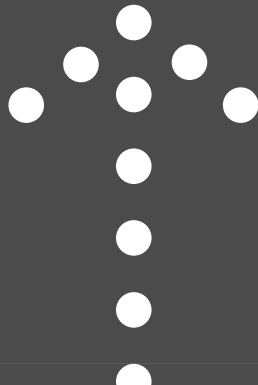


# INCLUDING MUSEUMS

**perspectives on museums, galleries and social inclusion**

written and edited by **Jocelyn Dodd** and **Richard Sandell**



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**perspectives on museums, galleries and social inclusion**

written and edited by **Jocelyn Dodd** and **Richard Sandell**

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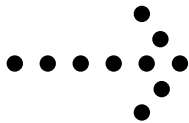
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# ABOUT



This publication explores issues around the social responsibility of museums and galleries and their potential to impact on inequality and disadvantage. It features multiple voices and experiences reflecting both the subject matter and approach to *Including Museums*.

The preface, introduction and each of the main chapters, written by Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd, form the framework within which the contributions of over 20 other individuals are interwoven.

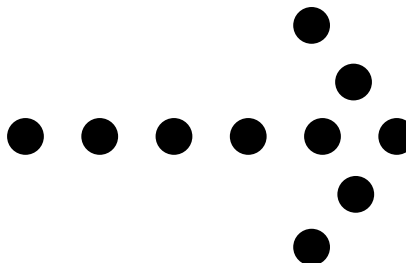
Some individuals have been commissioned to write these articles whilst other contributions have been compiled from interviews and discussions. *Including Museums* reflects the views of the authors/editors - that cultural organisations have both the potential to effect positive social change and a responsibility to do so. The contributions have been selected to provide viewpoints or evidence that support this belief. Each contributor has a different perspective and a different style of expression which, as far as is possible, has been preserved through the editing process.

It is hoped that the resulting publication is strengthened by being both diverse and idiosyncratic in style and content.

## INCLUDING MUSEUMS

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## Foreword by **Caroline Lang**

*Including Museums* offers an opportunity to review current thinking relating to the social role and purpose of museums, galleries and the wider cultural sector in the light of recent research. Some museums and galleries have been engaging with many of the issues reflected upon here with varying degrees of success for decades. However, what is new is the context.

In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on dismantling barriers to access and on providing services for a much broader range of people. In return for public funding we are being called upon to demonstrate that our services represent good value, are responsive and relevant to the needs of users and are developed in partnership with them. Museums and galleries are also looking at the perceptions of non-users, targeting new audiences and realising the benefits of inclusive practice for all concerned. Within this context, museums are better placed to move forward, to think beyond the provision of access to their potential impact on individuals, communities and wider society.

This publication is very timely in that it provides a framework for reflecting upon and engaging with fundamental issues and questions at a time when many in the sector are ready to do this. However, *Including Museums* is not the usual kind of guidance publication. Rather it recognises that definitions of social inclusion are evolving and complex and that museums need to respond in ways that are appropriate to their own circumstances. No universal blueprint can be applied. Instead, it seeks to encourage debate and presents a wide range of different perspectives and voices which give a sense of what is possible and demonstrate the advantages of a collaborative and flexible approach.

Although it does not underestimate the level of change that is implicit for many organizations in adopting new ways of working and pursuing different goals, *Including Museums* aims to enable all kinds of staff in all kinds of museums to respond creatively to the issues and challenges.

Resource has supported this publication and the research that it draws upon because we believe that museums and galleries have a significant role to play in promoting social inclusion, in partnership with other agencies in communities and neighbourhoods. I am sure that this book will be invaluable in reviewing and developing our practices and services in the light of social inclusion policies and objectives which should become part of the work of all museums and galleries.



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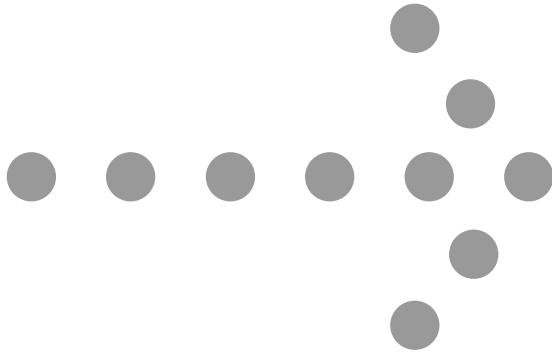
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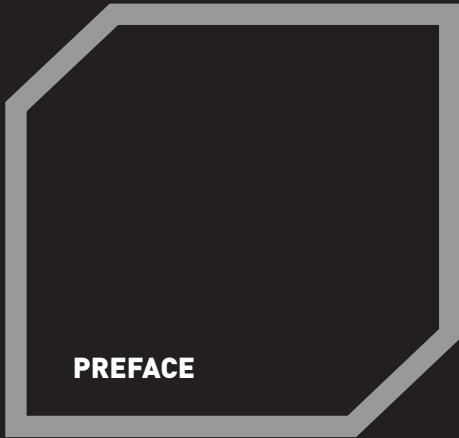
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# Means to an end

The year is 1993, a time when the language of social inclusion has yet to gain a currency in museums, or indeed, more generally. The place is Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery where we worked in our respective Marketing and Education roles. The occasion - an exhibitions planning meeting - may not, in itself, be especially interesting but, with hindsight, it proved to be a significant event in that it affected the way in which we worked and influenced how we came to view the role and purpose of museums and galleries more widely.

The purpose of the meeting is to agree an exhibitions programme and, importantly, though perhaps somewhat unusually for the time, the meeting includes staff from not only the exhibitions and curatorial departments but also, front of house staff, representatives from other departments within the local authority as well as ourselves.

Exhibition officers and curators present a series of ideas to the meeting though all staff are encouraged to comment on them. The discussions follow a familiar pattern until we come to consider a proposal for an exhibition of photography by women exploring issues around health and ill health - provisionally entitled *Our Bodies Our Selves* the proposed exhibition is to include some powerful images that we felt some visitors might find challenging. As well as the questions we were accustomed to exploring - Who might we aim the exhibition at? How does it relate to the gallery's exhibition policy? What are the implications of such an exhibition for our, predominantly family, audience? What opportunities does it offer for us to target and reach new audiences? - we began to stray into new territory. What was new and different and what, with hindsight, proved to be significant for the development of the museum and gallery service, was that we began to question what we were trying to achieve with such an exhibition. Did we simply want to develop and present a high quality art exhibition and seek to make it accessible to the widest possible audience (as our policy and practice to date suggested) or should we, in fact, develop the project with rather more direct, ambitious and outward looking social goals in mind?

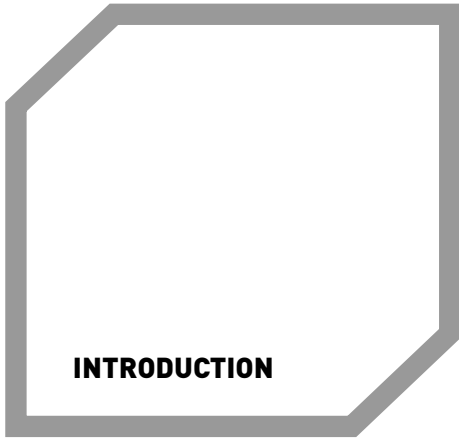
We began to consider the potential of such an exhibition to impact upon the health and well being of visitors and communities and to communicate health promotion messages. We explored the possibility of creating new

partnerships with non-museum agencies and the benefits that might accrue for both parties from this. To what extent could the museum have a part to play in helping to create healthier communities?

Of course, the event described above did not occur in isolation. Other initiatives, that we now understand as constituting socially inclusive practice, were developing concurrently. Our outreach programme was rapidly forging relationships with new audiences. We established the Drawbridge Group that set out to empower a group of disabled people to make and inform decisions on museum policy and practice and to enable the organisation to better meet the needs of its audiences. Nevertheless, that meeting was significant for the organisation, those that worked there and for the way in which we began to develop our views on the social role, value and purpose of the museum. Though many of the ideas have taken several years to become fully articulated, to become more widely shared within the sector, at that meeting we acknowledged the social responsibility of the museum and its potential to engage with issues beyond the traditional remit most often associated with museums and galleries.

Now, some eight years on from that meeting, there is greater recognition of - as well as considerable resistance to - the notion that museums and galleries can play an important social role, though the precise form which that takes can vary dramatically from organisation to organisation, context to context. Contrary to the views of some critics, the social inclusion agenda does not require all museums to tackle issues of poor health or high crime. It does, however, require a rethinking of the organisation's purpose and practices.

Whilst many organisations continue to cling to traditional, and increasingly untenable, museum agendas, others have been questioning them, putting them aside or at least re-prioritising them. Many galleries and museums have sought to be more closely stitched into the lives of the communities they seek to serve and have become more outward looking, more exposed to the needs of audiences and other stakeholders. Fundamentally, engaging with ideas around social inclusion requires us to recognise that the *cultural* is inextricably linked with the *social* and, more particularly, that collecting, documenting, conserving and interpreting are simply the means to an end. They are functions through which the museum can pursue its goals - social goals which must centre around their benefit to individuals, communities and society.



# The cultural and the social

Despite growing support and interest in the social role of the museum, there remains, amongst some museum practitioners and commentators, a marked reluctance to take seriously the notion that cultural organisations can, or should, engage with social issues. The very idea that museums or galleries, especially those which enjoy public funding and support, might seek to be relevant to all those who pay for them or to work towards broader social goals (rather than more narrowly defined cultural goals) remains alien, even abhorrent, to some.

In recent years we have seen increasing professional and academic debate and research around the issues of museums, galleries and social inclusion. Whilst the

widespread adoption of the terms social exclusion and inclusion by politicians and policy makers has undoubtedly given additional impetus to these discussions, the fundamental questions raised by these debates have significance beyond the confines of contemporary government policy. Indeed, the kinds of questions which are increasingly receiving mainstream attention in galleries and museums throughout the world are not dissimilar, except perhaps in the language used, to those which have been around (albeit marginalised) for many decades.

*What is the social role and purpose of the museum?*

*How does the concept of social responsibility relate to the museum?*

*What impact can museums have on the multiple forms of disadvantage described by the term 'social exclusion'?*

*What constitutes appropriate social goals for museums and galleries?*

*How can museum practice develop to respond to issues of exclusion and inclusion?*

New ideas are emerging which offer exciting opportunities for museums to redefine their social role and purpose though, in the sector as a whole, there remains considerable confusion, misunderstanding and reticence. The situation is worsened by the fact that definitions of social exclusion and inclusion are wide-ranging, fluid and evolving. Furthermore, many equate the issues solely with outreach, education or access projects, ignoring the wider imperatives for changes in mainstream museum philosophy and practices. Research suggests that there are a number of very different ways in which museums and galleries can contribute meaningfully towards social inclusion though these are not always understood or accepted both within and outwith the sector.

*Including Museums* aims to provide an opportunity for those working in and with the cultural sector to reflect on, and engage with, the fundamental questions outlined above.

### **Philosophy**

*Including Museums* reflects the views of the authors - that all museums and galleries have a social responsibility and the potential to impact positively on the lives of those with which they engage. It will be argued that the questions raised by the social inclusion agenda, that have gained prominence in the last three years, are by no means new. Indeed, some museums have been working within a framework of social responsibility for many years, seeking to reach the widest possible audiences, to involve communities and

engage them in decision-making processes and, above all, to consider the social impact of doing so.

It will be argued then that museums should have a social purpose - that the functions or activities of collecting, preserving and displaying are not undertaken for their own sake but rather as means to a number of social ends. Those ends may take many forms - museums can inspire, educate, inform; they can promote creativity, broaden horizons and expose people to new ways of looking at the world, all of which have a relevance to discussions about the museum's contribution to social inclusion. They also have the potential to deliver social outcomes less commonly assigned to museums - they can enhance individuals' self-esteem, empower communities to take greater control over their lives, challenge stereotypes and tackle intolerance. Some of them can utilise their social impact to play a direct role in combating some of the problems that disadvantage many diverse communities and individuals described by some as 'socially excluded' - poor health, crime, low educational attainment and unemployment.

*Including Museums* also seeks to clarify some of the misconceptions around museums and social inclusion. Some critics have understood inclusion solely in terms of recent demands made by government and others external to the sector. In contrast, the discussions that are now taking place build on decades of ongoing development and change within the sector and profession. (For example, the radical shifts in approaches to social history through the representation

of ordinary lives that transformed many museums). It will argue that social inclusion does not require all museums to deliver all of these outcomes or to work towards all these social goals, but rather to consider their own unique circumstances and opportunities to benefit individuals, communities and wider society. Furthermore, working to promote social inclusion does not require museums to 'dumb down' nor to become instruments of governmental reform.

However, the social inclusion agenda, undoubtedly presents museums with the need for change - change in philosophy, values, goals and practices. Such changes will bring with them both threats and opportunities. Some traditional museum practices, and the systems and structures which perpetuate the elitist and exclusive museum, will increasingly be open to question and scrutiny and, in time, new ways of working will evolve and become better established. Contrary to the fears and expectations of some, social inclusion does not demand a lowering of standards or a constraint on creativity. Nevertheless, many museums and galleries will face imperatives for radical changes in working practices and those who have traditionally held power and are accustomed to an autonomy that has resulted in neglect of audiences (and potential audiences), will continue to feel both uncomfortable and threatened.

## **Approach**

When we began work on this publication, our aim was, through research, to identify and disseminate some of the principles that underpin successful approaches to

inclusive museum practice. What emerged very quickly was that it was both impossible and inappropriate to attempt to produce a blueprint for effective inclusion work. The concepts, language and contexts remain altogether too fluid, slippery and ambiguous.

Furthermore, whilst there is a long history of thinking about museum's social purposes, in the last two years, these issues have achieved a prominence that has resulted in increased research, a climate of experimentation and the emergence of new practices. This dynamic context has demanded a different approach and, as a result, *Including Museums* is more exploratory than was originally intended. Its aim is to both inform debate and to stimulate new ways of working. Perhaps unlike other more established areas of museum practice there is little in the way of conventional wisdom about what constitutes effective inclusion work in galleries and museums, though some underlying principles can be identified. With no blueprint for success, at present, many uncharted opportunities exist for museums and staff in all areas of museum work to respond creatively to the social challenges and the issues facing the communities they seek to serve.



Crucially therefore, *Including Museums* presents a diversity of viewpoints including;

- The experiences of individuals from different communities who have been involved with museum projects, in their own words exploring the impact of this interaction on their lives.
- Contributions from staff working within social, health and welfare agencies who have collaborated with museums and galleries on inclusion initiatives. These will explore the opportunities, pitfalls and potential of collaborative work with the sector.
- Differing perspectives on key issues of practice from a range of staff within the sector with the aim of encouraging debate and the interrogation of working practices in an area that is rapidly changing and evolving.

06



# 1 2 3

**Chapter 1** unpacks the concepts of inclusion and exclusion to explore the implications and imperatives they hold for the sector and considers the nature of the recent backlash against museums' involvement in inclusion agendas.

**Chapter 2** draws on recent research to identify what contributions museums might realistically make towards inclusion.

**Chapter 3** explores inclusive museum practice and considers the processes and principles which museums might employ to effectively deliver social benefits.

# chapter one

07

(MIS) UNDERSTANDINGS OF EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION



CHAPTER **ONE**

08

# (MIS) UNDERSTANDINGS OF EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

Many museum and gallery projects or initiatives in recent years have been labelled 'inclusive'. As the language of inclusion has become increasingly embedded within professional and political arenas, some museums have felt increasing pressure to develop new projects in the name of inclusion or to identify what they already do that might be termed inclusive. Perhaps unsurprisingly, such pressures have resulted in some rather spurious claims and the reality has not always matched the rhetoric.

A survey of recent museum literature will elicit many different opinions on what constitutes social inclusion in the sector. For some, social inclusion work is based on combating the multiple forms of disadvantage experienced by our most deprived neighbourhoods, such as poor health or high crime. For others, it might describe the philosophy that underpins new approaches to practice based on the process of museum democratisation. For others, it might be the rationale for decisions aimed at widening access such as the introduction of evening opening hours or reduced admission charges. What, then, constitutes social inclusion work in galleries and museums? What characterises and defines an approach or initiative that is inclusive or contributes to social inclusion, in comparison with, for example projects or practices that are understood as audience development or inspired by access imperatives? To answer these questions it is helpful to unpack the concepts of exclusion and inclusion and to consider their historical development.

## **The roots of social exclusion**

Though the terms 'social exclusion' and 'inclusion' have a relatively short history within museum discourse, the former can be traced back to as long ago as the 1970s when it was used in France to describe those that fell outside of the protection of the State's social insurance. Since then, social exclusion as a concept for understanding disadvantage and inequality has grown in importance and usage and, in many arenas, (political, academic, sociological) replaced the previously dominant concepts of poverty and marginalisation. For

many concerned with social policy and its implementation, the term has been welcomed since it offers a more holistic view of inequality than the traditional understandings of poverty which have focused largely on access to material resources.

As its popularity as a concept has increased, so its meaning has shifted and become increasingly fluid and evolving. Research into the origins of the term has identified the ways in which understandings have been shaped by the philosophical traditions of different countries and contexts. There is a growing body of literature which debates and offers differing definitions and understandings of inclusion. Such debates are important and valuable but, in many ways they have perhaps helped to cloud the issues for the cultural sector and hindered the development of debate around the more fundamental questions of the museum's social role and purpose. A lack of clarity and consensus has encouraged inertia and perhaps served the purposes of those who may wish to preserve the status quo.

*Including Museums* is not the place to engage in lengthy discussions of the political and theoretical roots and contemporary implications of exclusion and inclusion. However, below we consider some of the diverse understandings of the terms in order to identify those characteristics that are relevant to the sector.

## **Characteristics of exclusion**

Despite the diverse understandings of exclusion which can be encountered, there are characteristics that are common to all definitions. The most significant of these for cultural organisations focus on the multi-dimensional and inter-related nature of inequality and disadvantage which the concept of social exclusion highlights.

### **The multidimensional nature of exclusion**

Walker offers a helpful definition of social exclusion in their comparison with poverty. Whereas poverty is concerned with "a lack of material resources, especially income, necessary to participate in British society", social exclusion is "a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society."<sup>(1)</sup> Exclusion is therefore multidimensional; a more holistic concept which recognises that an individual or group might be denied access to rights or services across different aspects of their life. With this definition, we can see how an individual or group might experience disadvantage within, or exclusion from, social, political, economic and cultural systems. See Figure 1.

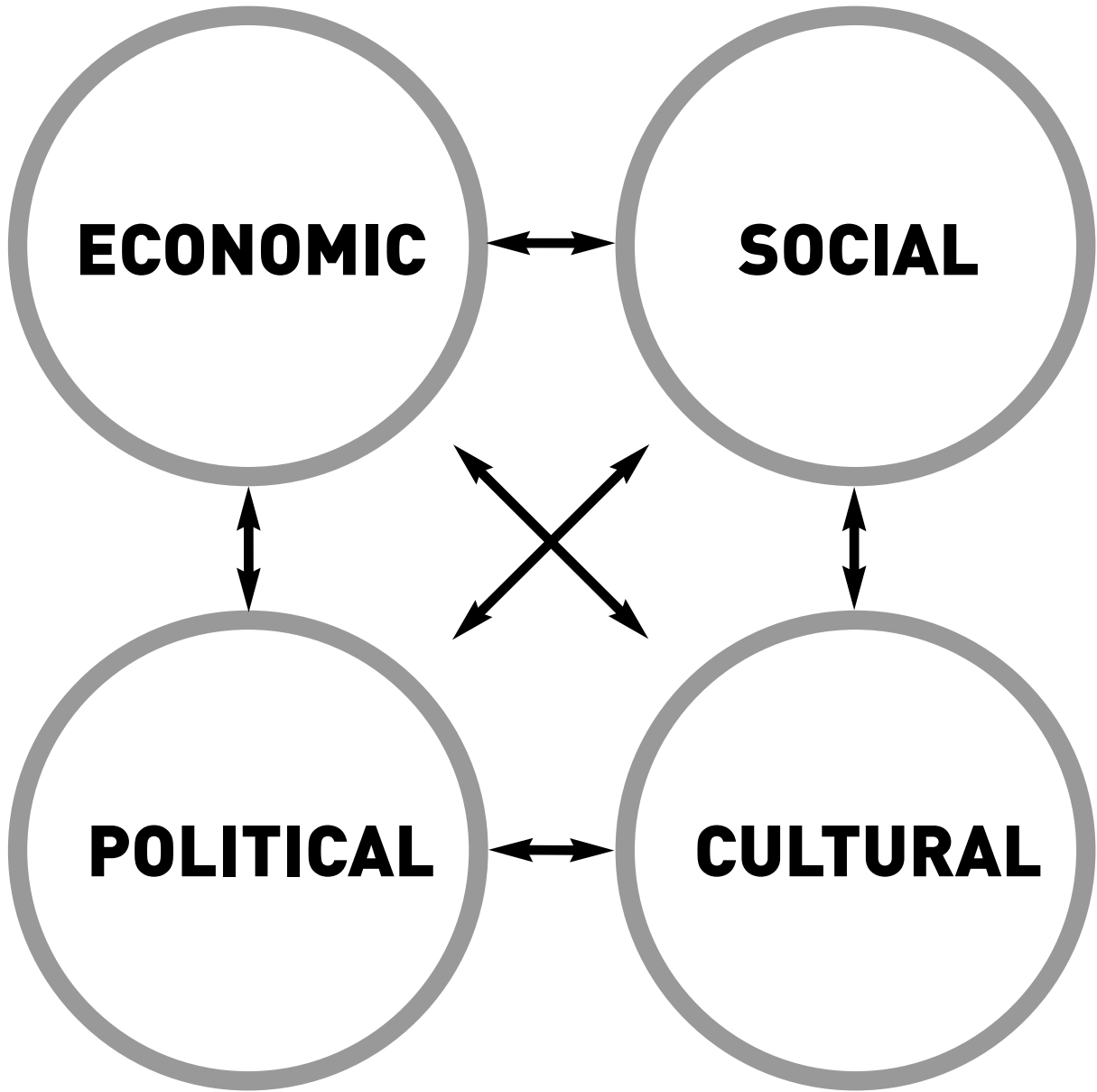


FIGURE **ONE** The dimensions of social exclusion

# Social exclus ion

is “a short hand term for what can happen 11  
when people or areas suffer from a  
combination of linked problems such as  
unemployment, poor skills, low incomes,  
poor housing, high crime environments,  
bad health, poverty and family  
breakdown”. (Social Exclusion Unit,  
Cabinet Office)

### The interrelated nature of exclusion

Social exclusion not only highlights the multiple ways in which people can be disadvantaged but also the ways in which these are inextricably interlinked and interrelated and cannot, therefore, be considered in isolation.

“The key characteristic of social exclusion is the interdependency and influence of one dimension on another. For example, low educational attainment may lead to low income in later life, or poor housing may lead to poor health. This can lead to exclusion from one or more of the other dimensions. For example, unemployment or low pay may, in time, lead to political, social or cultural exclusion. It is this complex network of interactions between different aspects of exclusion that enables museums and galleries to play a part in creating a more inclusive society.”[2]

This inter-relatedness helps to explain the adoption of the terms amongst not only the cultural sector but across many professional arenas. Before the widespread adoption of the concept of exclusion, debates around inequality and disadvantage were dominated by definitions of poverty and access to material resources. Consequently, the responsibility for ameliorating the symptoms and causes of poverty were assigned to employment and welfare agencies. Now, with greater recognition of the multidimensional and interrelated nature of disadvantage, the responsibility for developing and implementing solutions has similarly been widened. In policy terms, this has led to what has become known as ‘joined up solutions to joined up

problems’. As a result, museums and galleries have become involved in debates which many believe fall outside of their remit.

What role then might the museum play in combating exclusion or promoting inclusion?

### Cultural inclusion

If we begin with the cultural dimension of exclusion it is relatively straightforward to position the role of museums and galleries. Indeed, understandably most museums and galleries have interpreted their role in relation to social inclusion as synonymous with cultural inclusion by seeking to widen access to their services. So, through a range of activities or initiatives, widely understood as audience development, museums can seek to become accessible to those groups that are traditionally underrepresented in their visitor profiles. In this way, museums are looking to identify the many barriers that exist to deny access (cultural, financial, emotional, physical and intellectual and so on) and to identify ways of overcoming these. Such approaches have received growing attention and, in recent years, mainstream professional acceptance. With increasing awareness of, and interest in, the inter-related nature of disadvantage, what is now receiving further attention is the impact which cultural inclusion might have on the other (political, social and economic) dimensions of exclusion.

## A wider social role?

Whilst the process of cultural inclusion may well represent the most immediate and, perhaps, significant contribution that museums and galleries can make to the wider concept of social inclusion, there are other equally important approaches. Indeed, there are many examples of museums and galleries which have impacted upon the social issues or problems that are generally associated with the social, political or economic dimensions of exclusion.

Museums which purposefully engage with these issues view their role and purpose in a way which is fundamentally different from the majority of cultural organisations. For such organisations, culture, arts or heritage is not *intrinsically* valuable but rather its value exists in relation to people - individuals, communities and society. Such organisations may articulate these values and beliefs in mission statements or a project's aims which reflect their social goals. Examples include museums that seek to promote tolerance, provide a sense of place for excluded communities, projects that are aimed at helping failing schools or providing disadvantaged individuals with enhanced skills or self-confidence. The possibilities are many and varied but fundamentally, these are organisations which view the collection, conservation and interpretation of objects or artworks as well as initiatives aimed at widening access, not as the goal of the organisation but rather the means by which wider social goals are attained.

## Government policy and social inclusion

Although the discussions within *Including Museums* are not confined to the implications of recent government policy it is, nonetheless, useful to consider the significant impact that this has had in raising the profile and level of debate around these issues. Indeed, in its relatively recent history in museums, the social inclusion agenda has been blamed for (and credited with) many things. According to critics, social inclusion has been responsible for diverting museum's from their core purposes and goals, subverting their roles and responsibilities to political and governmental ends, politicising an otherwise 'objective' and 'neutral' organisation, putting collections and their care at risk and transforming curators into social workers..... the list goes on. In many instances, the terms social inclusion and exclusion, and their implications for museums, have been (either purposefully or inadvertently) misunderstood.

Whilst the adoption of social goals has always been a contentious issue within the sector, governments' recent policies have provoked particularly vociferous attacks. Following a government review of its recent policies for libraries, museums and archives on social inclusion, Chris Smith states;

"There have been some comments that it is not the business of museums, galleries and archives to be involved in social regeneration by serving a wider and more diverse audience. I cannot agree. It is clearly right that these national treasures should be available



and accessible to all citizens, and there need be no conflict between the dual responsibilities of responding to the needs of society today, and protecting and conserving treasures for future generations.” (3)

### **Social control versus social responsibility?**

The comments to which Chris Smith refers have, in many instances, sought to link the notion of social inclusion in museums with rather sinister government motives based around social control. Such criticisms may find support in the work of those cultural and social theorists who view inclusion policies as motivated by a government desire to stem disorder and reduce the mounting financial burden of poverty. Nevertheless, we would argue that the ideas which are presented within *Including Museums* are driven by different motivations based around social equality, democratisation and empowerment, (motivations that have inspired the work of some museum staff who have been working towards inclusive agendas for many years, sometimes in the face of political opposition or disinterest).

### **Art for Arts Sake?**

Other criticisms, which perhaps unsurprisingly have found their strongest proponents from within the arts world, have centred around the idea that inclusion equates with ‘dumbing down’ and is incompatible with challenging and high quality artistic practice. It can sometimes seem as if critics have wilfully misinterpreted the issues.

“When the new elite says we must tackle ‘social exclusion’ such a statement could mean a lot of different things. ‘Social exclusion’ sounds like a nasty thing because of its vague association with poverty and deprivation. However, like most key terms in the language of the new elite, ‘social exclusion’ is a radically subjective concept. Anybody can be socially excluded if they feel that way, or what is more often the case, if the new elite thinks they should feel that way. In practice, this sort of language works as a system of veiled threats. The museum or gallery that is not prepared to turn its collection into a children’s playground is being exclusive... An attack on culture is rebranded as a social and moral crusade. Anybody who dares take issue with him will be immediately branded a snob and an elitist... Although the precise meaning is unclear, there is never a doubt as to what the new language intends. The artistic director who is concerned only with the merit of his work, when he hears that he must tackle social exclusion, knows that he is being warned. Perhaps he is thinking too much about the art and not enough about The People” (4)

Perhaps such defensive reactions are to be expected. Social inclusion does indeed present a threat though it is not a threat to creativity, artistic production or the integrity of collections. Rather it presents a threat to those cultural establishments which, with public funding, pursue agendas which benefit a privileged minority and sometimes even argue that this is justifiable.

It is clear that associations with government intervention have helped to contribute to misunderstandings, unintended or otherwise, around the relevance of social inclusion to museums and galleries.

In Chapter 2 we consider in more detail the different contributions which the sector can make to the social inclusion.

[1] Walker, A. C. (ed.) 1997 *Britain Divided: The Growth of Social Exclusion in the 1980s and 1990s*. Child Poverty Action Group, London.

[2] *Museums and Social Justice: How museums and galleries can work for their whole communities*, Scottish Museums Council

[3] *Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for All: Co-operating Across the Sectors to Tackle Social Exclusion*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, January 2001.

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**THE POLITICS OF  
SOCIAL INCLUSION**

16



**David Fleming**

reflects on the politics and history of  
social inclusion and the implications for  
the sector.

*Combating social exclusion is one of the Government's highest priorities, and I believe that museums, galleries and archives have a significant role to play in helping us to do this. (Chris Smith, May 2000)*

Two fundamental issues underlie the role of museums in combating social exclusion. One is the ability of museums to make an impact in this area of social policy, and the perceived risk to museums' other, more traditional functions, should they pursue socially inclusive agendas. The other is the degree to which politicians involve themselves in defining the scope and nature of cultural activity.

Thanks to pronouncements such as the one above by New Labour politicians, museums which pursue socially inclusive policies have been branded as Government stooges by opponents of Government. When the Group for Large Local Authorities (GLLAM) published its report, 'Museums and Social Inclusion', in October 2000, there was a concerted attack on the document by the Institute of Ideas and its followers, who claimed that museums should stick to looking after and displaying collections, and leave inclusion issues to social workers (1).

As it happens, any attempt to bring about radical change to the traditional museum, with its narrow appeal and its insularity, inevitably provokes howls of outrage from people who, for various reasons, want to retain the status quo. Some of these critics long for the golden age of museums, when scholars reigned supreme, connoisseurship was the best entry qualification to the profession, and the vast majority of

the public, bemused by incomprehensible displays, failed to use museums with any regularity. Of course, one person's golden age is another's era of dustiness, mustiness and intimidation. Some critics pine unashamedly for a time when the peaceful contemplation of museum exhibits was undisturbed by noisy children. Admittedly, that might be nice, but not, perhaps, when it is public funding which is paying for the experience.

This resistance to change has been magnified by the appearance of museums in the realm of positive action on behalf of disadvantaged and excluded communities, as museums are accused - with no evidence whatsoever - of thereby neglecting collections and abandoning scholarship. While it has been convenient to portray museums which pursue socially inclusive policies as dancing to the tune of Government, this ignores the fact that many were implementing such policies years before New Labour came to power.

It is true that the term 'social inclusion' was not one with wide currency in museums, but since the early 1980s, with the growth in influence of social history curators in Britain, museums have been becoming more community-orientated, showing a growing interest in the lives of the ordinary, rather than the extraordinary. In this, museums were reflecting trends in academic history, these trends in turn resulting from a revolution in higher education in this country. The democratisation of the writing of history was always going to have a profound impact on museums, regardless of political influences, and it was when Thatcherism was in its

pomp that social history in museums began to come of age in cities such as Edinburgh, Liverpool and Hull.

It would not be fair, though, while denying that social inclusion work in museums has its origins in the election of a Labour government in 1997, to conclude that politics has had no impact on the development of the work. On the contrary, it was Labour politicians at a local level who influenced the social inclusion movement, through local authority museums. Back in 1986 the Labour Leader of Edinburgh City Council, for example, made it clear that he believed museums should pursue policies agreed by the Council, just like other Council departments (2).

Other local authorities may not have taken so overt a line, but they have certainly been known to respond positively to museums which have worked to broaden access, and made it clear that they support such initiatives. It was a coincidence that growing Government pressure on local authority finances, causing major re-evaluation by local authorities of their functions, and a drive to secure 'value for money', came at the same time as new attitudes to serving the whole community among social history curators. The services which demonstrated their commitment to their communities were those which would do best in the fight for increasingly scarce resources.

Many people are uncomfortable with political influence being wielded in this manner, and here we get to the root of the political dimension of any museum work, not social inclusion alone. Some believe that politicians

should stay clear of cultural activity, that politicians have no right to 'interfere'. Politicians are primarily interested in election and re-election, and in the exercise of power. They should not be able to direct cultural activity, because this will restrict freedom of artistic expression.

This would be a more persuasive argument if it weren't for the fact that it is public funding which underpins a great deal of artistic activity, and certainly most museum activity. In a democratic society we elect politicians to raise and spend public money in the public interest, through our taxation system. They raise it, spend it, and we can vote them out of power if we do not like what they do. This is the meaning of accountability. The alternative to politicians controlling the spending of public money is unelected and unaccountable people doing it instead. Many would agree that politicians should not get deeply involved with detail, but would accept that in terms of setting broad agendas for public spending, that is exactly what we elect them to do. We don't want them to dictate how teachers teach, but we do expect politicians to set the curriculum, acting on advice from specialists.

Those museums where social inclusion has been most warmly embraced are those where political influence is strongest, which is the local authority museum sector. This is also the sector where a commitment to free admission has been defended most stoutly. These two factors are closely linked. The Labour Government's discomfort with admission charges in the national museum sector can be explained by the proven impact

that charges have on museum visiting - it is the poor who are dissuaded from visiting, and yet it is the poor at whom social inclusion policies are targeted.

The fact is that as social stresses have become more acute, especially in our urban environments, and as the gap has grown between rich and poor, haves and have-nots, any museum worth the name has tried to be accessible to all. This has not meant declining standards. On the contrary, under the glare of value for money, publicly funded museums now simply work much harder than they ever used to. We are also infinitely better-trained and capable of running accountable institutions. Standards - in collections care, exhibition, and education - are the highest they have ever been and, where long-term inclusion policies have been pursued, public usage is broader than ever before.

References:

- 1) Group for Large Local Authority Museums, 'Museums and Social Inclusion - The GLLAM Report', October, 2000; Josie Appleton, 'Stop this litany of buzzwords', The Spectator, 25 November, 2000, p 63; Claire Fox, 'A sweet taste of the past', Municipal Journal, 17-23 November, 2000, p11.
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**A STRATEGY WORTHY  
OF SUPPORT**



## **Raj Pal**

**responds to some of the recent  
criticisms levelled at museums'  
involvement with social inclusion.**

While there is understandably a considerable amount of confusion about the exact meanings of social inclusion and exclusion what is not in doubt is that a commitment to deal with these issues would entail museums and galleries taking a long hard look at many of their existing practices. That perhaps is one of the reasons why the debate on the issue tends to arouse such strong passions. It is worthwhile stating here that many of the criticisms of the strategy that argues that museums have a role to play in addressing barriers to social inclusion are fundamentally flawed and intellectually shallow. The main thrust of the criticism seems to be that social inclusion leads to a dumbing down and dilution of the core purposes of museums. Moreover, critics argue, political interference undermines the neutrality and objectivity of museums. Excuse me!

What is the core purpose of a museum if it is not to respond to the needs of its visitors and where possible identify causes and remedies for those who don't feel that museums have any relevance for them? As for political interference, since when have museums been neutral? As repositories of the looted cultural artefacts and treasures of lands and territories that increasingly came under British control in the 19th century what were museums such as the V&A and the British Museum, to name just two, doing if not celebrating the glories of empire and colonialism?

As key funding bodies, both local and national governments are bound to take an interest in what goes on in museums and, where possible, to expect them to contribute to their wider political agendas. To expect

anything else is utterly unrealistic. Whatever its motives the fact remains that the government has highlighted social inclusion as a key element of its strategy for museums. The choice for the profession is between whinging from the sidelines or constructive but critical engagement. As with some of its other initiatives, the government's strategy on social inclusion does not address the crucial issue of resources. The goal of social inclusion can only be tackled if museums make a fundamental, philosophical commitment to it. For that to happen, ownership has to come from the highest level. But with a long legacy of ever more severe cuts in budgets and staffing resources, most museums could be forgiven for taking a cynical view of yet another government target being imposed upon them.

Social inclusion is fundamentally about embedding good practice at the heart of museums. Major museum services in cities like Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds need to understand the tremendous demographic and cultural changes that have taken place there in the last four decades. These cities, and many others today, have highly diverse and dynamic communities which do not often feel that they belong in museums. As long as government strategy is backed up by giving museums extra resources, the imperative to address social inclusion may well end up as a blessing in disguise for a profession notorious for its conservatism. Even while they are not adequately used, most museums are valued by their local visitor base as being at the heart of the area's civic and cultural life. They are seen as repositories of valuable public collections of art as well



as venues for displaying local heritage and histories. The challenge of tackling social exclusion for many lies fundamentally in reinterpreting existing collections so that they show a sensitivity and have a relevance for groups and communities that have hitherto felt neglected and as such they have a crucial duty to ensure that barriers, as often psychological as physical, are identified and removed.

The challenge of addressing social inclusion in museums lies in reinterpreting existing collections and cultures in ways that are sensitive and relevant to recent social dynamics (Birmingham Museum's Buddha gallery is a good case in mind). If that is the role of social inclusion then, in my view, it is a strategy worthy of support.

# chapter

SOCIAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

# two



CHAPTER **TWO**

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# **SOCIAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Museums and galleries have generally been comfortable in presenting their roles and their value to society in terms of cultural preservation, education, entertainment, tourism, perhaps even their economic value. On the whole, they have been rather less confident with the articulation of goals that extend beyond these familiar functions; goals that might lay claim to a wider social value and, in particular, a potential to promote social inclusion or to combat the social problems and multiple forms of disadvantage described by exclusion. For many museums these issues represent unfamiliar territory - poverty, unemployment, poor health and even the broader issues of discrimination and social inequality are not part of the museum world - surely such responsibility lies with welfare and related agencies?

However, as we have argued in chapter 1, there is increasing recognition internationally, that the familiar museum functions of collection, preservation, display and interpretation do not constitute the museum's *raison d'être* - they are simply the means by which the organisation achieves its aim of delivering benefits to society. But what are those benefits, fundamentally what can be achieved through the agency of museums? Can museums really make a difference?

Of course, museums cannot claim to single-handedly reduce crime, transform the health of a community or eradicate bigotry and intolerance. Nevertheless, a growing body of research is highlighting the significant, and sometimes surprising, contributions made by galleries and museums towards inclusion.

## Impact and process - a tentative conceptual model

Social inclusion work in museums has been most often associated with the work of outreach, access or education departments. Such activities with excluded individuals or groups are, indeed, important but research suggests that the museum's potential contributions are much more diverse, wide-ranging and complex. Consequently, the opportunities and challenges presented by inclusion affect all those working in and with museums and galleries.

It is difficult to categorise and simplify the many ways in which museums might contribute towards inclusion but the model below attempts to conceptualise both the social *impact* of the museum and the *process* by which this might be achieved. The model suggests that museums can deliver outcomes in relation to inclusion at three main levels; individual, community and society. See Figure 2.

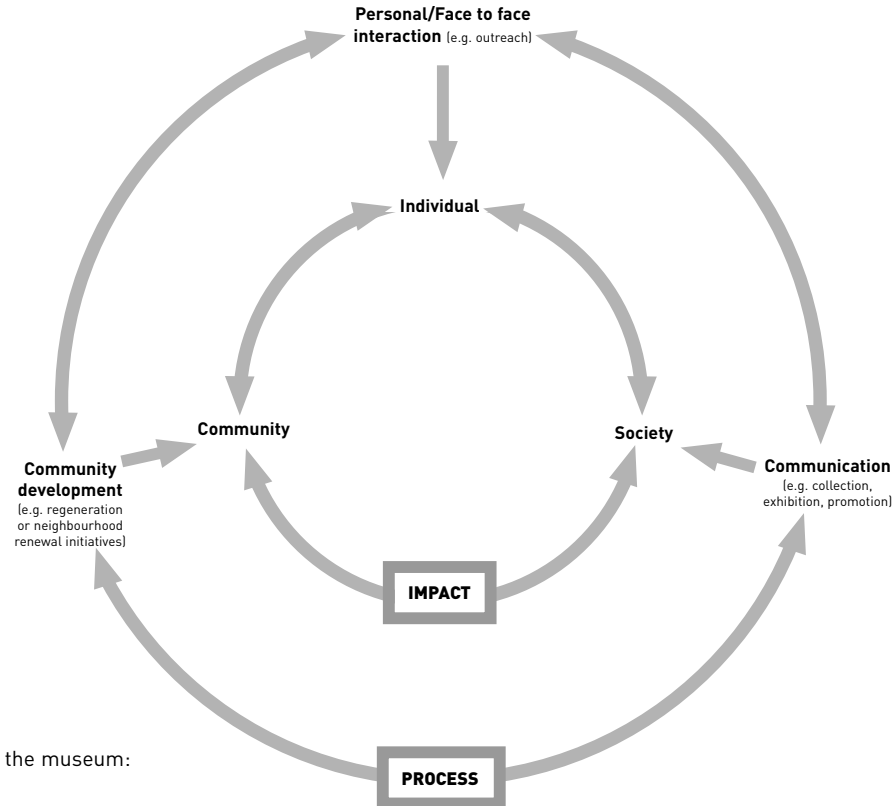


FIGURE TWO  
Social inclusion and the museum:  
impact and process

## Individual

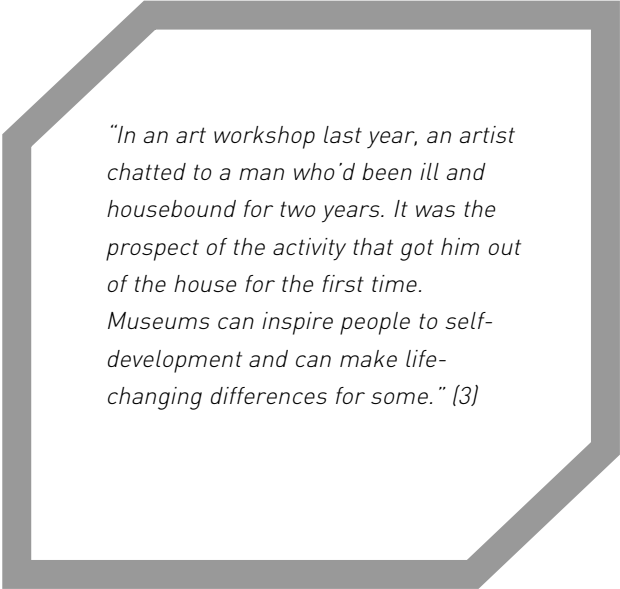
Some are understandably uncomfortable about identifying or labelling individuals as excluded or at risk of exclusion. Nevertheless, people may experience disadvantage in many forms, for example, by virtue of ill health, low incomes or limited life chances and opportunities. Engagement with museums can impact positively upon the lives of such individuals. Outcomes might include increased self-esteem, the acquisition of new skills, opportunities to explore a sense of identity or belonging or increased personal confidence. Such outcomes may help to create a virtuous circle enabling people to overcome other forms of disadvantage.

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Whilst some museums purposefully design initiatives with such outcomes in mind, in other circumstances they may be unintended and, perhaps as a consequence, are often overlooked and have only rarely been evaluated. Such evidence as exists has often been anecdotal and unrecorded. The experiences of individuals like Mandy and Jeremy, (see pages X and X) are particularly powerful.

*"The Margrove Heritage Centre Café in the north east of England is run by people who have experienced mental health problems. It offers a supportive, recuperative environment to individuals in taking the first tentative steps back into mainstream society. Over the past 5 years, 75 people have used the café for recuperative support and over 50,000 customers have used its facilities." (1)*

*"The visually impaired group - now just a group of friends - have real rapport with staff and feel at home in the building. One blind person told us how she learned to handle public places through coming to the museum, which took her out of her shell. You only get that kind of feedback from individuals themselves, as evidence from group leaders is always second hand. I hope we are doing that for others too." (2)*



*"In an art workshop last year, an artist chatted to a man who'd been ill and housebound for two years. It was the prospect of the activity that got him out of the house for the first time. Museums can inspire people to self-development and can make life-changing differences for some." [3]*

Such outcomes are generally achieved through personal, face to face interaction with individuals, often in the form of programmes of activities or workshops. In some instances, the skills of education, outreach or other museum staff are critical to the achievement of success and, in other examples, the museum environment itself appears to play a crucial role. It appears that museums can sometimes offer a space which is not only creative and inspiring but also safe, supportive and free from stigma providing some people with opportunities for self development that are not available to them in other aspects of their lives.

Recent research into small museums' contributions to inclusion highlights their potential to reach local communities at a grass roots level in a way that some larger organisations find difficult. The research also highlighted the significance of volunteering as a means by which individuals gained benefit. At the Ragged School Museum in London, volunteers come from many backgrounds and for many reasons. As well as benefiting the museum, volunteers can also gain. Through volunteering, unemployed people can learn new skills, people with mental health problems learn to develop confidence and elderly people can develop a social network and combat isolation and loneliness.

Most often, museums work in partnership with other agencies to reach, and work with, participants. Empowering participants to make decisions about how the museum can best meet their needs is a common characteristic of many successful initiatives.

### **Community**

Museums can also deliver benefits to communities in specific neighbourhoods and locations, as well as individuals. The outcomes in this area include community capacity building, whereby communities learn competencies and develop both the ability and confidence to change. Through museum initiatives, there are also examples of communities being empowered to participate in local democracy and developing increased self-determination.

There are few documented examples of the impact that museums have in terms of social regeneration, community empowerment and cohesion. Museums and social inclusion: the GLLAM report describes the growth of the Cowgate Women’s Group in Tyne and Wear.

‘Isolated mums must feel like it’s like living a life behind bars, but it doesn’t have to feel like this if they have joined us at the Cowgate Family Health and Community Project’ (publicity produced by the group)

There is a range of issues tackled by this group, beyond socialising and personal growth: unemployment, being a single parent, the generation gap, crime and violence to name a few. The women meet every week in term time and take charge of their own activities and agendas with support. This helps them gain new skills and access advice about possible courses or employment opportunities. They produced black and white photographs of the Cowgate area in collaboration with the People’s Gallery, a project they are developing further now they have gained more funding (thanks to a bid written by the museum). The women now want to extend to help others - to include the elderly, and the children and their families in the community. This initiative which started with a few black and white photographs, could prove to be a considerable agent for change in the Cowgate are, given time and support.” (4)

Similar outcomes were noted in research into the impact of participation in the arts suggesting a powerful potential within arts and cultural organisations for community regeneration. In these examples, the museum often acts as a catalyst for social regeneration which can take on a life of its own, sometimes continuing without further museum support.

The examples from Methil Heritage Centre and Plymouth City Museum further illustrate museums’ potential to contribute towards community regeneration. (see pages X)







Acts of racism, racial violence, racial prejudice and abuse do not exist in a vacuum. They are not isolated incidents or individual acts, removed from the cultural fabric of our lives.

# belonging and worth

30

Notions of cultural value, belonging and worth are defined and shaped by the decisions we make about what is or is not our culture, and how we are represented (or not) by cultural institutions.” (6)



## Society

In a gallery of decorative arts at Nottingham Castle aimed at the museum's core family audience, we find a section exploring the love stories linked to different objects within the collection. Within that section we find a beautifully decorated bowl and linked to that object, a story of gay love, that is presented, without comment, alongside other love stories. What impact might such inclusive approaches to interpretation have on both gay and heterosexual, accepting or bigoted visitors to the museum?

The third category of impact - that on wider society - is much more difficult to pin down. It relates to influences on not only those identified as disadvantaged, discriminated against or at risk of exclusion but also wider, 'mainstream' publics. Whereas individual and community impact is delivered to known individuals and defined communities in specific geographical locations the wider societal impact of museums and galleries is much broader and less tightly defined in terms of audience.

Museums and galleries can help to engender a sense of belonging and the affirmation of identity for groups which may be marginalised. They can envision inclusive societies and encourage mutual respect between different communities, tackle discrimination and challenge the stereotypes that feed intolerance. These kinds of outcome are delivered through thoughtful approaches to collection, display, programming and interpretation which reflect the full diversity of society.

This approach demands an acknowledgement of the power of museums to shape and inform people's attitudes and perceptions, both intentionally and unintentionally, through the stories they tell within their collections and displays. Here we can consider examples of museums that utilise their potential as a medium of mass communication combined with the organisation's perceived cultural authority, to respond to issues of disadvantage, injustice, inequality and discrimination.

Many museums will recoil at these suggestions, preferring to maintain an illusion of objectivity and impartiality and unwilling to adopt a standpoint on issues which might be interpreted as biased or politically motivated. Criticisms that are often raised hint at propagandist or morally superior, politically correct and patronising approaches to display and indeed, museums must be careful in their choices of messages to be conveyed. Nevertheless, such criticisms fail to recognise that, whether they intend to or not, museums already shape peoples' perceptions (though in many cases this has often been in a way which serves to exclude, discriminate and marginalise).

At an international conference on social inclusion in 2000, organised by the University of Leicester, Annie Delin presented a powerful and moving argument for museums to examine the role that they play in contributing to disabled people's exclusion from society and the significance of this for both disabled and non-disabled people.

“Any casual visitor to museums in Britain would assume that disabled people occupied a specific range of roles in the nation’s history. The absence of disabled people as creators of arts, in images and in artefacts, and their presence in selected works reinforcing cultural stereotypes, conspire to present a narrow perspective of the existence of disability in history.... What is the responsibility of museums in helping to create cultural inclusion for disabled people? In my opinion it is time that museums were more proactive in looking for what their collections hold, digging out the information buried in the footnotes and re-instating the identity of the celebrated and ordinary disabled people in their purview. Disabled people should be brought into the museum and supported in understanding where they existed in the past, to reinforce their right to belong in the present. Non-disabled people should be informed, through clear factual labelling and positive images, to see disabled people as having always been there - ad often to society’s benefit”.

The power of museum collections and displays is similarly acknowledged in relation to issues of racial equality and cultural diversity. In *The Future of Multi Ethnic Britain*, a powerful case is made for acknowledging that cultural organisations cannot remove themselves or see themselves as separate from the prejudice and discrimination that exists in wider society.

“Acts of racism, racial violence, racial prejudice and abuse do not exist in a vacuum. They are not isolated incidents or individual acts, removed from the cultural fabric of our lives. Notions of cultural value, belonging

and worth are defined and fixed by the decisions we make about what is or is not our culture, and how we are represented (or not) by cultural institutions.” (6)

What emerges from this is the notion of the social responsibility of all cultural organisations and an acceptance that museums and galleries, through their collections, displays and practices, have the potential to contribute towards more inclusive societies

“In Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, set in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, Edmund Bertram reproaches his cousin Fanny Price for not talking more to her uncle. ‘Did you not hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?’ replies Fanny. ‘I did’ says Edmund, ‘and had hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther.’ ‘And I longed to do it - but there was such a dead silence!’ In 1999 the dead silence was confronted by a new permanent exhibit at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. It showed a Jane Austen-like figure sipping tea with a sugar bowl on the table beside her. From beneath the floor at her feet a manacled black arm reached out as if from the hold of a slave ship, and as if to show the source of her comfort and wealth. The exhibit drew bitter criticism from sections of the media. The display, it was said, aimed ‘at depriving the British people of any aspect of their history in which they can take justifiable pride’. The museum’s director responded by maintaining that ‘museums are not just there to perpetuate the old view. We want galleries to be challenging.’ Through such episodes and arguments the cultural fabric of a country is questioned and re-formed.” (7)

## **Multiple impacts**

Of course it is impossible to categorise and compartmentalise the social impact of museums and galleries definitively in the ways we have attempted to do above. Frequently, initiatives will have overlapping outcomes delivering benefits at all three levels, individual, community and societal, simultaneously or through the course of a project. Nevertheless, it is useful to acknowledge the ways, multiple and diverse, in which museums and galleries' contributions to social inclusion can be considered and explored in future.

## **A unique role?**

Some of these contributions are unique to museums and galleries - they employ the uniqueness of museum collections, functions and staff resources. Others are akin to the contributions made by other cultural agencies (such as libraries and archives) or even similar to the approaches employed by community, health, welfare and social service agencies.

Even amongst those who support museums' working towards these social goals there exists an ongoing and valuable debate around the importance or otherwise of focusing on those contributions which are unique to museums. Undeniably, many of the impacts described in each of the sections above point towards a contribution that can only be made by museums and galleries and the sector as a whole will benefit from recognition of this unique role. However, a preoccupation with the uniqueness of museums' contributions denies the value of other benefits, akin to those delivered by, for example, welfare agencies, in such areas as skills training, personal development and increased self esteem and confidence which many museum projects may also be well equipped to provide.

## A responsibility for all?

Should all museums and galleries, regardless of size, collection type or mode of governance be concerned with the combating of social inequality and disadvantage? Are different kinds of museum and gallery able to deliver different kinds of impact and outcome?

What becomes clear from the discussions and examples within this chapter is that the imperatives presented by social inclusion have often been misinterpreted or misunderstood. The inclusion agenda does not demand that all museums design projects that seek to combat, for example, teenage pregnancy, youth unemployment or racism in schools. Nevertheless, the significance of collections, their power to represent diversity and envision inclusion emerges as relevant to all museums and galleries. Central to this is the notion of the social responsibility of all cultural organisations and a recognition of their potential to act as agents of positive social change.

The challenge is for individual organisations, and everyone who works within them, to explore the relevance of social inclusion to their own context and to become more open to the development of new goals and professional practices.

(1) *Conversations with...*North East Museums and Northern Arts, 2000.

(2) (3) (4) *Museums and Social Inclusion: the GLLAM Report*, Group for Large Local Authority Museums, 2000.

(5) Matarasso, F., *Use or Ornament?; The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*, Comedia, 1997.

(6) (7) *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Report on the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, The Runnymede Trust, 2000.

We have argued here that galleries and museums have the potential to change the lives of individuals, to help empower or regenerate communities and to contribute towards more inclusive, equal and respectful societies. The following contributions suggest ways in which this can be achieved.

**CHANGING LIVES 1**



## **Mandy's Story**

told with **Amber Walls**, illustrates the profound role that her involvement with galleries has played in changing her life.

Angel Row Gallery presents a changing programme of challenging, contemporary art exhibitions, many of international renown, though much of this is strange to, and beyond the realm of experience of, many Nottingham residents. But, for Mandy, being part of the gallery's *Activate* programme has proved, in many ways, to be a life-changing experience.

*Activate* is part of the gallery's response to recognise the need to broaden its existing audience and respond to inclusion and access issues, to recognise that the gallery should fulfil a social responsibility and to address local priority issues more effectively. Youth disaffection remains an area of particular concern within the City. *Activate* was a pilot project targeting young people at risk aged 12-16 and their families. The project aimed to develop a multi-agency approach to tackling youth disaffection and exclusion, using the arts as a creative tool to address personal and social development, to engage, motivate and build the confidence and aspirations of disaffected young people.

Mandy - this is not her real name for reasons of confidentiality - was referred to the project by Social Services. Her Social Worker describes Mandy's childhood as very traumatic. The impact of the trauma is manifest in how she feels about herself, she has low self-esteem and difficulties interacting with others, she lacks confidence and fears rejection. Mandy started attending the project when she was 14 and she has now just turned 16. When she started the project she was still living at home, but was just about to go into care. Her Social Worker referred her after Mandy said the

only thing she enjoyed doing was art. Throughout the first project Mandy grew in confidence, was particularly keen and attended sessions despite non-attendance at school, (from which she was subsequently excluded) and being constantly in trouble at the residential home. Towards the end of the project Mandy formed close relationships with project facilitators and often used the space to talk through personal issues and extreme unhappiness. Any information which was felt to put Mandy 'at risk ' was reported to her Social Worker.

Mandy is perceived to have benefited enormously from the project by her Social Worker and the staff at the residential home where she lived. Social workers commented, *'It was the only positive thing in her life.....it is the only link with the world outside the (residential) home.....it seems to be the only thing that she does that doesn't get her into trouble.'*

Mandy went on to participate in the subsequent project, *Platform* and she continued to blossom. At the end of the project she expressed a particular interest in taking part in other activities and, in the last year, she has been a volunteer for a children's Saturday Art club, acted as a summer holiday assistant for a children's exhibition, helped set up exhibitions, attended national conferences on Youth inclusion as well as developed her role as peer educator on subsequent projects. Throughout this work she has provided inspiration, offered continual commitment and creative energy. She has become more confident, communicative, helpful and patient with all participants. Her presence in the gallery has had a significant impact on all the staff



within the gallery team. Her personal aspirations have developed considerably: she now sees herself as having future prospects.

**Here, Mandy describes the experience in her own words.**

“

Before I started Activate my home life wasn't too good and also my schooling wasn't too good either. My schooling wasn't great because of family problems. Since my Mum passed away my family has fallen apart. I wasn't bad in school, it was just that I was treated horribly at home. I wouldn't show my anger at home because I didn't want to show my Dad that he had got the better of me. So I would take my anger out at school.

Before I started Activate I used to do art in my bedroom, the kind of art I did was stuff like glass painting and drawing. It was a bit naff in school because that's all they seemed to do whenever we did art. Before I started Activate I felt I had nothing going for the future. When I started I felt that I knew I would get something good out of it. I got involved because I thought that I would gain

more skills and be more confident. I knew I would make friends and by doing art I could express myself more. I used to visit galleries before I started Activate. I have always liked art galleries because the atmosphere was calm compared with home. I enjoy doing the projects because I am learning new skills such as video, photography and mask making. The projects are fun and I am meeting new people. I volunteer on the projects because I wanted to see what it was like to help organisers and the artists. It gave me more opportunity to pass on the skills that I have learnt. My life has changed because I can express myself more confidently and I have more of an idea about what I want to do as I get older - to work with children and art in some way. I might do a GNVQ in art. It has shown me how to chill, I am much more relaxed and well happier!”

”

## CHANGING LIVES 2

### **A personal perspective**

Jeremy Guy is more than aware of the stigma of mental health having spent periods of time in psychiatric hospital, in a supported living environment, attending day care centres and now working as a mental health worker supporting social interaction. Here, Jeremy talks about his mental health experiences and his involvement with several museum and gallery projects.





## Jeremy Guy

### A personal perspective

When I was very poorly I felt ashamed, withdrawn and I didn't like mixing with people. When you have been ill for a long period of time it is hard for people to relate to your experiences, you don't relate to them well either. I felt more relaxed with other users of mental health services; there is a sense of community, of some social interaction.

One project we did culminated in a Victorian Garden Party at one of the museums, it was a four week programme, we had to sign up for it all. We found out about life at the time and saw Victorian paintings and costumes. There was a great atmosphere at the garden party; it was funny, entertaining and you could relax and forget your problems. It wasn't just about having some good food and entertainment, it was about responsibility and commitment - you could only go to the garden party if you had attended the other sessions first, so it was about taking decisions and the consequences of those decisions.

One thing led to another, it is easy to get negative if you are not stimulated, so I got involved with a disability organisation called East Midlands Shape. This led to several gallery activities. I had more control over these, I moved out of being cared for, I felt more empowered, more in control, and very interested in the looking at contemporary art. I have been trying to convert my mum too!

I am also really interested in the cinema, and answered an advert for people to join a consultative group to represent the interests of people with disabilities. This led to me invited to join the Drawbridge disability consultative group at the Castle Museum. Here I learnt a huge amount about the workings of both the museum and of a group. I really learnt how you needed to be diplomatic. Being part of the Drawbridge Group made me feel responsible, staff listened and acted on your advice. It made me aware of my skills and abilities, it stretched me, and it pushed me to new things. I thought initially that I was out of my depth, but the group were very supportive, they realised that we all have skills in different ways - it was a real team approach. It made me feel good about myself!

When I was very ill I felt negative, I felt I had no future, no happiness. Now I am able to manage my illness, I am much more confident, I have much more self-esteem. It is easy just to chill out in a day care centre, but I am glad that I have pushed myself to experience new things. Now I work as a sessional worker supporting other users of mental health services, developing social interaction.

”

**CHANGING  
COMMUNITIES 1**

42

## **Regenerating Communities**

Elaine Samuel and Kevin Brown,  
outline the Methil Heritage Centre's  
approach to community development  
and its impact on those involved.



Methil Heritage Centre was set up seven years ago following the identification of Lower Methil by the Urban Aid programme as a priority area and following the introduction of a strategy for social regeneration, managed by Fife District Council. The Centre is now a branch of Fife Council Museums. The idea of establishing a museum was initially raised by an action group comprising local people who suggested that local pride might be fostered were a museum to be established in a derelict post house. Following the termination of the Urban Aid programme, however, the museum's guaranteed source of funding disappeared. It was at this point that Fife Council agreed to mainstream it into Council services. Though Methil Heritage Centre conforms to standards necessary for registration, it has always operated differently from most museums. Its main aim is to contribute to the regeneration of the area by meeting the needs of the local people.

### **Social inclusion strategies**

Methil Heritage Centre attempts to meet its social inclusion objectives by employing specific strategies. One strategy has been to mainstream social inclusion by involving the community in planning and decision making, rather than sidelining social inclusion to a specialist in outreach work. When the museum was first set up, for example, it sought to ensure that members of the Board were local residents and that they played a decisive role as to how it operates. New ways are constantly being sought to attract and sustain input from the local community, such as the establishment of The Friends of Methil Heritage Centre,

a group which is largely representative of the local community. This ensures that a second strategy, namely, that the museum building should not be the sole focus of museum services, is followed. Methil Heritage Centre has taken exhibitions out to pubs as well as community centres. Exhibitions have been welcomed by clients and publicans alike, and seen by people who have never set foot within a museum. Methil Heritage Centre's third strategy has been to enter into partnerships with other agencies.

### **Activities, partnership and social regeneration**

Partnerships have been crucial for running activities undertaken to promote social regeneration and for the success of these activities. Partnerships are entered into by the Centre on the grounds that the expertise of museum employees is not in community development. Because potential partners were unlikely to make the first move, however, it was invariably made by the museum. This was ultimately most rewarding. Successful projects undertaken by the Methil Heritage Centre rested upon successful partnership and, in the final analysis, successful partnerships depended on each being aware of their own and their partner's limits and potential. Examples of successful partnerships entered into by Methil Heritage Centre include:

**Trash Band** (in partnership with Fife Council's Department of Community Education) During the school holidays, young people in their teens were involved in making musical instruments out of rubbish to create a musical historical interpretation of Methil.

This involved them having to find out about their local history so as to ascertain the noises which they might have heard in times past, for example, coal being tipped into ship. The project provided participants with the opportunity to communicate with the older generation, to become aware of their historical surroundings, as well as to develop team work, new technical and personal skills, and musical interpretation.

**Photographic Project and Volunteering** (Proposed and planned in partnership with Fife Council of Volunteer Bureau). With the help of Fife Council of Volunteer Bureaux, volunteers are to be assigned to projects in Methil Heritage Centre, for example, projects relating to photographic exhibitions. Those involved will mainly be in their late teens to early 30s. FCVB will be providing the support which volunteers may need. Through their work in the museum, volunteers will have the opportunity to acquire a sense of their local history and identity, as well as skills. They will also be making a contribution towards a concrete end-product, namely, an exhibition displaying local history through photographs. The photographic exhibition is planned for display in the Centre and in the surrounding locality for 2001. This kind of activity may also encourage participants back into education. Indeed, the two Universities are showing a particular interest in the project for its potential to do so.

## Evaluation

Because of its commitment to taking exhibitions out of the museum building and into the community, Methil Heritage Centre had found the evaluation of its services to be quite difficult. The informational needs of Best Value are satisfied by counting heads. However, it was impossible to count the number of persons coming through the door when exhibitions are set up in pubs or libraries. It was not just a question of how many people were in the room, but of how many people were paying attention to the exhibition. We were also of the view that quantifiable indicators were able to provide little information as to the quality and impact of services. In some projects, large numbers were not involved, but those who were involved had never participated in a venture of this kind nor visited a museum before. Partners and collaborators were more often able to provide qualitative indicators of impact than museum officers, mainly because they had the expertise and the proximity to participants to do so. Indeed, it was this division of labour and specialisation between partners which Methil Heritage Centre found so valuable.

**CHANGING  
COMMUNITIES 2**

## **Regenerating Plymouth**



Museums may seem unlikely partners in the regeneration process. **Jo Loosemore** and **Nicola Moyle** reflect on the changing role and perceptions of Plymouth City Museum and its (sometimes unexpected) impact on the community.

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City Museums and  
Gallery. Photo by Chloe  
Howley, 2000.



Plymouth's maritime past of pilgrims, pirates and pilchards (!), often masks the city's more recent history. Wartime destruction, optimistic post-war planning and a dockyard in decline have ensured that Plymouth today is a city with very real social problems. A recent government survey calculated that three of the city's wards faced some of the worst poverty in the country. Social and economic deprivation now characterises much of Plymouth's urban geography in a deceptively idyllic rural landscape. Not surprisingly then, the city has sought and won funding, through several UK and European programmes, for the regeneration of its struggling communities.

Until 1997, the museum's concerns and priorities were undeniably inward looking. The establishment of an outreach post, as a direct result of local government reorganisation, enabled the museum to look beyond its own walls and into the local communities of the city. At a time of intense political change, accessibility and accountability became vital to the museum's work. At the same time, we also realised the opportunities of many of the regenerative initiatives in the city and how they might help us to realise some of our accessibility objectives. Consequently, over the past two years, Plymouth City Museum has become part of wider projects and programmes that have searched for and secured new funding. It has led us into partnerships with people and agencies unaware and distrustful of our role and purpose. It has also enabled us to realise the power of personalities and perceptions, and the importance of the political agenda. Drawing on our experiences from two projects, the Keyham Community

History project and the City Museum's participation in the bidding process by Devonport (a ward of Plymouth) for funding from the New Deal for Communities initiative, we describe some of the challenges we have encountered and the lessons we are learning.

### **Challenging cynicism and distrust**

Government funding demands community consultation and that people are themselves enabled to shape action in their own areas. Such ambitions are not helped by the considerable cynicism or 'funding fatigue' within the community that surrounds regeneration projects and the agencies that become involved. Regeneration may be a long-term process, but ironically it has always been led by project mentality. The ongoing cycle of 'new' funding initiatives and their associated acronyms (SRB, HAZ, NDC to name but a few) and the continuous efforts to pump-prime certain areas through the 'attractiveness' of deprivation have resulted in communities cynical of regeneration and its promises. Empowering communities, in areas previously deprived of decision-making power and experience is clearly a challenge but one which the museum played an important part.

Just as there is a distrust of the process, there is, understandably perhaps, also a distrust of any new partners that become involved. In Plymouth, the perception of museums as neither natural nor useful partners only adds to local scepticism of organisations hungry for a piece of the regeneration pie. Museums are not seen as committed or convincing community

players, and, with history/culture playing only a secondary part in regeneration in the south-west, Plymouth City Museum's involvement was regarded (at least initially) with distrust. There was an assumption that the City Museum was using the regeneration process to seek funding to boost our ongoing, yet ailing services. Perseverance, commitment and persuasion have challenged this perception to a degree, but the problem is pervasive.

### **Being in the right place at the right time....**

Project work in Keyham linked the museum more by accident than strategic design, with local Single Regeneration Bid (SRB) agencies on the search for little more than a few historic photos to decorate their offices. This limited ambition resulted in local history sessions for a tenants' group, (working with Groundwork to develop an area of land in keeping with the history of the site), and an active community history group. The latter was encouraged through weekly reminiscence work to develop their own exhibition and to tour it through the locality with themselves as 'community curators' and interpreters. Contributing to regeneration often happens by chance and through choice. The challenge is to ensure that opportunities can be created and within the Museum's broader strategic framework. 'Accidental' projects can always be used to raise a greater awareness of the role that the museum can play in the regeneration of communities.

### **Impact on the community**

It seems that there are few known outcomes at the start of the regeneration process. It is, then, for the museum to find itself a role within that ongoing process of change and consultation. For the SRB programme, the museum initially offered 'traditional' support in the form of collections and exhibition expertise but, by accident, found a more significant role in the process. We developed and supported a team of 'community curators' who, in time, became surprised by their own self-sufficiency. Neither they nor the museum could have anticipated or predicted their achievements. Equally, our work with the community has generated an enthusiasm which provides the everyday community history service, within the community, which the museum alone cannot actively sustain. As well as lessons about local ownership, these 'community curators' also taught us about language. The group never saw themselves or their activities as part of a 'regeneration' nor 'social inclusion' process. They are just local people with an interest, and an active role to play, in their local area; its working past, its political present and its unforeseeable future.

At a policy level, the City Museum has also had an impact on a community engaged in its regeneration. Our participation in the New Deal for Communities process has enabled us to contribute to the cultural ambitions of the Devonport area. As such, we have worked with local people to develop a ten year programme of cultural planning affecting the built environment, community collecting and historical resources.

## Impact on the museum

The City Museum's work in regeneration has also had a real impact on the museum itself. This has been shown in a change in the perceptions of the museum in the community. The projects we have been involved in have raised our profile throughout Plymouth. Our involvement has given confidence to those who distrusted or were sceptical of the City Museum's motives. As a result the City Museum is now seen as an acceptable advisor on culture, historical resources and community working. We are used as a community liaison for reaching other council departments. Our willingness to be a partner in the process has meant that we are no longer sidelined and now included in regeneration planning.

Being part of the process has also gone some way to changing the perception of the City Museum within departments of the City Council. Although local government re-organisation placed the museum within the department of Community Leisure and Learning, it is regeneration that has placed us with bigger players such as Social Services, Housing and Economic Development.

Perceptions may be changing, but what has been the impact of this kind of work on our own perceptions of our role and meaning? Undoubtedly local engagement has increased our opportunities for meaningful community contact and collecting. This has helped us to raise the profile of local history in our own exhibition programmes and service delivery. Local history has changed and has a much greater sense of people and

place. We find ourselves in the role of advisor to other history resource providers (libraries and archives) on community engagement.

For museums, regeneration can seem highly complex and demanding.. Becoming involved can seem daunting but by committing ourselves to the demands and uncertainties of the process we have begun to position ourselves as both a natural and necessary partner.



**CHANGING  
COMMUNITIES 3**



## **Neighbourhood Renewal**

*Sue Wilkinson reports on recent research into the role that museums and galleries can play in Neighbourhood Renewal initiatives.*

The Neighbourhood Renewal agenda shares some of the characteristics of the social inclusion agenda and often means working with the same or similar groups of people. However Neighbourhood Renewal focuses more on communities in specific locations and is more closely linked to urban regeneration.

### **Policy developments**

In 1998 the Government's Social Exclusion Unit published a report on neighbourhood renewal. As a result of that report, 17 Policy Action Teams (PATs) were established to look, in an integrated way at the problems of poor neighbourhoods. Policy Action Team 10 (PAT10) was established to look specifically at best practice in using the arts, sport and leisure to engage people in poor neighbourhoods and at ways of maximising the impact on poor neighbourhoods of government spending and policies in the arts, sports and leisure. The report stated that arts and sport can contribute to neighbourhood renewal and make a real contribution to combating disadvantage in deprived communities; in particular in combating poor health, high crime, unemployment and low educational attainment. The report presented a wealth of evidence to illustrate ways in which this is currently being done but there were very few specific mentions of galleries or museums in the report.

In April 2000 the Social Exclusion Unit published a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: a framework for consultation which drew together all the work which had been done by the Policy Action Teams

and invited feedback from people involved with deprived neighbourhoods. The report looked at the imperatives for regeneration and identified two of these as 'reviving and empowering the community', and 'improving key public services'. In response, Resource, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries commissioned research to look at Neighbourhood Renewal issues from the perspective of the organisations and agencies working in this area, communities, users and potential partners. The aim of the research was to establish the role museums, archives and libraries can play in Neighbourhood Renewal and to look for models of good practice and guidelines for developing work in this area.

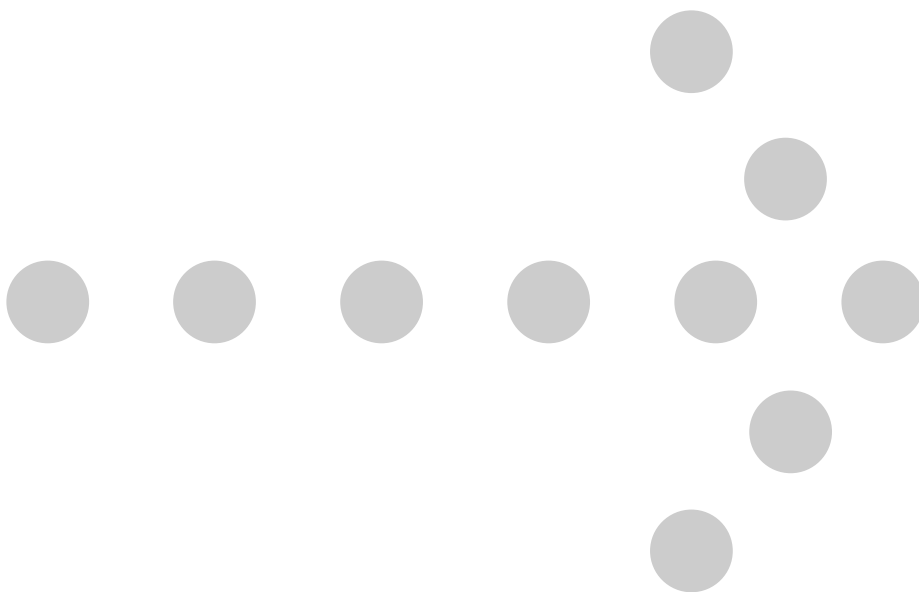
### **The potential of museums and galleries**

The research has made it clear that museums, archives and libraries do have a role to play in neighbourhood renewal and urban regeneration but that this is not something which they can do on their own. There is clearly an enormous amount of work to be done if the role of museums, archives and libraries is to be developed, to be sustainable and to be recognised. Even the terminology still needs to be clearly established. The terms inclusion, exclusion and neighbourhood renewal mean very different things to different organisations and are used in very different ways.

The research has identified the excellent work which can be done by museums, archives and libraries, the impact it can have on communities (though more needs to be done in this area), the critical success factors involved in developing work in this area, the areas which

are currently underdeveloped and the need for museums, archives and libraries to communicate what they can and cannot do to potential partnering organisations. The research has demonstrated a high potential for partnerships with organisations and agencies that do not or have not used museums, archives or libraries in the past but this has been accompanied by a degree of uncertainty about the role they might play in the process.

Where projects are most successful it seems is where social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal have been tackled together and where the museum, archive or library has been involved from the earliest stage. Pre-project planning has been identified as critical as has community involvement, partnerships, sustainability and funding. It is clear that museums, archives and libraries have a powerful role to play in bringing people together, in developing their self-confidence and self-esteem, both as individuals and as communities. However, in order to develop this work, museums, archives and libraries need to understand more about the organisations involved in neighbourhood renewal - their objectives, and working practises and the way in which these mesh with their own. Museums' and galleries' involvement in Neighbourhood renewal is not about becoming social workers but it is about using collections and resources to support social agendas for the public good.





**CHANGING SOCIETY 1**

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## **Changing Attitudes - in conversation with Alison Lapper**

**Alison Lapper**, artist, talks about her experiences of both exhibiting in and visiting museums and galleries and reflects upon their potential to challenge people's views of disability and disabled people.



“

“My work reflects and responds to other people’s attitude to me. I hope to question and change society’s ideas about physical beauty, normality, disability and sexuality. As a disabled person, I am generally perceived as ugly, sexless, inert, helpless and miserable.

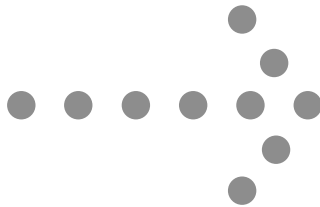
I know I am not.

My work gives me the opportunity to represent myself to the world on my own terms...”

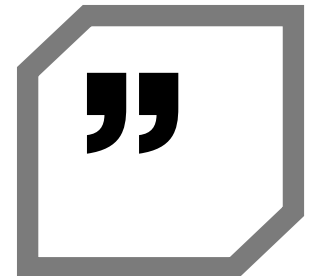
There is a general disinterest in the achievement of people with a disability. Disability is not mainstream and is deemed unfashionable in many arenas, not least museums and galleries. Museums and galleries can be very negative places - places that, rather than representing disabled people within the mainstream, so often marginalise their work and the issues that they explore. Sometimes, they have the potential to make you feel like a freak - I went to an exhibition at a major London arts institution and, in a gallery with a warning over the door saying ‘18 years old and over only’ I found a series of paintings of limbless people, people like myself and my reaction was, ‘What the fuck is this?’. It put me and many others back into the circus ring to be ridiculed as freaks, to be stared at in amazement. It felt obscene.

And yet, museums are potentially very powerful places that can expose people to the issues around disability and can represent disabled people within the mainstream. The potential for this to challenge people’s views is immense. Whilst working on a recent exhibition I was in the gallery when a group of pretty robust, straight-talking children came in and we got into a conversation. They wanted to know how I got dressed, what it was like being a mum with no arms, they were inquisitive and accepting, they wanted to use their feet as I do. It was spontaneous and accidental but it seemed to me what this is all about - it was about difference, about diversity about my disability, my life.

”



“These photographs show myself and my son Parys on land. Here I need a pair of hands to hold him, hold him to me, to do all the things I cannot do with him myself or that he is too young to do himself... our relationship is dependent on having ‘a pair of hands’ and the picture reflects this dependency”



Queen Park Studios, Bob Opray



CHANGING SOCIETY 2

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## The Holocaust Exhibition

**Suzanne Bardgett**'s experiences of working on the Holocaust Exhibition Project reveals the powerful potential of collections and displays to not only inform and educate but to challenge, to move and to encourage reflection on intolerance.

In June 2000 the Imperial War Museum opened its major contribution to Millennium year - a £5 million permanent exhibition on the Holocaust, installed on two floors of a major extension to its building. Since that date nearly 200,000 people have visited it.

For the team who worked on this four-year project, and the many survivors, historians and others who contributed in various ways, the press reviews of the Exhibition were hugely rewarding. 'Tireless searching for artefacts, relics and film,' wrote one, 'has given us something which takes at least two hours to examine properly and, I suspect, will stay in the memory for ever.' Jeremy Isaacs, whose *World at War* series brought the Holocaust to a mass audience in the 1970s, wrote: 'London, ahead of other European cities, has a new resource for understanding the world'.

The Exhibition posed difficult challenges and was, in many ways, new territory for the Museum - it was the first time that we had documented a genocide. We had to tread especially carefully as regards historical interpretation, and be sensitive to the memory of those who had suffered, and their relatives' continuing sense of injury and loss. More than with many other subjects, it was important to look not just at *what* happened but at *why*, and this involved investigating several abstract phenomena - extreme nationalistic ideology, the obsession with race science, and the social coercion which helped to produce a climate in which mass murder would eventually take place. Not easy notions to depict.

The Exhibition's primary aim was to give a factual narrative account of the Holocaust. Our approach would be deliberately straightforward, aiming to make visitors *think*, rather than tell them how to *feel*. The basic facts of what happened, illustrated with photographs, film and artefacts would, we felt, move the visitor. No theatricality or embellishment would be needed.

So, what does the Exhibition have to say about social inclusion? In documenting the very extreme instance of the thoroughly *exclusionist* society moulded and promoted by the Nazi regime, it provides a chilling factual account of what happened in a European state just over sixty years ago. It documents, moreover, the ease with which, when democracy fails, ideologically driven social policies can not only ostracise but, in extreme circumstances, kill.

The theme of prejudice and exclusion occupies much of the Exhibition's top floor, where events in Germany from 1918 to 1939 are portrayed. A six-minute film reviews the history of antisemitism through the ages, showing how the Nazis were able to build on a deep, pre-existing seam of anti-Jewish feeling. The Nazis' 'Utopian' notion of building a pure Aryan race to carry the German nation forward to a brighter future is featured with a poster showing the ideal German mother, and the medal awarded to mothers who produced eight children for the Fatherland illustrates how the Nazis gave incentives to procure - but only to those 'of the right type'. Those of the *wrong* type - like sixteen year old Anna V, a 'wayward' girl charged with promiscuous behaviour and delinquency - were forcibly sterilised.

ONCE IN  
A WHILE,  
SOMEONE  
INVENTS A  
PRODUCT THAT  
CHANGES  
PEOPLE'S  
LIVES.



© 2000  
[Illegible text]

Gypsies were systematically measured and documented by so-called race scientists. Our section on the Racial State depicts these and other groups - such as the children of German women who had married French colonial troops stationed in the Rhineland in the 1920s - who were ostracised and pilloried.

The extreme inhumanity of Nazi social policy was brought home to me forcibly when I was looking at film with a view to deciding on a possible programme for this section which would illustrate efforts to purify the German race. The propaganda films put out by the Nazi regime were quite blatant in their portrayal of the mentally ill and physically disabled as a drain on the public purse, and one particular production, *Victims of the Past*, is quite appalling in the intrusive and derisory way in which the cameraman films the inmates of an asylum. A friend in the social care sector was at the same time devising a programme for a London borough's social services department to ensure the fullest possible consultation with clients with learning difficulties as regards their housing and care. It seemed scarcely possible that both outlooks belonged to this century.

From video-ed testimony shown on monitors, the visitor learns at first hand what it was like to be on the receiving end of Nazi persecution. The Exhibition features some eighteen Holocaust survivors - witnesses whose testimony of their own experiences punctuates the narrative from the 1920s through to 1945. Thus, in the opening film, Ruth Foster remembers how, in the 1920s, her family were completely integrated in the

society: 'We were one of them'. Several sections later she is remembering her school days and how the headmistress brought big display boards with anti-semitic caricatures into the school to give the pupils a lesson in 'the peril of the Jews'. Ruth remembers a brave friend of hers who got up and said 'But Ruth Heilbron doesn't look like that - nor do the other people in this town'.

At the point in our narrative where the Second World War breaks out, the visitor descends a staircase which takes them, literally and metaphorically, down into the abyss of occupied Europe. More sinister measures are depicted as Jews are literally marked out with the Yellow Star, and the non-Jewish population fed pernicious propaganda linking the Jews with lice and disease.

At the end of the Exhibition, visitors sit in an oval shaped, wooden-walled room in which the survivor-witnesses deliver their thoughts on what the Holocaust can teach us for the future. One of them is Kitty Hart-Moxon, who survived Auschwitz Birkenau and worked in the Canada commando for many months - a witness to the arrival at Auschwitz of thousands of Jews. She has little optimism for the future, feeling that lessons have not been learned. 'Whether you're black or white,' she says, 'whether you're a Christian or whether you're a Jew, or a Moslem, what happened to me could in future happen to you.'



# opportunity to learn

"Do we ever learn? I believe we can,  
but we must want to. Sometimes it is  
only when evil or tragedy touches us

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"I am leaving this stunning exhibition a  
different person from when I came in.

personally, that we take the  
opportunity to learn. Perhaps this  
exhibition will allow us to learn from

Everyone should visit it. May the souls of  
these dear people who suffered so much

"Hopefully my children will  
never be prejudiced against  
another race or colour."

the pain of others. For that reason, it  
should be a permanent reminder of  
all our pasts - a warning."

now rest in peace and may we learn to live  
in LOVE for one another whatever race or  
creed."

**(extracts from visitor comments cards)**

It has been gratifying to see that as well as the general public the Holocaust Exhibition is attracting the attention of professional groups with an interest in combating racism. A major new police initiative in the London Borough of Southwark aimed at eradicating race hate crime was launched at the Museum a few weeks ago with the Holocaust Exhibition's message of combating racial prejudice firmly to the fore.

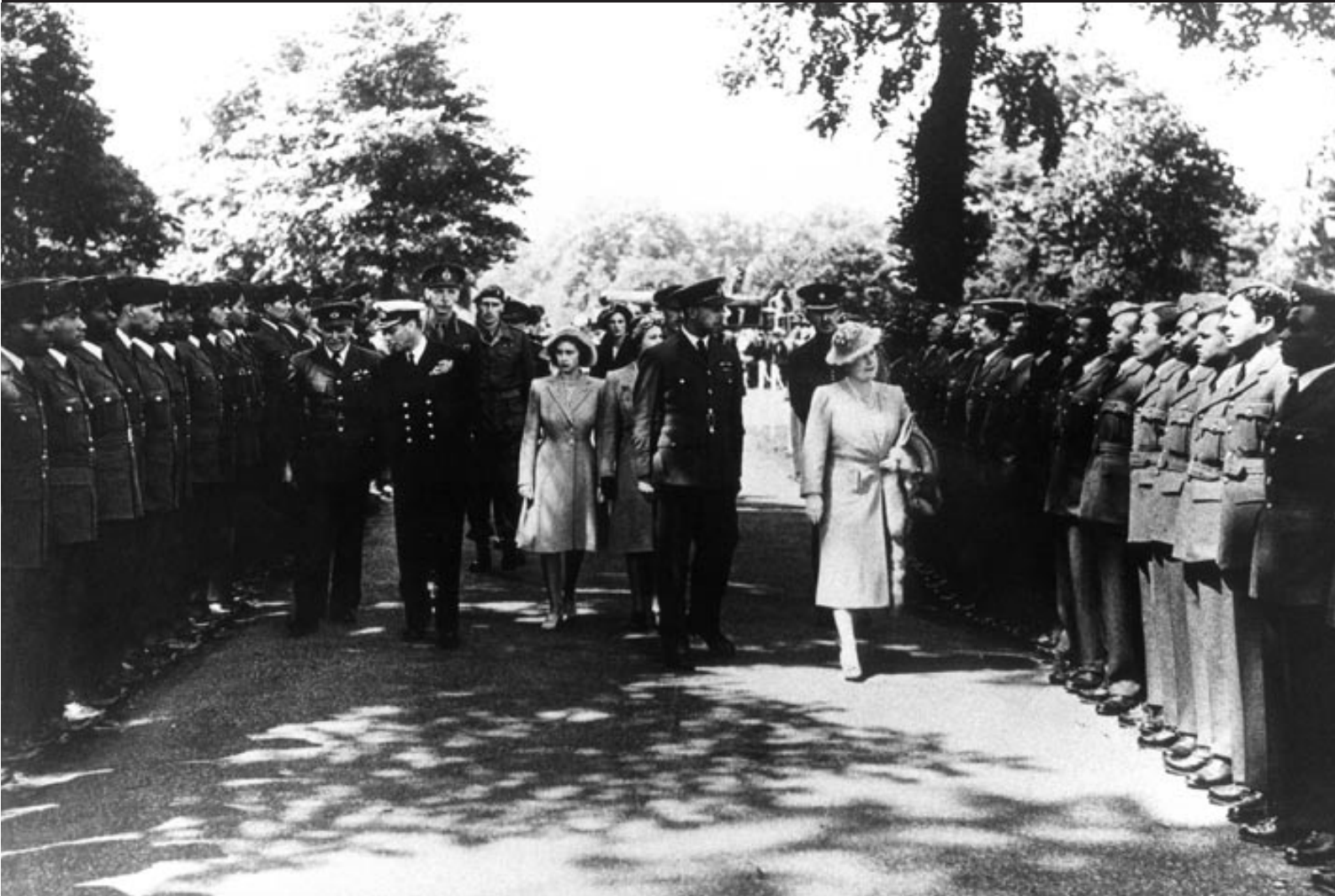
We learn quite a lot about how visitors respond to the Exhibition from the comments cards which they are invited to write on at the end. Many comment that they thought they knew the subject but that this had taught them more. Others praise the bravery of the witnesses for sharing their terrible experiences. Some make the point that the world continues to stand by while mass murder takes place. But the most commonly shared reaction is one of hope that such an event will not recur, and that tolerance and fighting prejudice are surely the only ways to ensure this.

CHANGING SOCIETY 3

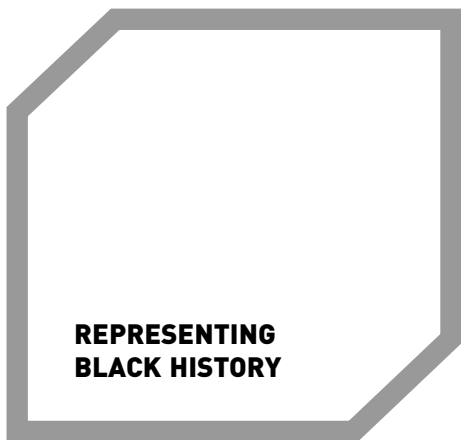
## Representing Black History



**Lola Young** explains the reasons behind the establishment of a new project that tackles the invisibility and misrepresentation of black cultural heritage, and makes a case for rethinking attitudes towards black history within the wider cultural sector.



Taken circa 1945, Hyde Park. The Royal Family and senior officers of the Army and RAF's visit to a Caribbean Airforce Contingency. Despite extensive research, the copyright remains unknown. It is not listed in the Imperial War Museum, London. If you have any information relating to the photograph, please contact Archives and Museum of Black Heritage. Tel: 0207 326 4154.



In 1981, a group of concerned black people met to discuss the lack of historical documentation and social data relating to black experiences in Britain. The impetus to act originated from the experiences of black diaspora peoples who felt that the absence of verifiable evidence of a continuous historical presence in Britain and the lack of a sense of belonging, contributed towards a feeling of alienation from society amongst young black people in particular. This sense of alienation militated against a commitment to wider community interests. The group consisted of educationalists, writers and other interested individuals and they were instrumental in setting up the African Peoples' Historical Monument Foundation whose remit was to establish a repository for artefacts, letters and other documents, photographs and so on, under the auspices of the Black Cultural Archives (BCA). Their aim was eventually to establish a purpose built museum and archive in Brixton because of its historic links to black communities. This aim is still the main

impetus to involvement with the Archives and Museum of Black Heritage (AMBH) project.

Black Cultural Archives' current collection is of national importance since it contains the largest specialist collection of records relating to black heritage and history in the country. Existing heritage assets consist of objects, artefacts, video and audio tapes, and documents and other forms of evidence of black Britain's richly diverse heritage.

#### **Aims of AMBH**

AMBH has a national remit and is dedicated to the documentation, preservation and dissemination of materials concerning the history and culture of black people who, at one time or another, have been based in Britain. This pioneering heritage development will make explicit the links between the descendants of the Windrush settlers and their predecessors who came to Britain over 500 years before them.

The aims of the AMBH are as follows:

- to catalogue and conserve those artefacts, memorabilia and documents which reveal and attest to the history of the black presence in Britain from 16th century (or earlier) to the present
- to make the resources of the BCA and AMBH available and accessible to as wide an audience as possible to disseminate information on the history and culture of black people in Britain nationally and internationally

The project has several different strands including the location and identification of relevant museum collections, and archives around Britain and the provision of information about such holdings to interested researchers and the general public and the implementation of an extensive outreach and education programme in schools, community groups and other organisations across the country. Educational materials will also be developed which will reach primary and secondary schools in England, Scotland and Wales, as well as inputs into further and higher education institutions.

### **Looking Forward**

AMBH has set ambitious targets and aims to contribute to the development of the rapidly emerging 'black heritage' sector in Britain. Our sense is that this is the right moment to be embarking on such a project with the level of interest in the subject area rising. There are, of course pitfalls - trying to take on too much, high expectations on the part of users, funders and policy-makers to name but a few. AMBH and similar projects should be viewed as the beginning of a long journey toward awareness, knowledge and respect for, and engagement with Britain's richly diverse past.

It is clear that there is little by way of an adequately resourced infrastructure of black organizations and individuals to support this kind of project and it is essential that such resources are developed. It is also imperative to shape and develop a wider supportive environment within which AMBH and other projects

such as the Black and Asian Archives Working Party, the Black Environment Network, and the George Padmore Institute can flourish. Policy-makers and funders across all the domains in the heritage sector must find ways of being more responsive, and more pro-active and flexible as work develops in this area, otherwise the project of recognising and documenting the contribution that all diaspora peoples have made to Britain will be finished before it has properly started. The initial investment in AMBH is a positive signal but the really hard work is just beginning.

CHANGING SOCIETY 4

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## Inclusion and Northern Ireland

Social inclusion will present different challenges and opportunities for different museums in different social contexts.

**Elizabeth Crooke** considers the implications for Northern Ireland's museums.



The social inclusion debate, which has gathered so much force in the museum sector in England, has provided an opportunity to think deeply about the purpose of museums. The development of such debate is essential for those working in museums in Northern Ireland where, given the political context, the purpose of exploring history and identity has been linked to building community and fostering peace. When thinking about social inclusion in relation to Northern Ireland it is important to consider how the context adds a different meaning to the language, and the perceived purpose of social inclusion, and how social inclusion will fit in with other community work already well established. These aspects bring us to questions about what museums in Northern Ireland can contribute to building peace, as it is the lack of such understanding that creates the most significant barriers.

A major part of the social inclusion agenda, as we are familiar with it in Britain, is about developing a sense of community. It is about giving those who feel disenfranchised, maybe because of disability, race, low earnings, unemployment, or lack of education, an opportunity to belong, achieve and build confidence. Northern Ireland has similar social problems to anywhere else in the UK; however, the divisions linked to the Northern Ireland troubles complicate these issues. For instance, some of the factors used to define social exclusion in England (such as unemployment and poor housing) have long been associated with political agendas in Northern Ireland. As a result of this history, adoption of the language of

social inclusion, (such 'social justice' used in title of the recent Scottish Museums Council Report) may well have divisive connotations in Northern Ireland and need careful thought. It is important to think, therefore, of the shifts in what language signifies as it moves from one place to another.

One should not only consider the impact on Northern Ireland as a receiver of social inclusion policies, but also of how the Northern Ireland context will change social inclusion as a practical tool. For the moment at least, social inclusion in Northern Ireland will require different and additional work to that elsewhere. In Northern Ireland social inclusion is closely allied with community-relations work. For instance, under the label of 'targeting social need' the Northern Ireland Museums Council has introduced a pilot training scheme with the aim to widen access to museums by developing community-relations skills amongst museum curators. This scheme is being funded through the European Peace and Reconciliation Fund. In the Ulster Museum the same fund, administered by the Community Relations Council, finances the post of an Outreach Officer. Through this post, the museum has established links with a number of cross-community groups in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland social inclusion related work can draw on already well-established initiatives led by the Community Relations Council (CRC) or the scheme, Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU). Programmes linked to both CRC and EMU have in the past used museums, and sites of historical



significance, as spaces to explore the meaning of culture and the expression of identities. For instance, cross-community school visits have been arranged to museums and CRC have supported workshops on identity issues. One only needs to glance through the various CRC newsletters to get a sense of the range of programmes that have been developed in cross-community arts, theatre and sport. In contrast, only a few museums are quite so engaged. In most of the CRC and EMU initiatives Northern Ireland's museums have adopted a more passive role, predominantly by providing a venue, and what some have described as a 'neutral space'.

The idea of a museum as a neutral space is a notion that will sit uneasily with many, and it is one of the many issues that need to be debated in the Northern Ireland museum sector. Indeed, this point reflects a general need to consider the purpose of museums in Northern Ireland. For instance, there has been little open discussion about what role Northern Ireland museums can contribute, if anything, to the peace process. The museum sector, which has such an important role in the representation of people in Northern Ireland, has, in general, played a passive role where debate about cultural and political identities is concerned. The Social History Curators Group Annual Study Weekend theme 'Can History Heal?', held in Belfast June 1999, was one such occasion when the issue of museums' contributions to cross-community work was debated. However, in the report of a one-day consultative workshop with museum and heritage

providers, hosted by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and held in April 2000, discussion of social inclusion or community work did not have a high profile. These were two very different forums, so maybe the difference in issues considered is understandable. However, on a deeper level, the peace process is fragile and maybe we are not all ready or equipped to debate it openly.

This is not to say that there have not have been any museum initiatives that have considered the troubles or identity formation in Northern Ireland. An exhibition on the subject of symbols was mounted by CRC in 1994-5. The Northern Ireland Regional Curators Group developed an exhibition titled *Local Identities*, which toured in 2000. The Ulster Museum is currently running an exhibition titled *Icons*, which considers the myths surrounding a selection of symbols in Northern Ireland and the museum has developed a touring exhibition *War and Conflict in Twentieth Century Ireland*. The impact of these initiatives is undiscovered. As yet, little qualitative analysis of the visitor profile to Northern Ireland museums has been undertaken, and none published. Many working in the museum sector would like to know more about who are visiting their museums and why certain people are not coming. We are still to discover what perceptions Northern Ireland people have of the region's museums and the message they are portraying. For instance, there have been suggestions that some museums are avoided because of a political position they are perceived to represent; this view is yet to be qualified.

# NEWS LETTER

*Irish*  
to *Irish*  
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*Saturday* **LIFE**

*Jane Fonda:  
finally learning  
to take it easy*

STARTS ON PAGE 18



**Farming Life**

**FREE INSIDE:**  
Ulster's top farming  
newspaper

**Free on MONDAY**

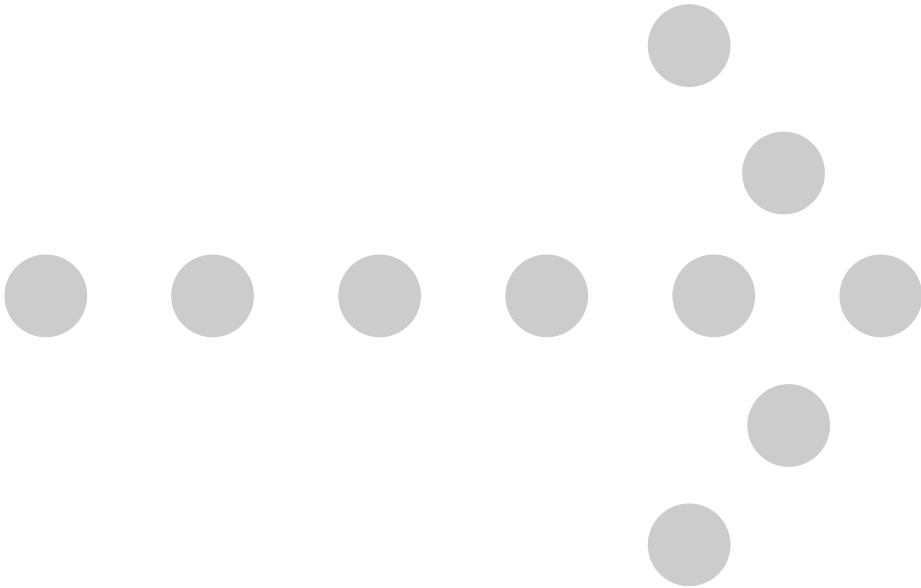
**SPORTS  
ULSTER**

A roundup of the  
weekend action

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# MUSEUM WAR OVER IRA GUN

The opportunity for development in the museum sector is here. The establishment of a Northern Ireland Executive brings new possibilities which are being felt in every sector, including schools, hospitals, and museums. Management of the heritage sector is now the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, which has recently launched its first Corporate Strategy. In the foreword the Minister introduces the aim of the Department: 'by fostering creativity and giving individuals a sense of identity we can make a positive contribution to the overall confidence of our community that helps build a climate of understanding and peace'. It is important in the first instance for museums to be provided with the resources for audience development. With these in place, the potential will be there to trigger the much-needed debate about the role of museums in Northern Ireland and to investigate whether museums are achieving their objectives.



# chapter three

CHALLENGING PRACTICES



CHAPTER **THREE**

# CHALLENGING PRACTICES

In many galleries and museums, relationships with audiences are taking on different forms; forms that require new ways of working to respond to the challenges presented by inclusion.

For example, museums are articulating new aims, often developed in collaboration with new partner agencies working in the social sector. Where previously, they have been accustomed to developing aims and objectives in isolation, hidden from view and with the authority they perhaps believed they had as experts, museums are increasingly identifying aims that overlap with those of other organisations outside the cultural

sector and to recognise the benefits of doing so. There is increasing recognition of a responsibility to audiences that can take several forms. Museums that, for example, develop a relationship with a particular community, are increasingly concerned with the need to sustain that relationship rather than raise, and then fail to meet audience expectations. There is also recognition that organisations have a responsibility when confronting what might be emotive and personal issues within the gallery environment. Museums can evoke powerful emotions in some visitors - fear, distress, and painful memories - personal responses that cannot be exposed and then ignored.

In recent years the sector has developed new approaches to, and understandings of, access. Galleries and museums are increasingly interested in new audiences and look for opportunities within projects that will allow them to reach them. This has required us to better understand who visits, who doesn't and why. Considerable attention has been given to the identification and understanding of the many and varied barriers to museum visiting and to develop ways of creating access to overcome these. Access is now much more broadly understood to encompass the removal of, not only physical, but also intellectual, emotional, financial and cultural barriers.

These new challenges demand that audiences, many of which have previously been disenfranchised from the museum, are not only consulted but also empowered to take an active role in decision-making within the museum

Perhaps above all, we can identify an openness to new ways of working, a willingness to interrogate traditional working practices and a commitment to developing more responsive, flexible, approaches. Some organisations are discovering that the issues that are prioritised within a traditional museum agenda are, for many audiences of little relevance and interest. As a consequence, museums and galleries are exploring alternative ways of engaging with audiences - ways that began with their lives, their interests and their concerns.

Conventional relationships between galleries, museums and their audiences are changing. The traditional, authoritative, and elitist model of the museum is increasingly unstable. Today, museums and galleries are beginning to see themselves within a bigger picture and recognise their potential to engage with issues previously perceived as irrelevant. New relationships are emerging - relationships based on active participation, mutual understanding and shared decision-making with audiences.

In this chapter, some of these key issues that are influencing new professional practice are explored.

**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 1**



**Museums and the  
health of a community  
- in conversation with  
Dr Michael Varnam, GP**

Can museums really make a difference to the health of a community and, if so, through what means?



“

Let's take the example of the *Sexwise* project - collaboration between at the Castle Museum and the Health Authority in Nottingham - which focused on teenage pregnancy. An important part of the project involved the teenagers themselves making a video about the reality of teenage pregnancy. They were obviously enthusiastic, they learnt a lot through participating in that project and their experience has undoubtedly influenced them. *Sexwise* also worked brilliantly with the schools. We use the project as a model of good practice for health promotion in schools.

What I am less certain of is the impact of the resulting exhibition and what effect, if any, it really has on exhibition goers? Is it likely to change personal habits? The teenagers who are likely to become teenage parents are not the people who are likely to either visit the exhibition, or be influenced by it. What it does do is expose

the rest of the population to this important issue and the fact that levels of teenage pregnancy in Nottingham are so high. It raises awareness in parents and gives them access to the knowledge they need to have

I think the exhibition Brenda and other stories (of artists' work dealing with HIV and AIDS) played a really important role in informing the population about a serious condition that they need to know about and need to understand. They need to understand because they need to know why society needs to spend so much money on HIV and they need to understand what their children might do - it is about informing people about how it is transmitted, it is about adult education. People need to own their own health, otherwise they will not do what is necessary to improve it and I think museums can play a part in engendering this ownership.

**How can museums  
best contribute to health agendas?**

The GP's prescription pad is not really the answer to many of the health issues in an area like this (the practice is located in Sneinton, an inner city area of significant deprivation). Health, needs to position itself in relation to community needs. Communities like Sneinton have concerns, for example, around crime, especially crime based around drugs. Anxiety around crime has a knock on impact on peoples' health. The prescription pad can mask that anxiety with drugs, but to create real solutions, we need to adopt a multi-agency approach. The police, the voluntary sector.. everyone needs to be part of it. So, this health centre that I operate from has been changing and becoming a one-stop shop - you can get housing advice, welfare rights and anti natal care as well as see the Doctor. It would be a great place to have a painting from the museum, to have exhibitions, to have museum-led activities. The health centre needs to be more than just a place where clinical techniques

magically restore good health. Museums have a role to play not only in raising health issues through exhibitions and outreach activities, but being part of a multi agency approach.

Compartmentalising health issues, education issues, policing issues will not create answers. Employment, education, culture, environmental and economic issues all have important roles to play in reducing health inequalities.

We need to convince more Doctors of the benefits of looking for solutions beyond the prescription pad. Some of the most conservative elements in the health sector are doctors and conservative doctors will only be led by less conservative ones. Museums need to become more connected and involved with their communities and be prepared to work alongside education, social and health workers. Museums need to become more political and need to be visionary and prepared to take risks if they are to work with the health agenda.





The overnight bag, a dose of pharmaceutical art made using contraceptive pills by textile artist Susie Freedman in collaboration with Dr Liz Lee, part of the Sexwise exhibition.

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**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 2**

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## **Collections Management and Inclusion**



In what ways can those staff concerned with the management and care of collections contribute to inclusion?

**Amanda Wallace**, reflects on the opportunities and challenges facing the collection management function

Despite rapidly changing attitudes towards the social role and responsibility of museums over the last few decades, much museum activity continues to revolve around the creation, management and use of the collection resource. And yet collections management practices have remained largely impervious to the challenges presented by social inclusion. Much of the success in contributing towards inclusion within museums has been led by those staff responsible for people-focused services though in many instances, collection management has constrained rather than enabled this work (It is deeply ironic, for example, that museum educators, whose work is heavily based on the concept of learning from objects, often have little access to core collections).

Museum and gallery collections are a historical resource created and maintained with a view to the needs of future users. Collection management then retains a foot in the past, as well as maintaining an eye to the future. Within this context it is easy to overlook the needs of the present and to construct barriers to inclusive practice. Issues around importance, significance and value are dominant in collection development, but audiences are seldom so clearly defined and their needs and attitudes rarely considered.

Collection Management has traditionally been seen as a neutral activity. However, the accumulation of knowledge, information and tangible things, and the shaping of that collection resource, is neither impartial nor objective - in practice it can often be deeply exclusive. Much of this exclusivity stems from the

historical development of museum specialisms, a blinkered and narrow approach to collecting and classification, and the lack of meaningful links between discreet collection areas, all of which are reflected traditional in entrenched systems and working practices. Much also originates from our attitudes towards that which makes museums distinct and important - the value and power of the 'real thing'. We like to think that objects can speak for themselves but, aesthetic or immediate personal associations excepted, unless an object has context and meaning, it speaks a language that most people cannot understand.

So, deciding what is 'worthy' of acquisition, what is important about objects, and how that importance is recorded and accessed- can never be a neutral or impartial activity. Such decisions are shaped by the agendas of particular individuals and groups within museums and this must be recognised if collection management is to develop a more inclusive way of working.

How then, might we be encouraged to rethink collections management in relation to inclusion agendas? How can the needs of users be built into the process from the beginning to ensure a smooth transition from collection management to collection use? How can inclusive practices be developed in the key areas of collection management - collecting, documenting and access.

14

\*id NCM 1968-43=44, 45, 46

\*part (a) candlesticks (b) wax pans

\*ident#sn CANDLESTICKS /SET OF 4

\*shic 2.32i

\*desc#m silver

\*dt each with a detachable square wax pan and a vase shaped sconce chased with spiral ribbing; the shaft as a standing figure of a naked negro, the left arm upraised to the sconce, the right arm resting on the draped hip, on a stepped square base with gadrooned border, embossed with 2 asymmetrical cartouches, one with supporters as Caribs with feathered head-dresses, standing on a vacant motto scroll, and surmounted by 2 palm trees; the other cartouche is flanked by 2 flags and rests on a trophy of anchors, cannon-balls, weapons and flowers, engraved at a later date with an armorial crest.

Fully marked on the undersides of the bases; standard mark on the wax pans.

\*dd 324 mm.

\*dt excellent ; complete

\*prod maker

\*pers Cripps /William

\*loc London

\*d 1757 = 1758

\*assoc collection of

\*pers Gostling /George, (Proctor to the Adair

\*note left to his grandson

\*assoc collection of

\*pers Gostling /The Revd. John Whalley

\*loc Whitton Park + Middlesex

\*note left to his only child and heiress

\*assoc collection of

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Galleries.

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A new exhibition, Every Object Tells a Story, seeks to reinterpret the candlesticks. The text panel now reads: "The silver candlesticks have been displayed in the museum since 1968 as purely decorative objects. Made in 1757 at the height of the slave trade, they depict African slaves, yet this provocative subject was neither acknowledged nor interpreted. Video makers Dan Saul and Joules Ayodeji explore the wider history of the candlesticks. Take a closer look..."



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## Collecting

Collecting, the first stage of collections management, is of course, key to the long-term future of museums. For the most part, collecting policies have evolved in an insular way, shaped largely by personal, curatorial bias often with little regard to potential users' needs (other than those of the specialist) or to wider social issues.

Many collecting policies are structured around distinct collection disciplines rather than encompassing the entire collection with a common aim and purpose. Whilst a role exists for distinct areas of collecting within a museum such an approach may also serve to minimise the value and contextual information of certain objects. (Different disciplines traditionally look at objects in different ways. A social historian may focus on the personal associations of an object, whilst a natural historian may see an item purely as a specimen with scientific significance, but be less interested in wider social issues).

In addition, many collecting policies focus on the classification of items and sub-groups in a systematic way and are based on the presumption that completing a set is not only possible, but also highly desirable. This completist approach identifies gaps within a collection (which then influence decisions about resources) that are based on the interests of a minority of scholars and specialists. What does this really tell us about the way we live and experience the world? How might decisions about collecting be made differently if we were to allow the needs of wider, non-specialist audiences to influence our thinking?

The development of a meaningful approach to collecting requires an informed knowledge of the existing collections, and a readiness to challenge implicit assumptions of importance. Fundamentally, we need to develop a clearer awareness of what users (present and future) may want from the collection resource. Focused consultation with diverse stakeholders to determine their needs, their interests and their aspirations - and to engage them in the decision making process offers a way forward.

What impact will this democratic approach have on collecting activity? It is unlikely that occasional gifts from the public and a reliance on passive collecting will suffice. Passive collecting can still be a good source of free material to fill genuine 'gaps' in the collection but focused, proactive collecting - preferably project-based and done in partnership with exhibition, education and outreach colleagues - appears to offer a more appropriate way forward. However it is done, collecting must be intentional, not accidental, and must have clear aims and outcomes.

## Documenting

Another key challenge to collection management lies in the way we document collections - how we generate information and context, how we record this, what terms we use, and how we draw links between objects. If the system fails at this stage, it can present one of the biggest barriers to inclusive practice - but if we get it right, it can unlock the vast potential of the collections for a diverse range of audiences.

The way that information is generated is important. What is the basis for recording and research? For whose benefit is it carried out? Does it have meaning and relevance outside particular disciplines? Is it based on public need and clear outcomes? There are many notable examples of museums that have involved community groups and individuals in the interpretation of collections - where the end result (whether oral history tapes, written information, video or artwork) has become a legitimate recorded and retrievable part of the collection archive. Increasingly the curator's role is not to act as a definitive voice of authority but, with an awareness of the different levels of meaning and interpretation, to be a facilitator for direct engagement between people and objects.

How can we record this information and make it truly accessible? Basic inventory information can be confusing to a non-specialist and gives a limited window into the collection. Although it will include the unique identifier for that object, its date and brief provenance and description, it is unlikely to present the type of context needed by educators or outreach staff - or present the kind of information needed for exhibition development. To make these necessary links with other objects and to draw out meaning and associations, we rely on access to the object itself, to its history file and (inevitably) to the individual curator. We must aim for information systems that are not wholly reliant on individuals to decode them, and can provide relevant information, associations and meanings in intelligible format for the benefit of a wide range of users.

## **Access**

What access to objects and information do users want? How do exhibition, interpretation, education and outreach staff prefer to work? How are ideas developed and how can information systems help? If we're unintentionally excluding colleagues in the museum how can we develop inclusive practice for the public? What are the public, especially target groups, interested in? What links, associations and meanings are important to them? Have we asked them? Virtual access to collections and collection information is undoubtedly the most important development in collection management. However, we must ensure that it is designed, not solely for the benefit of the immediate user (the curator, registrar, or conservator), but aims from the outset to address the wider needs of a diverse range of users.

Fundamentally, Collections Management must be understood as a means to an end - not an end in itself. It exists as a process to enable museums to fulfil their broader social remit by maximising the use of collections, giving collections and users a voice and reflecting diverse experiences. By embracing the principles of inclusive practice museums will gain not only increased public, political and financial support, but also higher quality collections, greater understanding of the meaning of objects, and stronger, more meaningful relationships with their communities. What's stopping us?

**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 3**

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## **Conservation and Inclusion**

The implications of inclusion for conservation in museums are not always immediately apparent and have received little attention. **Simon Cane** explores some of the issues.



## The Nature of Conservation

Conservation is, in some ways, a difficult word that carries many different meanings and interpretations. Invariably, members of the public think of and use the term in an ecological rather than a museological context. It is generally a 'back of stage' process, buried deep within the organisational structure of the museum. Its image within the sector has historically been that of the mystical art and the profession has effectively enhanced the mystique through developing approaches and philosophies in isolation from the wider sector. The principal ethic that governs and drives the conservator is to protect and preserve, inevitably resulting in a *Don't Touch* philosophy that can be readily perceived as negative and at odds with the desire to view, use and enjoy the objects and artefacts held in museums. The process of conserving an object is usually carried out behind closed doors by a few individuals who will develop an intimate knowledge of the object and any consultation regarding the extent and nature of the conservation process is usually limited to the curator. Wider constituencies are rarely considered.

The image that conservation has cultivated has served only to alienate it further from the normal and everyday. Conservators are invariably portrayed as white coated, *be-goggled*, scientist types doing something with chemical flasks or poking at an object with a scalpel. Practically all representations of the conservator, whether in professional journals or in the wider media, follow this rather tired and inaccurate formula. The language developed and used by conservators is

complex, laced with jargon and largely inaccessible to the non-professional. The place of conservation in the museum structure means that there are many physical and philosophical barriers between it and any potential audience. The approaches and philosophies it has developed are focussed on the needs (sic) of the object and not those of the audience. Combine this with the semantics around the words conservator and conservation and it is clear that there are myriad barriers to creating a wider understanding of what conservation is and, more importantly, its relevance to wider issues and how it can enhance the quality of life of ordinary people. These elements combine to build an almost impenetrable image that alienates all but the most committed of individuals.

## Changing Attitudes

There have been some significant shifts in attitude within conservation over the last ten years. Conservators have become more confident in addressing non-specialist audiences illustrated by exhibitions such as 'Stop the Rot' at York Castle Museum in 1993/4 and the opening of 'The Conservation Centre' in Liverpool in 1995. However, while both of these examples move the conservation process from the back of stage to front of stage they still place it in the traditional museum context. Audiences at the Conservation Centre are given direct access to the conservators via the live link but this process is largely stage-managed - the conservator retains control! Whilst the 'Stop the Rot' exhibition at York broke new ground in presenting the subject it was still in the

traditional 'glass case' format within a museum setting. Conservators in many museums are establishing a front of house presence, mounting small displays or simply making sure conservation is mentioned in a label, holding open days and many other creative ways of opening up the subject to the museum audience.

### **Beyond Access**

Talk to conservators about social inclusion and it is likely that most would equate this with widening access and expect to enter a discussion centred around the, now familiar, 'Touch/Don't Touch' debate. Conservators have traditionally placed themselves between the audience and the object; the idea that people must be allowed to interact with objects runs contrary to aim of protecting and preserving.

Though there cannot be said to be a consensus on the issue, there is at least growing recognition that the point of museum conservation is surely to allow people to experience and enjoy objects and where possible this needs to take place outside of the sterile, safe environment of the glass case. Conservators are all too aware of the transitory nature of the material world so perhaps it is an adjustment in mind set that is required, to move on from the fundamentally negative *Don't Touch* ideology to that of controlled, managed use and enjoyment?

With inclusion, the challenge for conservators is to take the next step. Rather than just equating inclusion with physical access to objects (which is undoubtedly

important) the conservation profession must also think more creatively about the more fundamental issues raised by this agenda.

### **Engaging a wider public**

How can we engage and involve ordinary people in the process of preserving cultural heritage?. This will certainly require conservation to adopt a different attitude towards itself, the wider heritage sector and the public. It cannot view itself as simply a process-driven subject but must engage in debate with a much wider audience about why conservation is important and how it can contribute to a broader understanding of cultural material. The idea that an individual or group may have an interest and, more importantly, a say in how an object is treated is a relatively new one but one which merits further exploration.

The other area where consultation is important is in the treatment of culturally sensitive or religious material. In contemporary Britain, it is possible that a particular community will have a link or a connection with objects collected long ago in a colonial context. Whilst curators have begun to consult local communities over these kind of issues, conservators are still left at the back of stage and remain largely silent on these important issues. There is no reason why a similar shift in thinking and practice cannot be made by conservators.

## **The social and spiritual value of objects**

Currently the philosophies and practices of conservation focus on the physical - what the object is made of, its condition and what needs to be done to it to make it a 'good object'. Conservators debate issues such as the reversibility of treatments, levels of cleaning, whether restoration is acceptable and just about all the physical aspects of objects (issues that are often central to debates around the repatriation of objects). What conservation has rarely debated is the social or spiritual context and value of objects. Though there is a belief within the profession that conservation benefits society, the idea has remained largely unexplored by conservators who have relied on disciplines such as museum studies and anthropology to think about the value of things in a social context. This is a dangerous, even arrogant, strategy because conservators are assuming that ideas of social and spiritual value are linked with the physical condition and nature of the object. Conservators must therefore broaden their areas of study and be prepared to engage more directly in debates around the social value and benefits of conservation.

Facilitating access to objects needs to become central to what we do but we can also contribute to the social inclusion agenda in other ways, ways which are not yet fully explored. To begin to do this we must acknowledge that it is people who have needs and not objects.



## A Personal Perspective - Dan Packe

### CHALLENGING PRACTICES 4

The represent project with young people is a new approach to working with audiences for Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Central to the project was the employment of a co-ordinator, **Daniel Packe**, through the New Deal Employment Initiative who has been vital to the project's success. Dan brought to the project many skills and ideas about how to reach young people at risk as well as an insight into the kinds of activities that they might be interested in. The project is characterised by working at a grass roots level in the recruitment of participants and in giving them a say in the project's development. represent has changed the participants' attitudes towards museums but perhaps most importantly, it has helped to give them a different outlook on life. They have grown from 4 members to 40. Dan sheds light on the need for flexibility on the part of museums and talks about the impact that involvement with the project has had on his own life.





“

My name is Daniel Packe and I am currently 25 years old, originally from the West Country now living in Birmingham. I came to Birmingham to study Business Studies at university and have ended up staying in the city - compared to where I'm from there is so much more choice here, not all of it good mind you, but at least there is more to do. After finishing at University I found it difficult to gain employment and actually motivate myself you see because it was a natural assumption that after you'd done your time there was another opportunity to travel the world some more and then settle into a job. Well, I travelled some more and then 'temped' moving from job to job to try and pay off student debts, the curse of 18 to 24 year olds around the country, without too much success. The only other option at the time was to sign on and claim benefits, which I did for over two and a half years.

During that time I was not completely isolated from the real world but I may as well have been - when one has so much free time there are two choices, do nothing

or try and do something constructive. I did a lot of voluntary work with a charity working with "disaffected youth" or rather school kids with learning and behavioural challenges and difficulties, which was actually a lot of fun and provided satisfaction too. It keeps you busy and stops you going mad -just. The real problem is that there is only so much you can take because you do work in theory but can't accept payment otherwise you lose benefits. Obviously I got lots of experience but, to be honest, what were my chances of getting employment? When you're signing on there isn't a lot that helps you escape the feeling of utter despair and shame. I mean, being made to go the job centre every two weeks and made to feel like you are worth nothing but to be grateful for my £80.46 for the next fortnight.

Having no money what pursuits are there that don't cost the earth? Well, the short answer is not many. I'd always tried to keep my mind busy by reading avidly - also not having a telly maybe was a blessing too! If I had thought about it maybe I would have contemplated visiting the

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“

museum and art gallery  
- after all they don't cost  
you. To be truthful though I  
didn't actually know where the  
museum was and that it was free to  
enter, and this after living here for nearly  
seven years!

So why then did I apply for the job of the  
project worker with *represent* knowing it  
was a museum job? I'm not too sure but I  
thought that it could be a challenge and  
when you're on New Deal you have to keep  
on applying for whatever is out there and I  
do mean whatever is out there. It also  
matched up with the skills I'd picked up  
and was the closest job to what I wanted to  
do so it was a nothing ventured nothing  
gained type of attitude and it actually paid  
off and they employed me. The prospect  
thrilled yet unnerved me too as I knew  
nothing about museums - I thought that  
they were boring and full of blokes with  
beards (and I know now that they are full of  
blokes with beards!!)

*represent* has certainly been a challenge  
up to this point and still has a long way to  
go as we find new obstacles to overcome  
and ways of doing things differently. I  
believe that it is an important project  
because it has certainly enabled me to look  
at myself in a new light but also the  
function of a museum too. I have found  
that there is so much to see and learn  
about within the ancient building, but have  
realised that I don't have to like it all and  
have tried to convey this feeling to my  
group. Above all else museums and  
galleries should cause debate and stir up  
feeling amongst the visitors and encourage  
people to challenge traditional views.  
Otherwise, why would an artist have  
bothered to paint a masterpiece if he knew  
that people would just accept it as being a  
great work of art, not thinking about what  
inspired it.

”

Perhaps museums should be more flexible in their approaches to programming and their role as to what a museum should do. This is certainly the case here in Birmingham. I have, to a great extent, been left to run the project the way I want to and that requires a lot of flexibility on my part so I expect the same in return from the museum, because not all of my work can be done between the hours of 10 and 5. A lot of what I've tried to do with *represent* has been calculated - to others it might have looked like a risk but then I believe that it is important to take risks and not be afraid to make a mistake. I learn more the more mistakes I make but I try and keep them to a minimum. I think it's important that you have a few mishaps along the way because it reminds you that in order to progress and know that you're on the right track, you need to find out how not to do things.

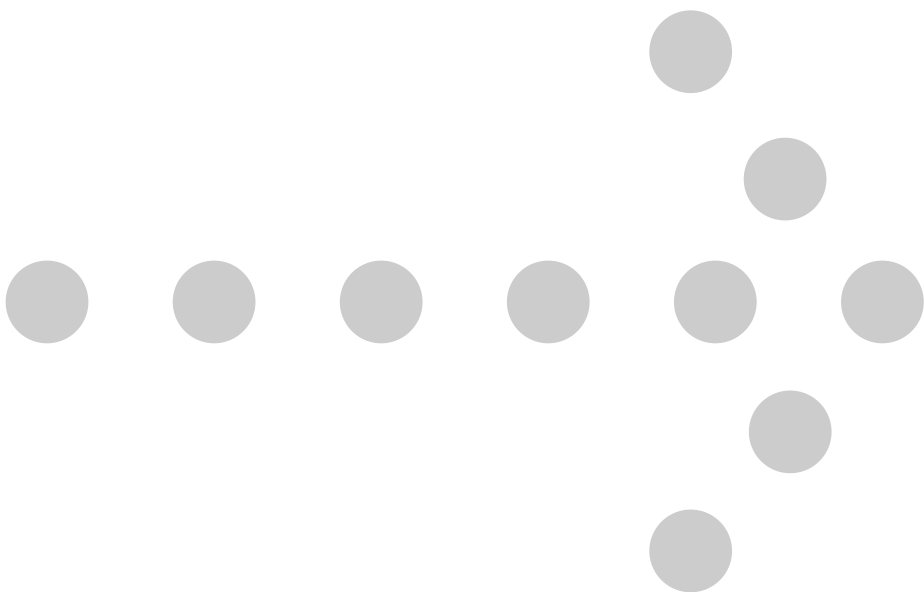
Museums staff need to listen more to what young people want and be able to respond to their needs. All along we've stressed the importance of empowering the group and boosting their confidence

and helping them every step of the way, getting them more accustomed to museums and what they have to offer. By befriending them and learning the same things as them helps the understanding of what museums are for. I do believe that they should entertain, inspire and enthuse people to want to return and find out more.

Before embarking on the project I had no real expectations other than that it would succeed and that it might change my life. As yet I've had no flashes of white light or been struck dumb but slowly I'm beginning to realise that my life has changed for the better due to the people I've met and worked with.

*represent* gave me a job and the chance to prove it could work and I feel differently to how I used to. Museums have helped broaden my horizons and altered my thinking but, in my eyes, that's what a museum is for.

”



**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 5**



**Exploring  
Cultural Diversity**

What are museums' and galleries' responsibilities in multi-ethnic Britain?

**Hajra Shaikh** raises some thought-provoking issues.

As public institutions, museums have a social responsibility to engage with audiences from diverse backgrounds. However Britain's multi-ethnic society is not reflected within its cultural institutions. A number of strategies - under the banner of cultural diversity - have emerged in recent years within museums and galleries aimed at combating the feeling of exclusion that many people from minority ethnic communities experience. These include outreach work, the development of 'culturally specific' exhibitions and collections, and enhanced representation of community voices through partnership, consultation or the employment of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds. Whilst these are all positive strategies to promote cultural diversity, they are often developed in isolation, on an ad-hoc basis, and often in the short-term to secure or fulfil funding opportunities and current Government agendas. In some instances they mask the need for more radical and fundamental change. Fundamentally, many museum staff are not clear about the meaning of cultural diversity or the challenges and opportunities it offers to their institutions.

In particular, many museums have adopted the strategy of utilising 'culturally specific' collections as a sure-fire way of attracting ethnic minority audiences. Here those collections that are deemed to have a particular resonance for ethnic minority communities residing in the UK (because the objects are linked to their cultural and historical backgrounds) are seen as a way to make museums more relevant, accessible and inclusive.

The problem with these strategies is that representation within collections has been isolated from the many other barriers that serve to exclude people from ethnic minorities. Representation needs to be examined in all its nuances. It is not simply about collections relevant to ethnic minorities, but also about the sensitive and appropriate display and interpretation of those collections, it is about inclusive and targeted education programming relating to collections, and it is about a diverse work force that reflects the ethnic make up of our society. Representation, to take it a necessary step further, is about having a powerful political voice within an organisation and in this context it means ethnic minority representation at all levels of the institution including trustees, sponsors and Friends' organisations.

Museums should be realistic about vesting their energies in one strategy to the exclusion of addressing these other barriers. Targeting communities in connection with 'relevant' collections should not become the limit of institutions' engagement with cultural diversity.

### **Cultural diversity at the V & A**

The Victoria and Albert Museum has sustained 'culturally specific' audience development work over a substantial period of time. For the last 10 years, the Far Eastern and Indian and South East Asian collections at the V&A Museum have been used to target the Chinese and South Asian communities respectively as a step towards developing these audiences at the Museum. The areas for community development were identified due to the extensive collections that the Museum holds in

these categories, the large percentage of these two communities within the UK and the opportunity of funding. The Museum has been successful in its community work but only in so far as attracting like with like; both these communities, on the whole, have been targeted exclusively in relation to their own cultures and collections. Although there have been opportunities for white audiences to interact with Chinese and South Asian communities respectively, and to become better informed about their cultural and artistic practices, there has been little in the way of cross-cultural interaction across all audiences. The V&A has made good progress in embedding culturally diverse provision within its programmes (indeed the South Asian Community Development post has made the leap from sponsorship to core funding), although it should be recognised that this is only one stage in developing an inclusive institution. There is a need now to move on to the challenging issue addressing issues of cultural diversity throughout the organisation.

### **Understandings of cultural diversity**

Lack of real engagement with issues cultural diversity may be based on the mistaken perception that this is solely about developing ethnic minority audiences. Certainly amongst museum professionals, there seems to be considerable confusion surrounding the reasons for promoting cultural diversity in the museums sector.

In the past two years I have attended a number of meetings, organised by the Museums Association and the Arts Council, to consider issues of cultural diversity,

at which individuals have put forward questionable personal views. For example, a museum worker responsible for marketing and education in a rural museum stated that she cultural diversity issues were not relevant there as there were no ethnic minority peoples living in the area. Another proposal was that, rural museums with white only populations could consider work undertaken with white farm labourers as cultural diversity work, the farm labourers being perceived as a minority in this region. It has also been stated that work about Black, Asian and Chinese people would be irrelevant and unwelcome as none of those communities resided in the area. If such apathy and ignorance exists amongst museum workers who profess an interest in this field, what can be the views of those people who are directly opposed to this work?

The idea that we can choose not to address issues of cultural diversity because the region we live in is not representative of the national population is reprehensible. Britain is a multi-cultural society and whether there are high numbers of ethnic minority people living in the locality or collections relevant to Black, Asian and Chinese peoples' histories in particular museums, is only half the debate. Surely all museums have a responsibility not just to be accessible but also consider their wider potential to contribute to the creation of a more equal society. The idea that cultural diversity strategies are only for the benefit of ethnic minorities and that those who do not come into contact with them have no need to consider the implications of cultural diversity, devalues its importance to society as a whole.

The presumption that the most appropriate way to attract ethnic minority communities is by using 'relevant' collections, also needs to be challenged. The issues surrounding cultural diversity are far more important, all embracing and more complex than a simple matching of collections to communities. It is easy enough for those museums that have relevant collections but what of those museums that don't? If a museum has ethnic minorities in its locale, but no 'relevant' collections and no resources to collect this material, does this mean they cannot attract these audiences, simply because the collections do not 'match'? More significantly, what if there are no ethnic minority communities living locally? Can museums in these areas side-step the issue of promoting cultural diversity on the basis that ethnic minorities simply do not figure in their local demographics? What of the charge of stereotyping and patronising ethnic minorities by only targeting them in connection with certain collections and exhibitions? And what about second, third and fourth generation ethnic minority peoples who regard their Britishness and ethnicity as equally important aspects of their identity?

There are no definitive answers to these questions; rather they serve to demonstrate the complexity of the issues at the heart of cultural diversity. What all museums must acknowledge is the social responsibility incumbent upon them to establish inclusive institutions serving the wider culturally diverse society that we live in.

[1] BMRB International, *Cultural diversity: Attitudes of Ethnic Minority Populations Towards Museums and Galleries*, (London: BMRB International, 1998), pp. 1,3.





**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 6**

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## **The rural context**

Is social inclusion relevant to all museums or just those located within urban areas that have most commonly been linked with disadvantage and deprivation? Large local authority museums have generally featured most prominently in debates around inclusion but here, **Jocelyn Dodd** and **Richard Sandell** consider the implications for museums in rural areas.

## Urban bias

The problems of social exclusion are understood largely as urban phenomena. In a recent article, Professor Anne Power (Deputy Director, Centre of Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics) states, "Social exclusion is about the inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within the reach of what we expect as a society. It is about the tendency to push vulnerable and difficult individuals into the least popular places, furthest away from our common aspirations. It is almost entirely an urban problem, the 100 most deprived local authority areas in the country are all urban and the 20 most deprived are in major conurbations." (RSA Journal 2/4 2000)

There is little question that many of those affected by exclusion live in urban areas and perhaps this has done much to encourage and develop fertile partnerships and opportunities for museums in urban areas. *Museums and Social Inclusion: The GLLAM report*, illustrates the quality, quantity and breadth of work that has been going on in large local authority museum services. Does this mean that rural museums have no part to play?

In the early 1990s, when community outreach was developing at Nottingham Museums and Galleries, a colleague who worked in a mainly rural area, commented that it was not possible for them to do that kind of work as the rural context was so different, the agencies and networks for partnerships simply didn't exist. Certainly, the context, the forms of exclusion and the patterns of distribution may differ but as the

Countryside Agency, in their report, *Not seen, not heard?*, clearly demonstrates, exclusion is nevertheless a serious problem in rural areas. Low incomes, poor health, inadequate housing, lack of education and training, difficulties accessing basic services and little or no involvement in discussions which affect their futures are problems that face those living in both urban and rural areas.

## The particularities of rural exclusion

However, there are some important differences which have served to conceal the problems of exclusion in rural areas and which necessitate different approaches to solutions. Socially excluded households in rural areas tend to be geographically scattered. Those most at risk of exclusion may live alongside extreme affluence which can serve to hide the existence of exclusion as well as to heighten the sense of social isolation. The manifestation and particular focus of problems may differ; for example, rural housing issues relate to the affordability of housing, rural job problems relate more to low pay and seasonality of employment than to unemployment *per se*. Distance, geographical isolation, poor access to jobs, services and other opportunities compound the problems for those in rural areas. The image of the rural idyll leads to misconceptions about the nature of living in the countryside with many people finding it difficult to believe that social exclusion exists in green and picturesque surroundings.

Furthermore, traditional attitudes about self-sufficiency and 'making do' can lead to exclusion going undeclared or unheard. Many of the commonly used indicators for identifying and measuring exclusion are more appropriate to the urban context. Party political allegiances further complicate matters as many rural areas, which are largely Conservative, are uncomfortable with the language of social inclusion which has become linked to New Labour and embedded within their policy, (especially in view of criticisms of New Labour for failing to address issues facing rural constituencies).

All of these issues conspire to produce a much less favourable environment for rural museums to engage with inclusion agendas. This is compounded by the fact that many rural museums are small, often with a tiny staff and limited resources. A large percentage of the museums are independent, volunteer run and already facing problems of sustainability where survival may be the first priority. Some independent museums remain concerned with 'ploughing their own furrow' resistant to government agendas and influence. And yet, small museums are often much closer to their communities and may be well placed to understand and meet community needs.

Some museums have very successfully connected with rural inclusion agendas. Nuneaton, which is already familiar with responding to the urban environment, has adapted and extended its programme to the rural, north Warwickshire context. This has been achieved by connecting with community transport and rural mobile

library services, being involved in advisory groups for village halls and community centres and shaping how these might be used. The museum has linked with networks in the voluntary sector, through friendship groups, with childminders, with charities like Age Concern and with the statutory sector, for example Social Services, by working with home help staff. The museum has also engaged with health agendas through Living Well initiatives and a Healthy Hearts project.

In Herefordshire, the museum service has worked strategically to focus on education, teaming up with an Education Action Zone, enabling small isolated rural schools (Herefordshire has the second lowest pupil density in England) to have access to museum resources to complement the curriculum and provide a breadth of stimulus to learning.

In Lincolnshire, many issues have been identified that create barriers to inclusion. Most excluded communities are concentrated in the east of this large county whereas most museum resources are located in the west, exposing a mismatch between resources and need. The service faces rural transport difficulties and the low expectations amongst communities. There are internal barriers too; some staff are reluctant to embrace change, limited financial resources and no staff with specialist community experience. Despite these difficulties, opportunities for inclusion work are being explored and piloted through lifelong learning initiatives using ICT in a project funded through the SRB.

Social exclusion is an issue in many rural areas and whilst some have begun to address this, elsewhere many factors have served to limit the realisation of museum's potential roles and contributions. Many rural museums are hindered by a lack of strategic focus, stakeholders who are unsympathetic to inclusion agendas, a lack of skills and confidence and, perhaps most of all, a lack of understanding of the role museums can play. Ironically, a repositioning of some small, rural museums in relation to inclusion could help to make them more sustainable. As some have already shown, they can become a valued community resource and be connected with a much larger and more diverse audience than the often narrow segment who currently use them. The challenge is to develop the skills and capacity within these museums that often have such limited resources.

**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 7**



**Museums and  
Mental Health Services**

**Peter Bates** explores the ways in which museums can support the inclusion goals of mental health agencies.

Over the past generation mental health services have begun a journey towards social inclusion. This paper explores some possible implications for museums and galleries.

One of the features of Victorian England was the enthusiasm for building large residential institutions such as workhouses, lunatic asylums and orphanages. While these establishments, which often housed in excess of one thousand people, may have been an improvement on the neglect of earlier generations, they have exerted a long lasting influence. Not until the 1950s was the first psychiatric ward unlocked, and the hospital closure programme did not really gain momentum until the 1980s. Over the past twenty years the majority of the traditional hospitals have been closed and replaced with a myriad of new services. These new services enable many people to live outside hospital who previously would have been admitted, and also provide residential care in a more homely environment for those who continue to need 'round the clock support. Indeed, the most imaginative agencies are simply asking the person who needs support to specify exactly how they would like to live and what help and support they will need, and then harnessing relatives, friends and formal resources to enable this dream to be fulfilled.

The development of opportunities for daytime activity has followed a slightly different path. The large asylums were commonly sited in the countryside and patients were an essential labour force in the farm, the laundry and the bakery. Physical rehabilitation services began to be developed after the Second World War to respond to the

large numbers of people injured in the conflict, and the ideas of assessment, re-education and sheltered work slowly drifted across into mental health services. Campaigning volunteers, relatives and professionals erected day centres, sometimes with their own hands, in the 1950s and 1960s. Many of these facilities provided daytime activity for 150 or more people. In the 1990s a combination of financial pressures on Social Services and the absence of any statutory obligation to provide day care led to the disappearance of a few services, but the majority remain. Renewed concerns about institutionalisation within day care now combines with a fresh focus upon social inclusion to generate disturbing undercurrents in many day care services, but wholesale change has not yet taken place. The managers who worked so hard to close the large residential institutions are just beginning to turn their attention to these facilities.

So how have all these changes impacted upon the lives of people with mental ill health? Most of the people who have exchanged a long stay hospital ward for a small, purpose-built staffed home have a vastly improved environment. Staff have worked hard to enable residents to live in an ordinary house in an ordinary street, spend money at the corner shop and visit the local pub. Despite all this effort the move from hospital to community has made almost no impact upon social networks. Whilst in the hospital, patients were surrounded by staff and other patients. Nowadays, many *service users* are surrounded by staff and other service users at the staffed house or the day centre - no change.

Here and there around the country, imaginative projects are creating new opportunities and social networks for people who have occupied these benevolent ghettos. Dave has left the sheltered workshop and now is supported in his real job with a high street employer. Susan visited her local volunteer bureau and was fixed up with two afternoons a week in a charity shop, where she contributes to her local community and relieves food poverty in a developing country. Andy has been assisted to join the supporters club at his beloved football club and has made new friends amongst the fans.

This brief history has highlighted four phases through which mental health services have moved, or are moving, in response to the issues of social exclusion and inclusion:

- entirely segregated provision
- residential integration (where people live at an address in the community but all other activities take place in a segregated setting)
- integration as customers (in which people with a disability are physically present in the community and interact with other citizens solely through buying things)
- full inclusion (in which people occupy social roles alongside other citizens leading to the possibility of friendship).

In this model, the goal is that of full inclusion whereby individuals have developed social networks which many of us take for granted. What role might museums and galleries play in achieving this goal?

### **Segregated provision**

Entirely segregated provision is illustrated in a myriad of ways. For example, the old Mapperley Hospital in Nottingham had a library for patients which included an exhibition of historical artefacts showing bygone psychiatric treatment methods and photographs of the old buildings. Many hospitals used to mine veins of contemporary cultural and artistic talent in order to stage a cabaret. More recently, day centre staff teams and others have worked with mental health service users to create and display paintings, ceramics, drama, poetry and music. Sometimes these exhibitions tour a number of mental health service venues and show to those who use the services. Health and social care staff adopt the role of artistic director and few, if any contacts are made with mainstream museum or arts professionals.

### **Residential integration**

The next step along the road towards social inclusion may be to support residential integration. This takes place when a museum or gallery bring their resources into the residential care environment or day centre. For example, a worker from the museum may bring along reminiscence materials or collect oral history from a group of elders in a day centre. Such work dramatically

enriches the quality of life for service users and begins the process of partnership between the museum and the mental health service, but is unlikely to impact upon the museum service or augment the social relationships of the participants.

### **Integration as customers**

A number of museums and galleries have engaged with mental health service users as part of their strategy for audience development. Commonly, this involves inviting them to engage with the museum as a customer - and so tackling the thorny issues of admission charges for people on a low income. A group of service users may tour an exhibition with one of the museum staff and then move into a studio area for a crafts session, to discuss their responses to the installations or to make a video. When the formal session is over a number of group members will make their way into the museum's café and sit round a table together while counter staff or gallery attendants look on, perhaps bemused at the visible difference between this group and their usual clientele. Perhaps the museum's access worker will build a useful working relationship with one or two colleagues within the mental health service, become something of a local expert on these issues within the museum world, and find themselves offering informal advice and reassurance to his or her colleagues in the café or around the galleries.

### **Full inclusion**

The fourth option at last begins to affect the social role and relationships of people with psychiatric difficulties, as well as transforming the museum or gallery itself. Full inclusion demands that the museum employ people with experiences of mental ill health alongside their other workers and harness their skills and expertise amongst the volunteer workforce. Users of mental health services will receive their share of the invitations to the grand exhibition opening and will occupy seats at the museum's advisory group. Information about how members of the public can contribute to the museum's decision-making will be readily available and presented in an accessible format. In addition to its traditional role as an archive of historic artefacts, the museum will have a clear role as a sponsor of contemporary culture, and people who have previously been marginalised will find their contributions valued and celebrated. Clear pathways will be forged into the local history group that delves into the archives held in the basement and, indeed, people with mental health experiences are supported to become full members of every social group and network that together form the informal culture of the museum community. They will find that this museum community has become a place rich in opportunities for identity, positive social roles and friendship with others who share their values.



**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 8**

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**Including Technology**

Can new media really help museums to meet the inclusion agenda? **Ross Parry** presents an inclusive approach to the use of technology.



To include new media in our discussions about the inclusive role of museums is not just appropriate - it's essential. Indeed, ever since the publication of the government's guidance on social inclusion (in May 2000) it has become clear that the application of networked ICT as a means of making collections more accessible is a main policy objective. And certainly, in this respect, museums have in recent years been working with diligence and imagination to begin to locate catalogues and key documents on-line. Moreover, the *Information and Communication Technology Challenge Fund* has helped realise some of the ways in which new media (particularly networked hypermedia) can contribute to access in museums. From the deep data archives such as 'Darwin Country' project ([www.darwincountry.org](http://www.darwincountry.org)), to educational resources, like 'The Victorians' project ([www.victorian-london.org.uk](http://www.victorian-london.org.uk)). And from partnerships such as the 'East West Central' project connecting the collections of three London-based museums, to outreach projects such as the community history-making of 'North Devon on Disk' ([www.ex.ac.uk/northdevonondisk](http://www.ex.ac.uk/northdevonondisk)), to empowering in-reach projects such as 'Planes, Tools and Automobiles' ([www.virtualgallery.org.uk](http://www.virtualgallery.org.uk)) that allow visitors to recreate (and re-curate) existing collections. Similarly, over the last few years, the £15mn of the *Designation Challenge Fund* has provided significant support for those museums that are attempting to provide on-line access to collections and collections information. Through driving initiatives like these, it has been hoped that we can help to remove the barriers (geographical, social, economic, attitudinal) between people and the unique and powerful collections of our museums.

And yet, if these high investments are to return equally high social dividends it seems only right (as we re-evaluate the state of our approaches to social inclusion) that we, likewise, re-appraise role of ICT as one means to that end. After all, if (as the government suggest) the next stage on the journey to social inclusion is concerned more with reaching out to new audiences, and creating events and exhibitions that are relevant to them, then perhaps it is time to revisit the role new media will play in such a development. In short, we are now seeing that there is more (perhaps much more) to 'inclusive technology' than just the online archive.

It certainly seems that the more we learn about new media (*who uses it, how do they use it, when do they choose not to use it?*) the more we learn that it has the potential to distance and exclude, as much as it can make accessible and include. For, there is an onus on all those involved in including new media within public provision to think carefully about how computers are being used by different individuals, and by different communities within society. The Web, for instance, may fashion itself as 'world wide', but its habits and cultures of use are, in fact, as diverse and as localised as the pages it contains. It may be as misleading to talk in general terms about 'the Internet' as it is unhelpful to generalise over matters of, say, 'disability' or 'culture'. Undoubtedly, museums have too often allowed protocol and prior knowledge to serve as the drawbridge and portcullis to their treasures. We should, therefore, be mindful to the fact that fortifying our collections with digital media may only serve as part of this history of exclusivity.

Also, notwithstanding the government's commitment (through *UK Online*) to ensure that everyone who wants it has access to the Internet by 2005, there are still, today, disparities in usage of networked technologies. Though perhaps talk of a 'Digital Divide' may, in many cases, over-simplify the attitudes to and patterns of use, recent research (such as that by the Leicestershire Learning and Skills Council, December 2000) would still indicate that within questions of access and inclination to use ICT, age, ethnic grouping, gender, employment status could all matter. Therefore, to think about using ICT as a means to reach out to new audiences and help position the museum as an agent of social change, demands, firstly, a reflection on whether new media is the right tool for the job. Is, in short, the medium relevant to the individuals or the community we are targeting? Does the medium connect to that individual's or that community's skills, aspirations and normative behaviour? In spite of the *hype* of *hypermedia*, it's time to step back and acknowledge that, right now, new technologies are not a fix-all solution.

But things are likely to change. For, to complicate things still further, all of us involved in using digital media in museums must also remain sensitive to the ways these habits of use are becoming quite fluid. With online connections sprouting in every library and classroom, with ever-increasing numbers of people entering retirement with IT skills, with adults identifying computer literacy as a key 'skill need', and many schoolchildren leaving Key Stage 2 with web proficiency ... the dynamics and culture of new media usage is changing. To include new technology in a thoughtful

and effective way is to remain circumspect of cultural shifts like these - as it is also of technological developments. For, technical innovation can quickly reconfigure the matrix of user behaviour. For instance, just as the advent of Internet TV offers a move from 'surfing' to 'sofa-ing', so WAP-enabled phones may prove to loosen the ties between the desktop computer and user. Similarly, just as merging technologies (telephone, television, Internet) are promising to blur distinctions within our communication, broadcast and information media, developments in broad-band connections (such as ASDL) might allow users to rethink both the timings and directions of their online pathways.

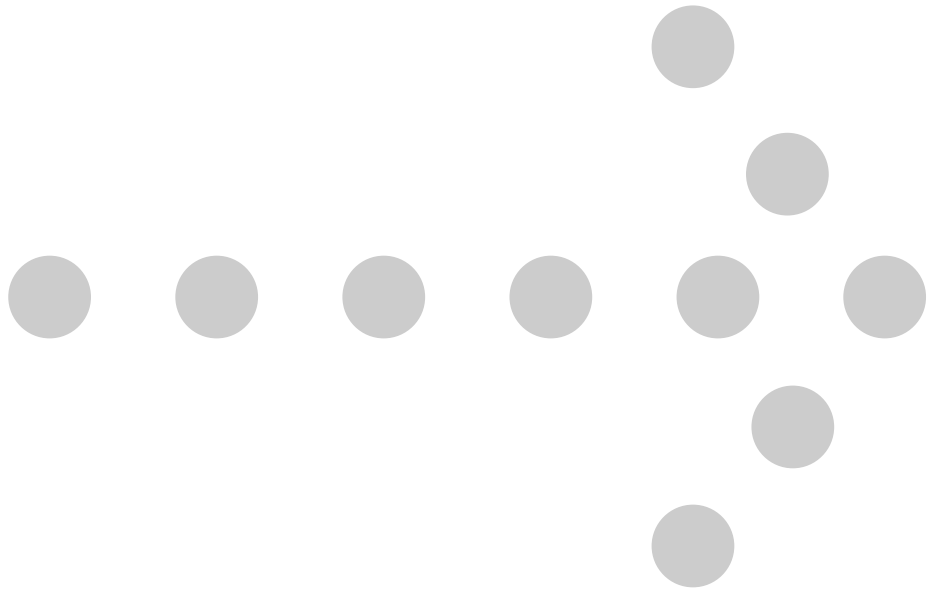
New Media can have an important role to play within our social inclusion objectives as long as we bear in mind the developments in the technology, the patterns of usage, and the culture of use - i.e. *what it can do, who is using it, and how they are using it*.

Also, it is important to bear in mind that there is more to new media than the web; we think here, for instance, of the *represent* project at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery that has used the teenage cult(ure) of mobile phone tunes as a way of connecting to a group of local young people at risk of exclusion. Similarly, it is important that we continue to acknowledge new media's potential, beyond just its ability to facilitate access through network technologies. For instance, the government's *IT for All* and *ICT Learning Centres* initiatives are providing entry-level experiences for IT beginners, and access to ICT learning (in spaces that could be in museums) by people who are disadvantaged



or living in disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, responding to the new ICT environment is to do more than put collections on-line. The design and content of our websites, the structure and location of our in-gallery interactives, the language and flexibility of our digital collections should all be part of our inclusive digital cultures.

The Culture Secretary sees new technology within a 'virtuous circle', within which increased access to our rich collections can increase participation, which, in turn, will help encourage individual creativity and the love of learning. In order to realise this shared goal, we need to remember that the most important connections do not, in fact, come down a fibre optic cable. They come, instead, between visitors and objects, people and their communities, and individuals and their own sense of self and identity. The more we embrace this idea, the more new media will be seen - rightly - as just one of many powerful ways to mediate social change.





**CHALLENGING  
PRACTICES 9**

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## **Partnerships and a Shared Responsibility**

Partnership between different agencies is important to the success of many inclusion initiatives. How can organisations with seemingly radically different agendas begin to work productively together? In conversation with **Margaret Mackechnie**, Assistant Director Social Services.

**Museums have not traditionally worked in partnership with Social Services. How do you think those working in the social sector might view museums as potential partners in inclusion initiatives?**

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In the past, with a background in residential social work, I have generally thought of museums as places to take children for a day out and that was about the extent of it. Museums did not figure in terms of thinking about childcare, I really didn't think they had much to offer. I am sure that these perceptions echo those of many who are working in the social sector.

**So how did your involvement with museums begin?**

It began at a 'visioning day', which was organised by the City council's youth service and which focused on services for young people. I got into discussions with the Museums Access Manager who talked with me about a range of ways in which we might work together - up until then I only thought of museums as places that the public visited. It was during this day that I began to see the potential museums might have to work with Social Services to support looked after children.

It is through examples of specific projects that colleagues within the social sector can begin to understand the potential of museums, and, in time, that will filter through the organisation.

**What contribution do you think museums can make within the social sector?**

In some ways we are still learning and I think we need to experiment more. Looked after children are citizens of Nottingham. They have poor self esteem, poor self-image and I think museums can help to build their self confidence. A sense of place is really important, especially when your own family experience is very disjointed. The museum can help develop that too, so that looked after children can view the City where they live in a different way and feel a sense of place and of belonging.

For many looked after children, their options, choices, life chances are closed down for them and, as a consequence their horizons may be limited. We used the *Quality Protects Programme*, where one of the standards is about children's life chances, to develop a partnership approach to provide opportunities



for looked after children. The Museums service offered projects which gave children opportunities, and encouraged participation. Projects like the Activate programme that the museums ran were able to broaden children's experiences, develop their interests and to raise their expectations.

champion projects and can provide a environment where collaborations between our sectors can flourish. This is crucial if we are to maintain the momentum. Working flexibly and collaboratively to tailor programmes which can meet the needs of children at risk is the most important first stage before they can become mainstreamed.

### **What does Social Services need from museums?**

Some body taking an interest in looked after children is important, it is rare in their lives, it makes an enormous difference, taking an interest and sticking with them. The children often do not have the sticking power, they do not trust adults, they have been let down by them, so they often test them.

We do not expect museum staff to be mentors, or friends to the children, we just need them to be professional, to give them taster sessions, to give some extra support.

It certainly helps to have a link person within the organisation, someone who can be a point of contact for us and who is familiar with, or at least sympathetic to, our work. It's also really important to have someone, probably within senior museum management, who will

### **What responsibilities do you think museums have in this area?**

Within the unitary authority of Nottingham City Council we all share a corporate responsibility. We are the 'corporate parent' and everyone in the City Council - and that includes departments like building maintenance as well as museums - has a responsibility to looked after children. We all have a role to play.

Looked after children have great potential but their talents are often hidden. We have to peel off the layers to get to the part where the talent is and to harness it. Museums, together with other agencies, have a very powerful role in peeling back the layers and improving the life chances of looked after children.

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## CONCLUSION

It might be said that *Including Museums*, provides little in the way of answers, though that has not been its purpose. Rather it is hoped that it provides a forum for diverse opinions, viewpoints and experiences that, taken together, suggest many pathways forward. These pathways are not always clearly defined - many of the issues raised in *Including Museums*, suggest a need for experimentation and flexibility in practices and a questioning of some of the most established ways of thinking and modes of operation within the sector.

What emerges most strongly from the perspectives presented here is the notion that the philosophy and practices now described by the term 'inclusion' are neither entirely new nor merely fashionable. Rather they are fundamental to the purpose and values of all museums and galleries and applicable to all those who work in and with them. They suggest the need for an ethos that both influences and helps to strengthen (rather than undermine) all the functions within cultural organisations. Furthermore, the viewpoints and experiences included here help to identify the multiple ways in which museums can meaningfully contribute to inclusion and, in doing so, expose many of the criticisms of this area of work as unfounded, inappropriate and reactionary.

It is hoped that *Including Museums* will encourage all museums and galleries to debate their own potential to contribute towards positive social change. This potential will be different for each organisation and will emerge through exploring ideas around the social responsibility of our publicly funded cultural organisations and addressing fundamental questions about what we do and for whom we do it.

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Jocelyn Dodd and Richard Sandell  
Museums and Galleries Commission  
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**Centres of Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All**

Policy Guidance on Social Inclusion for DCMS funded and local authority museums, galleries and archives in England.  
Published 2000.

Copies available from: Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Room 103, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1 5DH  
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**Cultural Diversity: Developing Museum Audiences in Britain**

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Published 1997.

**Conversations with.....**

Produced by North East Museums Service (NEMS), Northern Arts and the Community Action Forum  
Copies available from NEMS Tel. 0191 222 1661 Email:nems@nems.co.uk

**Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion**

Richard Sandell  
Published 1998  
Museums Management and Curatorship 17, No.4 401-418

**Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion**

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