angle would not be difficult to obtain. Where did you buy it? How do you use it? What’s on your playlist? Who do you follow on Twitter? Do you remember life without mobile phones? And so on.

Collecting to Reflect Local Events

Representing contemporary local events and situations is often daunting because so much happens, and the experience can be fleeting. One way to engage with this initially is through a contemporary collecting project. Museums could choose a local dispute, or protest movement with strong local flavour – opposition to wind farms, for example, the closure of a factory, or the downgrading of a local hospital. Curators could organise to meet with the leaders, follow on Facebook and Twitter, attend rallies, record protests on film and collect placards, t-shirts, ephemera and other connected objects. Context could be provided through oral history interviews, newspaper clippings, official documents and even TV coverage. In short, the project would be run through adapting traditional curatorial methods when collecting and displaying historical material – the main difference being that curators collecting contemporary material will have much more control over how and why this is done. An outcome could be an exhibition or display comparing and contrasting the contemporary dispute with historical examples, maybe concentrating on the similarities or the differences, effect on the landscape, and changing public opinion.



Woolworth ‘Closing Down’ sign. Woolworth’s stores were integral to many high streets, but they were forced into administration when the recession started in 2007, amid huge debts. The last store closed 9 January 2009. It was, for many, the first tangible sign of the current economic crisis (Copyright Amgueddfa Cymru, National Museum Wales)

Challenges and Potential Solutions

The main drawback of course is the lack of resources, as was mentioned at the beginning. It's all very well aspiring to do all this work, but it needs to be balanced with the work-time capabilities of the existing staff, storage capabilities of the institution, and conservation pressures. If these are major issues, then we could scale right back – one placard in the collection could be enough to tell the whole story. If it is, then it could be argued that this should be within the remit of all local museums, even in these cash-strapped times. Another way to deal with the lack of resources is to pool experience and work with other museums in the region, or those with similar collections, in order to investigate the possibility of dispersed collections. Sweden has been working along these lines through their SAMDOK project since the mid-seventies (Silvén, 2007; Stavenow-Hidemark, 1985; Steen, 2004). Here in Wales, we've been experimenting as well, albeit on a much smaller scale, firstly on an MA-funded project to record all post-1950s sports objects which are held in museums and private collector hands, and secondly on a CyMAL-funded project to assess how many post-2000 objects were held in Welsh museums. The long-term intention is to build on this, with the aim of producing a central database of all museum objects in Wales. Admittedly, this is ambitious, and there are obvious technical, logistical, geographical and financial obstacles, but it could be the first steps towards the aspiration of a shared collection. Would this work in the current political, financial and cultural situation in England, perhaps?

Such a dispersed or shared collection could be accessed by curators from all museums, ease the loaning process, democratise the collections and devolve power from Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales and other larger museums. Crucially, however, it would enable curators to share the responsibility of collecting contemporary objects. An annual panel could be set up to decide what objects should be collected, and which museums should collect them. Those objects then would be available for display at all Welsh museums. The main issue would be one of context – would a washing machine used in Merthyr be able to convey stories about how washing machines were used in Aberystwyth? I believe that this conundrum can be dealt with in the way museums interpret. At present, there is an ever growing movement towards participatory and dialogical approaches. This gives us the opportunity to collect, or even buy, “blank” contemporary objects (i.e. with no associated context), and ask visitors or chosen communities to “layer” these objects with their stories. If you take the example of the bread maker above, for example, you could buy a “blank”, new version, display it, and ask visitors to leave stories associated with their experiences of baking bread. These stories could then be collated and archived. This might be contentious, but it also might be worth exploring.

Other contentious issues surrounding contemporary collecting relate to the ways we collect and the ways we present the lives of disenfranchised or unseen elements of society. How do we represent the stories of communities who haven't got objects to donate, don't wish to donate, or are still using these objects in everyday life? Other factors come to play here as well – how do we engage these communities, how do we make museums relevant to them, and how can we instigate an on-going relationship that might result in further projects and the possibility of collecting objects at a later date? I'd argue that the remit of contemporary collecting includes this kind of outreach community work, and that sometimes we need to think laterally in order to collect. I'd like, therefore, to present a case study which encapsulates this lateral thinking.

Case Study

The project, which coincided with Refugee Week in June 2012, was a collaboration between members of the Cardiff and Newport refugee and asylum seeking community, and St Fagans: National History Museum. It was mostly financed by a Welsh Arts Council grant. Central to the project was the idea that refugees and asylum seekers

would attend workshops at St Fagans, and work with curators, designers and front of house staff towards creating an informed and accurate replica of a refugee house in the temporary exhibition space. The aim was to highlight stories about the long and dangerous journeys made by asylum seekers and refugees before they reach places like Wales, and to document their continuing struggles and everyday life after arriving. It was also treated as a pilot project for participatory and dialogical projects which St Fagans would host in the future. This meant initiating and sustaining a two-way dialogue between a variety of museum staff and volunteers.

The aims and objectives were:

- To create a snapshot of refugee and asylum seekers' lives in Wales at the beginning of the 21st Century.
- To dispel myths and stereotypes around refugees and asylum seekers.
- To build a bridge of understanding with the indigenous community and new arrivals to Wales.
- To create a record of an important historical migration to Wales through the creation of an archive of stories and artefacts.
- To develop an on-going relationship between St Fagans and the refugee and asylum seeking community.
- To foster skill-sharing between museum staff and the refugee community, and provide valuable work experience.
- To be a case study that informs future projects.

A series of 5 workshops were held between 15 December 2011 and 27 March 2012. During these, refugees and asylum seekers were guided by curators around historic buildings (to introduce them to museological processes), were asked to photograph their houses, worked with front of house staff to create collages of different rooms, discussed and argued about how their story should be presented, and instructed designers, artists and set builders on how to re-create their experiences. One point of contention was over whether to include a television, as most refugees and asylum seekers would have one, although not all would pay for their license due to financial issues. Some wanted to explicitly state this, while others were worried that it would reinforce stereotypes and compromise the desired positive impact of the display. In the end, we included a battered old television, with the interpretation stating that not all could afford this.

The culmination of the process was the artist Carwyn Evans designing and building a life-size set of a refugee house (complete with kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and living room), and populating it with objects from the refugees themselves, or from charities such as Cardiff Storehouse, who supply much of the furniture for these houses. A photographic exhibition by women from Newport was also displayed. Members of the community were interviewed, and an edited selection broadcast on the television in the living room. A version of the Citizenship Test (which refugees have to pass before being naturalised) was offered to visitors. And volunteers from the community resided in the installation throughout the month – this proved an invaluable way of engaging visitors.

The feedback from the volunteers was very positive – they felt appreciated, respected, empowered, had gained confidence, and were pleased that the museum had listened to their views. Over the course of the project, a level of trust was achieved, and whilst they were initially very willing to talk of their previous life and their lives now, it was only towards the end that we began to hear snippets of stories outlining their reasons for leaving and their journeys here, which were all very traumatic. This made us even



The Refugee House installation showing part of the bedroom and the comments wall (Copyright Amgueddfa Cymru, National Museum Wales)

more determined to continue with our relationship after the project came to an end, in order to further explore these stories, stories we had consciously avoided approaching originally. We were also keen to devolve power to the community, and the result of both these factors was that one of the community groups we partnered during 2012, Oasis Cardiff, are currently bidding for HLF money to run their own oral history and recording project.

Even more interesting than the response from the community was the response of visitors. This was mostly positive, although some were, predictably, negative. We had installed a feedback wall where visitors could leave their comments, and it became apparent that people were responding to each other through these comments, contributing to the intended participatory and dialogical nature of the exhibition. 'Amazed and disappointed,' wrote one visitor, 'that economic migrants live in better conditions than many of our own children and they get all from taxes'. Another retorted with 'Comment below – please read the panel in the yellow area. These are not economic migrants, but political asylum seekers. There's a big difference!' Another comment was 'Disappointed that NMW [National Museum Wales] should be pandering to minority in this way! Fact: there are more Muslims in the UK than there are Welsh. If they all moved to Wales we'd have Sharia Law and this museum would be cleared to make way for a mosque. Get your priorities right and promote Wales instead!' Someone had answered 'I'd sooner have Sharia law than your small-minded hatred. Try thinking of others for once!' And so on. It must be emphasised that most comments were positive, and that most visitors felt informed and emotionally engaged.

The reason I have written at length about this particular project is to convey the sense that there are alternative ways of communicating with communities and audiences about contemporary issues. No objects were collected, but the museum provided a platform for this particular community to tell their story, and a platform for them to continue with similar work in the future. It was also an opportunity for visitors to become involved, and for us to archive the views and outlook of today's society for future generations. This model could be adapted for other topics, and could work on any scale. This is not to say that it should replace collecting objects – objects should be core to museum work – but that it could be used to initiate other methods of engaging. I'm also aware that many museums are already engaging through these methods, including those in our local vicinity, Cardiff Story, Swansea Museum and Newport Museum.



One aim of the project was to break down barriers between the community and the museum, and between museum staff and the community (Copyright Amgueddfa Cymru, National Museum Wales)

Conclusion

I hope therefore that this paper has encouraged those who might have felt daunted about collecting the contemporary before, and that it has reinforced the beliefs of those who are currently engaging, either through “filling in the gaps”, updating a collection, reflecting older objects, or collecting objects to represent current trends. I hope that suggesting the collection of local protest objects is a good way to initiate contemporary collecting, even if only one object is collected. Rather more ambitiously, I’ve outlined the first tentative steps towards a dispersed national collection in Wales, and touched on the benefits, and possible pitfalls. And lastly, in order to expand the potential of the field, I have included a case study describing how museums can work with contemporary communities in a participatory and dialogical manner, empowering the community and emboldening the museum. Get rid of those doubts therefore, and collect the contemporary.

References:

Rhys, Owain, 2011, *Contemporary Collecting: Theory and Practice*, Edinburgh: Museums Etc.

Silvén, E., 2007, ‘Reflecting collecting’, in Fagerborg, E. (ed) *Connecting Collecting – 30 years of Samdok*, 4-5, Samtid & museer No 2, 2007, Stockholm: Nordiska museum.

Stavenow-Hidemark, E., 1985, *Home thoughts from abroad: an evaluation of the SAMDOK Homes Pool*, Stockholm: SAMDOK, Nordiska Museet.

Steen, A., 2004, ‘Samdok: tools to make the world visible’, in Knell, S. (ed.) *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, 196-203, Aldershot: Ashgate.

WWW1 - http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/research/merl_collectingruralcultures.aspx

Jeremy Bentham's Big Day Out

Nick Booth is one of the Curators of the Teaching and Research Collections at University College London. Here, he shares his experience of moving, cleaning and encouraging visitors to engage with a large and unusual object from the collections.

Introduction

The auto-icon of Jeremy Bentham is one of the most iconic objects cared for by UCL Museums and Public Engagement (UCL MPE). Its location in the South Cloisters of the Wilkins Building, on the Ground floor, means that it is accessible not only to staff and students at University College London (UCL) but also to the general public. In November 2012 the auto-icon was removed from its box for a day, cleaned and inspected by UCL MPE staff and students, and for the first time visitors were encouraged to come and inspect the auto-icon "up close and personal".

Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832) was a jurist and philosopher whose ideas inspired a great many of his contemporaries as well as later thinkers. He is best known today as the founder of the doctrine of Utilitarianism, which is often summed up by the principle of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. He was an early proponent of animal rights and also argued that homosexuality should not be a crime, as long as it was consensual. He invented a number of common English words, such as "maximise", "minimise" and "international". His name was also used for a character in the television series *Lost*.

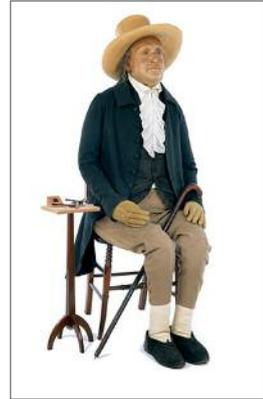
Bentham died on the 6th June 1832, at the age of 84. In his will he left his body to be publically dissected by his friend Doctor Southwood Smith. This was carried out, dramatically during a thunder and lightning storm, at the Webb Street School of Anatomy and Medicine in Southwark, in front of a gathering of Bentham's friends and disciples. It should be noted that the Anatomy Act, which greatly increased the supply of bodies for dissection, was not passed by the House of Lords until 19th July 1832, and so at the time the only legal way of sourcing bodies was by using those of executed criminals.

Bentham's will then goes on to request:

The skeleton he [Dr Southwood-Smith] will cause to be put together in such a manner as that the whole figure may be seated in a chair usually occupied by me when living, in the attitude in which I am sitting when engaged in thought in the course of time employed in writing. I direct that the body thus prepared shall be transferred to my executor. He will cause the skeleton to be clad in one of the suits of black occasionally worn by me. The body so clothed, together with the chair and the staff in my later years bourned by me, he will take charge of and for containing the whole apparatus he will cause to be prepared an appropriate box or case... (Marmoy, 1958, p.80)

After the dissection Dr Southwood Smith followed these instructions and eventually ended up displaying the auto-icon in a mahogany case in his consulting rooms, at two different addresses in London. In the winter of 1849/1850 he wished to retire and offered the auto-icon to UCL, which accepted. However it seems that rather than putting it on display the UCL authorities instead chose to keep it out of sight. Southwood Smith wrote in 1857, 'no publicity is given to the fact that Bentham reposes there in some back room. The authorities seem to be afraid or ashamed of their own possession' (Marmoy, 1958, p. 82).

Bentham is often credited with being the founder of UCL; there is even a mural painted by Henry Tonks (1923) in the library depicting Bentham inspecting the architect's plans for the university. However this is one of the many myths that have formed around his auto-icon at UCL. Bentham did purchase £100 worth of shares in the University when it was being set up, however he was one of several hundred people to do so. Now he is most often referred to as the spiritual founder of UCL, as the university was the first in England to accept students who were not part of the Church of England.



The auto-icon of Jeremy Bentham (Copyright UCL Creative Media Services)

Eventually the auto-icon found its way into UCL's Anatomy Museum, where it was studied for the first time in 1898 by Professor (later Sir) George Thane and the Curator of the Museum, T. W. P. Lawrence, who found the clothes moth-eaten and his mummified head wrapped up in paper 'in the cavity of the trunk-skeleton, being fastened by strong wire running from the ribs to the vertebral column' (Marmoy, 1958, p. 84). From then the auto-icon was moved around the university and was displayed in the library and the academic common room, with intermittent inspections, until after the Second World War, when it finally came to rest in its current location, the South Cloisters of the Wilkins Building on the main UCL Campus.

Now

Despite its age and iconic status the auto-icon has never been the subject of regular environmental or pest monitoring, or systematic inspection. Work up until recently has been quite haphazard and usually relied on special events that required it to be taken out of its box, notably two loans to two different museums in Essen in 1992 and 2002 (purely coincidence, there is no link between the auto-icon and Essen that we know about). Since 1980 the auto-icon has been inspected by the Textile Conservation Centre three times, and each time found to require treatment.

In November 2011 it was taken out of its box and photographed from a variety of angles to form a 360 degree view, available on UCL's website.¹ During this move staff noticed a number of cracks between boards at the base of the case, through which dust was entering, and there were signs of damage to the clothes. Due to the lack of regular inspections it was not possible to be certain if this damage was new or historic. It was decided that a system of regular checks should be started, and environmental monitors and pest traps should be installed in the case. The first step in this process required the auto-icon to be removed from its case again for a full inspection by UCL MPE conservators.

Planning

As the auto-icon is one of a kind, in planning for the inspection and clean we faced a number of difficulties that are unique to it. First and foremost is the difficulty of how to move it.

The auto-icon consists of the skeleton of Jeremy Bentham with the joints held together with (original) copper wire. His clothes were then dressed around the bones and originally padded with hay and linen tow, although now a purpose-built 3D body made of synthetic material is used. The auto-icon is bolted to a chair with a metal pole that runs up its back and ends in a spike, onto which a wax head is attached. In 2003 a series called *The Mummy Roadshow*, by Engle Brothers Media, filmed a programme on the auto-icon, part of which involved x-raying the body. This allowed a number of important observations to be made, most notably that the joints of the skeleton are

hinged in such a way that allows them to move. In moving the auto-icon this presents a problem, in that its legs and feet move in the same way as a living person's, i.e. if the chair is picked up, the feet will dangle and point forward. This presents an obvious risk to the auto-icon.

The solution to the problem of moving it was to carefully lift the auto-icon still on the chair out of the box; place it on a board on wheels; push / pull it to where the work needed to be done; and finally lift it all off. This had previously been done in 2011, however then the additional precaution of wrapping cellophane around the legs and the chair had been taken. This time we opted not to do this, as the legs actually proved quite stable and it was decided that it was best to leave the feet as still as possible, and to try to move them in concert with the chair. Luckily for us the auto-icon is not very heavy, which actually proved to be quite disconcerting when you move something that looks so human.



The auto-icon on wheels (Copyright UCL Museums)

Knowing how to do it, the next question was when. The case the auto-icon sits in is opened by security at 8am every weekday morning, and closed around 6pm. The university is usually quiet on weekends, and as the auto-icon is not usually displayed this would have been a good time if the only thing we wanted to do was to move, inspect and return it. However we wanted to turn this into a public engagement event as well, and allow visitors to come and have a closer look. Therefore we opted to do it over a week day. Conversely, while one of our aims was to make it publically viewable, we were worried about large crowds of people being present while we moved it, so Reading Week in early November was chosen.

We decided that it would be moved in the morning, to allow as much time as possible for the conservators and other staff to inspect the auto-icon and its belongings. We used the Rock Room, UCL's Geology Museum, as the venue. This was ideal for a number of reasons, notably its security (it has only one door in or out); the fact it has no carpets and so reduced the chance of pests; and the simple fact that it allowed access for the skeleton of an 84 year-old man on a board on wheels!

The Day and its Outcomes

To move the auto-icon required three members of staff to lift it and place it on the board, while a fourth member of staff took photos of the whole process to record it. It was also felt that if something went wrong having a photographic record would be useful for future conservation work. Despite it being Reading Week, there were still a reasonable number of people on campus, and its usual home is in a very public area, so there was soon a crowd watching us at work.

It had been decided beforehand to use Twitter during the day as a live feed of the event, to encourage people to visit it during the public "opening hours" and to keep those who couldn't attend up to date on what was going on. The @UCLMuseums account was used, with only one member of staff posting during the day to keep the "voice" of the event consistent.

Once we had moved Bentham and got him safely into position, it was time for our conservators, with an intern, to inspect him. The last full inspection of the clothes had been carried out by the Textile Conservation Centre in 2002, and there were no records of the objects associated with the auto-icon, such as the walking stick 'Dapple' and Bentham's reading glasses, having ever been inspected from a conservation point of view. The morning was spent fully recording all of the associated objects, both on paper and with detailed photographs, and inspecting and dusting the outer layers of the auto-icon and its clothes. This "light clean" was preferable as there wasn't enough time to conduct a full investigation of the auto-icon, which would have involved undressing it. A very big job indeed!

A copy of the conservation report will be made available on the Bentham web pages in future, however a brief summary of the report:

- The auto-icon is in generally good condition, with no signs of new pest damage to the outer layers of the clothes.
- The "inner" clothes were inspected, as much as possible, and were also found to be in reasonable condition.
- The auto-icon was surprisingly clean given its location in central London. The dirtiest parts were the feet and slippers. This would suggest that dirt is coming in under the glass panel of its box.
- The chair shows some sign of woodworm, but this does not appear to be active.
- One insect was found in the outer layer of the clothes, however it was not a "museum pest" species and it is likely that this arrived on the day itself.

The box was inspected separately, and found to have a number of small cracks between the floor boards. These were filled with cuts of dark plastazote, as were the gaps under the glass window which the dirt on the slippers would suggest were letting in the most dust and dirt. The inner and outer boxes in which the auto-icon is stored were vacuumed and dusted with eCloths.

After the morning's inspection the public were invited to come and view the auto-icon between 12 – 4 pm. This was publicised via the UCL Museums Facebook page and

Twitter accounts, as well as the main UCL website and a staff and students “What’s On” email. The response to this publicity was quite underwhelming; with only three “likes” on Facebook, we were not expecting a huge response.

It turns out we were wrong. Despite the low level of initial interest, we had over 360 people come to view the auto-icon during the time it was publically “open”. We had a member of UCL Security with us at all times, which was good because we needed to stop people coming into the room a couple of times, due to the numbers already present. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority were UCL Staff or PhD Students, with the second highest number members of the general public and the lowest number of visitors UCL Undergraduates. This was not particularly surprising given that the event happened during Reading Week.

For an hour during the public opening times a member of the Bentham Project, which aims to transcribe and publish all Bentham’s Collected works (which at a conservative estimate stand at 36 million words) was on hand to talk to visitors and answer any questions, as were members of the conservation team and the curator.

The live updates on Twitter also went well. During the day 20 tweets were sent from the @UCLMuseums account, with one re-tweet from another account (a video of Bentham being moved set to music). The most popular tweets, in terms of those which were re-tweeted or favoured by other users, were those with photos. The most popular from the whole day was taken while Bentham was being moved in the morning, and showed the auto-icon in a lift. A number of other UCL Twitter accounts also got involved, posting their own photographs taken during the public opening hours or modifying our posts. We found during the day that individuals’ Twitter accounts interacted most with tweets that included photos of the auto-icon in unusual places (such as the lift), while institutional Twitter accounts interacted more with announcement type tweets. For example tweets such as ‘Still time to visit Bentham. He’s in the Rock Room until 4 [photo]’ had good responses from organisational twitter accounts; this example was re-tweeted by the University of London, UCL Scandinavian Department and the UCL school of Pharmacology, amongst others.

At the end of the day a Storify story² was made, showing the day’s tweets, and a photo blog³ was produced. Through links to the Bentham UCL Museums web pages we noticed a large spike in traffic, with a resultant increased level of interest.

In terms of conservation outcomes, we achieved everything we wanted on the day. All of the accessible parts of the auto-icon were photographed and written records were produced. This should act as a good “baseline” for all future inspections.



The most re-tweeted photo from the day. The auto-icon of Jeremy Bentham in a lift (Copyright UCL Museums)

What was Learnt / Further Plans

From a purely collections care and conservation point of view, the main outcome of the day was the fact that we were able to inspect the auto-icon and its accompanying objects, and records were made of their condition. This has already proved very useful for further conservation work.

The level of public interest was a big surprise. Although anecdotally we know he is seen by many as UCL's mascot, visitor figures for the auto-icon have never before been collected. The data of people who visited him on the day will prove helpful in planning future projects.

The live tweeting was also a success. Through this we were able to engage with a much wider audience than those that were present on the day, and generate a lot of interest in our existing web pages.

If we were to do this again we would probably make sure that the person tweeting had a better camera on their mobile phone (we were using an iPhone 3) and we would seek to integrate Facebook better into the day. We would also gather more comprehensive visitor data regarding who came to see the auto-icon, and why.

Our work on the day, and the publicity that resulted from it, has led to increased enquiries about Bentham, and increased awareness around UCL about the work of UCL Museums. More recently, in July 2013, the auto-icon was again removed from his box to attend the retiring Provost's final council meeting. The experience from the earlier inspection proved invaluable for this, not only for the conservation and moving him side, but also the public engagement aspect. That move made the papers in the form of the Metro.

Finally it seems that we have added another page to the legends that surround the auto-icon at UCL. During a UCAS open day, potential new Earth Science students, whose common room / museum Bentham had been displayed in, were told 'this is Jeremy Bentham, he visits the Rock Room every year so the Museums can clean him and everyone can get a closer look'.

References:

C.F.A. Marmoy (1958) 'The "Auto-Icon" of Jeremy Bentham at University College London', *Medical History*, 2 (1958), 77-86.

- 1 <http://tinyurl.com/7te433w>
- 2 <http://tinyurl.com/ouynq3d>
- 3 <http://tinyurl.com/q5b8bo3>

A Foot in the Door? Heritage Lottery Fund 'Skills for the Future' Curatorial Traineeships in Practice

Leah Mellors is a former Social History Curatorial Trainee at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in Coventry, funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund Skills for the Future programme. She details the structure of Skills for the Future traineeships and provides an insight into her own and others' experiences of funded traineeships in museums.

The museum sector is a notoriously difficult sector to enter. A quick glance at the comments on the Museums Association website is all it takes to understand the difficulties, and often frustrations, faced by people trying to get a "foot in the door".

Almost all personal specifications for entry-level job vacancies now request a museum studies postgraduate qualification in their "desirable" criteria; many state it as "essential". This can be a disheartening sight for people who simply cannot afford £6000-£8000 in course fees, plus living expenses.¹ Similarly, relevant experience is often a vital requirement for acquiring an entry-level position and, whilst voluntary work is a great method of obtaining this experience, financial constraints can make volunteering a difficult prospect in the long-term. Is there another way?

Thankfully, the answer is yes! Internships and traineeships that provide work-based training and experience for those with a "non-traditional" background can offer a route into the sector. One of the major funders of such traineeships is the Heritage Lottery Fund's Skills for the Future programme, which has been running since 2010 and aims to support heritage organisations across the UK in developing work-based training programmes. In May 2013, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded a further £20.1 million to the Skills for the Future programme with the aim of delivering 876 new placements between 2013 and 2018.

The Skills for the Future programme covers the entire heritage sector, from museums and galleries to buildings and the environment. Projects are co-ordinated by one organisation or a partnership of organisations; examples of current organisations involved are the Ashmolean Museum, CITB – Construction Skills Northern Ireland, Grimshay Boatshed Trust, the National Archives and the North Pennines AONB Partnership.² Despite the range and number of projects currently available, competition is very high. In August this year, Museums Galleries Scotland announced that they had received over 2000 applications for 20 positions on their Skills for the Future internship programme.

So, what do these traineeships offer and do they actually work?

This article will focus on curatorial traineeships in particular. As someone who is almost halfway through a social history curatorial traineeship, I am well-placed to provide an in-depth look at the aims, structure and realities of this particular project. The article will also feature the viewpoints of Helen McConnell, who completed the social history curatorial traineeship at the Herbert in 2012-13 and Willemijn van Noord, who is approaching the end of Future Curators traineeship based at the British Museum and Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives.

Overview

My social history curatorial traineeship is organised by Birmingham Museums Trust and hosted by the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in Coventry. Within this particular project, there are four trainees: myself; an arts trainee hosted by Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; and two natural history trainees hosted by Manchester Museum and Leeds Museums Discovery Centre. Each trainee receives a bursary to cover living expenses:

for this traineeship the bursary is £13,480 but the amount varies for each Skills for the Future project.

The curatorial traineeships aim to benefit the trainee by providing them with the skills, knowledge and experience to gain an entry-level curatorial job in the museum sector. Over the twelve months, the traineeships offer a combination of work-based learning within the host museum, up to eight weeks of placements at other museums, and formal training through courses and conferences.

The traineeships are tailored to the needs of the individual trainee. Each trainee completes a Training Needs Assessment, discussing past experience and any gaps in knowledge or skills with the Project Manager, Paulette Francis-Green, and their supervisor. Based upon this assessment, projects, placements and courses are provisionally decided upon and a training plan for the year is drawn up. This training plan is a working document that can be amended and updated as the trainee's needs and interests develop.

Projects

Projects at the host museum are intended to give practical, hands-on experience of curatorial work. The aim is to increase the complexity of the projects as the traineeship progresses and to ensure that the trainee is given ownership of at least one project.

One of the main gaps in my expertise was exhibitions and displays: as a volunteer or intern, it is especially difficult to gain experience in this area. To address this gap, I have been assisting my supervisor with the curation of 'Keeping Up Appearances: Fashion Through Two World Wars', a costume exhibition that opened in September 2013. I have been heavily involved in the practical aspects of exhibition delivery, including researching the objects, writing and editing the interpretation, selecting and dressing costume and installing the exhibition. However, due to the start date of my traineeship, I missed out on the development phase of the exhibition. This highlights one of the disadvantages of a short-term traineeship: it is not always possible to oversee or gain experience of the entire process involved in delivering projects.



The Herbert Art Gallery & Museum's current costume exhibition, 'Keeping Up Appearances: Fashion Through Two World Wars' (From the collections of The Herbert, photograph courtesy of Leah Mellors)

To further my experience and knowledge of displays, I have begun working on two displays in the Herbert's 'What's In Store' gallery. The first of these examines one theme across the various collections and the other showcases aspects of the Herbert's costume collection. I will also be co-curating a 'Your Coventry' display with the Irish community in Coventry, which will develop my knowledge of both display work and outreach work. Community outreach is an area that I observed during an internship at Leeds Museums and Galleries but of which I am now able to gain first-hand experience. In this way, the traineeship has offered me a significant step-up from internships and voluntary work.

Collections Management was also identified as an important area to develop and I have taken on the challenge of a collections review project. I am reviewing an infamous collection within the Herbert known as the "Phyllis Collection", which comprises the entire contents of a Coventry-based drapers' shop that closed down in the 1980s and has never been completely accessioned or documented. This project is helping to reinforce my knowledge of documentation and providing me with an opportunity to learn about the review and disposal processes.

The traineeship takes into account every aspect of the trainee's development, offering opportunities to gain specific curatorial skills but also to improve soft skills. For example, I have been working independently on the collections review project and supervising a new trainee on one of the 'What's In Store' displays. As such, I am able to develop my project-management, time-management and leadership skills, in addition to gaining collections management and display experience.

Placements

Each trainee must undertake up to eight weeks of placements in other museums, including two weeks in a specialist museum. Placements are designed to provide the trainee with a broader understanding of museums and offer experience that cannot be gained in the host museum. A budget is provided to cover the cost of travel and accommodation whilst on placement but trainees are strongly encouraged to identify placements that are within commuting distance of their current location or that of a friend or relative.

Since the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum has been able to meet most of my training needs, I am using the placements to gain a better understanding of different types of museums and their governance and to apply my university education in mediaeval history to curatorial work. My specialist placement will be at the Museum of London, where I will spend one week gaining an overview of the museum and one week working on a more in-depth project with the museum's mediaeval collection. I will also complete placements at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Kirkstall Abbey and Abbey House Museum, Rugby Art Gallery & Museum and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

Previous trainees have spread their placements out evenly over the twelve months. However, I was keen to focus my attention on the costume exhibition and chose to postpone my placements until mid-October, when I began my first placement at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. I will now undertake one placement per month until February. It is a credit to the project that the traineeships can be adjusted and moulded to the requirements of each individual trainee in this way.

Formal Training

Formal training, in the form of courses and conferences, is encouraged by the project and a budget is provided to cover any costs. Attendance at some conferences and courses is compulsory, such as the Museums Association conference and any courses organised by the Project Manager. All other formal training can be decided upon by the

trainee and their supervisor but must be approved by the Project Manager and Birmingham Museums Trust.

Trainees are required to complete pre- and post-course evaluation forms, which are an effective way of recording and critically assessing learning opportunities. As part of this, trainees are asked to assess how they will apply their formal learning to their day-to-day work and this reflects the over-arching focus of the traineeship on practical skills and work-based learning.

I have attended a number of courses and conferences, including the Social History Curators' Group conference, the Museums Association's 'Sorted: New Approaches to Collections Rationalisation' course and soft-skills training courses on time-management and assertiveness. The usefulness of the courses and conferences I have attended has varied but, in most cases, I have been given the opportunity to provide constructive feedback when I feel there have been issues.

In addition to formal learning through courses and conferences, enrolment on the Museums Association's Associateship of the Museums Association (AMA) qualification is a mandatory component of the traineeship. The project covers the cost of the registration and fees for the first year. For me, this is an integral part of the traineeship: completing the Knowledge Journal enables me to develop a broader theoretical and practical understanding of museums, whilst the CPD plan will provide a structure within which I can continue to progress.

Support

Each trainee is assigned a main mentor to support them through the traineeship. In theory, trainees aim to meet with their mentor four times over the twelve-month period; in practice, restrictions in geography and time have meant that I will meet with my mentor less frequently. However, I have not found this to be a problem, as I have received ample support from my colleagues at the Herbert and from a local mentor. In fact, the level of support and assistance provided by staff at the Herbert has been one of the most valuable aspects of the traineeship so far. Whenever I have approached members of staff, including senior management, for discussions, guidance or informal training, I have found them to be welcoming, supportive and very generous with their time.

As well as support with training and work-based learning, my mentors and colleagues have offered career advice and guidance, including coaching for a recent job interview at the Victoria and Albert Museum. I have found this advice, from people who have successfully navigated the process themselves, to be far more useful than any advice I could find on a website or in the office of a university careers advisor.

Previous Candidates

Many of the previous candidates who have completed Skills for the Future traineeships have been successful in gaining employment in the museum sector. Candidates have gained employment in institutions such as the Horniman Museum, Leeds Museums and Galleries and Hereford Museums and Galleries.

Helen McConnell completed the social history curatorial traineeship at the Herbert in 2012-13 and has now secured a position as Collections Officer for Public History with Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives. The following is a short account of her experience of the traineeship and beyond:

'I undertook the social history curatorial traineeship at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum between March 2012 and March 2013. My traineeship was one of four based at museums in the West Midlands and managed by Herefordshire County Council. I was based mainly at the Herbert, but also undertook work placements of various lengths at other museums within and outside the West Midlands. Prior to securing the traineeship,

I worked with universities and museums seeking funding at the Arts and Humanities Research Council, completed an MA in Museum Studies at Newcastle University, and volunteered with the History team at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle.

'For me, the most valuable element of the traineeship was the generosity with which many of the museum professionals I encountered shared their time and expertise. My immediate managers and the wider team at the Herbert were hugely supportive, offering me opportunities to get involved in a wide variety of tasks, sharing their knowledge and providing advice and support for job applications and interview preparation. I also encountered this attitude in most of the placements I undertook, which allowed me to gain an insight into a variety of types and sizes of museum, and to clarify my own interests and ambitions. I feel that this input from my hosts, along with my own desire to learn as much as possible, was crucial to my development over the period of the traineeship.

'Less successful were placements in which the host museums were less keen to share their experience and focused instead on the extra labour I could provide. There were also some practical issues with the placements – commuting time made for very long days, and keeping accommodation costs as low as possible did not always result in salubrious surroundings! However, the vast majority of my experience on the traineeship was very positive, and I feel I learnt and developed much more than I would have done in a year spent in an entry-level museum job.

'Prior to the traineeship, I had struggled to secure interviews for entry-level posts. In the last quarter of my traineeship, when I began to job hunt in earnest, I was offered interviews for more than half the jobs for which I applied. This was the case for both entry-level and "one or two steps up" jobs. This meant I was able to gain interview experience and to polish my technique. However, I was told repeatedly that I had performed well at interview but lacked the breadth of experience offered by another candidate. It seemed that the traineeship had fast-tracked me past Documentation Assistant level, but that the current financial situation in the sector meant that I was competing with much more experienced professionals for posts at the next level up. Eventually, my particular interests and experience fitted well with a post and I was offered a temporary contract as Collections Officer for Public History at Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives. This role is exactly the one I would choose at this stage in my career, and I am absolutely delighted.

'After four months in post, I feel that the traineeship has prepared me extremely well to fulfil my responsibilities. So far, I have not encountered any tasks of which I have no experience at all. There has been an adjustment in moving from a trainee position to that of a full staff member, in terms of working on my own initiative and having less constant supervision and support. However, this is no more than I have previously experienced following a promotion. I feel that the traineeship was instrumental in my gaining this post, and the first step in a career in museums which it represents, and I am extremely grateful for the opportunities it afforded me.'

Future Curators

One of the projects funded by the HLF Skills for the Future programme is 'Future Curators', which organises traineeships through a partnership between the British Museum and five regional museums. Willemijn van Noord is a Trainee Curator in Eastern Art at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery under this project. The following is an account of her experiences of the Future Curators project:

'The British Museum Future Curators programme is generously funded by the HLF Skills for the Future programme. For each intake (the third and final intake will start this October), five trainees were recruited to spend 18 months at UK museums, learning on-the-job and working towards attaining the British Museum Curatorial Diploma.³

'To decide the specialisation of the traineeships (e.g., Medieval Britain, Ancient Egypt), the British Museum (BM) approached Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow Museums, Manchester Museum, and Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums. These five partner museums identified areas of their collections that needed specialist attention, whereafter the BM selected a supervisor from the relevant department to train the Future Curator during their first six months in London, preparing them for their work at the partner museums in the twelve months that followed.⁴

'I was selected for the traineeship in Far Eastern Culture in June 2012 whilst finishing my MA Sinology (Classical Chinese language), focusing on Chinese art and archaeology. I spent the first part of the programme at the Asia department of the BM, supervised by Jessica Harrison-Hall (Curator of Chinese Ceramics), and Lucinda Smith (Senior Museum Assistant). I learned so much in such a short period of time just by experiencing the actual work that goes on behind the scenes at the museum. I acquired practical skills that I could never have learned at university. My main project was to re-house, photograph, research and catalogue the BM's collection of around 450 Chinese snuff bottles. Once a week I would have a training session with the other four Future Curators on a wide range of topics, e.g. conservation ethics, audience development, and marketing. It was very helpful to experience this first part of the programme with other trainees, to discuss your progress and differences between departments.

'I started the second part of the programme last January at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, supervised by Kate Newnham (Senior Collections Officer Visual Arts). Here I have been involved in a wide range of projects, e.g. organising a large event to celebrate the Chinese New Year, developing gallery tours and new displays, and studying and documenting objects from all over Asia. Working at both a national and a regional museum is a wonderful experience. It was very useful to have learned "best-practice" museum work at the BM before moving to Bristol, where I was trusted with much responsibility and had to find creative solutions to various challenges.

'The best thing about the programme is that as a trainee your main purpose is to learn. You are actively encouraged to approach colleagues to ask them about or observe them in their work, visit museums, attend workshops and conferences, thereby building a substantial network. I am now starting to apply for jobs and feel confident that this programme has provided me with the skills needed to be a curator.'

Conclusion

The Skills for the Future curatorial traineeships offer a unique opportunity to gain practical experience and theoretical knowledge of curatorial work through work-based and formal learning. There are a number of significant advantages to this traineeship programme: the emphasis throughout on learning and development; the step-up from internships and voluntary work; the development of both specific curatorial skills and soft skills; and the tailored-nature of the work programme.

It is rare to be offered the chance to focus so heavily on personal learning and development within the workplace. Those involved in organising the project, such as the Project Manager and staff at Birmingham Museums Trust, have emphasised the primary aim of the traineeship as learning and have been careful to classify it as a training opportunity, not a job. It would be easy, and perhaps understandable in these times of cuts, to use the trainee to complete those tasks which have fallen to the bottom of the priority list, but I have never found this to be the case. All projects have been chosen for their potential to develop my skills and help me to become a viable candidate for curatorial roles.

Before I began this traineeship, I was struggling to get interviews for entry-level jobs. After only four months of this traineeship, I had secured an interview at a national

museum. The benefits of this traineeship are clearly evident, not only from my experience but also from the experience of my predecessors and fellow trainees. I would recommend this programme to anyone looking to find that somewhat elusive “foot in the door”.

References:

- 1 The University of Leicester Museum Studies website states that the fees for a UK student in 2013-14 are £6260 for a campus-based Masters degree and £7680 for a distance-learning Masters degree.
- 2 A full list of current and future projects can be found on the Skills for the Future section of the Heritage Lottery Fund website www.hlf.org.uk.
- 3 The diploma is an accredited vocational qualification and is an equivalent to a Level 5 on the Qualifications and Credits Framework. It is assessed based on the evidence that trainees upload onto an electronic portfolio.
- 4 The last intake of Future Curators will differ slightly in that, during the last 12 months, trainees will divide their time between working at the initial partner museum, and a second regional museum.

Encounters: Photograph Albums and Their Stories

Royal Engineers Museum, 21st October 2013

– 30th May 2014

Alex Patterson, Collections & Galleries Manager at The Historic Dockyard Chatham, gives us an insight into the Royal Engineers Museum.

The central purpose of this exhibition was to explore the notion of the photograph album. Why were they constructed and what do they mean? Within The Historic Dockyard's collection there are countless albums that have been put together by studious individuals of the navy, categorising different destroyers and cruisers throughout the First and Second World War. Individually these photographs show a single ship, but together they show a progression of design and development. Therefore, an exhibition on photograph albums by the Royal Engineers sounded an interesting concept, which would showcase the work of the Corps. To a point, this exhibition does portray the work of the Corps, but it is much more than that.

The Royal Engineers were pioneers in many fields in the 19th century, including that of photography, with the first official photography course running at the Engineers Establishment at Chatham in 1856. The early recognition of photography's uses as a tool for reconnaissance and survey are portrayed in the exhibition with a number of memorable reproduced images of men holding large box cameras or stood next to tripods, or a large box strapped to the back of a bike to transport all the equipment. Related to this in the centre of the exhibition is a range of examples of cameras from the Boer War onwards. These provide a useful reference point to the development of camera technology itself. While processes are important to understand it is not the focal point of the exhibition, it is the product.

Encounters is a striking exhibition. The pictures that have been selected are powerful and have been displayed sympathetically. There is no competition between interpretation and content. A simple clean display lends itself to the subject matter, many of which are direct and honest, some of which are constructed scenes. However, I think this is the point of the exhibition. These photographs were taken by individuals who were recording a snapshot of their travels, their experiences and their perceptions of their surroundings, compiled in albums that were a visual diary of their time abroad as a showpiece to a specific audience.

There are a number of issues in displaying photograph albums, which the team at the Royal Engineers have overcome. A select few original albums are on display, allowing the visitor to see an original construct. The majority of albums have had pictures selected, scanned and reproduced. These are framed and grouped accordingly. While separate from the original artefact, they are contextually together, allowing the viewer to gain an understanding of the album with the selected pictures on display. There is also a touch screen monitor in the corner of the space that allows you to look at a selected number of albums in their entirety. By selecting an individual album, you can leaf through the pages, which provides a better sense of the construct of the albums and the variety of pictures taken without damaging the original object.

Much has been said of the construct and display but not of the photographic content. However, the Royal Engineers have a remarkable collection of social history / ethnographic photograph albums. Those men who have constructed these albums have managed to capture a moment in time that catalogues cultures, identities and daily life, from their own point of view. There is an interesting comparison between professional

photographs of the period that were reproduced as postcards available for sale and those original photographs taken by amateurs who often try to emulate the scenes depicted in the saleable product that are also often included in albums. While there is some imagery that is most definitely from a colonial perspective, there are others that are more natural, capturing daily routine. Striking close-up individual portraits are balanced with street scenes and families sat together outside their tents. The style of photography, in many cases, is akin to the famous 20th century explorer Wilfred Thesiger, also from an Army background, who was interested in recording what he saw, but also in constructing scenes to provide a view of what life was like in Arabia – a pitfall for any outsider viewing and recording a different culture.

The exploration of photograph albums in the exhibition does not deny this and in fact the interpretation highlights the importance of the role of these objects as a hand crafted scrap books that tell a story. Reproduced images on the interpretation show pages with a photograph surrounded by notes related to the image. On its own, a photograph may be just a portrait of a child, an interesting building or a team photo. Take the accompanying notes into consideration along with the picture, and suddenly a portrait becomes something else entirely. It is true that a single picture can say more than a thousand words, however couple a picture with a few hand written notes compiled in a collective and you get volumes.

Encounters is a fascinating exhibition that has managed to display previously unseen photographs from the early days of photography by the Royal Engineers from 1850s onwards. The images used are powerful. The exhibition not only provides a contemporary snapshot of different cultures and experiences but highlights the important role that the Royal Engineers contributed to the medium of photography. A well thought out exhibition that provides an interesting take on the role of photographs as a collective, in a constructed album, rather than solely on the individual image.

The Cheapside Hoard: London's Lost Jewels

Museum of London, 11th October 2013

– 27th April 2014

Leah Mellors is Collections Officer for Human History at Saffron Walden Museum. Here, she considers a recent temporary exhibition on the Cheapside Hoard at Museum of London.

In 1912, in a brick-lined cellar under a tenement house in Cheapside, workmen discovered a casket containing hundreds of gems and jewels. It is likely that these workmen immediately lined their pockets with some of the treasure but the majority was acquired by George Fabian Lawrence, known as "Stony Jack"; an antiquities trader, pawnbroker and inspector of excavations for the newly established London Museum. The collection of mostly Elizabethan and Jacobean jewellery, constituting almost 500 pieces, was then split between the London Museum, the Guildhall Museum, the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹ It became known as the Cheapside Hoard.

Although parts of the Cheapside Hoard have been displayed over the past century, a new exhibition at the Museum of London, entitled *The Cheapside Hoard: London's Lost Jewels*, showcases the entire hoard for the first time.² The exhibition aims not only to display the entirety of the collection but to contextualise the jewels within the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods as much as possible. Security in the exhibition is very high: entry to the exhibition is via a turnstile, guarded by museum staff and no coats or bags are permitted. Although some visitors have complained about this, especially the £1 non-refundable charge for a locker, I felt this added to the impression that I was about to see something very special.³



The Cheapside Hoard: A Colombian emerald, diamond and enamel Salamander brooch. Image courtesy of the Museum of London.

Layout and Content

The exhibition is divided into four sections: the first introduces the discovery of the hoard; the second contextualises the hoard; the third showcases the hoard; and the fourth explores the mystery of the hoard. As you enter the exhibition, you are faced with a re-construction of a broken cellar, onto which images of the jewels are projected, and this creates an atmospheric introduction to the hoard's discovery. Questions surrounding the hoard – who buried it, why was it buried, why was it never retrieved? – are posed, setting these questions in the visitors' mind from the very beginning.

The exhibition then moves back in time, offering an in-depth look at the jewellery trade in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. The curators were keen to use a wide variety of objects, some of which had rarely been displayed before, to provide as much context as possible.⁴ As such, they have included drawings and portraits, caskets and containers, prints, maps and floor plans, moulds and models and a reconstruction of a jeweller's workshop complete with tools and machinery. At this point in the exhibition, the hoard itself is blocked from view by a wall, ensuring that the visitors' attention is not distracted. This section of the exhibition feels a bit like an added bonus and I was pleasantly surprised by the cross-collection approach, which offers a broad insight into the lives of Elizabethan and Jacobean jewellers, traders and consumers.

The main section of the exhibition showcases the hoard itself. The first impression you have as you enter the space is the sheer size of the collection and seating has been carefully placed to enable visitors to admire beautiful vistas across the room. The display of the jewels is effective: for example, necklaces and chains are hung from near-invisible wires to display them as they would have been worn. Unfortunately, the success of the lighting varies. Some cases are lit beautifully, making the jewels sparkle, but others are much darker. Jackie Keily, assistant curator of the exhibition, explained that the tight security on the exhibition monopolised the budget somewhat, meaning that the lighting on some cases had to be sacrificed.⁵



The Cheapside Hoard: Bejewelled necklaces and chains. Image courtesy of the Museum of London.

It would have been easy to let the jewels speak for themselves but the curators continue to contextualise the hoard in this section. For example, portraits showing contemporary women wearing jewels are placed next to corresponding cases: one demonstrates that rings were often pinned to ruffs and collars, rather than worn solely on the fingers.⁶ No stone is left unturned: the exhibition explores fashion, perfumery, trade and counterfeit trade, theft, beliefs and superstitions, Christian symbolism, wills and bequests, and medicine, amongst many other things.

The final section of the exhibition returns to the questions that were posed at the very beginning, namely 'who buried the hoard, why was it buried and why was it never retrieved?' The curators have not attempted to answer these questions definitively but have offered possible theories using text panels, paintings and a short dramatic film

that explores one option in greater depth. The message behind this section – that curators don't always have the answers and that history is open to interpretation by all – is an important one and I was glad that the curators took the opportunity to convey this. However, for me, the delivery of this section lacks impact. Most of the theories are not explained thoroughly and, unfortunately, the film didn't grip me (I didn't watch to the end, despite it only being around five minutes long). I was disappointed with this section, as it felt that the exhibition fizzled out, rather than ending on a high.

Interpretation and Interactives

The interpretation in the exhibition is detailed but accessible. The text is arranged by theme, rather than by object, meaning that visitors can pick and choose the information that interests them the most. For example, in a case of necklaces featuring floral designs and roses, the text panel offers information on the themes of necklaces, enamels, chips, London enamellers, floral links and the symbolism of roses. The interpretation often includes contemporary quotes or anecdotes and this is an effective way of connecting the jewels to real people and stories. The only problems I encountered were the size of the font, which was often too small – I saw several visitors using their magnifying glasses (available for studying the detail of the delicate jewels) to read the text panels – and the position of the lighting, which meant that, at times, other visitors cast dark shadows over the text. However, these are minor complaints and probably ones that most people have encountered in their own exhibitions and displays.

The exhibition is aimed predominately at adults and, perhaps for this reason, there are few interactive elements. Short films showing reconstructions of incomplete jewels or close-ups of particularly impressive items are dotted around the room and there is an opportunity to press a button to light up examples of minerals in their raw form (though this interactive was broken when I visited). To accompany a bejewelled scent bottle found in the hoard, a perfumer has recreated an Elizabethan perfume, using contemporary recipes, and visitors can open a small door to smell this creation. There are also some enlarged replicas of certain objects that can be touched. As someone who was visiting alone, without children, I felt that this was a sufficient level of interactivity. There is a programme of events to accompany the exhibition, including curator talks, a 3D printing workshop and a jewellery-making workshop.



Bejewelled scent bottle. Image courtesy of the Museum of London.

Conclusion

Throughout the exhibition, I felt that the curators had been meticulous in their research and presentation. For example, the reconstruction of the jeweller's workshop is a close reproduction of an engraving by Etienne Delaune from 1576, giving a feeling of authenticity and accuracy. The exhibition certainly has a big-budget feel to it but it is backed-up by interesting and engaging interpretation and the curators have not relied solely on their budget, or solely on the jewels themselves, to make an impact. The aims of the curators were simple – to display the hoard in its entirety and to contextualise it as much as possible – and they have certainly achieved these aims. By offering a multitude of objects, themes and interpretations alongside the hoard, they transformed the exhibition into something much more than a display of decorative arts.

References:

- 1 When the London Museum and the Guildhall Museum merged in 1976 to form the Museum of London, the majority of the collection came together. There are twenty-five pieces in the British Museum and five pieces in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- 2 Loans from the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum have made it possible to showcase the hoard in its entirety.
- 3 Some users of www.tripadvisor.co.uk have complained about this charge.
- 4 Personal correspondence with Jackie Keily, assistant curator of the exhibition, 23/01/2014.
- 5 Personal correspondence with Jackie Keily, assistant curator of the exhibition, 23/01/2014.
- 6 The curators have used a wide variety of objects to provide context, including costume, portraits and other paintings, fossilised fish, oysters, freshwater mussels and raw minerals, such as the Medusa Emerald.

Destination Tyneside

Discovery Museum, Ongoing

Jack Ord is a volunteer with the History team at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. Here, he reviews the new migration gallery at Discovery Museum.

England gives elbow room to every man, a field for his labour and energy and full liberty to build up his house by his labours, without demanding in return a denial of his principles or the sacrifice of his character.

Gottfried Kinkel, artist and philosopher (1866)

Can you imagine arriving to start afresh in a strange place, not knowing if you will ever see your homeland again? *Destination Tyneside* invites Discovery Museum visitors to take a trip with some of those who settled in Newcastle and the surrounding area, on their journeys from uprooting to carving out new lives on the banks of the river Tyne. The gallery documents Tyneside's history as a migratory epicentre, bringing together some of the stories and artefacts that shine a light on the issues associated with migration. Focussing on the timeframe of c.1840 – c.1920, the gallery offers an insight into the varied experiences of migrants during the Industrial Revolution while also telling the stories of more recent settlers. Though the Scottish and Irish influences might be well known, visitors may be surprised to discover the vast scale of nationalities that have contributed to the livelihood of the area, including an Italian migrant family who set up a local ice crème business that is still going strong today.

Until November 2012, this section of the museum housed the costume and textile displays, which Senior Management decided were out of date and out of fashion. It was felt that the subject of the region's cultural identity needed to be addressed and so the History department began work on the configuration of a permanent migration gallery. One of the key issues was that, according to research carried out by Durham University in 2010, recent migrants to north-east England felt socially disconnected due to a lack of representation in the region's museums. The aim is not merely to celebrate the cultural diversity of Tyneside but to challenge stereotypes and reveal just how deeply embedded migration is in the framework of the region. Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums' flagship venue hosts an innovative and, in many ways, futuristic assemblage of material that should inform Discovery's full spectrum of visitors of this largely untold story. The gallery is set to be in place for at least the next fourteen years, during which time some displays will be changed.

Rather than presenting visitors with an exhaustive introductory panel, *Destination Tyneside* begins by placing the visitor in the shoes of an overseas migrant and with an 1848 quote from English Chartist, Julian Harney: 'The exile is free to land upon our shores and free to perish of hunger beneath our inclement skies.' The slightly less formal overture may put off traditionalists but it should provide a more accessible entry point to those who may otherwise struggle with conventional museum interpretation. We then meet six people who came to Tyneside when the local industry was thriving (portrayed by actors), projected onto a large screen and talking about the hardships they face in their homelands and their decisions to move to north-east England. These include a Yemeni who settled in South Shields and a young boy, John "Jack" James Lawson, who made the relatively short move from Cumbria to join his father and brothers down the mines. The audiovisuals are accompanied by character profiles on the wall nearby, giving further details of each migrant and asking, for example, 'Will Ann's family have a better life in Tyneside?'

The gallery continues with a display of historical information, objects and images, opposite a large map showing the key migration destinations within the region. This contextual section introduces the idea of the “European Gold Rush” that occurred around the turn of the twentieth century, when the North East was ‘a wild west society, a frontier of immigration where people came because the wages were so high’ – David Byrne, historian (1999). The influx of labour, prompting an increase of 76,000 in Newcastle’s population in the sixty years to 1861, is highlighted as being fundamental in the region realising its golden age. At the end of this section, visitors can find out what happened later on in the lives of each of the featured migrants in a 180° cinema room in the centre of the gallery. The navigation is partly intended to symbolise a journey; after a pause for contemplation, we catch up with the migrants some years later and hear about how they adjusted to life on Tyneside. About a third of the space is dedicated to a community area, which includes the stories of seven first-generation living migrants, a Snakes and Ladders-style migration game and a facility that enables visitors to trace the history and spread of their surname. Unfortunately the latter feature occasionally malfunctions, such are the drawbacks of digital technology. Visitors can also make themselves comfortable in the reading corner, which includes Robert Winder’s *Bloody Foreigners*, one of the books that the curatorial team consulted.

There has been a quite apparent “less is more” approach in recent times, and throughout the gallery, textual interpretation is fairly minimal. In a relatively similar exhibition at the Discovery Museum last year, *West End Stories*, much of the commentary was provided in the audiovisuals, in the words of the people who took part, and the trend has continued here. A few of the objects used in the aforementioned exhibition also feature in *Destination Tyneside*, most notably a 1958 photograph of two early Asian immigrant women, taken by the locally renowned photographer Jimmy Forsythe. The image has been enlarged and integrated as part of a montage of visual material that complements the physical objects and oral histories in the community area. There is almost nothing in the way of text accompanying these photos, which a lot of people may find perplexing. For others however, the reduction of description should allow for a more personal engagement.

While the gallery goes a long way to giving recognition to previously underrepresented groups that have woven themselves into the fabric of the region, the touchier subjects cannot be overlooked. For all the benefits that migrant workers brought to the North East between the 1840s and early twentieth century, they seldom had it easy and were not always welcomed with open arms. This darker aspect of migration is most potent in the story of Ali Said, who found his way to South Shields from Yemen through working as a fireman on a merchant ship. In the second part of his story, he tells of how he and his people were subjected to intolerance, being accused of “stealing” the jobs from the locals or being branded “lazy” if they did not work. The segment of the audiovisual concludes silently with brief details of a 1919 incident that saw hundreds of Yemeni seamen in South Shields clash with white sailors over jobs and a similar conflict, the Mill Dam riots of 1930. We are reminded that sadly this type of small-mindedness persists, in the individual account of a Zimbabwean care worker who studied at a local university but was unable to return home afterwards, as her country suffered its worst period of humanitarian crisis. Although she had a turbulent time, experiencing hostility and hardship, she decided to make Newcastle her home and thinks that race relations are improving.

One wall of the gallery is dedicated to a word cloud, containing the key words: “migration”, “immigration” and “emigration” in large vinyl lettering, surrounded by a selection of associated terms such as “multiculturalism”, “citizenship” and “community cohesion” but also “persecution”, “scapegoat” and “xenophobia”. It is indeed important that these issues have not been left in the dark but I feel they have not been properly addressed in the interpretive texts. Perhaps that is a good thing

though; by keeping sensitive subjects to the personal testimonies, the museum service is less likely to be seen as taking a biased approach. Luggage tags, on which visitors can write their thoughts and attach them to a mesh wall, have provided a platform for further engagement. This feature has been enormously popular but, adversely, it has also enabled people with negative attitudes to freely assert their views. In turn these comments have provoked defensive responses, thereby creating a debate forum, even if it cannot be a fully-flowing discussion.

In terms of layout, the gallery is altogether user-friendly although I think that the use of wall space could have been better. I can understand the project team not wanting to overwhelm the audience with too great a quantity of objects and information, however in place of a large screen showing a projected loop of thematic images I personally would have put a display case. In an interactive section, My Tyneside, visitors can access extra content but it is situated in an alcove and can easily be missed. Visitor surveys suggest that the gallery has raised awareness of Newcastle's cultural diversity and encouraged people to reconsider their local identity. There has been an especially strong impact on young people, with a quarter of 16-25s saying that visiting *Destination Tyneside* has changed their attitudes towards migration.¹ All of this will hopefully go some way to improving outside perceptions of the North East, considering that 25% of people in the region were found to hold pessimistic attitudes towards Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups in a 2003 Stonewall report. The BAME community is well represented, particularly in the oral history of Bahal Singh Dhindsa MBE, an Asian Ugandan refugee who led extensive community-cohesive work in Gateshead and was eventually honoured by the Queen, in spite of having spent many years campaigning against British rule in India. Inevitably not everyone can be equally included and while some groups are less visible than others, I think the gallery offers a well-heeled portrait of Tyneside's cultural diversity.

Destination Tyneside has successfully shown that the area's identity has never been static and that the local population has ebbed and flowed not just through migrants coming in but also as a result of people emigrating from the North East. It is hoped that together with ethnic minorities feeling better acknowledged, people with the more inward-looking mindset will gain a better appreciation of how migrants have positively contributed to Tyneside over the last one hundred and seventy years. It remains to be seen if the gallery will have a long term influence on commonly-held perceptions of migration and it will be interesting to discover if in ten years time, there has been an evident change in attitudes as a result of *Destination Tyneside*.

Reference

- 1 Alexander, C. (2013) *Destination Tyneside Research Report*. Durham: Durham University.