

SHCG Conference 2019



The Future of Social History: Who are we Curating for?

Thursday 18th July — Edinburgh, City Art Centre

Keynote with Q&A session

Piotr Bienkowski and Christine McLellan

Museums use many different terms to describe their work with audiences and communities: for example, engagement, participation, representation, or socially engaged practice. Often, these concepts overlap, but they are distinctly different. This keynote will start by defining and differentiating these terms.

The core argument is that representation is not participation. But participatory practice is the best way to achieve representation; and a key part of genuine participation is joint reflection, in which museums and communities reflect together on what went well, what could have gone better, what might be done differently, and who else to involve. The keynote includes a case study on reflective practice from Glasgow Museums that brings out issues of imperialism and critical whiteness.

Museum processes themselves are a barrier to participation and representation. Processes around collections often deliberately exclude the community voice. Few museums recognise members of the public as a relevant source of expertise, and many judge the public to lack the necessary expertise and objectivity to be helpful participants in collections development. These processes should be re-examined and adapted to ensure that they are not a barrier, and to widen the pool beyond specialist curators to include a broader range of staff and community partners. The most effective way of doing this is through partnership with communities, especially voluntary and charitable sector agencies who are a source of sustainable partners and expertise which the museum often does not possess.

Biographies

Piotr Bienkowski runs a cultural consultancy specialising in organisational change and community participation. He was Project Director of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation programme Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners. He has been a curator, director, university professor and federation chair, and is Emeritus Professor of Archaeology and Museology at the University of Manchester.

Christine McLellan is Logistics and Programming Manager at Glasgow Museums.

‘Ideas worth fighting for’, collecting and engagement at the PHM

Samantha Jenkins

Peoples History Museum

The personal views of staff at museums can have a large impact on what we collect; not only the type of objects but the stories we focus on and the histories we portray. At PHM we’ve worked very hard to include diverse audiences – including LGBT+, disabled people, and migrants to the UK – but there are still large gaps in our collections, largely right-wing politics, what the ‘ideas worth fighting for’ are fighting against and things our staff, generally, don’t personally advocate for.

We need to continually remember that ‘our’ side of the story isn’t the only one (and may not even be the ‘right’ one); to show the full story of our communities right now, we have to engage people outside of our personal political comfort zone. We need to get past these personal issues if we are really going to represent society as it is.

But, it’s not easy collecting from these audiences: the nature of our museum engages those campaigning for ‘progressive’ causes and overwhelmingly they are the ones to respond to calls for objects. If we are to show the full breadth of society, we need to reach those who aren’t actively engaging with our museum already, whose views differ from our own. We need to reach those who aren’t responding.

Through looking into two case studies of under-represented areas in PHM’s collection – anti-migration rhetoric and pro-Brexit objects – this talk will highlight the challenges museums can face in collecting opposing views, and provide examples of how we can try to counter these problems.

Delegates will learn what challenges may arise in collecting contemporary political issues, and how to approach these to be able to show the full breadth of society.

Biography

Samantha has worked across the UK in various Collections roles since graduating from Leicester’s School of Museum Studies in 2015. She has experience of a variety of collections including industrial heritage, archaeology and social history. Samantha has been working at the People’s History Museum since August 2018, where she cares for the collection of political and social objects that tell the story of the development of democracy and equality in the UK. Samantha is especially interested in how museums can portray challenging stories and difficult histories of conflict and social unrest.

Curating London: Brexit talks and Representation

Dr Domenico Sergi and Jen Kavanagh

Museum of London

The Museum of London's 'Brexit Talks' project aims to directly respond to the conference themes 'Has Brexit affected your organisational thinking towards identity?', and also 'How has your organisation addressed an under-representation of a community within the collections?'. This contemporary collecting project has involved fieldwork across communities in London, including outer boroughs which are not often involved in engagement work with the museum, to understand if people identify as Londoners, and how Brexit has changed their identity and relationship with London. This paper will discuss our methodology for collecting, including street-level vox pops that aimed to ensure multiple voices were captured. 'Brexit Talks' is encouraging the museum to explore what it means by 'oral history', and we are keen to present this to the delegates to understand how other institutions are creatively collecting oral testimony and people's stories.

In addition, the project involves an ambition to crowd-source digital material from people across the capital. This new way of collecting for the museum may or may not be successful, and lessons learned will be shared. We are keen to discuss: How do we moderate content when the subject is so contentious? Should a museum censor material for public consumption, and should this be different for the collection? Is offensive material that relates to the Brexit debate still worthy of collecting?

This paper will discuss the challenges of topical collecting and capturing the hyper- contemporary, presenting ideas on how museums can be responsive to something that is ever-changing and in flux.

Biography

Domenico Sergi (aka Dom) is Senior Curator, Curating London at the Museum of London. He graduated in sociology, undertook his master degree in anthropology and received his doctorate in refugee studies and museology at the University of East Anglia in 2016. He has experience in developing community collecting initiatives, engagement projects and public programmes across a number of heritage organisations in the UK and further afield.

Jen Kavanagh is a freelance curator and oral historian. She is delivering the Brexit Talks project for the Museum of London's Curating London programme. Jen specialises in contemporary and community collecting projects, having delivered collecting initiatives on disability rights, punk culture, working class rowing and women's equality in the past couple of years.

Towards a curatorial citizenry

Dr Tehmina Goskar

Curatorial Research Centre

At the Curatorial Research Centre we use the 50% model of a curator that is part knowledge maker, part communicator. This model underpins all of our education, research, facilitation and mentoring work including our flagship programme Citizen Curators that is currently underway with the support of Cornwall Museums Partnership and the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund.

This model is simple to understand but not always easy to apply. As social history curators we are constantly under pressure to modernise and broaden the appeal of our museums, sometimes at the expense of our own values and principles about sharing and communicating collections knowledge. Citizen Curators exists to address two major needs: to create a mechanism for two-way conversations between collections and audiences by diversifying the people who research and interpret them; and to provide an alternative pathway into museum work by creating flexible and meaningful volunteering supported by a high-quality experiential learning course.

This case-study will provide data and insights into the unexpected successes and the challenges from the pilot and first year's cohort. Change takes time. It is often uncomfortable and frequently exposes limitations in our organisations to which we are blind. Co-curation is not always the harmonious process it is presented as. But it can be incredibly powerful in the long-term, to generate a curatorial citizenry that will take an active interest in collections, be confident in challenging how we curate them, and increase the social value of curatorial knowledge.

Biography

Dr. Tehmina Goskar is the Director and Curator of the Curatorial Research Centre. She is a Fellow of the Museums Association and a member of its Ethics Committee, Accredited Member of the Association of Facilitators and Research Associate at Swansea University. In June 2018 she completed a leadership fellowship supported by Arts Council England called Change Makers. Tehmina is a material culture and collections specialist and is currently preparing a new book on curating. She is also the co-founder of Twitter's ever-popular #MuseumHour.

Representing communities – finding time and resource

Danielle Patten

The Geffrye Museum

This paper will explore how, through our displays and collections, we can better represent the demographic of our museum audiences, exploring this theme using the 'Meaning of Things' project at the Geffrye Museum. The aim of the project is to curate a space in the new Home Gallery, exploring the significance of objects on display in people's homes. As part of the museum's commitment to engaging diverse communities and including culturally diverse stories of home in the new Home Gallery, we are co-curating this space with members of our Faith and Culture Forum, bringing a variety of perspectives and voices to the display.

The Forum have commissioned an AV installation for the new gallery, showing the meanings of deeply personal objects as well as the material of daily life, which is often "collected" on a mantelpiece or similar surface in the home. Homes of people from our local community are featured in the installation, which will be on permanent display in the museum, and added to the museum's collection. Among the project's many objectives is that we challenge the assumption that homes are homogenous and to highlight the variety of ways that people create and reflect identity and belonging in the home. We aim to achieve this by including the stories of home from diverse audiences in terms of age, gender and religion from the museum's local community.

We hope to create a display that is inclusive from start to finish, in its content and its approach, by working with the Faith and Culture Forum and local residents, and to communicate this value shift to visitors. This presentation will show the benefits and challenges of sharing curatorial authority, how this collaborative practice has allowed us to represent better the complexity of our local community.

Biography

Danielle Patten is Assistant Curator at the Geffrye Museum.

Danielle is currently working on the redevelopment project at the Geffrye which will double the gallery spaces in the museum and bring the voices of a diverse audience to the forefront of the museum. She is working with faith groups and organisations as part of the project to bring objects and stories around faith in the home into the museum's collections. She is also working on the curation of the re-display of the museum's seventeenth century period rooms.

Her research interests focus on the domestic history of London from 1600-1800.

Institutional memory and unwanted objects: the challenges of a rationalisation project

Lowri Jones

Royal College of Physicians

Recent years have seen an increased focus on the rationalisation of collections, but how easy is it to actually see through such a project? The Royal College of Physicians has been carrying out a rationalisation project on its uncatalogued and unprovenanced items since July 2017, with no end currently in sight. A project that has been started but never finished at various points in the past, working on this has shown how time-consuming rationalising is, and thrown light on some of the gaps in the guidance provided by sectors bodies. Being part of a wider charitable and membership organisation means that there is a potential wealth of institutional knowledge about the objects available, but accessing this information has raised some complex considerations. Those working on the project have been grappling with questions such as how to talk about disposal without panicking risk-averse stakeholders, how to ensure you've made the most of institutional and membership knowledge and, if you are going to dispose of items that are only of interest to a very specific group of people, how you do this in a fair and ethical way.

This paper will consider the practicalities of rationalising collections through the lens of this particular project, looking at the logistical difficulties, the use of rationalisation tools, and at involving a key audience in decisions about their histories. It will also discuss fear of disposal, institutional memory and managing expectations, and disposing of items unsuitable for external transfer.

Biography

Lowri is a Collections Manager currently working at the Royal College of Physicians. Prior to this she worked as Collections Manager of the Asia department at the British Museum and in collections-based roles at SS Great Britain in Bristol and English Heritage. Lowri is a keen advocate for the importance of embedding collections management and care across all areas of museums work, and has a specific interest in collections storage and documentation.

Collections Trust Workshop

Sarah Brown

Collections Trust

Collections Trust helps museums capture and share the information that gives their objects meaning. Our standards and advice are used around the world to make museum collections accessible. Although based in the UK, Collections Trust works internationally to help shape the documentation standards used in many countries, always in step with wider information management developments. The core of this work is Spectrum, the collection management standard with tried-and-tested guidance on more than twenty museum procedures.

This session will have a practical element, using themes from the conference to explore collections issues such as rationalisation and disposal. The aim of the session is to provide delegates with some of the tools for undertaking essential collections work and draw upon the Collections Trust expert advice.

Biography

Sarah is the face of Collections Trust around the country, and works closely with the museum development network across the English regions to deliver free, ACE-funded events (she can also deliver training elsewhere on a consultancy basis). Sarah is the person to contact with your collection management queries, and also maintains the cultural property advice platform on this website. Sarah originally trained as a conservator and has worked in various collections management roles, most recently managing the team that secured £1.3m HLF support for Kent Mining Museum.

Rationalising Practically

Nicola Moss

Curator of the National Mining Museum Scotland

This paper will explore the process of rationalisation from the viewpoint of a small independent museum with limited resources. It will examine how effective the rationalisation process is for those with limited knowledge and experience in this area, the lessons learned from this and what could be improved on for future projects. For example, due to various projects, a timescale was set up for this process that meant rationalisation would take place before all paper records had been reconciled into the computer, meaning items had to be triple checked for their background information, adding additional time to this process.

It is hoped that delegates would learn about the difficulties for small museums in undergoing rationalisation projects e.g. a lack of specialist collections information as there is only one member of staff; and common mistakes e.g. assuming exact duplicates could be easily added to the list of items for rationalisation. It is also hoped that delegates thinking of rationalisation would be able to learn from this and that any potential questions/discussions from the delegates outlining their own experiences, would feedback into the project itself which is still currently underway.

Biography

Nicola Moss is Curator of the National Mining Museum Scotland and was formerly the Curator at the St Andrews Preservation Trust Museum. Having begun her career as a Visitor Assistant in Dundee, Nicola moved on to be Collections Assistant for The Black Watch Castle and Museum in Perth before moving on to St Andrews. Currently studying towards her AMA, much of Nicola's current work is focused on small, independent museums with social history collections. Nicola volunteers in her spare time as committee member for the Scottish Museums Federation and Fife Contemporary.

Profusion in Heritage Futures

Sharon Macdonald, Jennie Morgan and Harald Fredheim

University of York and University of Stirling

The Profusion theme of the Heritage Futures project explores how people in homes and museums make decisions about what to keep for the future – in the face of an ever increasing number of things that could be collected. In this paper we will focus on what we have found out about how collections development practices in UK museums that collect everyday objects from the recent past.

We will share how the museums we have engaged with approach representation, contemporary collecting and rationalisation before reflecting on the futures current collecting practices appear to be creating for social history collections. In doing so, we will ask what we would like social history collections to be like in the future and how we might go about collections development differently in the present to get there.

Biographies

Sharon Macdonald is an anthropologist specialising in museums. She is currently Anniversary Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of York and Professor of Social Anthropology at the Humboldt University of Berlin.

Jennie Morgan trained as a social anthropologist before working on a number of interdisciplinary research projects, studying organisational practices within and beyond the museums sector. Jenni is currently Lecturer in Heritage at the University of Stirling.

Harald Fredheim is a trained archaeologist and objects conservator. He is currently a Research Associate in Sociology at the University of York.

The Future of Social History: Who are we Curating for? Transforming social history in museums

Friday 18th July — Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh

Keynote

Professor Jocelyn Dodd

University of Leicester

Unruly Bodies and Minds

The lens we use to interrogate museum collections matters. All too often we showcase and privileged some people's lives, it is all too easy to see this in the choice of what is collected, what is displayed, in how collections are presented and interpreted. We passively exclude. Collections can be actively used however to reveal powerful stories which represent the experiences and histories of groups and communities who have been misrepresented or whose experiences have been absent from mainstream narratives, despite very much being part of our collective experience.

Drawing on a trajectory of research projects carried out over 15 years by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), all focused on disability and difference including Buried in the Footnotes, Stories of a different kind, Exceptional and Extraordinary, Unruly Bodies and Mind in the Medical museum and Disorder, Dissent and Disruption, this session will explore how issues based approaches, framed by clear values, can enable collections to be reassessed and reinterpreted to ignite their powerful social role. Working in ways that are ethically conscious, which challenge the inequalities in power that have tended to characterise many attempts by cultural institutions to engage people whose lives, perspectives and experiences have been previously neglected, the session will focus on the use of The Trading Zone, a model which brings together people from different backgrounds, expertise, specialisms or lived experience to discuss an issue and collaborate. The session will reveal the powerful role disability activists & artists play in revealing new insights into collections to stimulate public debate around the implications of a society that values some lives more than others.

Biography

Jocelyn Dodd is Professor for Museum and Social Change and Co-Director of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. RCMG research stimulates new thinking and practice enabling cultural organisations to become more ambitious and impactful in nurturing more equitable and inclusive societies. Her research is informed by many years working in the museum sector, she has co led a number of large research projects with multiple partners including Exceptional & Extraordinary: Unruly bodies and minds in the medical museum, recent publications include Unexpected Encounters: How museums nurture living and aging well and Trading Zones: Collaborative Ventures in Disability History in the Oxford Handbook of Public History.

Beyond the tartan: Local histories in a capital city

Diana Morton

Museums & Galleries Edinburgh

What visitors to Edinburgh may not realise is that beyond the Royal Mile, the castle, tartan shops and the festival, is another city where ordinary people live and work. Tourists make up many of the visitors to our venues, but as a part of the council we have a duty to our local residents.

Alongside the larger story of Edinburgh, the capital city, are the local histories of the docks of Leith and the small fishing village of Newhaven, historically home to the iconic fishwives. In order to engage with local residents (who often avoid the Royal Mile because it is seen as being for tourists) we have developed a programme of community engagement exploring these other local identities. From developing a museum in a local school to working with young people to explore the histories of the port of Leith through art, film and dance.

Participants will learn about some of the less well-known histories of Edinburgh. How we have balanced the needs of tourists and the big histories of the city with smaller, engaging local ones. How we have made hyper-local histories relevant to residents and brought generations together. As well as how to survive and thrive as a smaller museum service in a capital city.

Biography

Diana Morton is Curatorial and Engagement Manager (previously Outreach and Access Manager) for Museums & Galleries Edinburgh. She also works as Open Museum Curator for Glasgow Museums. She is fascinated by museums and local identities and with the lives of the Newhaven fishwives.

We are Colchester: Identity and intersectionality in the museum

Ben Paites

Colchester + Ipswich Museums

Colchester Museums programmed an exhibition at Hollytrees Museum for the summer of 2018 that would explore the stories of the LGBT community that live in the town. Ben Paites decided to establish a focus group in 2017 to work on the exhibition, involving various groups and organisations from across the town that had a strong LGBT connections.

It soon became apparent that an LGBT exhibition is something the community did not want. It would run the risk of alienating non-LGBT people from seeing the exhibition and would also risk “outing” those that did visit. The concept of identity more broadly became the focus of discussion, with particular interest in the concept of intersectionality. We Are Colchester explores how individuals have identities that go far beyond one simple label. In fact, it is often the combination of these characteristics that shape our lives, for good or bad. Visitors were even asked to share their own identity in the exhibition space through an engagement wall where they could fill in a label with their own identity.

This paper will look at the process behind the development of the exhibition, from its initial conception, through consultation with community partners and ending with visitor engagement and feedback. It will highlight the risks faced when working with one specific community group, as well as considering best practice for this sort of community engagement. We Are Colchester was developed in a very organic style and this case study will hopefully help other museum professionals realise how working with communities can lead to the production of some innovative and engaging content.

Biography

Ben Paites received a BA in Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University and and MA in Artefact Studies at UCL. He then worked with the Finds Liaison Officer at the Museum of London, recording archaeology found by members of the public. He became the Finds Liaison Officer for Essex in 2015 based at Colchester Museums. In 2016 Ben became one of the Collections and Learning Curators. In April 2018 Colchester Museums became a National Portfolio Organisation and Ben’s role now includes Community engagement.

An Intersectional Feminist Approach to Curation

Jenny Noble

Glasgow Women's Library

Since 1991, Glasgow Women's Library has grown from a small grassroots organisation to a lending library with innovative programmes of public events and learning opportunities, archive collections – and the only accredited museum in the UK dedicated to women's lives, histories and achievements.

Exploring issues of equality, identity, inclusion and neutrality, this paper will discuss how three key strands of curatorial practice – collections management, contemporary collecting and interpretation – are shaped by the organisation's core values of Empowerment, Addressing Inequalities, Valuing All Women, Learning and Development, Diversity and Inclusivity, Openness and Respect. The focus of these strands will be:

- Applying a feminist classification system – collections management with identity, inclusion and access at heart;
- Repealing the Eighth – the advantages and pitfalls of contemporary collecting practices and rapid response interventions;
- Representation through intersectional interpretation – working with Community Curators and decoding inequality.

This presentation will encourage delegates to reflect on the social history of objects relating to women's history, using them to illustrate historical and contemporary inequality, and to consider an intersectional approach to curating collections.

Biography

Jenny Noble has been Social History Curator at CultureNL since 2009. Since 2017 she has also been Museum Curator at Glasgow Women's Library. Jenny was a seasonal attendant at the Highland Folk Museum as a student, and has worked continuously in the sector since 2001.

Past roles include Education Facilitator at the National Museum of Rural Life; Education Officer at Paisley Museum & Art Galleries; and Outreach Officer in Museum Resources for Social Inclusion, a Lanarkshire partnership project. She has been SHCG Treasurer since June 2016.

Rethinking industrial history – people, objects, sounds

Jana Golombek and Konrad Gutkowski

LWL-Industrial Museum

Founded in 1979, the LWL-Industriemuseum consists of eight different sites including three coal mines, a textile factory, glass works, a ship-lift, brickworks and a museum for iron and steel. The mission statement of the museum puts the working-life and the everyday culture of the workers at the centre of its work, thus being in tune with the latest developments in social history in the beginning of the 1980s and its methods by using oral history. Social developments and new impulses in history and cultural studies require new master narratives. We would like to talk about the restructuring of the museum in these contexts, focusing on the museum's work on two current topics: migration history and sound studies, respectively, sound history.

The history of migration is a very important aspect not only because it shaped the whole region but because it has to be identified and highlighted as integral part of the regions history instead of presenting it as a side story. Telling the history of the “Gastarbeiter” and collecting items and interviews has just been a first step. New approaches like re- examining and re-assessing the existing collections to implement or to uncover migration as a topic within the different branches of the industrial museum is the next. The driving impulse for collecting Sounds came from new developments in the field of sound studies. In most of the cases you can see our cultural heritage, but you can't hear it because just a few people recorded the sounds of our environment or do not think of sounds as cultural heritage. Hence the LWL-Industriemuseum ran the EU-projects “Work with Sounds” (2013-2015) and Sounds of Changes (2017-2019). The collection resulted in a European sound collection which are linked to the industrial and post-industrial world. We hope to be able to give other museums an input in this regard but also to get helpful hints and to initiate a discussion.

Biographies

Jana Golombek works as a research associate and senior curator at the LWL-Industriemuseum in Dortmund. She has curated exhibitions on the cultural history of the Ruhr focusing on migration, the impacts of deindustrialization and the social history of the workers. Previously she was a researcher at the Institute for Social Movements, Ruhr University Bochum and a research associate at the German Mining Museum. She has published on the history of migration to the Ruhr, deindustrialization and industrial heritage. Currently she is also working on her PhD-thesis on industrial heritage and the construction of memoryscapes in the Ruhr and Pittsburgh.

Konrad Gutkowski is a Research Associate and senior curator in the LWL-Industriemuseum in Dortmund. He studied History and German literature at Ruhr-Universität Bochum and at the Jagiellonian University Kraków. As a curator he worked on EU-projects and currently is involved in an exhibition project on knowledge transfer (Alles nur geklaut/SimplyTheft?) which opened in March 2019. He is working and publishing on history of industrialization and work, social and cultural history of the glass industry, Gender history, Sound history, history of the energy transformation and material culture.

Courage: Curating from the Heart

Charlotte Holmes

National Trust

This will be a quick paced session; where we will explore the role of honesty, openness, compassion and joy in contemporary social history curation. It will challenge contemporary collecting practices, ideas and realities of representation, the concept of engagement, ways of working and the pace of change in social history curation.

Together we will:

- Explore the writings of Stuart Hall and Audre Lorde, and what they tell us about representation.
- Be inspired by the radical compassion and healing justice of activists.
- Reflect honestly on the challenge and opportunity of contemporary collecting practices.
- Consider the role of heritage organisations in ally-ship.

Reflection and empathy will be at this session's core.

Biography

Charlotte Holmes is an Urban and Social History Curator for the National Trust. Charlotte's previous roles have been grounded in museums based professional development, critical thinking and practice. Charlotte led community engagement for Birmingham Museums' award winning 'Collecting Birmingham' project, where the public selected objects to be added to the permanent collection of the museum; and has over 10 years' experience in developing and delivering workshops in museum ethics, reflective practice and mentoring.

Representation and identity: Gypsy/Travellers and museums

Rhona Ramsay

University of Stirling

There are around 20,000 Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland today (and around 300,000 Gypsy Roma and Travellers across the UK). They exist in most communities, but they go largely unseen by the majority population. Similarly, the material culture of Gypsies and Travellers is present in many of our museum collections, but is often hidden in plain sight. Invisibility, in our communities and our museums, has a detrimental impact on these populations and has implications for education, employment and equality. It also provides conditions which allows continued ignorance and prejudice to thrive. This presentation will outline the (sometimes surprising) material that museums might have that is connected to these populations, and reveal some of the ways in which Gypsy/Travellers have been found to have directly contributed to the development of museum collections. Gypsy/Travellers and museums share a mutual interest in old objects, and this talk will highlight ways in which this has led to contact, networks and sometimes friendships between curators and these populations. It will also look at how some of our museum practices could be shifted in small ways to bring about positive change.

The research that forms the basis of this presentation has been carried out with Gypsy/Travellers, who have offered insights and knowledge connected to collections, museums and how they view them. This has helped to bring new understanding to the material encountered, but also ideas around greater visibility and representation for these largely marginalised peoples within museums. Delegates will gain specific insights into the sorts of material that they might find in their own collections that are connected to Gypsy and Traveller communities, but will also be prompted to consider practical approaches within museum practice that could help give voice to a host of underrepresented individuals and groups within our museums.

Biography

Rhona is a PhD student at the University of Stirling, looking at the material culture of Gypsy/Travellers in Scottish museums. Rhona's background is in museums, and while working at the Highland Folk Museum developed and delivered a series of projects which brought young Travellers together with museum collections related to their cultural heritage. These projects led to an awareness of gaps in museum practice and policy, and subsequently to this research. Rhona's research focuses on what Gypsy/Traveller material is in museums, how it is used and valued, and what museums can do to let these communities tell their stories.

Diversifying Museum Representation: Co-producing Women's Histories

Sarah Cartwright, James McGuire, Katy Wilson-Scott

Paisley Museum

Paisley Museum, like most museums, suffers from an inequality of representation within its collection and exhibitions. This was one aspect that the current redevelopment of the museum wished to address and challenge. Paisley Museum's Re-Imagined Project has, at its foundation, the ethos of redesigning a museum full of exhibitions that both engage and include the voices of the community in which it stands. Having undertaken an audit to establish excluded groups, the museum is currently working with a range of sections from Paisley's museum's audiences to address this disparity. Gender bias is just one of the many ways in which audiences are under-represented. Women's histories, particularly working-class women's histories, are largely unwritten, under researched and emphasise the lack of information on women's lives out with the home. Focussing on co-production as the methodology to further understand the demographic of our museum audience and working with a women's group, we aim to redress the balance and lack of representation of women within collections and displays. By actively researching and exploring our collection and seeking out female focussed stories we are putting women back into the historical narrative and the museum displays.

Delegates will gain an insight into how the curatorial team at Paisley Museum are currently developing collections knowledge through co-production and working closely with local groups to incorporate their voices into the stories that need to be told. Starting a dialogue with Kairos, a women's group set up in 2017 in the town of Johnstone, resulted in a mutually beneficial relationship through shared ideologies and outcomes. (<https://www.activecommunities.co.uk/content/kairos/>) Focussing on their work on one of the female centred stories, delegates will have the chance to explore why it is important for audiences to be involved in discussions when a museum wants to address representation.

Biographies

Katy Wilson-Scott is the Kairos Development Manager and has worked in women's centres for the last 5-years creating spaces for women, alongside women. She is passionate about equality, feminism and representation of marginalised groups at all levels of society.

James McGuire is Co-Production Officer at Paisley Museum Re-Imagined. From a background in marketing, now working in audience focused-roles in the cultural sector.

Sarah Cartwright is the Social History Curator at Paisley Museum Re-imagined and has worked in museums since 2005. Passionate about feminism, social justice and empowering individuals through engaging with museums and their collections.

Poverty and class narratives workshop

Tracey Weller

Museum as Muck

Museum as Muck was formed in 2018 to raise awareness of the shared barriers that people from working-class backgrounds experience in the sector as well as support each other. Through our social media presence and our 'Supermuckers' intervention at the Festival of Change (November 2018), we are aware that, for many people, the label 'working-class;' is synonymous with poverty, giving a limited understanding of working-class experience and the barriers that working-class people can face.

This workshop will draw from a range of contemporary narratives about working-class experience, including poverty, work, family and education. We will investigate how these narratives complement and conflict with each other and how we can use them to better understand working-class identities and how these might be represented in public history narratives.

Biography

Tracey Weller is a member of the Museum as Muck network and a Learning Manager at the National Army Museum. She has also worked for Cutty Sark, The National Maritime Museum and The Women's Library. Tracey has recently completed an MLitt in Family and Local History with Dundee University, her dissertation focussing on working-class women in Tower Hamlets. Apart from working-class histories, Tracey's other research interests include Life-Writing and dementia work.

Critical Conversations: Audience representation in museums

Erin Partridge

Elder Care Alliance, Alameda, CA and Notre Dame de Namur, Belmont, CA

Professionals and activists from many different backgrounds continue to raise important questions about who has access to museums and cultural institutions and the stories represented in these collections; these questions of representation are much needed and should be considered part of our ongoing professional practices. For some, even getting in the door of museum spaces is difficult because they feel socially or culturally excluded. Programs aimed to include certain marginalized groups have resulted in exciting outcomes—dynamic programming and increased connection to community spaces. We need to engage in deep, critical conversations about who feels comfortable in our museums and cultural institutions. We need to examine our current audiences and read between the lines—envision those currently missing or underrepresented. Joining ongoing external dialogue is one way to do this work, but must also be accompanied by “critical self-examination” (Paquet Kinsley & Wittman, 2016, p. 40) within institutions.

This workshop will engage participants in a creative exploration of their past, current, and future audiences in order to stimulate dialogue about who is missing and how to seek them out. Participants will create visual representations of their museum or collection audiences and engage in reflective writing and discussion about their work. Participants will identify at least three groups currently underrepresented in their collections or in their audiences and will identify at least one barrier for each group’s participation. They will create action-plans to address the barriers and strategies for increased representation and inclusion.

Biography

Erin Partridge is a board certified, registered art therapist, on the faculty at Notre Dame de Namur University, and Experiential Researcher-In-Residence at Elder Care Alliance. Erin has a BFA in Fine Art, Psychology and Women’s Studies; a MA in Art Therapy from New York University, and a PhD in Art Therapy from Notre Dame de Namur. Erin’s clinical experience includes work in community, paediatric, forensic, and geriatric settings and she is published in the areas of art therapy, museums, elder care, and technology. Erin’s research interests incorporate the lived experience and focus on participatory, ethnographic, and art-based approaches.