

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ROMANCE...

In July, NUM President Arthur Scargill fulfilled a long standing promise to visit the 1984-1985 Strike Memorial Coal Sculpture, which had been unveiled in Stoke-on-Trent's City Museum in March. SHCG News asked the miners' leader for his thoughts on museums and history.

Q During the past fifteen years or so, new museums, many of them industrial museums, have been opening at an unprecedented rate. In fact, there are now more working museums than working pits. Do you think that Britain is in danger of becoming one big industrial museum?

A There's no doubt that Britain is currently in danger of becoming an industrial museum with greenfield sites where we formerly had industry. What I would like to see is a combination of a thriving, developing and expanding industrial base, and alongside that museums not merely of an industrial kind but showing all aspects of our culture and life, showing to the younger generations in particular what life was like 50 years ago and 1,000 years ago. Because I think it is imperative that we have that. There is no reason why we can't have museums that reflect our history while at the same time continue to operate with those things that are essential to both our economy and our way of life. And I think that sooner rather than later Britain is going to have to revert to using millions of tonnes of coal to supply our energy needs and also to supply our petrochemical industry.

We already have the technique to turn coal into liquid and we can produce petrol virtually as cheaply as we can produce petrol from oil. We can produce oil from coal, we can turn our coal product into a thousand and one different things including what you are wearing and everything you see around you today, the plastics and various other materials and that's the direction we ought to be heading in the 21st century. The fact that we are depending more and more on expensive and dangerous nuclear power is not only devastating for society but will if continued to be pursued, not only produce a society where we've got an abundance of industrial museums and no industry, but also the potential threat on an on-going basis for the utter destruction of the human race.

Q You expressed the hope that when people visit the museum and see the coal sculpture they will start to ask questions and perhaps understand something of what really went on during the miners' strike. Do you think museums can really act as a serious channel for that sort of



Arthur Scargill in lighter mood at the STUC Congress. George Outram, Ltd

debate, or do we inevitably present the past as something it wasn't, whitewashing it with buckets of nostalgia?

A I think it's a great mistake, understandably and genuinely made to romanticise the past. There's nothing wrong with romance; but for it, probably, none of us would be here! But, at the same time, we should all understand that history is something that has been lived and experienced by people in a set of circumstances which they and they alone really know. The job of a museum is to translate what happened in those times into modern day language and in a way that can be easily understood by the present generation. And if, in 15 or 20 years time, people can come into this museum and look at this marvellous sculpture and read about the background of the miner's strike, I'll bet that they'll talk about the events of 1984 and 1985 with the same reverence that we talk about the suffragettes, the Tolpuddle Martyrs and those who stalled the first attempt at a poll tax when Wat Tyler said, 'We've had enough!' People will begin to understand just how important the strike was - the valiant attempt that was made by miners, their families and the support groups to sustain the mining industry, not only for themselves, but for Britain. In doing so, people will talk in reverential terms about the miners with the same language that we used to talk of all those who have struggled against injustice and inequality in the past.

HARMONIOUS RELATIONS

Popular Music in Family Life on Merseyside.

Popular Music, as a cultural expression, perhaps plays a more significant part in people's lives than almost any other art form. Yet it is a subject which has received little attention in museums. When the new department of Regional History was formed in 1989, Liverpool's contribution to popular music was seen as an area of absence which needed to be rectified. As an Institute of Popular Music (IPM) had been established at the University of Liverpool in 1988, with the support of National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, it seemed obvious that the best way to initiate progress was through a joint project. A six-month pilot study, co-funded by NMGM and the University was, therefore, begun in September 1990.

The aim of the study was to begin to investigate the development of popular music in 20th century Liverpool life. In order to do this the study looked at the part that popular music has played in the lives of a cross section of people, focusing especially upon the role that it has played in family life. Twelve families, representing a wide range of musical experience, formed the basis of the study, conducted largely through interviews, and the results were incorporated into a temporary exhibition.

Loraine Knowles.

*Loraine Knowles is Head of Regional History Department,
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside.*

Popular music on Merseyside is supported in a variety of different ways: the home is an important and often ignored setting in which people experience music, and in which musical activities and resources may be located. The families in the exhibition offer numerous examples of people getting involved with music, or learning it, through their relatives, either because they were actively encouraged to do so and provided with the

necessary support, or because they would have felt left out if they hadn't. Family musical gatherings within the home to celebrate birthdays, weddings or other occasions have continued to be popular, and many people claim that music has brought their family closer together, or provided a sense of continuity and tradition within it. It was often musical activities or dances that had brought married couples together in the first place.

It is also quite common for relatives to perform together in the same chorus, band or family group. The exhibition features a mixture of well known - professional - and amateur musicians: the Vincent family and Collings family brass/concert bands; the dance band of the Blackman family; the barbershop activities of the Sherry/McCartney family; the vocal/dance groups that have emerged out of the Deen family and the Amoo family; and 'Grouper Soup', a band that incorporated Tony and Beryl Davis, along with Tony's sister and her husband. Often, other relatives have taken an organisational or other role. Eddie Amoo, for example, manages and produces his four daughters, whilst Norma Foulds acts as secretary for the band her son conducts and her husband and daughters perform in. Relatives also offer support by forming part of each other's audiences.

The contemporary family portraits, commissioned by the museum to complement the historical photographs collected during the course of the study, also highlight the important role that women often play to encourage and facilitate music making, although with regard to some musical styles, the performers tend to be predominantly male, as do those working within the music industry. Within the home, however, women have often played the piano and other instruments, sung songs, and managed the domestic economy in order to allow for instruments and lessons. Outside the home, they have often played a fundraising, administrative, or other supporting role for musical activities. Some organisations exclude, or have excluded, women as performers. Bootle Concertina Band for example, now

in its 88th year, only allowed women to enrol from the mid- to late seventies in an attempt to counter a falling membership rate. In other organisations men and women may be kept apart - as in barbershop choruses where men and women sing separately. Many women have by no means been excluded from playing an active performance role in musical groups, but their presence has generally been overlooked when histories are written. Beryl Davis and her sister Muriel, for example, were two of the very few women performing with Liverpool skiffle groups in the 1950s, whilst female members of the Blackman family have played a variety of instruments in dance bands over the course of the century.

The exhibition demonstrates the vast number of people involved with popular music on Merseyside in a variety of different capacities. Many are performers, performing in public or in the privacy of their own home. Others may be organisers - presidents, secretaries, treasurers or fundraisers; teachers, judges and managers; composers, publishers and promoters; DJs and roadies; or simply consumers. Often they may be involved with different styles of music at the same time. Members of the Foulds and Sheridan family for example, compose or perform big band, brass, country, folk, concert band, spiritual, classical and avant garde music, and consume a variety of additional styles. Each style has its own particular conventions of rehearsal and performance, and its own modes of recruitment, learning, teaching, notating and recording.

Those featured in the exhibition come from a wide range of social groups, backgrounds and ages, and many have had no formal music training, insisting that they are not particularly 'musical'. This hasn't, however, discouraged them from getting involved with music. Many of those taking up singing or an instrument for the first time cannot read music but they have found alternative ways of learning it. For most of them music is a hobby. For some it is a career or potential career. All, however, professionals or amateurs, are deeply committed to their musical activities and invest in them a great deal of time, energy and other resources. Music may provide a context in which people can meet, collaborate and communicate with each other. It may offer them a means of structuring their lives through a routine of rehearsals, performances, conventions and other events. It may earn them money, or it may simply act as relief from work. In addition, competitions, examinations and

performances may provide a set of goals to aim for, whilst music making may in itself act as a challenge and offer a sense of achievement, satisfaction and self-expression, building confidence and sense of personal and collective identity. Above all, music gives pleasure to those involved with making and listening to it.

Together, the families highlight some of the many different factors that have affected the production and consumption of popular music in Liverpool, such as developments in mass media and technology, and the distribution of musical instruments. World War II also had an impact. It led to collective music-making by civilians, soldiers and sailors in order to boost morale, and it brought migrant workers and military personnel to the city, some of whom, like the servicemen at the Burtonwood Airbase, patronised and performed in local clubs and brought into the city records from abroad. Liverpool has experienced a continual influx of immigrants through its port, leading to new patterns of intermarriage and the consequent mixing of social groups and identities. All this has contributed to the distinctiveness of Liverpool's popular music.



*Chris and Eddie Amoo with Eddie's four daughters (left to right) Sara, Chris, Micheal, Dionne and Marlene.
Photograph: Derek Massy, 1991.*

This pilot study represents just one small step towards the documentation of popular music in 20th century Liverpool life. Thanks to a generous grant from the Leverhulme Trust we are able to continue this project for the next three years and will aim to incorporate the many different families, social groups, activities, events and musical styles that we were not able to

represent in the initial study and, at the end of it produce a more comprehensive exhibition.

Harmonious Relations will be on show at the Merseyside Maritime Museum from 4th November 1991 to 10th May 1992. An accompanying catalogue is on sale priced £3.95 from the Commercial Services Department, NMGM, 127 Dale Street, Liverpool L69 3LA

*Sara Cohen.
Sara Cohen is Research Fellow at the Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool.*

Creels to Wheels, News from the North East

Once again, the North East is awash with events, exhibitions and activities taking place in the region's museums. In the north of the region, Liz Ritchie (County Museum Officer for Northumberland) has coordinated the production of 'The Creel and the Barrel' - an exhibition about the role of women in the fishing industry during the herring boom years of the 19th and early 20th centuries in Northumberland. It provides an insight into the working lives of those women who "travelled" the herring" from Spittal and Seahouses to herring stations in the Shetlands and in Yarmouth; the fishwives who sold fish either locally from door to door or in larger centres such as Hexham and Newcastle; and those who were involved in daily tasks such as baiting lines or launching the local lifeboat, which in itself led to many acts of courage and bravery. The exhibition will be seen at various museums in Northumberland Berwickshire until September 1992.

In Woodhorn Colliery Museum, near Ashington, officially opened by Neil Kinnock in June 1990, two new exhibitions have opened. The first, 'From Pit Wheel to Wagon Wheel' traces the history of the colliery railways. With its historic photographs and film recordings the exhibition provides a personal insight into the workings of the pit railways through the memories of John Elliott, traffic foreman at Ashington 1958-1980. The second 'Protest and Celebration' is a permanent gallery devoted to Trade Union history, and, in particular, marks the 200 year history of the Northumberland Miners' Union. The exhibition examines the role played by the Union in improving working conditions and the welfare of members and their families. It also considers the impact the Union had on the political and social life of pit communities. Perhaps the most impressive exhibits in 'Protest and Celebration' are six Union Banners donated by the Northumberland Area of the NUM to the museum. These are displayed in a hall filled with the sights and sounds of the annual Northumberland Gala or Picnic, which provides the context in which the exhibition is set.

South of the region, the Dorman Museum, Middlesbrough, has just concluded its exhibition marking the 40th anniversary of the 1951 Festival of Britain entitled 'You've Never Had It So Good'. This gave an opportunity to look at lifestyle in the 1950's and popular culture largely ignored by the Festival and its creators. Subjects such as utility fashion and design, rationing and art were all included in the exhibition and backed by the vocal strains of Buddy Holly and the like. Reconstructions of a kitchen and living rooms contrasted the 'new look' Festival-inspired furniture with the austerity furniture many people actually used in the 1950s and beyond. One of the most successful aspects of the exhibition was the playing of period newsreels. Visitors were able to select a year of their choice and spend the afternoon wallowing in nostalgia.



*Fishworkers gutting Herring (The Creel and the Barrel)
Northumberland County Museums Service.*

And what's next at the Dorman? 'Good Health?' - a look at the history of health care in Middlesbrough over the last 150 years - hospitals, the effects of industrialisation, the advent of the NHS and so on. It all starts from 7 December 1991.

And what about Tyne and Wear, I hear you cry! David Fleming, became Director of the Service from 25 September following the early retirement of John Thompson, erstwhile Director of 16 years. And with it, perhaps not surprisingly, the resolve and purpose of the History Department continues to strengthen.

Monkwearmouth Station Museum now sports a resident Edwardian family queuing for their railway tickets at the ticket booth while a weary porter takes advantage of the momentary delay by resting nearby on the luggage trailer. Behind the Edwardian facade, visitors can hear a tape commentary from Archie Potts who relates working life as he remembered it in 1949 as a 17 year old booking office clerk at the station. Archie later became Chairman of the Tyne and Wear County Council, amongst other things.

On the other side of the River Wear Sunderland Museum's 'Sunderland Story' is now enhanced by a new video - 'The Sunderland Story' - narrated by none other than the Wearsiders (Sunderland's answer to the Simpsons). The 15 minute video, produced by local animator Sheila Graber, combines the untraditional computer designed graphic with the traditional archive

film, photographs, etc, and shows the development of the town from 10,000 BC until the present day. Not only does this new format achieve all round family appeal but it is also proving to be infinitely more reliable than its tape/slide predecessor! 'Sunderland's 100th Year in the Football League' attracted over 54,000 visitors in its five month showing - who said interest in football in Sunderland was dead? (Well, perhaps only David who has never fully got over the disaster of 1973!) Football in Newcastle however is another matter and I'm afraid to say that the Newcastle United FC Museum is like the play on the park this season - decidedly indifferent and a terrible anti-climax.

Perhaps two of the most significant events in Tyne and Wear this summer were the opening of two other exhibitions. 'The World of Dolls' opened quietly in popular South Shields Museum but is now the cause for its visitor records to be re-written. 12,500 visitors came in one week to see the 220 dolls of mixed ages, types and nationalities, 20 teddy bears and 10 dolls houses.

And, of course, 'Art on Tyneside' was opened at the Laing in Newcastle in July by Arts Minister, Timothy Renton. The region's art is looked at in its historical context from the Border Raids to the present day. Devices such as talking tugboats, re-creations and videos, integrated with the overall design of Redman Design Associates, makes art accessible and fun to boot. The Laing's visitor figures have increased by over 75% over the same period last year. It could be keenly argued that this, some would say 'Disney' approach to art has been more than justified whatever criticisms the pure art lobby may throw at it.

And what of the future? 'Getting Around' now called 'Going Places'; the new transport display at Monkwearmouth Station Museum (transport seen through the eyes of three local families from c 1900 to the present day) is now set to open in March 1992. The first of three phases of a new gallery at South Shields is also due to be completed by March 1992 - 'Land, River and Sea' - an exciting audio-visual introduction to the history of South Tyneside by looking at man's effect on the natural environment of the region. Caroline Imlah (Keeper of Costume and Textiles) is planning a major exhibition about the fashion emporium BIBA for Spring 1993. It will consider the effect it had on fashion in the provinces created either by a pilgrimage to Kensington High Street or a glance through its mail-order catalogues. It will be the first major retrospective exhibition about its creator, Barbara Hulanioki. So if you have any BIBA clothing or accessories in your collections, please let Caroline know at the Laing (091 2327734). As for 'Time Tunnel', the potted history of Newcastle - its production has been overtaken by requirements in other districts. However, the idea for a 'Museum of Newcastle' has gained extra momentum in that this proposal was accepted as part of Newcastle City's response to the Government's 'City Challenge Initiative'. The overall submission was successful, although now we are

concerned that the museum element survives the fairly drastic pruning required for the City's bid to match the financial remuneration the Government is offering. Times are hard - Newcastle City is looking to save some £27m over the next two years. As a result, some of the existing museum budgets are being frozen in order to lessen the severity of the blow of threatened, but increasingly likely, reductions the Museums Service is having to face. The City Challenge Initiative focusses on the West End of Newcastle (scene of the September riots). Blandford House stands on the eastern edge of the designated area. We are hoping that this 'new' money will enable the museum to become a new generation community resource providing a multi-purpose focus for community activity.

Alisdair R Wilson - Tyne and Wear Museums

How Everything Got Out Of Place - And Back To People

*SHCG Annual Study Weekend
Oxford 5th - 8th September 1991*

Acknowledging that 'there is no such thing as a free-place', my initial reaction to writing a review was that it would be preferable to the alternative of washing-up in order to earn my keep! I hope that after reading it you don't think that I should have opted for the 'Nanette Newman Experience' in the kitchen, with the rubber gloves and the bottle of Fairy!!!!

It is only fair to warn you that what follows is a highly subjective interpretation of the weekend's proceedings from a 'first-time' conference-goer and a wannabe museum professional: newly released from the Leicester course. Thus, it contains all the implications which these factors afford.

The most notable feature of the conference as a whole, was the lack of correlation between the title, 'Everything in its Place?: Social History Museums and the Environment', and the actual papers presented. Not only did this connection become increasingly blurred, but the theme itself was inextricably linked to that of last year's conference (and of Leicester University's 'Christmas Lecture' 1990) "Museums and People". Environment, when defined as 'External conditions or surroundings' (Collins dictionary), seemed an unsatisfactory basis for discussions; all of which served to emphasise the fact that "people" and "place" cannot be explored independently. Stephen Kay in his highly perceptive summary referred to the term 'community' as being a more accurate reflection of the issues raised and addressed during the weekend. Although presenting a potential discrepancy, this did not detract from the value of the conference; in fact, I believe that it actually served to enhance it.

Sally MacDonald gave a promising start to the first day's proceedings. She referred to three ways in which museums relate to places; by adapting to them, seeking to interpret them and by trying to change them (or a combination of all three). This was tempered by the truism that museums are often slow to change with their environment. As a consequence the past often dominates the expression of the present. Finally, calls were made for museum professionals to determine more accurately how people influence places (and vice versa) and for them to respond as more positive agents of change.

The historical context of twentieth century environmental change was provided by David Hall of the Town and Country Planning Association. His paper covered changes in the legal and administrative systems the development of planning policies and the corresponding physical and attitudinal changes. This was of crucial value to every historian not only in terms of an understanding of those forces working to shape the past, but also in terms of projections for the future. These included a trend towards a more dispersed and decentralized demographic pattern, the continued growth of car-ownership and an enormous public awareness of environmental issues. He also referred to the "Unknown Factor" which cannot be planned for; recent events in Russia served to illustrate this.

This was followed by two lectures which gave an holistic view of both the rural and urban environments. The former was explored by Martyn Brown of Oxfordshire Museum Service. He referred to the way in which 'Chocolate Box' or 'Hovis' images of timelessness and tranquillity have become synonymous with the rural environment. Many museums have perpetuated this scenario via rather static displays of harrows, ploughs and threshing machines. Oxfordshire's own response was to become more receptive to environmental changes such as 'Geriatric Gentrification' and the decline of the farming industry. Exhibitions would be based on the theme of 'Change in the Countryside'. An exhibition on the M40, showed the effect that such a project had upon the surrounding landscape. We were able to see this when visiting Woodstock Museum later that evening.

David Fleming of Tyne and Wear Museums followed this up with a comprehensive survey of the urban environment in all its complexity. Combining sociological theory with practical examples taken from Hull's Old Grammar School and the proposed new Museum of Newcastle, he called for an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach towards the study of people. He emphasised the need to be aware of contrasting 'urban neighbourhoods' (for example, working and middle-class communities, deprived 'inner-city' and prosperous white-collar areas), stating that, 'not everybody's experience of the city is the same'. The need for a Social History Museum to be active within its area was stressed, along with the need to personalise the museum experience in

order to inspire in visitors an awareness of historical process and of their own place in the world.

The afternoon was spent in two workshop sessions. I chose to go to one held by Arts Compass, a group who have worked alongside museums and seek to, 'explore the environment in geographical, abstract and individualistic terms'. This is achieved in various ways, including creative writing, drama and more location specific projects. Our particular activity was based upon the construction of a 3-D box, in which we were asked to represent three contrasting perspectives of our environment (more specifically located near Oxford Poly bike shed!); This provided an opportunity to look more closely at textures and colours, and to become aware of the diversity in the immediate environment. It also provided an insight into museum professionalism in general; especially the clashes which arose over custody of felt-tip pens and glue-guns. I did notice that some boxes were wantonly disposed of; though possibly verging on the unethical, it was in keeping with the idea that it was the 'creative process' which was all-important and not the finished product.

Alistair McAllum gave an interesting and energetic lecture on the use of photography in exploring the environment. The arts/cultural groups which he works with in Glasgow, have concentrated foremost upon the 'people' who make Glasgow a City in all its diversity. Photographic projects have become the mainstay of this group as people seem generally less intimidated by photography than other creative media. 'Ordinary people' are encouraged to use their own skills to investigate their own environments and cultures in self or auto documentary projects. 'Biscuit Tin' exhibits were also organised in which people were encouraged (by means of a free bottle of beer!) to display photographs from their family albums. Although the group takes an arts/cultural, rather than a social-historical approach, they have already worked successfully with Glasgow Museum Service, and the application of such projects to other museum situations is self-evident,

Other workshops were given by representatives of York Archaeological Trust and by Walter Jones, Education Officer at St Fagans. The former consisted of a demonstration of interactive computer technology and its application to the study of the environment, with a specific concentration upon census returns. The latter showed how maps, photographs of the environment and the study of place-names can be used to stimulate children's interest in social history.

The second day's papers concentrated upon more specific environments. However, there was little actual reference to the word 'environment' itself; and there was more of a concern to put 'people' back into the equation, especially in situations where there has been an over interpretation of certain aspects of the environment at the expense of others.

Gillian Greaves's thoughtfully prepared paper dealt with an environment dominated by tourism; that of York. She drew attention to the way in which 'Yorvik' has dominated the over-all image of York (apparently there is even a Yorvik Carpet Cleaning Company) and has subsequently led to a trivialisation of the history of the city. Although tourism can rejuvenate an area, local residents often feel pushed out by such developments. In contrast to 'Heritage-type' developments, the challenge of museums in such a situation was identified as embracing all elements in the surrounding environment, which means local residents, as much as tourists.

A similar situation is found in Bath. Stephen Bird of Bath Museum Service, in a paper which concentrated upon an environment dominated by archaeology, spoke of a place pigeonholed by its 'Roman' and 'Georgian City' images. This was in spite of the fact that there remains archaeological evidence of a number of different periods. He had no doubts that visitors 'like to hear about people' and referred to archaeology as a technique by which a 'heap of old stones' can be interpreted in order to cast light upon the social history of many different periods. He also spoke of the problems which have arisen due to departmentalisation of museums, and echoed a sentiment expressed by other speakers when he advocated a cross-disciplinary approach.

Steven Harrison's lecture focussed on an island environment. He spoke of efforts to devise a development plan, relating to the Isle of Man's museums and heritage sites, which would be beneficial to both local and governmental concerns. He underlined the problems of achieving a balanced interpretation in a climate in which tourism is declining, a new financial and business sector, is developing and the Manx people themselves are becoming an 'ethnic minority in their own country'.

John Steadman's paper on Portsmouth was perhaps too detailed for the brief, but Gordon Rintoul's paper on Catalyst Museum caused the most contention. Catalyst is a museum of the chemical industry which attempts to interpret this subject matter nationally, and its funding comes from the chemical industry itself; all factors which seem inherently problematic. Stephen Kay vocalised the feelings held by many when he referred to the lecture as being defensive in tone, since it appears that this particular museum has ignored the environment of the local community. However, there was vague references to the use of the local area and its people as a case study in future 'Social History' exhibitions.

These papers emphasised the fact that it is difficult for museum professionals to know their own environment, especially when this was obscured by an overlay or over-emphasis of certain environments. For me, the most valuable sentiment was expressed by Sally MacDonald during question-time when she spoke of the dangers inherent in the assumption that, 'the longer you

have lived in a place, the more important you are'. She stressed the fact that in a society which is becoming increasingly fluid, incomers need a sense of place too. She saw the potential for museums to incorporate the history which the 'new-comers' bring in, together with projects aimed at rekindling the interest of 'locals'. The diversity of experience to be had in just one environment had been summed up earlier by David Hall, who spoke of the dichotomy between Oxford as the 'City of Dreaming Spires' (the University town) and the 'City of Screaming Tyres' (a reference to recent events at the Blackburn Leys Estate).

That afternoon members were given the opportunity to respond to the surrounding environment of Oxfordshire; which the majority did with remarkable ease. These social historians seemed happiest when reclining in the noon-day sun, after a tour of Cogges Farm and Wantage Museum, and whilst settling down to a luxurious buffet. Oxford Museum Service's hospitality was certainly excellent, possibly a contrast to Oxford Poly's own bill of fare.

Examinations were held as to the authenticity of both the potatoes we had on the first evening (were they really undersized golden delicious before the added colourings?) and the spam which the meat-eaters were faced with every morning at breakfast (how did that egg get in the middle?). The only slightly contentious issue came from those who boasted of extra-facilities, such as sinks in their rooms (obviously malicious rumours spread by an unknown source). Perhaps you had to be there....

The mix of work and pleasure was obvious as conference-goers became philosophical over drinks at the rather aptly named 'Plasterer's Arms' Public House. One hardened museum professional, obviously shocked by youthful (misplaced?) idealism, warned me, 'Wait until you meet your first councillor' - sobering advice for a novice still desperate to change the world via the parameters of museum studies course packs.

The third day's presentations were reserved for 'members papers'. For me, the positiveness and optimism of the whole weekend was to be found in these. They were not 'closed' or 'finished' presentations demonstrating the 'achievements' of individual museums, but were papers which sought and provided consultation and debate with other group members.

Richard Devaney highlighted the problems caused by the emergence of 'stereotyped environments' - such as Heriot Country, Catherine Cookson Country, and, that which his own museum sought to redress, Captain Cook Country. It was a sad irony that places struggling for a sense of themselves only chose to emphasise these specific aspects of their culture, leaving so many other areas untouched. The Captain Cook Museum attempts to redress the balance through thought-provoking temporary exhibitions which seem to contrast the interpretative methods of the other six museums which relate to

Captain Cook. While enjoying much success with exhibitions such as 'Images of Cook' (which included Maori bark-drawings) he saw these attempts as an on-going process and was particularly aware of the problems of relating the history of a time of imperialistic expansion to today's multi-cultural society.

Nigel Wright spoke of the way in which the Manx Museum has sought to break down the stereotypical aspects of Manx culture by means of their two new social history galleries. Interpretative techniques were used to give history 'back to the people'. Quotations from a 1940s/50s Folk Life Survey, 'The Voice of the People' were used extensively in gallery labelling. Options and choices were also given to the visitor: "black and white" labels were juxtaposed to illustrate the complexity of history and of individual subjectivity (for example, a Manx 'hero' could be perceived as a 'traitor' in English eyes). As well as highlighting the many achievements of this project, a useful insight was given into the problems of gallery design and how these may be overcome in order to allow visitors to fully appreciate the museum experience.

Maria Van Helmond of the Museum of Labour History, Merseyside, related her own museum's attempts to represent black local history, in an effort to fill in the gaps of existing collections and interpretation. She spoke of the processes by which this was achieved; including negotiations with local black communities and the appointment of a black member of staff as a temporary research assistant. While showing some slides of the excellent exhibition which resulted, she focussed upon aspects which she still regards as problematic. She asked were the correct themes covered, was negotiations the best way to establish links, and can white people really empathise with the black perspective? Unfortunately there was insufficient time to discuss fully enough the questions raised by this very honest and thought-provoking paper.

This lack of time for discussion applied equally to the following two papers. However frustrating this may have been, it did not mitigate their worth but, in fact, highlighted it. Mandy Paul's paper sought to determine ways in which local societies and groups could be integrated with the museum. Referring more specifically to local history groups and to her own experiences at the Museum of East Anglian Life she commented upon the growing public interest in local and family historical investigation. The focus for these investigations is usually that of 'place' rather than 'people' (or, if it is people, only 'local notoriety' or the confines of the 'family group'), therefore having no hallmarks of social history and obscuring questions of conflict, women's history, class and community. Discussions arose over the means by which the museum could facilitate a transition from antiquarianism to historical analysis and interpretation. Some societies and groups may not be willing to face issues of change and may not be ready to tackle further challenges. Perhaps museums should offer

'options' to such groups without setting agendas which assume that we know what is good for them.

Steph Mastoris of Harborough Museum explored the way in which another increasingly popular phenomenon, that of the 'Book of Old Photographs' can be used as an opportunity to provoke debate about social change. He recommended a move away from the old clichés of 'Then' and 'Now' photographic images, which usually lead to the past appearing preferable to the present; and he advocated a move towards a more explicit interpretation in such books. He suggested that this might provide the key to debunking mythology and to the development of points of discussion and debate. An important corollary is that such projects lead to active collecting in the community thereby enabling the curator to get out of the office and to connect with the local people and the local environment.

The conference ended on an optimistic note and left me believing that the title, 'Museums and the Environment', served as a valuable (though unintentional) Aunt Sally, which was then knocked down by successive papers. This was well worth it, because in the process questions were posed, experience was shared and ultimately, it led to the reaffirmation of 'people' as the central focus of social history. In sum, it was worth 'getting out of place' in order to 'get back to people'. My own experience of the four days was as much about SHCG as a whole, as about one specific conference. Stephen Kay in his summary referred to three factors which he felt distinguished SHCG from any other group; hard work, a lack of inhibition to tackle interpretation and theory, and a commitment to analysis. Throughout the conference some sense of professional self-definition was tangible; this was especially true of the members' papers. While acknowledging Stephen Kay's comment that, 'We don't get the museum we want or deserve; but the museum which is possible in a particular environment', it seemed that the 'dynamic force' and positiveness came from the museum professionals themselves; people who wished to counter negative stereotypes who were willing to work with other organisations and disciplines, who wished to 'go to the people' to inspire and be inspired by them and by these means gain a true knowledge of the environment (people and place in all its complexity).

For a novice such as myself, the weekend proved formative and inspiring. There was a noticeable spring in the step of (even amongst the more hardened museum professionals) or was I deceived? I am aware that for every issue I have highlighted, there are many others which I haven't been able to do justice to. However, if anyone feels that I initially made the wrong choice in writing this review...I'll just go join Nanette....and do that washing up!?!?!?

Beverley Butler - Scunthorpe

GOOD VIBRATIONS : THE MACAURA BLOOD CIRCULATOR

Examples of how the Macaura Blood Circulator are found in many social history collections in the British Isles and they are often brought in by members of the public for identification. But what are the origins of this strange device? The story of the Blood Circulator and its inventor Gerald Joseph Macaura that emerges is intriguing indeed.

The Macaura Blood Circulator, or Pulsocon, is a hand cranked vibrotherapy device which, according to the inventor, when the handle is turned, delivers 2000 therapeutic vibrations per minute to the afflicted patient.

The device has a simple gear and cam mechanism which is enclosed in a chrome plated case. It has wooden handles, plastic base ring and plunger with a detachable soft rubber cup for more delicate treatments. Three versions are known to exist which differ only in the location of the inscription. The most common version is illustrated in the accompanying photograph.

The device was supplied in a stout cardboard box labelled 'Dr Macaura's Blood Circulator' on the sides and 'The British Appliance Manufacturing Company' on the ends.

Also found with the device are three booklets:

• Macaura Blood Circulator : Primer



The Macaura Blood Circulator

• The Macaura Blood Circulator : Instructions and Useful Hints

• The Cure of Disease by Vibration and Hygiene

(All Copyrighted to G J Macaura)

Using patent number 13932 as a starting point for research and then enquiring of local library sources it became possible to construct a picture of Macaura's working life.

In 1900 G J Macaura was listed as a physician boarding at 28 Charter Oak Place, Hertford, Connecticut, moving to 686 Main Street for 1901 and 1902. This year saw the issue of British Patent 3619 for a vibrotherapy device. In the patent he titles himself 'doctor'. By 1904 he was at 4 Spring Bank Place, Bradford, England, where he started the American Electrical Institute. This year also saw the granting of patent 13932 for the Blood Circulator in which he described himself as MD (USA) Medical Practitioner. In 1905 patent 10067 was issued for a 'galvanic therapy device' which enabled one supervisor to treat up to 30 patients simultaneously. Three years later an application from Cathedral Road, Cardiff for patent 326 for an extra steady hand-powered vibrator was not granted but a further application (3732) for a variable vibration intensity vibrator was successful.

About this time, the British Appliance Manufacturing Co Ltd was formed in Leeds. Somehow Macaura became aware of their existence and on 17th July 1911, went into a joint venture with them, having formed the firm of Pulsocon Ltd. He was managing director on a salary of £1,000 per annum. His co-directors were William Tay, Consulting Engineer of the Cosmo Hotel, Southampton Row, London, K Mallory, Spinster of the Cosmo Hotel, M M Holmes, Manageress of the Cosmo Hotel plus three others. The firm did not prosper and liquidation occurred on 8th January 1913.

Macaura had by this time moved to London, giving addresses in Oxford Street and Princes Street, off Hanover Street. He had not stayed in Cardiff long enough to be mentioned in the street directories. The association with the British Appliance Manufacturing Co Ltd continued; for 1915-16 their telegraphic address was given as 'Macaura' and he finally parted company with them about 1923.

In the various instruction books for the vibrator, Macaura refers to a "London Institute" in Hanover Square. There is not trace of a suitable establishment between 1910 and 1925, and it would seem that the Princes Street address is the most likely site. This institute had a staff of nine men, two women and a boy.

Macaura's inventiveness continued; in 1923 he patented a combined vibrator and electrotherapy

machine, followed the next year by a vibrator with a shoulder rest and an improvement on the previous year's device. At this time he was living at 53 Ladbroke Grove, Holland Park, London W11, and had changed his title from 'Medical Practitioner' to 'British Subject'. The trail of patents fades until 1940 when Patent Number 540298 for a deep massager was issued but during the time taken for the provisional patent to be granted he moved from Edgbaston, Birmingham, where he did not reside long enough to feature in the electoral role or trade directories, to Belfast. Having come to the end of the trail issued a press release which included an appeal for help. This was sent to the media in all the places in Britain Macaura was known to be associated with, in the hope that someone might remember him. A letter was received from a Mrs McGinley who had been recruited as Macaura's secretary in Belfast. She had been employed along with three sales people to sell the vibrators, but sales were poor, and then, following an air-raid, they shut up shop and moved to Dublin. The selling price of the Blood Circulator was about £3 which she describes as 'a lot of money'. After 1940 the Macaura trail ends, although I have circumstantial evidence that at some time he traded in Plymouth and Edinburgh.

Macaura's Claims

The State of Connecticut records for 1893-1907 contain no trace of a Dr G J Macaura. In Britain he claimed to have been a member of the Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene but a search of their archive failed to reveal any correspondence or membership details. It is interesting to note how, through the years, Macaura downgraded his medical qualifications from Doctor (1902) through MD (USA), medical practitioner (1904,5,8) and then simply British Subject (1923, 4, 40).

Macaura fails to be consistent on the most beneficial treatment; having started in England running an electrotherapy institute he was later to disparage electrical machines and quack therapy. Yet, in 1923, he patented a combined electro and vibrotherapy machine.

The Blood Circulator/Pulscon/Vibrator is, according to the instruction booklets, able to cure infantile paralysis, gonorrhoea, deafness, cancer (early stages only), tuberculosis, and a host of minor ailments such as rheumatism, constipation, gout, insomnia, 'general nervousness', writers' cramp, asthma, catarrh, "womens' diseases", impotence and haemorrhoids. None of these claims could have been substantiated by rigorous clinical trials even at the turn of the century, certainly not now. The booklets do contain enough advice on other measures to take whilst undergoing the vibrotherapy to have cured some patients of minor ailments. Indeed the healthy diet, avoidance of alcohol and taking of regular exercise proposed sound very familiar today. If Macaura had not invented the vibrator and made outlandish claims about the diseases that could be cured, it is possible that he might have been remembered as a pioneer of healthy living. As it is he seems to have been a charlatan who

made a career of moving round the country faster than anyone could catch up with him to investigate his claims or qualifications.

This research began when I was involved in cataloguing medical items and coincided with answering a public enquiry. The project then expanded to become a between-course project for the Museums Diploma and has continued in my spare time. Should anyone have in their collection a well provenanced Blood Circulator, I would be grateful for information to help me fill in the missing years. I would like to thank Mr D Webb for producing the photographs and the staff of various libraries and institutes for their assistance.

Ian Blomeley, Twickenham

A FOCUS FOR PRIDE - COMMUNITY HISTORY IN WALSALL

In April 1990, Walsall Museum and Art Gallery appointed Su Jeanes as Community History Officer. The job title reflected a deliberate departure from the more traditional role of a Keeper of Local History. It emphasised the necessity for the new postholder to prioritise the involvement of the local people in the museum services. The first three points on the job description summarise the post's aims:

- To promote awareness of, and participation in, community history around the Borough of Walsall...
- To liaise with relevant groups...as an initiator, enabler and professional adviser.
- To develop community history resources borough wide, and encourage greater access to, and exploration of, such resources...

It was clear, therefore, that a commitment has been made to Community History. It now remained to discover exactly what that would mean, in terms of Walsall. One of the first issues to be addressed was the future development of the History Section, within these specific aims. In order that it might develop and implement policies which would satisfy the needs of local people, research into those needs and way of meeting them had to be done. The results of this research were then incorporated into a document : The Community History Strategy.

The aims of the Strategy were twofold: it was to serve as a guide to those working within the History Section, helping them to prioritise their work, as well as to explain the section's aims to those outside the Museums Service.

The Strategy itself opens with a Mission Statement which begins: "Walsall Museum and Art Gallery Community History Service exists to promote the awareness and enjoyment of, and participation in, the histories of all communities living and working in the Borough of Walsall up to the present day." This sets the tone for the rest of the document, which goes on to explain the emphasis that Community History puts on people other than places; the importance of public interaction with the service; the role of the Museum as a storehouse for people's objects and as a focus of community pride.

The next section is a list of aims and objectives for the Service. In brief, the main aims are:

- . to establish and maintain a high profile for Community History within the Museum and Art Gallery Service.
- . to increase the participation of all communities within the Borough in the work of the Community History Section
- . to establish high standards of collections management for existing and future collections
- . to create collections which are representative of the people in Walsall and their roots around the world
- . to increase the use of museum resources by a range of educational groups

It was felt that these objectives could best be achieved through a programme of temporary exhibitions, which allowed for a maximum of community involvement. The first exhibition held in the History Gallery was one originated and mounted by a community group: the Slade Fan Club approached the Museum and Art Gallery, wishing to display Slade memorabilia collected over 25 years. We were delighted to show this exhibition, which also proved to be very popular with our visitors. The next exhibition, "Walsall in the 30s, 40 and 50s", was more traditional in content, but again we invited community participation. Instead of using traditional labels, we asked school pupils to interview older friends and family and used quotes collected by them as captions. Following the enthusiastic response to this, we then decided to once again have an exhibition organised by a local group -but to a topic of our own choosing. "Walsall in 1991" was the theme and a brief was sent out to all schools and youth groups inviting them to give us their view of Walsall today. This proved to be our most popular exhibition yet, receiving appreciative comments both on the theme and on the work put in by those involved.

The History Gallery is at present closed for refurbishment, with an exciting new exhibitions programme planned for 1992. This covers topics which

can involve local groups as well as contribute to the growth of our collections and hopefully attract new audiences. More groups are now coming forward with ideas for projects leading to exhibitions, allowing us to move more firmly into the role of enablers rather than providers. It is envisaged that the careful handling of this programme will leave time free for other community related projects to be developed along the guidelines given in the Community History Strategy.

Su Jeanes - Community History Officer

Wanted - Sewing Machines!

Disposal. That oh so emotive activity can be a very positive and rewarding activity. Sharing collections makes sense, duplication doesn't. Duplication. During my work as SHIC surveyor for the Area Museum Council for the South West, I examined the collections at over 100 museums and was astonished by persistent duplication in single collections. Rampant kleptomania, sewing machine addicts, chest upon chest of carpentry tools with worm infested handles, rusty blades. Shame.

But, like a bolt of inspiration, I fell upon the 'Tools for Self Reliance' stand at the York Peace Festival last weekend. This organisation recycles tools so that they can be provided cost-free to village workshops in some of the poorest countries of the world.

'Tools for Self Reliance' has strong links with overseas organisations that are run by local people and by working in partnership with them, tools are delivered to where they are really needed. After getting advice from local groups, TFSR collects, refurbishes and ships out the required tools. The partners then provide transport, sometimes hundreds of miles, to the workshop or group where the tools will be put to work. For example, Mozambique and Nicaragua have been ravaged by war and natural disasters. TFSR sends tools for building homes, fishing boats and clinics. Tool kits go to trade schools where trainee carpenters learn to make and mend their own tools- a big step towards self reliance.

Village blacksmiths in Tanzania make hoes and other implements essential for growing food, but are short of tools and scrap steel. TFSR puts high priority on supporting self reliant tool production.

Social History curators will be delighted to learn that sewing machines are also required. Several have already been received and refurbished and are being used by women's tailoring groups in East and West Africa for clothes production.

Hands up those Curators with rows of Singer sewing machines, duplicate, unprovenanced or undocumented hand tools in poor condition and those of us who are

persistently offered (and decline) such items into the collection? Take positive action, contact TFSR. (Sorry, they don't take mangles - I asked!) Yvette Staelens, Curator Scunthorpe Museums Service

TFSR National Offices, Netley March, Southampton SO4 2GY Tel: (0703) 869697

Secretary's Report 1990-91

The Committee met three times this year, at Yorkshire Museum, 12.11.90, Pickfords House, Derby, 25.2.91, and the Yorkshire Museum, 2.7.91.
Committee Business

Major items with which the committee has dealt with are the coordination of the Annual Study Weekend and the News, the journal, Seminars, Membership and Finances.

The group has been asked to comment on various matters.

M.A Working party on Equal Opportunities.

Sally MacDonald has represented S.H.C.G on this working Party which aims are to promote Equal Opportunities in the profession including the M.A. Unfortunately since the M.A membership's rejection of the working party's recommendations at M.A Conference in 1990, the status of the Working Party is not clear, but it is hoped that it will become a formal sub-committee of the M.A.

M.A. Council

The committee supported the candidacy of two members, Christine Johnstone and Ian Lawley to M.A. Council.

M.A. Conference Newcastle 1991

David Fleming, Stuart Davies and Robert Lumley gave a session organised by S.H.C.G., "Fooling Some of the People All the Time? History vs Heritage".

Museum Documentation Association

Chair and the N.E.M.S Conservator made a detailed response to the M.D.A labelling recommendations. Sally MacDonald is the S.H.C.G representative for the M.D.A.

National Vocational Qualifications Steering Group

Although S.H.C.G has not been asked to sent a representative, Bill Jones sits on this group as a representative for the National Museums of Wales. He has been able to advise the Committee of developments.

Museums Under Threat

S.H.C.G wrote to Chichester District Council expressing concern over the threatened closure of the museum on Saturdays. The threat has since been averted. The group continues to monitor the situation in Peterborough, now without a social history curator.

M.T.I - Martin Greswell of M.T.I. gave a presentation to Committee about the first draft Standards of Competence for museum work, as part of the consultation process. He explained that the set of standards were distributed to a cross section of museums, but that anyone could write to M.T.I. to have access to a copy to comment on. Committee enquired about the validation of S.H.C.G as a body and the validation of seminars. Martin was unable at this point to advice on the mechanics of this. S.H.C.G. still require validation and if necessary will liaise with other specialist groups to ensure validation by M.T.I. Committee will keep in contact with M.T.I. to chart developments.

Regional Correspondants

If you are involved in creating a new project or any other activity that you would like other SHCG members to know about, contact your regional correspondent. Photographs and illustrations are also welcome.

YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE

Sue Hopkinson, Scunthorpe Museum
Tel: 0724 843 533 ext 864

NORTH WALES

Keith Davies, Isle of Anglesey, Museum Service'
Llangefni. Tel: 0248 724 444

SOUTH WALES

Stephen Done, Cyfartha Castle Museum,
Tel: 0685 723 112

SOUTH WALES

David Eveleigh, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
Tel: 0272 222 000

SOUTH EAST

Felicity Hebditch, Verulanium Museum, St Albans
Tel: 0727 54659

LONDON

Frances Collinson, Museum of London
Tel: 071 600 3699

SCOTLAND (Borders, Dumfries & Galloway)

David Lockwood, Dumfries Museum, Tel: 0387 533 74

SCOTLAND (Lothian, Fife, Tayside)

Denice Brace, People's Story, Edinburgh
Tel: 031 225 2424

SCOTLAND (Highlands & Islands)

Ross Noble, Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie
Tel: 05 402 307

All contributions and correspondance should be sent to Frank Little, Summerlee Heritage Trust, West Canal Street, Coatbridge, ML5 1QD. The copy date for SHCG #28 is 1 February 1992