Issue No.3 Spring 2011

Research Journal

Edited by Angela McShane

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VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

Contents

Editorial

Angela McShane, Tutor in Graduate Studies, RCA/V&A MA in History of Design, Victoria and Albert Museum

Angela McShane

Welcome to the third issue of the V&A Online journal. This issue was due to be published in February 2011, but was postponed to allow it to be launched in the style of the new V&A website launched in May. We would especially like to thank contributors and staff for their kind patience and hard work in getting the third issue of the journal up online during this busy and inevitably disruptive period.

In this year's edition recycling and design emerges as an especially strong theme – a vital aspect of the relationship between design and the environment with which the V&A has long been associated. This is shown in the fascinating, complimentary articles by Pierre Désrochers and Ann Christie, who discuss the Animal and Waste Products Galleries that once filled the basements of the Bethnal Green Museum (now the Museum of Childhood). Both writers illuminate the depth of Victorian concerns about sustainability in the exploitation, design and manufacture of new goods and materials: aspects of economic and environmental management that are commonly assumed to be 'modern' phenomena. Ian Blatchford's article, on John Thomas's sculpture Rachel, investigates a rather different aspect of recycling. He shows how by renewing our vision of objects - simply by moving and redisplaying them – forgotten stories of low-born artisans, whose talents enabled them to reach the highest places, can be newly discovered, explored and assessed. Another way of thinking about the re-use of museum space is analysed in Tillie Baker's study of seating and circulation around the V&A.

The V&A's remit has always been to educate and inspire new designers and the design industry in general, by making the glories (and disappointments) of past design available and comprehensible, enabling a dialogue between past and present. Dierdre Murphy examines this aspect of the museum by investigating the recycling and renewal of old forms and ideas in the contemporary fashion world. In a very different context, Yolande Crowe shows how a combination of political, religious and economic factors enabled design ideas originating in Persian ceramics and textiles from India and Europe, to become intrinsic elements in the design of 18th century Turkish ceramics.

Conservationist Joanne Hackett's detailed examination of the materials and techniques in some eighteenth-century English quilts in the collections reveal some unique evidence of social interactions and domestic values in the period. Alice Dolan investigates another aspect of women's work in the intriguing recycling of prints and fabrics to create 'adorned prints' in the 18th century. Unlike these very silent, anonymous, middle- and upper-class domestic objects, a stark contrast is presented in Clare Rose's discussion of the male, working class production of intarsia patchwork quilts in the 19th century. These objects were expressly 'public' in intention – their authorship was claimed and lauded, they were much publicised in the press, being shown as paying exhibits - while the working hours and materials that went into them were minutely enumerated.

Finally, in Elizabeth Walker's article on the Digital archive the obverse of these questions of retention and recycling are debated. How much of the vast digital archive that is daily created should we allow to become trash – beyond the possibility of retrieval and recycling? Who is qualified to decide what should be kept, and why? In this very contemporary discussion, we find ourselves questioning how the archives of previous ages were created - often as much by accident as design (as so much of the V&A's collection shows). Is the agency of accident the best way to create an archive? We often hear lamentation of how the ignorance or prejudice of previous ages have destroyed aspect of the past (for example the terrible damage done to the V&A's buildings and decoration during the middle of the 20th century) how can people of our own era make sure they do not make the same mistakes, while at the same time creating an archive it is feasible to sustain?

The V&A Online Journal aims to provide a forum for research papers from scholars inside and outside the museum, in a bid to promote dialogue and open up new ways of interrogating material culture, current design practice, histories of design and all other related fields.

Provided that submissions meet the academic standards set by our Editorial team and peer reviewers, we welcome articles for future issues on the history of art, architecture and design relating to the V&A 's collections, public programme or institutional history; features focusing on new acquisitions or objects linked to V&A exhibitions; reflections on the educational or creative industries role of the Museum and reviews and previews of V&A publications, conferences or displays.

For further details see how to submit a proposal to the V&A Online Journal.

We can be contacted at vandajournal@vam.ac.uk.

I would very much like to thank all who have contributed to the successful production of this issue, the authors of individual articles and the following staff:

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Promoting corporate environmental sustainability in the Victorian era: The Bethnal Green Museum permanent waste exhibit (1875-1928)

Pierre Desrochers, Associate Professor of Geography, University of Toronto

Abstract

Due to a widespread belief in the environmental carelessness of early industrialists, historical scholarship on business-environment interactions has side-stepped the study of corporate innovations that had both economic and environmental benefits. A more nuanced perspective on the issue is offered through a discussion of the permanent waste products collection that was on display from 1875 to 1928 at the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum. Through several hundred examples illustrating the profitable conversion of polluting industrial residuals into profitable by-products ranging from fertilizers and animal feed to construction materials and dyes, its organisers demonstrated that the interest of business was often compatible with environmental remediation.

ON WASTE.

Figure 1 - Illustration to the chapter 'On Waste' from Edwin Lankester, The Uses of Animals in Relation to the Industry of Man; Being a course of lectures delivered at the South Kensington Museum (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1860), 140

Historical scholarship on the impact of industrial activities on the environment has largely ignored the study of innovations that had both economic and environmental benefits. Indeed, the dominant perspective on the issue has long been that job creation in the industrial age could only be achieved at the cost of increasingly severe pollution problems and the depletion of non-renewable resources. To a large extent, this view can be traced back to Victorian coal-powered mills, factories and mining operations that darkened the sky, polluted rivers and severely damaged the British countryside.

While the undesirable environmental side-effects of some past manufacturing activities are undeniable, much evidence suggests a more nuanced perspective needs to be taken on the subject. First, environmental and public health problems, from deforestation and indoor air pollution to lack of basic sanitation facilities, were severe long before the 19th century.[1] Second, as in developing economies today, many individuals were willing to trade some environmental degradation for a higher standard of living. As one commentator observed in 1876, removing the chemical works of East London on account of their 'unusual [but] not necessarily injurious' smells would entail 'a great deal of sickness as a result of shortness of bread consequent on want of employment'.[2] Last, much progress in terms of developing innovations that had both economic and environmental benefits, most prominently valuable by-products such as fertilizers, building materials and dyes out of what were previously polluting emissions and production residuals, was achieved at the time. Considerable efforts were devoted to promote the latter endeavour, including a permanent exhibit on the topic that was on display from 1875 to 1928 at the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum (discussed in detail by Ann Christie in this issue of the V&A Online Journal). Indeed, a case can be made that the individuals involved in this effort, most prominently the chemist and politician Lyon Playfair (1818-1898) and the journalist and publisher Peter Lund Simmonds (1814-1897), not only anticipated concepts and debates now at the heart of the modern sustainable development literature, but also that their work questions some fundamental premises of this discourse.

Background to the waste products collection

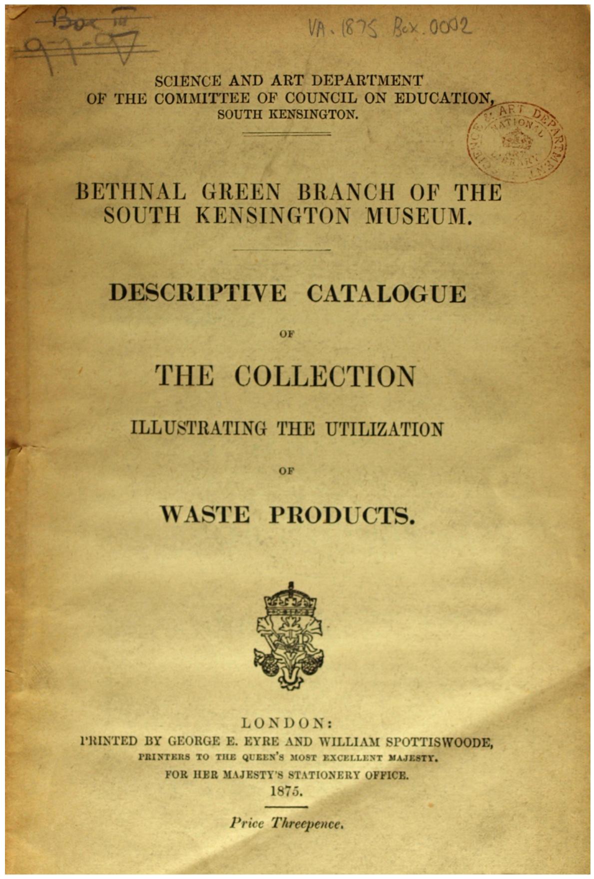
Figure 2 - Lyon Playfair, with kind permission of Smithsonian Institution Libraries

Lyon Playfair's sustained interest in the creation of lucrative products out of industrial pollution can probably be traced back to his days as a manager in the Primrose calico print-works in Clitheroe (Lancashire) in 1841 and 1842, but his contribution to the Bethnal Green waste exhibit can be more directly linked to his role as commissioner of the 1851 Great Exhibition and in his later influencing of the management of its financial surplus (fig.2).[3] Be that as it may, the Scottish chemist never had the inclination to become a full-time populariser and was apparently happy to leave this task to the Danish-born Peter Simmonds.

Although now mostly remembered as the author of the first detailed global study of human foods,[4] Simmonds' main works were essays, pamphlets and extensive works of synthesis on the development and use of natural resources.[5] While the origins of his interest in by-product development are unclear, the topic was a logical extension of his previous writings. His work on waste products was first sponsored by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce to whom he dedicated the first edition (1862) of his 430-page 'Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances; or, Hints for Enterprise in Neglected Fields.' In his best-seller, he observed that the creation of wealth out of industrial waste was already 'too extensive in its scope to be discussed successfully in detail' in a single book.[6] He discussed several hundred cases, such as the various products derived from cattle horns. He described how the lower portion was made into combs and the remaining clippings of this process sold for manure. The middle portion was split into thin layers used as a substitute for glass in cheap lanterns, with some leftover material cut, painted, and used as toys and the rest sold for manure. The horn tip was turned into knife-handles, tops of whips and other such related articles. The core of the horn was then boiled in water. The resulting fat was used by yellow soap producers, and the remaining liquid purchased by cloth dressers for stiffening. The insoluble substance was then ground down and sold as manure. In light of the dynamism of the British economy, he added, new industries were constantly appearing, along with new problematic wastes from which commercial wealth had yet to be extracted.

As he would readily admit in later editions, Simmonds was overcommitted when he wrote the first version of his book and was displeased with the result. Fortunately, he produced a better compendium when the authorities of the Vienna International Exhibition of 1873 decided to devote a significant portion of their event to the topic. Because of his prominence on the issue, Simmonds was asked to form a representative collection to be shown in the British section of the exhibition. This endeavour also gave him the opportunity to begin developing an even larger exhibit on behalf of the Science and Art Department which would eventually be displayed at Bethnal Green. He used these opportunities to publish thoroughly updated versions of his book, first in 1873 and again three years later as an entirely new 491 page third edition which he concluded by observing that the topic was certainly not exhausted 'since every day furnishes new instances of what has become one of the most striking features of modern industry – to let nothing be lost, and to re-work with profit and advantage the residues of former manufactures'.[7]

The Bethnal Green waste products collection


SCIENCE AND ART DEPARTMENT
OF THE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL ON EDUCATION,
SOUTH KENSINGTON.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH OF THE
SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE
OF
THE COLLECTION
ILLUSTRATING THE UTILIZATION
OF
WASTE PRODUCTS.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY GEORGE E. EYRE AND WILLIAM SPOTTISWOODE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.
FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.
1875.

Price Threepence.

Figure 3 - P. L. Simmonds, Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection Illustrating the Utilization of Waste Products (London: HMSO, 1875)

The permanent waste exhibit formally opened to the public in 1875. It was described as follows by a contemporary:

> *'A department has been added to the Bethnal Green Museum (London) which promises to be highly instructive. In all manufactures, and, indeed, in all dwellings, there is a great deal of waste, some of which is noxious.*

> *Art and science are continually trying to discover uses for this waste, and have had much success; and in the new department above refereed to, there is a large collection of articles manufactured from waste. Waste silk, cotton, and wool are now converted into clothing or articles of domestic use. Beautiful dyes and exquisite perfumes are obtained from waste coal-tar; cork-clippings are manufactured into floor-cloth; and many other articles are now "on view," as auctioneers say, at Bethnal Green. Anyone who discovers a way to utilize waste (old corks, for instance), may reckon on an ample reward'.*[8]

According to another observer, this 'very large and comprehensive' collection was intended to 'show the importance and practicability of utilizing what have been considered 'waste products', rendered more necessary year by year in the face of increasing competition'.[9] It was originally accompanied by a seventy-nine page catalogue (originally priced three pence) that summed up its content along with Simmonds' earlier observations on the widespread nature of recovery practices and the importance of the profit motive in driving their development (fig.3).

On the latter subject, he observed that as

> *'competition becomes sharper, manufacturers have to look more closely to those items which may make the slight difference between profit and loss, and convert useless products into those possessed of commercial value, which is the most apt illustration of Franklin's motto that "a penny saved is twopence earned"'.*[10]

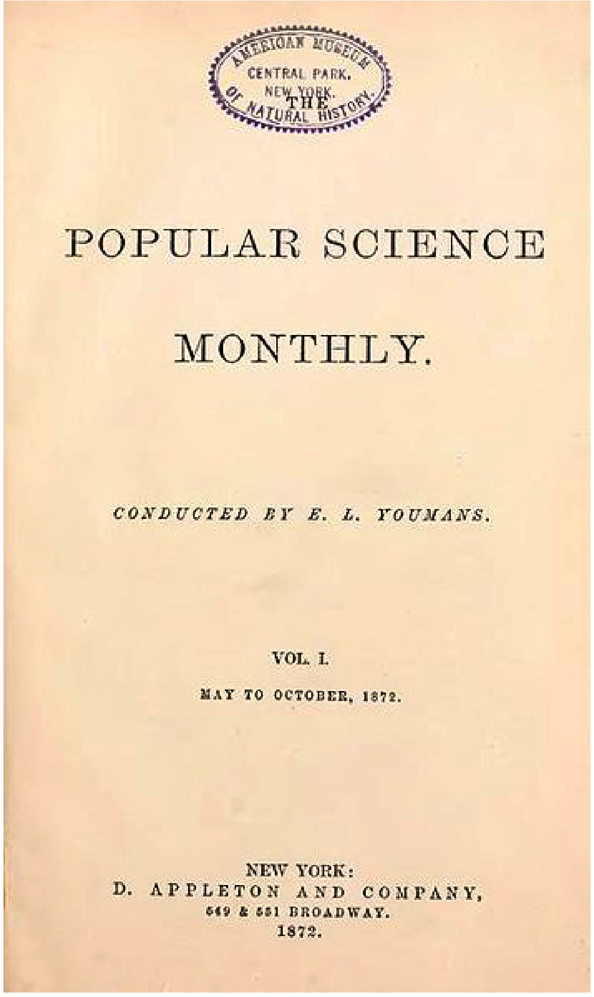


Figure 4 - Popular Science Monthly 1:1 (1872), with kind permission of The American Museum of Natural History, New York

The number of substances displayed - in each case with an explanatory label written by Simmonds - was said to have been very large at first, but the exhibit seems to have grown slowly afterwards. No new additions were reported in 1877 and 1881, while thirty-three new items were added in 1880 and eleven in 1883.[11]

The collection was removed from the north to the south basement of the Bethnal Green building in 1883. It was rearranged, relabelled, and benefited from better light, thus reportedly resulting in increased interest by visitors.[12] Perhaps not coincidentally, what seems to be Simmonds' last essay of significance on the topic was published that year in the Popular Science Monthly Journal, a publication for which he had written many times since its inception in 1872 (fig.4).[13]

The surviving records indicate that he was retained on an ad hoc basis until the Autumn of 1891, as Ann Christie discusses in her article. He might have been employed as much for his expertise as for charitable purposes by then, as he had fallen on hard times. Indeed, his work seems to have been plagued by much delay and judged somewhat unsatisfactory, but he was paid despite these problems. He died in 1897 aged 83, but his waste exhibit survived him by another 31 years after which it was destroyed after years of neglect.[14]

Impact of waste exhibit

The impact of the waste exhibit is somewhat difficult to assess in retrospect, but it is nonetheless possible to get some idea from contemporary sources. Regarding the relative overall success of the Bethnal Green Museum, it can first be observed that more than nine million visits were recorded during its first decade and a half.[15] While other exhibits were more popular, Simmonds, a man usually extremely modest in his writings, described his waste products collection as having attracted 'much attention and interest'.[16] As to its educational value, perhaps the most informative assessment can be found in Thomas Greenwood's 1888 survey of British museums and art galleries.

> *'In the lower part of the building there is, in a series of long wall-cases, a very comprehensive series of products illustrating the utilization of waste. These might be most interesting and useful, but in a dark corridor, and without a scrap of printed matter respecting them for the visitor to carry away, either by purchase or otherwise, their utility is considerably lessened. And yet there is no part of the whole Museum so calculated to produce solid lessons on the mind of the visitor as this section. Here in proper form there are specimens of products, arranged by that veteran in the utilization of waste products, Mr. P. L. Simmonds, of cotton, jute, nuts, straw, wood, barks, leaves, oil, silk, glass, metal and other substances'.*[17]

A decade earlier, one anonymous reviewer had similarly remarked that 'the utility of any museum is undoubtedly much increased by the publication of a catalogue of its contents' which helped visitors remember exhibits in a more productive way, especially in terms of their value and commercial relations. Simmonds' 'affordably priced' booklet was then available and 'even those who have not the opportunity of visiting Bethnal Green Museum may learn a good deal by [its] perusal, which we may unhesitatingly state is one of the most useful of its kind that we have seen'.[18] As another reviewer observed, since most of the inhabitants of the museum's vicinity were engaged in some branch of trade and were earning their daily bread by manipulating some of the very articles displayed, 'the mere fact of seeing them elevated to a position of importance in a public exhibition will no doubt inspire them to seek further information on the sources of the materials which are constantly before their eyes, but of the origin of which they know but little.[19] The reviewer further suggested that this result would be considerably assisted by the Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection. According to the 1877 annual report of the Science and Art Department, the booklet was selling 'moderately well', while the 1878 edition reported that 110 copies had been sold. Only one badly-damaged copy now remains (fig.3).[20]

In the end, however, it is probably fair to say that while the Bethnal Green permanent exhibit might have played a valuable role in educating a broad audience and influencing specific individuals, it is doubtful that it was absolutely crucial in promoting by-product development among British industrialists for, as both Playfair and Simmonds commented, widespread behaviour in this respect predated their writings. This was certainly obvious to William Crookes, the editor of The Chemical News, who observed soon after the publication of the first edition of Waste Products that the 'progress of our great chemical manufactures during the last ten years, as exemplified in the International Exhibition of 1862, appears chiefly to have been directed towards the utilization of waste substances'.[21] Indeed, none other than Karl Marx considered industrial waste recovery as 'the second great branch of economies in the conditions of production' after economies of scale.[22] It can also be observed that by-product development was simultaneously becoming widespread in locations where people had never heard of these writers and did not benefit from a permanent by-product display, and that books similar to Simmonds' Waste Products were later published in Germany, France, the United States and the United Kingdom without any apparent knowledge of his contribution.[23]

The fact that resource recovery was still going strong after the deaths of Playfair and Simmonds is also attested to by the launch of Waste Trade World: The Journal of the Metal, Cotton, Woollen, Paper, Rubber, and other Waste Trades in 1912. It was the first British periodical devoted to the business of scrap and waste products. Interestingly, in 1918 one of its editors contemplated the creation of a detailed bibliography on waste recovery and came across a reference to the 1875 Bethnal Green Waste Exhibit catalogue in an edition of William Stanley Jevons' Principle of Economics. Upon contacting the museum, T. A. Lehfeldt, the employee then in charge of the exhibit, informed the editor that the catalogue had long been out of print, but that a copy could be found in the Science Library of South Kensington.[24]

Conclusion

The several hundred win-win examples collected by Playfair, Simmonds and others suggests the necessity to rethink some of the intellectual foundations to the now dominant approach to sustainable development. Admittedly, by-product development was never able to eliminate pollution problems completely, but it seems undeniable that such activities were triggered on a large scale by profitability considerations and very often resulted in drastically reduced environmental impact.

All this is not to say, of course, that Playfair, Simmonds and some of their contemporaries were denying the severity of environmental problems created by profit-seeking businesses in various locations. It is, instead, to say simply that their contribution is better understood as an attempt to promote the development of win-win practices through creative problem-solving rather than through the reduction of manufacturing output and living standards. In a world where widespread poverty and famine were still the norm for most of the human race, and where people were much less sheltered from the vicissitudes of nature than they would later become, these authors were surely better able to appreciate the trade-offs between economy and environment of their day than are 21st century writers so often prone to indict Victorians for their lack of environmental concern. In the end, it may be that the rational interest of business has never been as opposed to the environmental interest of society as is currently supposed.

This essay is drawn from the author's article, 'Victorian Pioneers of Corporate Sustainability: Lyon Playfair, Peter Lund Simmonds and the Society of Arts' Waste Products Initiatives'. *Business History Review*. 83:4 (2009): 703-729.

Endnotes

1. See, among others: Lomborg, Bjørn. *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Indoor air pollution, especially when individuals are

exposed to smoke and particulates in poorly ventilated houses where low quality fuels (wood, dung, etc.) are burned in traditional stoves and open air fireplaces, is still responsible for millions of deaths per year in less developed economies. See, among others: Duflo, Esther, Michael Greenstone, and Rema Hanna. 'Indoor Air Pollution, Health and Economic Well-Being', *Survey and Perspectives Integrating Environment and Society (SAPIENS)* 1 (February 2008): 1–9.

2. Glenny Crory, William. *East London Industries*. London, 1876: 72.

3. Playfair's two most important writings on the topic are 'On the Chemical Principles Involved in the Manufactures of the Exhibition as Indicating the Necessity of Industrial Instruction' in *Royal Society of Arts, Lectures on the Results of the Great Exhibition of 1851*. London, 1852: 157-208, and 'Waste Products Made Useful'. *North American Review* 432 (1892): 560-568. He also discussed the topic incidentally in several other essays and articles and probably authored a few anonymous pieces on the topic.

4. Davidson, Alan. Introduction to *The Curiosity of Food*, by Peter Lund Simmonds. London, 1859; reprinted Berkeley, 2001.

5. Simmonds' publications include *The Commercial Products of the Vegetable Kingdom*. London, 1854; *Tropical Agriculture*. New York, 1877; *The Commercial Products of the Sea*. New York, 1879; and *The Animal Food Resources of Different Nations*. New York, 1885.

6. Lund Simmonds, Peter. *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances; or, Hints for Enterprise in Neglected Fields*. London, 1862: 2.

7. Lund Simmonds, Peter. *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances*. (third edition). London, 1876: 477.

8. Anonymous, 'The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature'. *Science and Art* 23:1(January 1876): 124.

9. Liversidge, Archibald. *Report Upon Certain Museums for Technology, Science, and Art, also upon Scientific, Professional and Technical Instruction and Systems of Evening Classes in Great Britain and on the Continent of Europe*. Sydney, 1880: 11.

10. *Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection Illustrating the Utilization of Waste Products*. London, 1875: 4.

11. *Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, Report of the Science and Art*

Department of the Committee of Council on Education. London, 1876-1878; 1880-1881.

12. *Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, Thirtieth Report of the Science and Art Department, with Appendices*. London, 1883: 532.

13. Lund Simmonds, Peter. 'The Saving of Science'. *Popular Science Monthly* 33:2 (1883): 798-811.

14. From various internal documents available in the Victoria and Albert Museum Registry's *Bethnal Green Museum, Waste Products Collection 1874-1928* file.

15. Greenwood, Thomas. *Museums and Art Galleries*. London, 1888: 266.

16. Black, Barbara J. *On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums*. Charlottesville, 2000: 33-34. See also *Waste Products and Undeveloped Substances*. (Third edition), iii.

17. Greenwood, Thomas. *Museums and Art Galleries*. London, 1888: 264.

18. Anonymous, Review of 'Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection Illustrating the Utilisation of Waste Products'. *The Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions* 6:3 (1876): 598.

19. Anonymous, Review of 'Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection Illustrating the Utilisation of Waste Products'. *The Gardeners' Chronicle* 4 (1875): 427.

20. *Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, various Report of the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, with Appendices*. London, 1876-1878.

21. Crookes, William. 'Chemical Products - The Application of Waste'. *Popular Science Review* 5:2 (1862): 58.

22. Marx, Karl. *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*. vol. III. Chicago, 1909/1894: 95.

23. Koller, Theodor. *The Utilization of Waste Products*. Third Revised Edition. New York, 1918 (original German edition, 1880); Razous, Paul. *Les déchets et sous-produits industriels*. Paris, 1937/1921/1905; Kershaw, John B. C. *The Recovery and Use of Industrial and Other Waste*. London, 1928; Lipsett, Charles H. *Industrial Waste and Salvage: Conservation and Utilization*. New York, 1963/1951. For a more detailed survey of the past literature on the topic, see Desrochers, Pierre. 'How did the Invisible hand Handle Industrial Waste? By-Product Development before the Modern Environmental Era'. *Enterprise and Society*. 8:2 (June 2007): 48-374.

24. The original query (June 6th, 1918) and Lehfeldt's reply (June 12th, 1918) can be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum Registry's *Bethnal Green Museum, Waste Products Collection 1874-1928* file.

‘Nothing of intrinsic value’: The scientific collections at the Bethnal Green Museum

Ann Christie, Graduate of RCA/V&A MA in History of Design, Victoria and Albert Museum

Abstract

Until the 1920s, the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum contained scientific collections as well as the better-known displays of objects of art and design. This article considers these collections, particularly the ‘Collection illustrating the utilization of waste products’, in the context of the Museum’s early history.

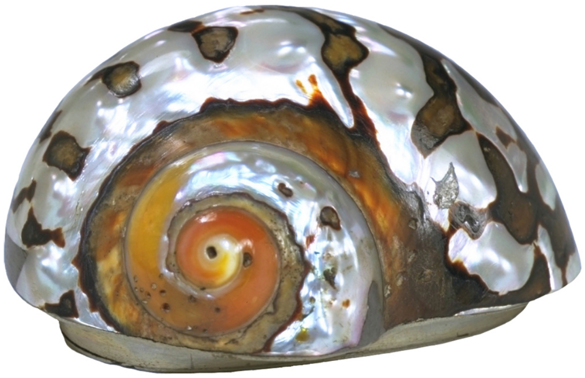


Figure 1 - Shell snuff box, England, 1800–75. Museum no. AP.81-1875

A glass fronted cupboard in a corner of the basement of the Bethnal Green Museum, now the Museum of Childhood, is crammed with small decorative objects – jewellery, boxes, notecases - made from shells, feathers and skins (figs 1–3).

A plastic printed label on the door – ‘Animal Products’ – confirms that what connects these objects is their material origin in the natural world, following the broad and convenient classification into the ‘three great kingdoms’ of animal, vegetable or mineral which underlies the organization of the 1851 Great Exhibition. This classification was applied to the ‘nucleus of a permanent Trade collection’ comprising articles presented to the Commissioners at the end of the Great Exhibition. The items were considered to have potentially ‘great practical benefit for the manufacturing and mercantile communities if systematically arranged for the purposes of reference’.[1] With plant products housed at the Museum of Economic Botany at Kew, and mineral products in the Museum of Practical Geology in Jermyn Street, an extensive collection developed from the Animal Products was retained at South Kensington. The background to the Animal Products collection provides a context to understanding the Waste Products Collection, discussed by Pierre Désrochers in this issue of the V&A Online Journal; in one sense, the waste products of manufacture represented a new category of ‘cooked’ raw materials, arising from cultural rather than natural processes, in a world where such neat divisions of material origins were no longer adequate, where chemistry, synthesis and re-synthesis were increasingly important, and where concern about scarcity of materials and growing urban populations drove innovative uses and re-uses.[2]

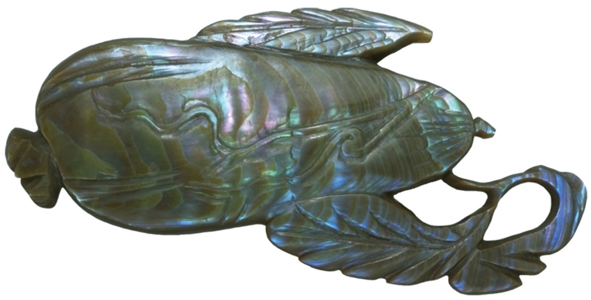


Figure 2 - Carving in the shape of a teapot, mother-of-pearl, Japan, about 1875. Museum no. AP.118-1875

The objects in the cupboard are the remnants of curious tributaries in the history of the South Kensington – and hence the Bethnal Green – Museums. They are a reminder not only of its roots in the Great Exhibition but of the original scientific and educational purposes of the founders, often overlooked in narratives of the Victoria and Albert as an institution primarily concerned with taste and design in the decorative arts. As Bruce Robertson argues in his ‘alternative history’, ‘The Museum, in Cole’s vision, was never just a container that staged programs. It was an educational force that deployed material collections’.[3] Three long standing exhibitions at Bethnal Green - the Animal Products Collection, the Food Collection, and P. L. Simmonds’ ‘Collection illustrating the utilization of waste products’ - are closely tied together in concept and in the personalities involved. They are a paradigm of a scientific and educational approach mediated through objects and texts, and equally significantly through substances themselves. Underlying the three exhibits is a quantitative approach to the material world, and to the value of its constituents: the Food Collection, for example, was arranged by ‘chemical composition’ on the grounds that ‘all food is found to be composed of the same materials or elements as the human body’, and indeed the exhibit contained a chart showing the composition of the human body by weight of the chemical elements and with those chemical components arranged in 'jars, trays and saucers'.[4]

What has survived of the three collections are small decorative items; but also represented in the original displays were industrial and manufacturing processes, bottles and jars of materials and explanatory texts. Few images survive relating to the scientific displays in the museums but an idea of their presentation can be surmised from these and from the registers of objects, catalogues and museum guides. A useful contemporary account of the detail of museum display is given by Thomas Laurie, a manufacturer of museum cases. He proposes in his 1885 booklet *Suggestions for Establishing Cheap Popular and Educational Museums of Scientific and Art Collections* that 'material relating to the human body and the laws of health', for example, could be displayed 'In an upright glass case, seven feet high, raised one foot from the floor, fifteen feet long, and one foot deep'. Texts should be clear in their educational purpose: 'Explanations, in simple language, and boldly printed in large type, should form a special feature of all collections'.[5]

Figure 3 - Miniature basket, shell and ormolu, 1875. Museum no. AP.110-1875

The inclusion of the word 'cheap' in Laurie's title seems significant, intended as it was for new audiences for local museums. Value was a concept that was not only particularly relevant to the Waste Products Collection and to Simmonds' own exhaustive research into the economics of his wide-ranging interests, but an idea that haunts the wider story of the Bethnal Green Museum: the East End and its people might have been considered only as liabilities or as problems, but for the value of the economic activity concentrated there. The story reflects ambivalence not just towards industry - and those who worked in it - but specifically to refuse, base materials and dirty processes as sources of wealth. As Esther Leslie discusses in Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry, the natural cycle of growth, decay and reproduction had been thrown into asymmetry by the growth of towns and industry, and she quotes Marx's proposition of a new, man-made cycle: 'capitalism teaches how to throw the excrements of the processes of production and consumption back again into the circle of the process [...] and thus [...] creates new matter'.[6] This ambivalence was also epitomized in Dickens' last novel Our Mutual Friend (1865) with its recurring themes of salvage; the soiled fortune from waste collection which holds the complex plot threads together, represented by a landscape of the 'mounds of dust' from which the wealth was extracted (fig. 4).[7]

Figure 4 - 'The Dutch Bottle' woodcut, Marcus Stone, frontispiece in Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, Vol. II (London: Chapman and Hall, 1865)

Like Dickens, the founders of the Bethnal Green Museum believed in the redeeming and improving power of education for the working classes, but there was an ultimately irreconcilable difference of opinion about whether this could best be done through association with precious objects of high culture or by deepening understanding of more mundane aspects of the material world, particularly those of immediate relevance to the audience in their daily working lives.

When the South Kensington Museum came to dispose of the iron buildings known as the 'Brompton Boilers' from the site of the 1862 exhibition, the buildings were to be offered 'in portions' to London districts expressing the wish to see local museums established. The origins of the Bethnal Green museum typify Anthony Burton's phrase 'vision and accident' to describe the history of the Victoria and Albert Museum; the vision being to establish museums in parts of London where working class people could benefit from their educational purpose.[8] That attention to the education of adults from the working classes was clearly linked in the thinking of the time to the fitness and competitiveness of British industry is confirmed by supporting statements before the House of Lords debate on the setting up of the museum: 'unless our working people in this country are educated we will not be in a position to maintain that supremacy in commerce and manufacture upon which all our other supremacy is based'. The huge popularity of newspapers and periodicals was cited as evidence of the current 'disposition amongst the working classes of this country to be enlightened'.[9]

In the event, only the Bethnal Green district came up with a proposal for using the buildings. The accident was the fortuitous availability of a large site in Bethnal Green which was 'useless and unprofitable' since it was used for grazing, being held by a charity as open space– hence having no commercial value despite its location in a densely populated area. According to one commentator, who described the Bethnal Green Museum as an 'asylum for South Kensington refuse', these displays, like the buildings themselves, were thought to have reached the end of a useful life at South Kensington and to be ready for disposal.[10] As such, these exhibits may have been considered to be particularly appropriate for a working class audience.[11] The museum was thus already a recycling project, viewed with suspicion by some critics; the Galway MP William Gregory suggested that 'if [the South Kensington] authorities were allowed to transfer the overflowing and sweepings of Kensington to other parts of the country, there would be no check upon their extravagance'.[12] As well as the building, the collections of Food and of Animal Products were similarly relocated from South Kensington: 'There are one or more classes of objects in the South Kensington Museum which would appropriately constitute the foundation of such a museum, such as the collections of animal products useful in manufactures'.[13]

As Désrochers points out, Simmonds' Waste Products Collection, added three years after the museum's opening, was a similar blend of a cabinet of curiosities, classroom and showcase for industry, following in the catalogue the three broad categories of substances derived from vegetable and animal origins and from sewage and mineral waste.[14] Visitors were presented with a huge range of exhibits, from decorative items from other cultures to examples of the latest applications of industrial chemistry, with descriptive labels explaining processes and estimating their potential economic value. As well as a generally instructive purpose, one thought was that museums should be location-specific: ‘in every district of London there ought to be a branch museum established, adapted to the particular trades of the locality in which it is established’.[15] The 1860 regulations for contributors submitting exhibits for the Animal Products Collection make clear that, as in the Great Exhibition, there was a strong commercial element to the displays: ‘Descriptive labels will be attached to the various contributions, giving their names, uses, prices, &c’, and thus that the relationship between exhibitors, visitors and proprietors could be more complex and interdependent than merely a top-down educative project. Labels and catalogue descriptions helped to situate the manufactures and processes on show, and as much as passive observers, the visitors could equally have been involved in production or consumption of articles on display.[16] Yet, one commentator on the International Exhibition of 1872 criticised that approach as 'scarcely removed in their aspects from the factory and workshop life from which an escape is needed', significantly ignoring the scientific displays in referring to Bethnal Green Museum's early success as a 'really admirable art-museum' and reflecting that what the 'thing really wanted is a scheme for placing worthy objects of interest in fairly attractive buildings in various quarters of our great metropolis'.[17]

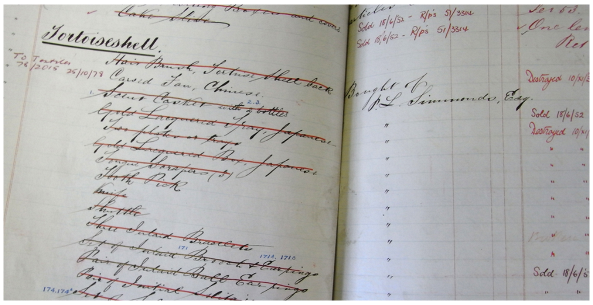


Figure 5 - Entries from Register of the Animal Products Collection showing items supplied by P. L. Simmonds. Photograph by Ann Christie

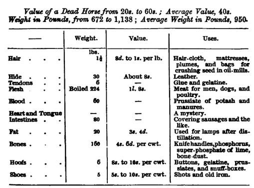
The collections of Animal Products and of the Utilisation of Waste Products were also linked through Simmonds - an inveterate collector himself - who 'took a not inconsiderable part' in setting up the Animal Products Collection with Lyon Playfair in 1857. He wrote descriptive catalogues for the collection and indeed provided many of the exhibits, as the registers of objects show (fig. 5).[18]

Many of Simmonds' donated items from shells, for example, are among those which still remain in the V&A collections. The content of both demonstrated a vision of the world as raw material and economic resource that should be exploited as inventively as possible. Indeed, one division of the Animal Products Collection already covered waste - Class V, the ‘application of waste matters’ was set out as follows:

- Div I Gut and Bladder
- Div II albumen, casein &c
- Div III prussiates of potash and chemical products of bone etc.
- Div IV animal manures, guano, coprolites, animal carcases [*sic*], bones, fish manures etc.

This class in the collection persisted throughout the life of the Waste Products exhibition, despite the apparent overlap in subject matter once that was installed.[19] A table from the Animal Products Collection showing the uses and value of a dead horse, is characteristic of the preoccupations common to both - to quantify commercial value and to demonstrate the ingenuity of industry - and a very similar description appears in the Waste Product Collection with the added invitation that ‘those curious to see the whole process may pay a visit to Green Street, Blackfriars, or Wandsworth and other localities where horse slaughterers are located’.[20] The chart of the horse’s components, reproduced here from The Uses of Animals in Relation to the Industry of Man by Edwin Lankester, is shown in the register as being ‘revised and reprinted’ in 1872 (figs 6–7).[21]

Figure 6 - Illustration to the chapter ‘On Waste’ from Edwin Lankester, The Uses of Animals in Relation to the Industry of Man; Being a course of lectures delivered at the South Kensington Museum (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1860), 140.



Value of a Dead Horse from 20s. to 60s.; Average Value, 40s.
Weight in Pounds, from 672 to 1,138; Average Weight in Pounds, 950.

—	Weight.	Value.	Uses.
	lbs.		
Hair . . .	1½	8*d.* to 1*s.* per lb.	Hair-cloth, mattresses, plumes, and bags for crushing seed in oil-mills.
Hide . . .	30	About 8*s.*	Leather.
Tendons . .	6	—	Glue and gelatine.
Flesh . .	Boiled 224	1*l.* 8*s.*	Meat for men, dogs, and poultry.
Blood . . .	60	—	Prussiate of potash and manures.
Heart and Tongue	—	—	A mystery.
Intestines . .	80	—	Covering sausages and the like.
Fat . . .	20	3*s.* 4*d.*	Used for lamps after distillation.
Bones . . .	160	4*s.* 6*d.* per cwt.	Knife handles, phosphorus, super-phosphate of lime, bone-dust.
Hoofs . . .	6	8*s.* to 10*s.* per cwt.	Buttons, gelatine, prussiates, and snuff-boxes.
Shoes . . .	5	5*s.* to 10*s.* per cwt.	Shots and old iron.

Figure 7 - Table from Edwin Lankester, The Uses of Animals in Relation to the Industry of Man; Being a course of lectures delivered at the South Kensington Museum (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1860), 159

In itself an example of the recycling of a useful idea, the deconstructed dead horse can be traced back through a note added to Babbage's Economy of Machinery and Manufacture by its German translator in 1833.[22]

A description of the uses of animal guts in Animal Products illustrates how the displays used text and objects. In case 312 'exhibited by Mr F. Puckridge of Kingsland Place' (in Hackney) is an explanation of the process of making 'gold beaters skin' from the membrane covering the intestine of the ox (fig. 8).[23]

Figure 8 - Goldbeaters' skin. Image courtesy of Talas bookbinders' and conservation supplies, New York

Gold beaters' skin was used to interleave thin-rolled sheets of gold which were then beaten out to form gold leaf:

1. A bottle, with the raw skin in the wet state, as obtained from the ox; being the outer membraneous covering of the gut.
2. the same dried.
3. the skin as prepared in frames for varnishing.
4. goldbeaters' skin finished as used by druggists.
5. A goldbeaters' mould, with sheets of skin containing 850 leaves, each leaf being double, making 1700 thicknesses, used to beat out gold leaf.
6. A goldbeater's shoulder, as used in the second process of

goldbeating.

7. A silver mould and book of leaves, used to beat out silver from the size exhibited to the size of the mould.
8. A heavy goldbeater's mallet, weighing 8 ¼ lbs.

Figure 9 - Illustration from poem 'The water that John drinks', Punch, or the London Charivari, Vol. XVII, 145

The product was valuable, 'often fetching ten guineas per mould of 850 small leaves', and evidently Puckridge's business was thriving as it was said to consume the guts from 10,000 oxen a week.[24] It is an extreme example of the alchemy of industry refining such an apparently base material – the 'raw skin in the wet state' into a valuable commodity through association with gold itself. A comment by Charles Knight in his Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge that this industry belongs to an 'exceedingly dirty and disagreeable class of manufactures' is, however, a reminder that industries using waste were among the most noxious in themselves (fig. 9).[25]

Images showing the Food Collection while still at South Kensington and a detail from the opening of Bethnal Green Museum give at least some idea of how the exhibits for the scientific displays were laid out overall, using a combination of frames, glass cases and substances in jars 'ranged on shelves over the counter' (figs 10–11).[26]

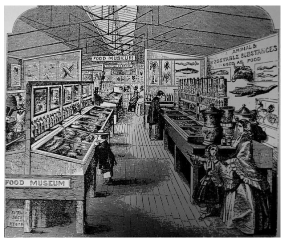


Figure 10 - The Food and Animal Products Collection, South Kensington Museum. From The Leisure Hour, 14 April 1859

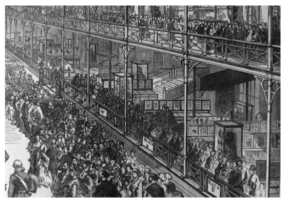
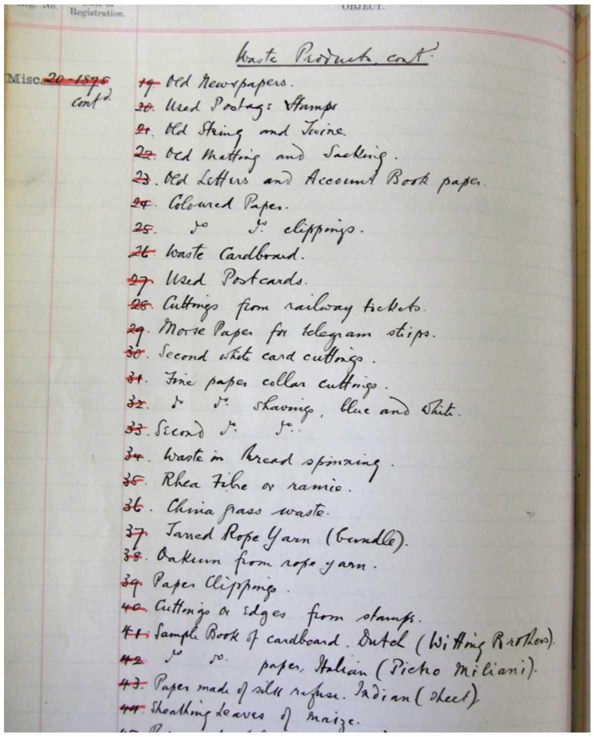


Figure 11 - Detail of engraving of the opening of the Bethnal Green Museum, showing gallery with the Animal Products Collection. Illustrated London News, 29 June 1872

The displays were evidently generously labelled with text. An article about a Bank Holiday at the Museum in Chassell's Family Magazine in 1883 approvingly describes local visitors to the Food Products display giving time to the labels: 'it was worth remarking, too, that as a rule the visitors did not content themselves with any mere cursory glance at the cases, but passed along the lines of bottles, and slowly deciphered their inscriptions in a way indicative of a thoroughly aroused interest'.[27] An illustrated publication about the Animal Products was produced in 1880 to meet the demand for 'popular scientific information',

> *'The brief descriptive framed labels of the Animal Products collection in the Bethnal Green branch museum, prepared by Mr. PL Simmonds, are found to be much studied, and many have frequently been copied by visitors. [...] To meet this demand for popular scientific information the Lords of the Committee of the council on education have directed these labels to be reprinted, in a collected and cheap form, with merely an occasional alteration of figures[...] and the additions of some woodcuts'.*[28]

This book is in a larger format than the catalogues, with larger and briefer text and a profusion of illustrations, mostly of the animals themselves. The demand for the product raises the interesting question of whether the performative aspect of a museum, where the visitor moves through taking in smaller units of information with visual prompts, had itself influenced the production of texts of popular science. As suggested by the publication of books of lectures on the Food and Animal Products collections by Edwin Lankester (who according to one reviewer was known for ‘bringing abstruse matters into a simple form’) there were a number of ways in which the museum might mediate knowledge to a wider audience both directly and indirectly.[29]



Registration. OBJECT.

Waste Products, cont.

Misc. 20-1875 cont^d.
19. Old Newspapers.
20. Used Postage Stamps
21. Old String and Twine.
22. Old Matting and Sacking.
23. Old Letters and Account Book paper.
24. Coloured Paper.
25. D^o D^o clippings.
26. Waste Cardboard.
27. Used Postcards.
28. Cuttings from railway tickets.
29. Morse Paper for telegram strips.
30. Second white card cuttings.
31. Fine paper collar cuttings.
32. D^o D^o shavings, blue and white.
33. Second D^o D^o.
34. Waste in thread spinning.
35. Rhea Fibre or ramie.
36. China grass waste.
37. Tarred Rope Yarn (bundle).
38. Oakum from rope yarn.
39. Paper Clippings.
40. Cuttings or edges from stamps.
41. Sample Book of cardboard. Dutch (Witting Brothers).
42. D^o D^o paper. Italian (Pietro Miliani).
43. Paper made of silk refuse. Indian (sheet).
44. Sheathing leaves of maize.

Figure 12 - Page from the register of the Waste Products Collection, 1875. Photograph by Ann Christie

On examining the register of the objects Simmonds supplied for the Waste Products exhibition it is striking how, in addition to the texts and objects of manufacture, materials themselves were produced as evidence. The catalogue lists 51 categories of entry with a total of nearly 1,000 objects ranging from 43 items under ‘silk waste’ to old bus tickets (fig. 12).[30]

Over 600 jars are logged as arriving at the museum, containing everything from sand to human faeces (three different proprietary processes for transforming sewage into fertilisers were represented). Even in glass jars their particular qualities would have been obscure; but the quantity of them suggests that Simmonds must have felt that their presence as ‘real things’ was essential rather than illustrative, to be supported by text rather than the other way round. Unlike objects and artefacts made of durable materials, however, or the well-behaved mineral division of the natural world, this organic matter had a limited shelf-life. The register records a series of removals with the terse comment ‘decayed’. One wonders what the display must have looked like– and possibly even smelt like - when the next batch of removals became necessary. It has to be said, too, that Simmonds’ magpie enthusiasm for the subject made it a very elastic concept, allowing him to wander outside the realm of industrial by-products - materials that are already ‘cooked’ in some way - into examples of interesting uses from raw materials of all kinds. Simmonds’ own words when he was asked to report on the collection in 1891 with a view to updating it suggest that he was aware of these problems: ‘Animal and Vegetable Wastes, necessarily deteriorate, and become unsightly – the difficulty I experience is as to where to draw the line – between the utilisation of the residues of Manufactures, and the development of neglected products, which until used are certainly waste substances'.[31] The list of objects in the receipt on the file for 22 July 1875 reads as if he might have gathered them from a forgotten corner of his attic:

> *22 July 1875*
>
> *78 Bottles containing Illustrations of Waste products*
>
> *10 articles -as per list attached [list reads:]*
>
> *1 small piece of cork matting*
>
> *1 Straw photo frame*
>
> *1 Pair horse hair socks*
>
> *1 small Brick*
>
> *1 Piece esparto grass*
>
> *1 Wooden Idol, one ear missing, much broken*
>
> *1 Small Box with date stones etc*
>
> *1 Small model of a Bark Canoe, both ends broken one small piece lost*
>
> *1 piece imbira cheirosa for rope making Brazil*
>
> *1 small tin with sand from Senna Green'.*[32]

Reading this list, it is not difficult to understand why R. A. Thompson, the Assistant Director of the museum, noted on the file in 1891 that 'another edition of the Catalogue is wanted, but I cannot recommend Mr Simmonds to do it. He might be employed to add to the Collection any waste products that are new but many of the specimens already there are not waste products'.[33] In 1897, when a manufacturer of 'silicate cotton' who had provided samples wrote to enquire if they should update their exhibit as it was no longer 'very presentable', a file note reads 'If the Waste Products Collection is to be kept up I think it would be well to accept this offer', suggesting the future of the collection was already in doubt.[34] In the 1920s, under the head curator Arthur Sabin, the museum was gradually reorganised and the collections of Animal and Waste Products and Food removed from display.[35] The collections had been reviewed by the Director of the Science Museum, who 'considered that nothing in them could be of the slightest use to the Science Museum'. The Animal Products collection was said to have 'scattered throughout its bulk many objects of minor interest'. These decorative items, textiles and clothing were removed to other departments or still survive in the Bethnal Green Animal Products cabinet. Some 'miscellaneous' items from the Waste Products collection were retained but the remaining items, 'a great bulk of quite useless and valueless material' according to Sabin, contained 'nothing of intrinsic value whatever, whilst the state of most of it is such that its early destruction has become imperative'. A Board of Survey was appointed to review objects for disposal which Sabin judged 'entirely foreign to the present purpose (or any conceivable future purpose) of the Museum'. Having duly inspected 1600 items, of which some materials such as oils and lac were retained for use by the Art Workroom (the V&A's conservation department), the Board reported that the remaining items comprised 'small specimens of various materials which have absolutely no value of any kind'.[36]

How was it, then, that the aspects of these scientific collections which represented some of the most advanced applied science of their time, had come to be viewed so negatively; as not only worthless but actively threatening to the health of the museum? In part it is a reflection of a lack of direction of the Bethnal Green Museum in its early years; the image of the museum as itself something of a cast-off persisted. Anthony Burton quotes a report from the Daily News as early as 1879: 'It is grievous that an institution established with the best of intentions and successfully launched should be allowed to dwindle into a mere refuge for specimens and spectators who have no other place in which to find rest and shelter'.[37] With the Science Museum's move for independence at the turn of the century, leaving the V&A as an art museum, these exhibits were increasingly anomalous, and as permanent collections, it had perhaps been too easy to overlook them as part of the fabric of the museum without reconsidering their role. Increasingly, a visit to the Museum was described more in terms of the merits and intrinsic interest of individual objects than the thematic links of their origins - for example, the Animal Products collection was interpreted in one account as clothing: 'the covering of the outward man'.[38] In 1891 the *Brief Guide to the Collections* described the waste products display as 'instructive and interesting' but as a list of materials rather than a concept: 'waste cotton, waste jute, coco-nut, mosses, seaweed etc, waste nuts, seeds, flax straw, &c: waste wood, rattans, barks, leaves &c; waste paper, oil-cake, rags &c; waste silk, vines, leather, feathers, &c; tanners waste, gut hair fish, &c; waste shale &c; glass and metallic waste, coal tar &c'. It was not mentioned at all in the 1904 edition and with the briefest note in 1908 as being between a collection of medals and a Roman coffin.[39] 'New matter' in the form of world-changing substances such as aniline dyes and artificial fertilisers were included in the displays; but left unattended over the years and without an enthusiastic programme of re-interpretation, they must have seemed outdated and mundane, even disgusting, compared to the riches of paintings, sculpture and other artifacts with which they competed for visual attention.

Endnotes

1. *Catalogue of the Animal Products Collection*. London, 1857.

2. See Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Raw and the Cooked*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969 (tr. John and Doreen Weightman) for the origin of this dualism.

3. Robertson, Bruce. 'The South Kensington Museum in context: an alternative history'. *Museum and Society*. 2 (2004): 9.

4. *Inventory of the Food Collection*. HMSO, 1869: 53; *Guide to the Collections of the Bethnal Green Branch*. London, 1872. This information represented very current research into the composition of the human body related to the composition of foodstuffs. See 'History of the Study of Human Body Composition: A Brief Review'. *American Journal of Human Biology*. 11 (1999): 157–165.

5. Laurie, Thomas. *Suggestions for establishing cheap popular and educational museums of scientific and art collections and industrial productions and inventions in all towns, villages and districts and also for their classification, arrangement and exposition on a new plan, making them available for pupils in lower and middle class schools and colleges, mechanics' institutes, science and art classes, and for the instruction and recreation of the general public*. London: T. Laurie, 1885.

6. Leslie, Esther. *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*. London: Reaktion, 2005: 83.

7. Dickens, Charles. *Our Mutual Friend*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1865. See also other accounts of the value to be found in waste in 'Dust – or Ugliness Redeemed'. *Household Words*. 1850: 379, which Dickens was said to have used as an idea for Our Mutual Friend; 'Filthy Lucre'. *Good Words*. 20 (1879): 741.

8. Burton, Anthony. *Vision and Accident: the story of the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: V&A, 1999.

9. Evidence of Thomas Conolly, described as 'a working man'. *Correspondence etc. relative to the establishment of the East London Museum*. 1872: 18. Collection of Bethnal Green Museum.

10. Kriegel, Lara. *Grand designs: labor, empire, and the museum in Victorian culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008: 182.

11. The other collection mentioned as being desirable to include was ethnography from the British Museum. In the event Pitt Rivers supplied ethnographical items which were displayed in 1875, the same year as the Waste Products Collection: see extract from W. R. Chapman, Pitt Rivers and his collection. 1984,

reprinted as ‘Bethnal Green and South Kensington Museums’, https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/Kent/musantob/betsken.html (accessed 15 January 2011).

12. *Hansard*. August 10th, 1867: 1298.

13. *Correspondence etc. relative to the establishment of the East London Museum*. 1872: 18.

14. See *V&A Museum of Childhood, Miscellaneous Register, 1871–1921: Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection illustrating the utilization of Waste Products. Bethnal Green Museum*. London: HMSO, 1875.

15. Evidence of Mr Conolly: *Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection illustrating the utilization of Waste Products*, 18.

16. *Catalogue of the Collection of Animal products*. South Kensington Museum, 1860.

17. *Penny Illustrated Paper and Popular Times*, 26 October, 1872.

18. Simmonds, Peter Lund. *Animal Products; their preparation, commercial uses, and value*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1877.

19. *Catalogue of the Collection of Animal Products.* South Kensington Museum, 1860: 109.9

20. *Waste Products Catalogue*. 47.

21. Lankester, Edwin. *The Uses of Animals in Relation to the Industry of Man; Being a course of lectures delivered at the South Kensington Museum*. London: Robert Hardwicke, 1860. Lankester was at the time Superintendent of Science at the South Kensington Museum. See also *V&A Museum of Childhood, Register of the Animal Products Collection*.

22. Babbage, Charles tr. *Dr G Friedenberg, Über Maschinen- und Fabrikenwesen*. Berlin: Verlag der Sturschen Buchhandlung, 1833.

23. A gain, a description of goldbeaters’ skin also appears in the *Waste Products catalogue*: 42, but relates to a much smaller exhibit from a different manufacturer.

24. *Catalogue of the Collection of Animal products*. South Kensington Museum, 1860.

25. Knight, Charles. *The English Cyclopaedia: A new Dictionary of Universal Knowledge*. Volume 4. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1860: 437.

26. *Catalogue of the Collection of Animal products*. South Kensington Museum, 1860: 111.

27. *Cassell’s Family Magazine*, 1883. Tower Hamlets Library collection.

28. *Commercial products of the animal kingdom employed in the arts and manufactures shown in the collection of the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum*. (briefly described by P. L. Simmonds, with more than 150 illustrations). London: HMSO, 1880.

29. 'Review of The Uses of Animals in Relation to the Industry of Man', in *Medical Times and Gazette*. Nov.17, 1860: 485.

30. This appears to be another overlap with the animal products exhibit. Making threads from silk waste, short or damaged fibres which would previously been thrown away, was now a thriving industry. See Simmonds, *Commercial products of the animal kingdom*. London: HMSO 1880: 92.

31. V&A Archive, MA/2/B20, nominal file: *Bethnal Green Museum, Waste products Collection*.

32. V&A Archive, MA/2/B20, nominal file: *Bethnal Green Museum, Waste products Collection*.

33. V&A Archive, MA/2/B20, nominal file: *Bethnal Green Museum, Waste products Collection*.

34. V&A Archive, MA/2/B20, nominal file: *Bethnal Green Museum, Waste products Collection*.

35. V&A Archive, MA/50/2/12, Policy file: *Bethnal Green Museum Board of Survey*.

36. V&A Archive, MA/50/2/12, Policy file: *Bethnal Green Museum Board of Survey*.

37. Burton, Anthony. *Vision and Accident*. 120.

38. *Cassell's Family Magazine*, 1883. Tower Hamlets Library collection.

39. *A Brief guide to the various Collections in the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum*. London: 1891, 1904, 1908 editions.

Shedding light on the digital dark age

Elizabeth Walker, RCA/V&A MA History of Design Graduate 2010, Victoria and Albert Museum

Abstract

Digital technology appears to offer the potential of perfect and infinite memory and, as such, provide a great service to the museum, one of the common custodians of national memory. Yet paradoxically, this capacity is threatened by what some have called the prospect of a 'digital dark age', an uncertain era in which many contemporary digital artefacts have been rendered inaccessible by the swift obsolescence of the software. For museums hoping to preserve digital relics, such a 'digital dark age' presents major challenges.

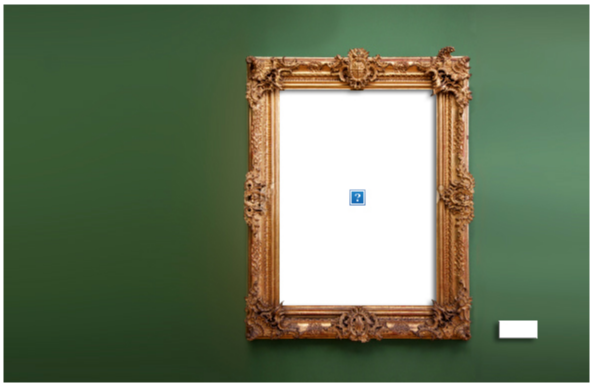


Figure 1 - E. Walker, *Image not found*, created in Photoshop, October 2010

Digital technology appears to offer the potential of perfect and infinite memory and, as such, provide a great service to the museum, one of the common custodians of national memory. Yet paradoxically, this capacity is threatened by what some have called the prospect of a 'digital dark age', an uncertain era in which many contemporary digital artefacts have been rendered inaccessible by the swift obsolescence of the software. For museums hoping to preserve digital relics, such a 'digital dark age' presents major challenges.

In the technologically advanced, digitally conversant environment of the developed world, an increasing number of our everyday experiences rely on digital design - such as the user experience relative to the smart phone for example, the satellite navigation system, the games console and most conspicuously the internet. Moreover, the sheer volume of emails, text messages and online video create a major headache for the 21st century archivist. Content is endlessly added, edited, recycled, shaped and repurposed by its creators and consumers in a myriad of ways; design in its digital form never stands still. According to the National Media Museum for example, 'the average website has a lifespan of around 44 days – about the same as a housefly'.[1] While various rescue attempts have been initiated such as the Way Back Machine on Archive.org and the British Library's UK Web Archive (est. 2004), these moves are not sufficient to retrieve earlier versions of websites. More often than not all that is salvaged are the ghostly remains of original forms as graphic components and code are moved, changed or deleted. In *Wired* magazine, Bruce Sterling highlights the issue with a call for 'innovative tools for documenting, discovering and defending culture born at the turn of the millennium from the ravages of obsolescence and obscurity'.[2]

It is difficult to anticipate what our future perception of the turn of the 21st century will be. The time feels extraordinarily immediate, yet paradoxically it is likely to become far more remote than any other period in history. Imagine fast forwarding fifty years into the future and wanting to experience the first ever iTunes introduced by Apple Inc in 2001 - the software simply no longer exists in its original form. It has evolved to incorporate design updates and functionality upgrades since its conception, the latest version offering a mere trace of its digital ancestor. Similarly, the development of hardware has rendered many digital artefacts unreadable as earlier generations of equipment are updated and replaced. In her article 'Digital killed the analogue star!', Claire Battisson, a Preservation Conservator at the V&A, remarks 'that many master copies were functioning as "user copies" and some media was inaccessible due to outmoded formats (for example varieties of magnetic tape; video, audio and open reel) and lack of playback equipment (such as vinyl, cassette and video players, and specific projectors)'. Battisson is working with colleagues and other institutions to produce a set of policies addressing the care of this type of work, as well as a migration programme to guarantee access to them. However, both of these processes are costly and time consuming. Significantly, she states, 'if we don't have the resources to look after this media in an acceptable way and are not able to make this type of work accessible then maybe we need to consider why we are collecting it in the first place' (figs 2–3).[3]

Figure 2 - IBM 3410 and Magnetic Tape Subsystem, introduced in 1971, courtesy of IBM

Figure 3 - 8 inch Floppy Disk Drive, announced 1978. Photographed by Michael Holley, courtesy of Wikimedia, July 2007

In an article in *The Observer*, David Smith writes that 'while the Domesday Book, written on sheepskin in 1086, is still easily accessible, the software for many decade-old computer files – including thousands of government records – already renders them unreadable'.[4] Ironically, in 1986, the BBC created a digital Domesday Book on an Acorn computer and videodisc player. By 1999, the digital book was inaccessible and it took a team of researchers three years to develop emulator software to unlock it.[5]

In conversation with Tom Woolley, the curator of New Media at the National Museum of Media, Smith explains that although the museum has 'acquired fully functioning artefacts, it is time consuming and laborious to run original software, to boot up operating systems each day and so forth so the museum has begun to look into emulation methods'.[6] Researchers at Portsmouth University are doing just that. By building the world's first general purpose emulator as part of the project KEEP, they aim to make a variety of formats future-proof.[7] It takes the form of a piece of software with the ability not only to recognize but 'play' or open all previous types of computer files from 1970s *Space Invader* games to three-inch floppy discs. Other emulators exist which are specific to certain platforms or types of media, but it is hoped that the new version will be able to emulate media in any format. If successful, this initiative may provide some kind of appeasement to the threat of the 'digital dark age'. However, it does raise interesting questions about emulation and authenticity, issues that can be further scrutinized through an entirely different method of conservation originating as far back as 1873.

Figure 4 - The Cast Court collection, V&A, London. Photographed by M. Chohan, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, 31 July 2007

The Cast Courts (fig. 4), which opened in the V&A at this time, offer us a historical equivalent to the challenges posed by digital design. During the mid-to-late 19th century, plaster-cast collections became increasingly popular. As it was so expensive to travel to the continent, museums acquired reproductions for their many visitors otherwise unable to view and experience important monuments and sculptures. With time, imitation collections faded along with the growing public antipathy to copying works of art. It was not until fairly recently that revived interest in the casts arose from a greater appreciation of what they offered. According to Malcolm Baker 'the [cast] collection is becoming increasingly valuable as a record of originals that have either suffered the over-zealous attentions of later restorers or severely deteriorated through the pollution of more than a century'.[8] Significantly, the V&A exhibit a reproduction of Lubeck's late 15th-century relief of Christ washing the Apostles' feet; since the original has been destroyed the cast now serves as a unique record of a lost work. Although a different methodology from the preservation of digital relics, the reproduction of monuments and works of art present a model for emulating software.

Victor Mayer-Schönberger, author of *Delete: the Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*, claims that 'since the beginning of time, for us humans, forgetting has been the norm and remembering the exception' but concludes that 'today, with the help of technological developments, forgetting has become the exception, and remembering the default'.[9] As a society, our collective ability to gather and disseminate information is a large part of what makes us successful, but Mayer-Schönberger argues that as individuals, we would be crippled by the sheer weight of a perfect memory. It is only our ability to forget that enables us to make decisions and move forward. Yet museums have a mnemonic function and, although forgetting is useful to individuals, for nations it can be dangerous. Learning from history requires a societal capacity to remember just as aphorist George Santayana asserted in 1906 that 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.[10]

'Google [the popular search engine] knows more about us than we remember about ourselves' Mayer-Schönberger claims.[11] This raises issues about privacy and the ethics of sharing and storing information. The Library of Congress in Washington DC has announced that it will store every single tweet posted on Twitter for posterity. The first tweet was recorded at 3:50pm on 21 March 2006. According to the Library's blog 'Twitter processes more than 50 million tweets every day, with the total numbering in the billions'.[12] Twitter's official blog noted that 'Over the years, tweets have become part of significant global events around the world–from historic elections to devastating disasters. It is our pleasure to donate access to the entire archive of public tweets to the Library of Congress for preservation and research. It's very exciting that tweets are becoming part of history'.[13]

In a speech delivered on internet freedom at the Newseum in Washington DC, Hilary Clinton stated that the 'spread of information networks is forming a new nervous system for our planet'.[14] In many respects it could be said that information has never been so free. Twitter and other social-networking platforms have provided a public space for people to express opinions, whose voices perhaps in other circumstances might be suppressed or unheard. An article published in *The Telegraph* on 15 June, 2009 describes how the Tehran street protests against the 'rigged' elections were not only publicised, but also orchestrated online.[15] The piece states that 'Iranians intent on change are using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other blogging sites as a loud speaker to amplify their anger towards the regime'. The digital platform provided a powerful reformist tool as many of the online community assembled to occupy the streets of Tehran. The authorities attempted to 'block websites, text messages and phone calls implying that it fears the power of communication. [...] By giving a new generation of Iranians the right to protest, [...] the people of the Islamic Republic are being watched – and can communicate with – a worldwide audience. The government can no longer suppress a population which refuses to be silent'.[16]

Of course it is because this is an open, universal platform that commentary can come from a broad spectrum of voices. Clinton notes that 'amid this unprecedented surge in connectivity, we must also recognise that these technologies are not an unmitigated blessing. [...] These tools are also being exploited to undermine human progress and political rights. The same networks that help organise movements for freedom also enable the spread of hatred and incite violence'.[17]

Nevertheless it is worth remembering that there are areas of society not participating in the social interactions enabled by digital media. There has always been a dividing line between those who can access and convey knowledge and those who cannot, or who choose not to. The internet has created a technocratic, technophobic divide; a digital division between the information rich and the information poor.

The power of the digital platform is fundamental to shaping world events and arguably public 'tweets' are a part of our history. Even so, billions of 'tweets' will not enable a master narrative, but instead present an endless barrage of meaningless 'twitter' impossible to keep pace with in the present, let alone decipher from the future. Jean-Noel Jeanneney explains that 'it's wonderful to get easily to as much of the culture as possible, but when you get everything you get nothing'.[18] Nevertheless, by documenting a form of history through social networks the traditional top-down power structure is readdressed. Not only are these new narratives informed by a wide spectrum of people but they also have the potential to reach a broader audience, allowing for a greater dissemination of information.

In *Building a Universal Digital Memory*, Pierre Lévy writes that 'the future will inevitably bring an increase in network capacity, not only in terms of data storage, but also processing power and bandwidth'.[19] But what is the impact of infinite storage capacity for the museum? Institutionally, museums find it very difficult to withdraw physical objects from collections. How on earth will they decide what data to drop?

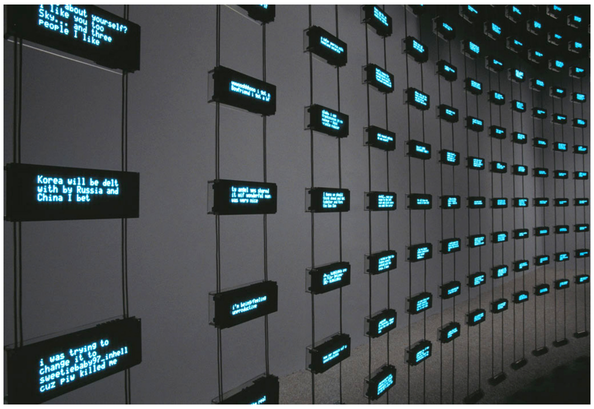


Figure 5 - Mark Hansen and Ben Ruben, *The Listening Post*, 2001–2003. The Science Museum, London. Photograph courtesy of David Alison

In an article covering the Decoding the Digital Conference at the V&A, Liz Farrelly notes that the Science Museum's resident art curator Hannah Redler has facilitated more than 70 commissions of computer art projects since 1997. Farrelly specifies that Redler acquired many of those commissions by lobbying for changes to accession politics (fig. 5).

Furthermore, the Science Museum now recognizes that computer art projects could be insured against obsolescence when built using bespoke software. This would suggest that the future preservation of artefacts requires a generation of conservators with a solid grasp of code. These restorers need to understand the fluidity, physics and politics of digital systems.

An example of the Tate's internet art could illustrate why accessioning digital work is problematic. In 2000, Graham Harwood was commissioned to develop a piece of digital work producing another version of the Tate's website (figs 6–7). Sitting alongside the official version, Harwood's site critiqued the Tate from within. Upon entering the domain (www.tate.org.uk), an alternative window popped up in front of the home page. The Harwood site looked similar to the official site, but the content was skewed. For example, Tate Britain was described as 'the home of 500 years of tasty babes, luxury goods, own goals and psychological props of the British social elite'.[20] Regardless of what we think about the counter-cultural position Harwood has taken and the relationship between the internet and art, it is clear that the Tate might appear unable to document this transient art form in any meaningful way. This is in stark contrast to the established conventions of other impermanent disciplines such as performance art. In addition to this inadequacy, Tate has updated its own website design since the creation of the satirized website. Harwood's creation is no longer a replica of the site and the issue is confused further. This scenario illuminates the preservation issue that museums face; that the digital design domain is in constant flux.

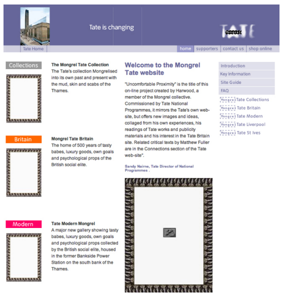


Figure 6 - Graham Harwood's interpretation of Tate's homepage, digital screenshot captured October 2010, courtesy of Tate

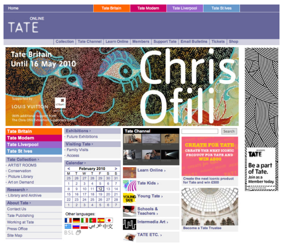


Figure 7 - Tate's homepage, digital screenshot captured October 2010, courtesy of Tate

In *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss the idea that nothing is thrown away; that new media is folded into old. Their theory is based around the fact that old and new media can sit side by side, that one informs the other. They claim that 'innovation rearranges and reconstitutes the meaning of earlier elements. What is new about new media is therefore also old and familiar: that they promise the new by remediating what has gone before'.[21] For example, the internet initially refashioned the letter, the book and the magazine before remediating graphics, advertising, TV, film and radio. Bolter and Grusin state that 'the web today is eclectic and inclusive and continues to borrow from and remediate almost any visual and verbal medium we can name'.[22]

The past is ever present; it is constantly being re-written. 'The more memory we store on databanks, the more the past is sucked into the orbit of the present, ready to be called up on the screen'.[23] As various methods for preserving digital design emerge such as the future-proofing emulation project KEEP or migration attempts by museums, some issues are yet to be addressed. If preservation becomes infallible, to what extent should digital design be preserved given its ever-changing nature, and who should choose? Do we want our digital history to be an objective commentary? As a form of preserving our cultural heritage, our early attempts at digital preservation may not adequately map the way in which digital technology has shaped the world. At the same time, there is a dichotomy between collective memory (central to the museum and our nation's memory) and individual narrative.

We are witnessing a democratization of knowledge through the volume of multi-authored information on the internet (the use of blogs, Twitter, Wikipedia etc), which better reflect the multi-faceted history museums could be portraying. Aleks Krotoski suggests that 'instead of truth, knowledge and accuracy being agreed on by experts and handed down by an elite from above, it will slowly emerge from the masses and come up from below'.[24] Similarly, in *Theatres of Memory*, Raphael Samuel describes history as 'a social form of knowledge; the work in any given instance of a thousand different hands'.[25] Trying to preserve digital history and design may lead to uncertain and untidy ends. To record a particular point in history inevitably requires the inclusion of many different interpretations and memories. Should curators collect everything or should they become more like search engines, filtering information, preserving and presenting only the most relevant searches?

On the one hand emulating software presents us with the possibility of a precise and infinite memory. On the other hand, without it, we will be plunged into digital darkness without access to vast swathes of our past. The perfect, precise memory presents a new type of history, but one in which we are in danger of information overload. In order for us to deal with the past in the present, we need to discard some of that past to make it comprehensible, digestible and useful. A 'digital dark age' implies a more traditional historical trajectory, a history that is very flawed. Some pieces are left out by accident and some are left out by design – this is the history that has been plotted up until now.

Such is our dilemma. A symptom of our time is a perceived notion that we have the capabilities to preserve everything through digitization and we are distracted by the fact that we are not doing it. The bigger question is this; even if we can harness these capabilities, would it be correct - or even ethical - to do so?

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John Thomas and his 'wonderful facility of invention': Revisiting a neglected sculptor

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Abstract

One of the myriad pleasures of working in a museum such as the V&A is the way in which appreciation of an object, such as the sculpture 'Rachel, the Daughter of Laban', by John Thomas (1813–1862), can be renewed by something as simple as a modest change in presentation. This brief article aims to investigate how the apposite object label, intelligent lighting, and the correct plinth, can help us to rethink the past.

Figure 1 - ‘Rachel, The Daughter of Laban with a Lamb at her Feet’, John Thomas, marble. Museum no.257:1,2-1885

A good example of this was the decision in 2009 to move two sculptures from a dingy corner in one of the Museum’s lobbies on Exhibition Road to niches in the corridor which leads visitors towards the temporary exhibition galleries. The whole space was relit and painted in celebration of its robust 19th-century proportions and tiled floor and what was once a mere transit space acquired an elegant air. The sculptures acquired new plinths, at a height carefully calculated by curators and the design teams to display the object to best effect.

The sculpture, ‘Rachel, the Daughter of Laban’, by John Thomas (1813–1862) (fig. 1), has particularly benefited from this apparently unassuming project.[2] The biblical matriarch now regularly catches the eye of exhibition visitors and one often sees them intrigued by the composition. They might be similarly interested to learn how its acquisition demonstrates the museum’s consistent good fortune in enjoying the generosity of donors, and how Thomas himself provides an engaging 19th-century tale of the rapid progress of a man of design from humble roots: a tale that includes a lost masterpiece, an art-historical puzzle and a suitably melancholic ending. This article also affords an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of the V&A-RIBA partnership, because both institutions hold drawings by John Thomas, and it has been possible to illustrate this article with examples from these holdings, all of which have been digitised for the first time.[3]

In 1885 Sir Henry Hunt, an important patron of John Thomas' work, wrote to the Director explaining that this 'beautiful piece' was displayed in the conservatory of his London home in Eccleston Square, but as he was giving up his house, and was reluctant to sell the work, he preferred to offer it for display either at South Kensington or Bethnal Green.[4] Sir Henry had enjoyed a prominent career as a building surveyor, advising on a wide range of landmark projects. Most notably the new Palace of Westminster - and he had been knighted in 1876 for public service.[5] Rachel had been exhibited at the Summer Exhibition of 1856 and it is possible, especially given the close connection between Hunt and Thomas, that Hunt had acquired the work at that time.[6] The sculpture was duly inspected by George Wallis, senior keeper of the art collections, who considered it 'one of the best, perhaps the best work, I have seen by this artist' and having declared that it was 'well worth acceptance as a work of modern sculpture', Rachel was accessioned later that year.[7]

A prosperous baronet's gift to a great national museum, contrasts sharply with the simple early life of the sculptor that made it. Thomas was born in Chalford, Gloucestershire, 1813, and, being orphaned at thirteen, he was apprenticed to a local stone cutter. An early appreciation of his work claims, rather mawkishly, that 'anxious not to be a burden to anyone' the boy devoted his evenings to engraving brass-plates and lettering grave-stones.[8] True to our Victorian narrative, virtue was rewarded when, several years later, Thomas was working as a craftsman on the King Edward VI Grammar School in Birmingham. Its architect, Charles Barry, had been frustrated by delays in the supply of original models for workmen to use in executing ornamental bosses and so was delighted when Thomas took the initiative of making one himself. Barry was so impressed that he engaged Thomas for his Palace of Westminster project and also sent him on a tour of Belgium to inspect Gothic buildings.[9]

Thus began a rapid ascent in status for the sculptor. By 1848, at the young age of 28, he was supervising carving at the Palace of Westminster and was formally appointed superintendent in 1846. His industry and skill were vital because the sculptural programme was so extensive and complex: monarchs, angels, heraldic animals, coats of arms, were all to be sited on major elevations and set in a rich gothic context (figs 2–4).[10] At the same time, playing such a central role in executing and designing one of the great public works of the century afforded him ample opportunity to acquire private patrons.

Figure 2 - Queen Eleanor in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 49)

Figure 3 - Richard III in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 54)

Figure 4 - Henry V in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 50)

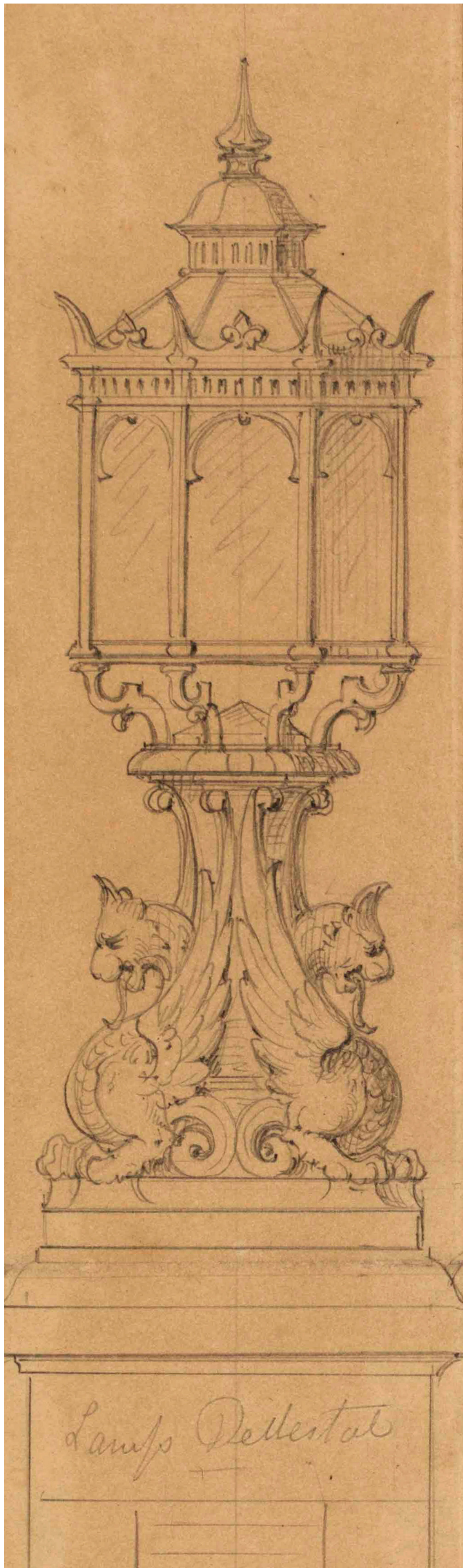

Figure 5 - Design for garden furniture for Somerleyton in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 58)

Two eminent figures were vital to his continued success. First was Sir Morton Peto, the enormously successful and wealthy contractor for railways and public works. Peto had worked with Barry on the grammar school in Birmingham, and they collaborated again on the Westminster scheme. He also worked closely with Thomas, and in 1844 commissioned him to rebuild Somerleyton Hall, in Lowestoft (fig. 5).

Peto would later have to leave the vast mansions when he endured a spectacular bankruptcy in 1866 arising from failed railway investments, lamented by The Times as a 'national humiliation'.[11] Such a man, and such a mansion, required impressive art and Peto commissioned a sculptural group Queen Boadicea and Her Daughters which was exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer of 1855.[12] Alas, it is currently untraced, and one can only hope that it may yet emerge; engravings in the RIBA Collection suggest that it was a bravura composition (fig. 6).

The connection with Peto brought Thomas into contact with other entrepreneurs, such as his business partner Edward Ladd Betts, for whom Thomas was to build Preston Hall in Kent. Betts also proved to be an avid commissioner of Thomas's marble sculpture.[13] Yet, while such connections undoubtedly brought prosperity, it was the encounter with his most illustrious architectural patron, Prince Albert (fig. 7) that was to bring exceptional prestige.

The Prince was deeply engaged with the Westminster project through his Chairmanship of the Royal Fine Arts Commission, and doubtless encountered Thomas through this enterprise. Thomas was to receive several royal commissions and was said to have enjoyed a respectful relationship with his energetic patron. The Prince appreciated his simplicity of character and Gloucestershire accent, describing him as a 'man of consummate ability, utterly without conceit or arrogance'.[14] More tellingly, the Prince may have relished the opportunity to see his own wishes carried out precisely, without enduring the prickly professional pride of some contemporary architects.

Figure 6 - Statue of Boadicea in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 69)

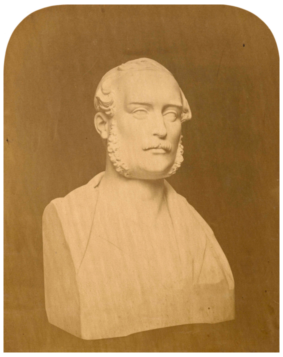

Figure 7 - Bust of Prince Albert in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 1 (RIBA, 68)

Thomas's Royal commissions included reliefs of War and Peace for the interior of Buckingham Palace and the remodelling of the print room at Windsor, but it is worth dwelling on two of his projects which have been researched in some detail and which illustrate the degree of close collaboration between Prince and architect. Particularly close to the Prince's heart, as an expression of his interests in design and architectural innovation, was the development of the Home Farm at Frogmore. Thomas is credited with the overall design of the Royal Dairy, erected in 1858, although it is also clear that his patron played an active role in the direction of the project (fig. 8).[15] Both would have been pleased with its reception, for the Illustrated London News praised it as a 'perfect gem of taste and art'. The building, still in splendid condition today, contains many Thomas touches, including profile portraits of the royal children, and dramatic majolica fountains at each end of the creamery, with enormous herons supporting a shell, all made by Minton.[16]

This sanguine collaboration was succeeded in 1860 by the considerable honour of redesigning Queen Victoria's Audience Room at Windsor (fig. 9).[17] Poignantly it was to be the last such project, because by 1862, both men had died; the Prince in the winter of 1861 and Thomas in the following year.

Figure 8 - Drawing for Royal Dairy in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 1 (RIBA, 67)

Figure 9 - Drawing for Audience Chamber in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 1 (RIBA, 62)

Figure 10 - Sculpture for Leeds, photograph, in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 14)

One obituary for Thomas singled out the Audience Room for exceptional praise as one on which 'Thomas devoted his utmost strength' 'under the personal direction of the late Prince Consort, and it has been pronounced by the best authorities to be of the most perfect and beautiful things of the kind ever produced'.[18] Bills submitted for the works, taken in conjunction with his drawings, indicate the extent of Thomas's responsibility and involvement in the design of every part of the room, including the fittings.[19]

The Windsor Audience Room was not the first extensive decorative scheme undertaken by Thomas and, indeed, there is some evidence that the Prince also took an active interest in Thomas's commission to design the entire interior decoration and furnishings for the new Glasgow home of the industrialist John Houldsworth.[20] Thomas was already well known in Glasgow, having completed several projects, including the Graeco-Egyptian Houldsworth Mausoleum at the Necropolis in 1854.

Figure 11 - Designs for Manchester in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 1 (RIBA, 21)

With such a reputation, it is hardly surprising that Thomas was engaged to decorate the new Houldsworth mansion at Park Terrace. One of Houldsworth's biographers was later to claim that the magnificence of the designs, seen as impeccably innovative, was so much talked about that the Queen and Prince Albert paid a visit to the Thomas studio to inspect them.[21] The expensive and elaborate scheme was nearing completion when cut short by Houldsworth's death in 1859. Whilst it was seen by contemporaries as a ground-breaking scheme the furniture is untraced and little survives in the house of its original decorative arrangement.[22] Our principal evidence for the character and scale of the scheme derives from a prospectus published in the Glasgow Herald for a contents disposal in 1861. Descriptive catalogues were also issued, but regrettably none have been located.[23]

During his lifetime Thomas was admired for his prodigious energy and versatility over a remarkable range of commissions completed within only a few years. He created sculpture for the railway bridge over the Menai Strait, Manchester Free Trade Hall and Leeds Town Hall, and completed many banking buildings across the country, all in the popular palazzo style (figs 10–11).

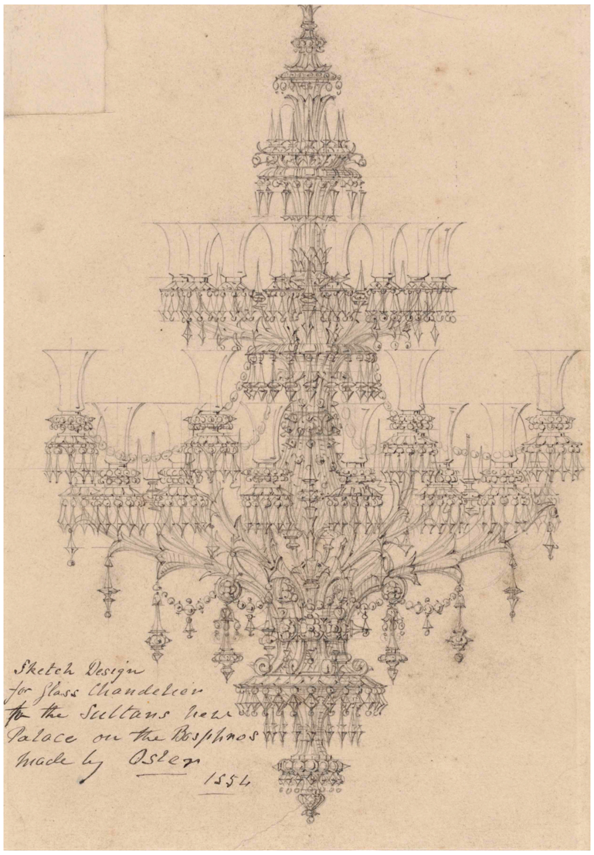

Figure 12 - Design for chandelier for sultan in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 1 (RIBA, 10)

The same practice was designing Italianate garden ornaments and layouts, church furnishings, commemorative sculptures and even glass chandeliers, made by Osler of Birmingham, for the Sultan's palace in Constantinople (fig. 12).[24]

Thomas also benefited from the small-scale reproduction of his work by the Art Union for whom leading manufacturers, including Minton, with whom Thomas had worked on many projects, produced ranges in Parian ware.[25] One of his most acclaimed large-scale marble sculptures, Lady Godiva, now in Maidstone Museum, was reproduced in this way (fig. 13).[26] Regrettably the V&A has no examples of Thomas Parian copies in its collection.

In 1849 the Art Journal reviewed the career of the promising young artist and found much to praise in his industry and quality because:

> *'Nothing seems to come wrong to Mr Thomas in the shape of Art. His whole career shows a remarkable aptness for adaption: sculpture, carving, designing, drawing, painting, and architecture - he is equally at home in them all'.*[27]

However, two obituarists in 1862 provided a rather more nuanced assessment of his achievements. One commented that his work was executed with scrupulous care and earnestness, rather faint praise perhaps. Another noted thoughtfully that he might have been an even finer sculptor had he been able to study antique sculpture in his youth, and devote greater time to his own development as an artist instead of being burdened with the supervision of major public and private building schemes.[28]

Figure 13 - Lady Godiva, photograph in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 71)

When in 1871 the artist William Bell Scott was celebrating the 'school' of British sculpture, he included Thomas in a survey that celebrated the more recognisable names in that canon, such as Flaxman, Nollekens, Chantrey and Gibson. Thomas was to be praised for his sureness, celerity of execution and commanding intelligence, because:

> *'Perhaps there was no other man in England, or, we might say, in the world possessing the complete practical training with the versatile and inventive ability displayed by Thomas, under whom the whole could have proceeded so regularly and easily'.*[29]

A more recent commentator has also observed that Thomas deserves credit for his part in breaking down snobberies within the sculptural profession.[30]

Figure 14 - Design for Shakespeare monument in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 2 (RIBA, 95)

Thomas died in April 1862. He might simply have died from blood poisoning, but many friends felt that his death was hastened by disappointment. It was suggested that after considerable discussion, and not of the most conciliatory nature, the Royal Commissioners had refused him space for his Shakespeare monument at the International Exhibition of 1862 (fig. 14).**[31]**It seems a plausible account, especially as Thomas had lost his chief patron, Prince Albert, the previous year and lacked this protector to intervene in his cause.

It has to be conceded that Thomas's reputation has declined sharply since the 19th century. It could be argued that to some extent he is tarred with the general disdain that befell Victorian sculpture in the 20th century, as new generations rejected the taste and imperialism of their forebears, a trend exacerbated by the disappearance of Victorian sculpture from the public realm as war time destruction and damage, and newly planned cities, redefined the landscape in which the work was originally created. In his seminal study, Benedict Read suggests that the fate that has befallen much Victorian sculpture has been 'temporary oblivion or permanent destruction' and notes that of almost three hundred British sculptures exhibited at the International Exhibition of 1862 few have survived.[32] The Thomas survival rate, including his drawings as well as his sculpture, has been healthy by comparison with many of his contemporaries, though even so his remarkable collection of models for the Palace of Westminster were destroyed in the Crystal Palace fire of 1936.[33] The decision to move his Rachel into a more prominent location provides an opportunity, albeit modest, to return his work and Victorian sculpture to public consciousness.

However, it is telling that Rachel has not secured a place in the Sculpture in England 1600–1900 galleries in the museum, which opened in 2007. Despite the generous space they occupy, curators of the new display still needed to make difficult choices, replete with aesthetic and historical judgements, about which works to display from the museum's considerable collection. That process clearly concluded that Thomas was not essential to a particular narrative about British sculpture. Some would argue that Rachel has simply been moved from an entrance lobby to a new role as decorative object in a corridor; a period piece rather than a significant chapter in a story.

The problem of grading an artist such as Thomas is not, however, simply a recent one. Within his lifetime, sculptors and critics deliberated keenly about the nature of sculpture, the demarcation and status of the profession, and the quality of its invention. We have already seen how the Art Journal and William Bell Scott were fulsome in their praise for Thomas, whilst modest doubts were raised by others. It is interesting that Scott should have viewed Thomas as a member of the same British 'school' which embraced Sir Francis Chantrey because the career of the latter might explain why Scott was so anxious to situate Thomas within a vibrant sculptural tradition. The foundation of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768, and its identification of sculpture as membership category, had a marked impact on the status of the profession. Following in these footsteps, some have suggested that Chantrey used the prestige and wealth from his remarkably successful career to formulate the concept of a national school in painting and sculpture; an objective confirmed by the fortune he bequeathed to the nation for the acquisition of art derived from this tradition.[34] Thus it could be said that Scott takes his cue from Chantrey in his eagerness to identify Thomas, with his prodigious energy and range, as a fine exemplar of the breed.

Figure 15 - Engraving of John Thomas in Sketches and Drawings by John Thomas, Volume 1 (RIBA, 1)

Advocates for Thomas might also have felt that he had overcome some of the creative challenges that the painter Sir Charles Lock Eastlake had propounded for the sculptural profession. Eastlake became Secretary of the Fine Arts Commission in 1841- a body charged with the encouragement of British art and the interior decoration of the Palace of Westminster through which, one imagines, he must have encountered Thomas.[35] Eastlake became President of the Royal Academy in 1850 and was later to become Director of the National Gallery. He also lectured on a wide range of artistic matters and his prognosis for sculpture was hardly cheerful because ‘sculpture is most liable to be particularly confounded with reality’ and ‘identity with nature is impossible in the chief object of imitation, the living figure’.[36] One presumes that in works such as Rachel, Thomas had convinced many influential critics that he had been worthy of the challenge.

Although contemporary critics were largely supportive, tentative concerns were raised about the absence of academic rigour in Thomas’s training, and the potential unrealised as a result. A tougher view might have cited the deficiencies in his education, and the diversity of work, as evidence that Thomas typified the plight of British sculpture rather than its hope. The influential critic Michael William Rossetti writing in 1861, only a year before Thomas died, surveyed the condition and prospects of the national ‘school’ and despaired.[37] He opined that true and beautiful form was the central object of sculpture, but feared that it was ‘too lamentably apparent’ that British artistry fell short of the ideal. He then proceeded to lament the poor training and patronage of sculptors, especially when compared to painters. Rossetti avers that in the absence of genius, and deadened by dependence on unimaginative patrons, ‘the tradesman like style of art takes comfortable possession’ and too many sculptors are ready enough to produce ‘Saint, king, or hero, Eve, Venus, nymph, shepherd, baby or allegory’.[38] Whilst Rossetti does not name Thomas, and indeed he is circumspect in mentioning many artists directly, one might feel that these aspersions are a little near the bone when contemplating

John Thomas. In the same year, Sir Richard Westmacott complained that ‘true’ sculpture was obscured by the sprawling diversity of workshops and their productions.[39]

While Thomas emerges from this narrative as a remarkable man, with a career forged through determination and energy, an art-historical perspective struggles to assign him a prominent role in the progress of British sculpture. However, it would be clinical and ungenerous to edit him too assiduously from the picture. He was a central player in forging the Palace of Westminster, a landmark project of that century, and was commissioned by some of the most prominent and engaging figures of his age. In this context, Thomas deserves respect and notice. By placing Rachel in a corridor adjacent to the Sculpture in Britain galleries, but not part of them or their scenario, Rachel, like her creator, stands in the wings rather than centre stage, a restaging that provides an elegant solution to what was an important omission, in the best ‘vision and accident’ tradition of the museum.

Acknowledgements

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Dialogues between past and present: Historic garments as source material for contemporary fashion design

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Abstract

This article explores London fashion designers' use of historic garments for research and inspiration for their collections. Examples of work by graduates from the Royal College of Art, two established designers and an interview with Professor Wendy Dagworthy, Head of Fashion at the RCA, demonstrate how historical research helps to build fashion collections redolent of meaning and narrative.

Figure 1 - Sketchbook, Katie Eary, 2008. © Katie Eary © Katie Eary

Research is absolutely central to the fashion design process. It underpins designers' ideas, informs the shapes and proportions they use, influences the materials they choose to work with and determines the techniques they employ to put them together. Surviving historic garments and images which record what people have worn in the past provide an invaluable research resource for many fashion designers. This paper will explore the diverse ways in which London fashion designers today use these tools to inspire their designs. Examples from the V&A exhibition Future Fashion Now: New design from the Royal College of Art (May 2009 - Feb 2010) will reveal how some recent fashion graduates have applied their personal approaches to research in developing their graduate collections. An interview with Professor Wendy Dagworthy, Head of Fashion at London's Royal College of Art, will demonstrate the central place research occupies in design education at the college. Interviews with designers at two London-based firms - Stuart Stockdale, Design Director at Jaeger and Barry Tulip, Senior Designer at Dunhill, will illustrate the importance of detailed research in inspiring their design ideas, reinforcing company heritage and developing a narrative behind their work. Finally, I will argue that this research, which enables dialogues between historic and contemporary fashion, helps to build new, more complex narratives about both past and present.

The exhibition Future Fashion Now: New design from the Royal College of Art explored key aspects of the fashion design process. It featured garments and accessories from the degree collections of graduates from the Royal College of Art's 2008 fashion MA programme. Completed examples from the designers' graduate collections were displayed alongside their sketchbooks, images of source material, paper patterns, three-dimensional models and equipment they used to make the garments. Each garment or ensemble in the display illustrated an element of the design and making process, offering a glimpse of how the designer approached their research, developed their ideas, experimented with materials and technology, collaborated with students in other disciplines or added subtle details to refine their work. Sections about concept, form, technique and detail illustrated how deeply intertwined these stages of the design process are.

London's Royal College of Art started its fashion programme in 1948, under the direction of Madge Garland, former fashion editor at Vogue magazine.[1] Today, the college welcomes aspiring designers with undergraduate degrees and prepares them for fashion careers through technical workshops, specialist lectures, project critiques and work experience. After a two year Masters Course the RCA's fashion graduates have gone to fashion houses such as Dior, Burberry, Vivienne Westwood and Chloe, while others, such as Ossie Clark, Boudicca, Julien Macdonald and, more recently Erdem

Moralioglu and Carolyn Massey have developed their own labels.[2]

Several of the Royal College of Art graduates whose work was featured in Future Fashion Now took some inspiration from historic garments. For her crystal-clad menswear collection, Katie Eary looked to a wide range of influences, including the uniforms of the Grenadier Guards, 19th-century English tailoring, and Russian literature. Her sketchbook is replete with images of men's military uniform and swatches of leopard print fabric and leather (fig.1).

For her graduate collection, Eary played with the showy, flamboyant elements of men's uniform such as metal and braid decoration to create a stage-worthy tailored coat covered in gold crystals with exaggerated, wide hips supported by leather pannier-style structures.

Figure 2 - Sketchbook, Siri Johansen, 2008. © Siri Johansen © Siri Johansen

Menswear knitwear designer Siri Johansen's collection included voluminous, oversize jumpers and trousers based in part on existing classic or favourite garments. For her research, the designer selected basic items such as a cable knit jumper, a herringbone tweed coat and a denim jacket. She focussed on the familiar details of the garments' patterns and textures, playfully altering their scale and magnifying surface details. Johansen used a range of printing and knitting techniques to expand and exaggerate patterns which are traditionally woven – a herringbone weave wool fabric became extra-large knitted chevrons; twill-woven jeans morphed into knitted trousers with an electronically-produced, enlarged version of denim's familiar diagonal lines. Future Fashion Now included Johansen's oversize grey jumper, inspired by a cable knit jumper in her mother's wardrobe (fig.2). She used an electronic Morat knitting machine to reproduce the cable of the source garment as an extra-large image, in two dimensions instead of three.

Figure 3 - Dress, Léa Carreño, 2008. © Royal College of Art/Dominic Tschudin © Royal College of Art/Dominic Tschudin

Given the Royal College Art's geographic proximity to the V&A and the close relationship between the two institutions, it is perhaps unsurprising that some of the objects featured in Future Fashion Now were inspired by V&A collections and exhibitions. During a visit to the Modernism (April - July 2006) exhibition at the V&A, womenswear knitwear designer Léa Carreño sketched textile designs by the French artist Sonia Delaunay, which formed part of the displays. Delaunay's vivid colours and geometric shapes formed part of Carreño' s extensive body of research, which included images of the costumes of the Ballets Suédois from the early 1920s. Inspired by this research, she produced a graduate collection of dresses knitted in bright stripes and bold blocks of colour (fig.3). This research also led her to experiment with light and heavy weight yarns, which she combined in ways that would move with the body like the more rigid 1920s ballet costumes.

Liam Jackson's menswear collection was also based around research on historic clothing. He combined wools, velvets, plastics and reflective materials to create tailored jackets, breeches and shirts, drawing parallels between the structured coats and knee-length breeches worn by men in the early 19th century and the weatherproof jackets and short trousers which bicycle couriers wear today. He contrasted light with dark, playing on ideas of bright lights in night time cityscapes, and echoing the images of road workers wearing reflective uniforms which he had collected in his research. For details of cut, Jackson looked to books on men's dress history but he also examined original garments in vintage clothing stores and theatrical costumiers.

Research is absolutely central to fashion education at the Royal College of Art. Under the direction of Professor Wendy Dagworthy, fashion MA students are encouraged to develop original ideas through detailed primary research. Beyond their lectures, tutorials, work critiques and dissertations, students are required to take part in a variety of research-oriented projects. Some of these projects involve studying original objects in museums. One recent group of students visited the Prints and Drawings Study Room at the V&A. Each student had to choose two images from a large selection of material then develop their ideas through research and build a collection around their chosen visual references. ‘We wanted them to do primary research and look at real things’, says Wendy Dagworthy. [3]

Where appropriate, RCA fashion students are encouraged to study examples of historic clothing. ‘They’re a source that you shouldn’t miss’, Dagworthy argues, ‘they can inform you about silhouette, details, prints, fabrics...they’re a really fantastic source of research’. She urges her students to visit museums to view historic fashion as well as art, architecture, furniture, sculpture. Of course not all fashion students at the RCA look to museums for inspiration. Among the 2008 graduates, some referenced their immediate surroundings, while others researched music or philosophy. ‘When we’re doing tutorials, we give them ideas about where they can do research related to their work’, she explains, ‘ideas can come from anywhere – you just need feeding and that’s what museums can do’. For many designers, looking to the past has produced groundbreaking work. But Dagworthy adds a note of caution: ‘you have to be careful - I think it’s fine to look to the past but you have to do it in a different, contemporary way’.

This creative appropriation of elements of historic styles is a long-established theme among London-based fashion designers. From the beginning of her career in the late 19th century, the couturière Lady Duff Gordon, known as Lucile, frequently looked to historic garments for inspiration. Writing in the 1920s, she hinted at the romantic quality these historical references lent to her designs. She remembered: ‘I loosed upon a startled London, a London of flannel underclothes, woollen stockings and voluminous petticoats, a cascade of chiffons, of draperies as lovely as those of Ancient Greece’.[4] Lucile explained her design and making methods in columns she wrote for The New York American Examiner, citing museum collections among her research sources. The columnar designs she created between 1910 and 1913 had names inspired by the late 18th and early 19th centuries, such as ‘Directoire’, ‘Empire’ and ‘Josephine’.[5]

The study of historic garments also formed part of Norman Hartnell’s research. Dresses worn by sitters in the mid 19th century paintings of Franz Xavier Winterhalter inspired the full-skirted, crinoline styles he produced for society ladies in the 1930s. In advance of designing dresses for the Maids of Honour to wear during the coronation of George VI in 1937, Queen Mary urged the couturier to examine surviving coronation clothing at an exhibition assembled by the Royal School of Needlework.[6] The enormous commission he received for the 1953 coronation prompted more detailed historical research at the London Museum and the London Library. His resulting designs included modern coronation robes and caps of state which blended sympathetically with the historic garments at the ceremony and a coronation dress for The Queen embroidered with traditional symbols of the Commonwealth.[7]

In more recent decades, several British designers have become renowned for producing fashion collections laden with historical references. Vivienne Westwood has consistently borrowed and remixed elements of historic dress in her designs. At the beginning of her career, Westwood used vintage clothing as source material for her work, unpicking 1950s garments to understand how they were constructed.[8] In subsequent years, the designer built on this interest in historic styles of dress producing, for example, short, 19th-century inspired crinolines for her Mini-Crini collection in spring/summer 1985. Her Portrait collection (autumn/winter 1990-1) included shawls and 18th-century style corsets printed with reproductions of Francois Boucher's painting Shepherd Watching a Sleeping Shepherdess in London's Wallace Collection, and some of her later work is replete with references to historical tailoring and dress construction. Westwood's designs are meticulously researched. She has continually examined historic cut, and has studied examples of historic garments in stored collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum.[9] As

Professor of Fashion at the Vienna Academy of Applied Arts from 1989 to 1991, and later as a fashion educator in Germany, she urged her students to study and copy historic garments in order to further their knowledge of cut and technique. Throughout her career, she has used her thorough understanding of historic garments to create new designs which challenge orthodox ideas of beauty and sexuality.[10] Her approach does not aim to replicate the past but, as Rebecca Arnold has argued, it represents a utopian vision, offering an escape to a nobler, more elegant existence.[11]

London-based Zandra Rhodes has also looked to the past when researching some of her designs. For her autumn/winter 1981 collection, Rhodes designed a bold evening ensemble inspired by examples of 18th-century dress she had studied at the V&A. She donated the dramatic black quilted-satin bodice with gold-pleated polyamide, polyester and lamé skirt and panniers to the museum.[12]

Alexander McQueen remains well-known for his highly original collections and spectacular fashion shows which frequently evoked historical themes. McQueen took apprenticeships at the Savile Row tailors Anderson & Sheppard and then Gieves & Hawkes where he learned traditional British tailoring techniques. He later worked as a pattern cutter at the theatrical costumiers Angels and Bermans where he further focused his training in historic garment construction.[13] McQueen's 1995 Highland Rape collection, which placed him firmly on the world stage, was inspired by his own family history and the Highland Clearances.

His radical re-presentation of historical narratives continued throughout his career alongside his innovative combination of contemporary and historic cut and materials. 'I like to challenge history', he stated in the 2008 BBC series British Style Genius, in which he emphasised the semi-autobiographical nature of some of his historical subject choices.[14]

Whether challenging history, fostering dialogues between past and present, offering an escape from reality or bringing long-standing traditions up-to-date, studies of the past have lent an authority and a deeper meaning to the work of many London designers. Through their innovative and often groundbreaking approaches these designers have devised complex narratives by nurturing unexpected relationships between the historic and the contemporary and between seemingly divergent individuals and styles. This shared, but very individual, focus on the historical and, in particular, the shape, cut, construction, materials and decoration of historic dress has been a key feature in attracting the 'AngloMania' which Andrew Bolton explored in the 2006 exhibition of the same name at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As an extension of the Anglomania which compelled figures such as Voltaire to endorse an England they believed to be characterised by freedom and tolerance, Bolton emphasises Anglomania's continued existence as a stylistic phenomenon. It is, he argues, 'based on idealized concepts of English culture that the English themselves recognize, but also, in a form of "autophilia", actively promote and perpetuate'.[15] This self-referential tendency to incorporate the British past into new design has been a common thread among well-known London brands and couturiers.

The designer Stuart Stockdale also recognises historic fashion as an invaluable research tool. Stockdale has been Design Director at Jaeger since 2008. To support his work for heritage brands, he has used historical garments, museum collections, vintage finds and company archives to inspire his designs. Stockdale studied fashion design at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London where, for his degree show, he took inspiration from the Industrial Revolution – one dress he created featured an integral loom, designed to weave the model's skirt as she wore it. After completing an MA in fashion at the RCA, he worked for two and a half years at Romeo Gigli in Milan, then moved to New York to design for American brand J Crew. A few years later, he returned to London where, after a brief period working for Jasper Conran, he became Design Director for Pringle of Scotland.[16]

Between 2000 and 2005, Stockdale worked to revive Pringle's staid image with a flagship store on the corner of London's New Bond Street, including a glamorous advertising campaign featuring model Sophie Dahl, and runway shows at London Fashion Week. He plundered the company archive, using argyle pattern jumpers and twinsets, the label's core garments, with a sense of irony. Stockdale never lost sight of the brand's heritage. The womenswear collection he launched in 2003 featured bra tops and knickers in the company's signature Argyle pattern, lending it a more up-to-date, sexier image.[17] 'I really got into the whole heritage of the brand', Stockdale remembers. He made regular visits to the company archive in Scotland and tracked down early Pringle designs in museums. 'I think something new would catch your eye each season – something you wouldn't give [a] second glance [to], suddenly it seemed really new'.[18]

Stockdale worked with historic garments in the Pringle archive to bring them up to date. The retired golfer Nick Faldo was the face of Pringle when Stockdale joined the company in 2000, and golf jumpers were the company's mainstay. For his autumn/winter 2005 menswear collection runway show in Milan, Stockdale gave the familiar argyle pattern jumper an edgy, teddy boy look, complete with donkey jackets, winkle pickers and big quiffs. The fashion press took notice, he recalls, 'they remember that first men's show. I made [argyle sweaters] a little bit more rock and roll'. Later that year, Stockdale returned to the company archive for Pringle's 190th anniversary, for which he produced a capsule collection of 19 garments – one item for each decade of the company's history. Each garment was a modernised version of an item in the archive. Stockdale tried to make each new item as true to the original archive garment as possible, tweaking style and fit to suit a modern customer and adapting materials and techniques to today's standards. Looking back on these designs, Stockdale acknowledges he might do things differently now. 'I think it was important [to reference the past]. In hindsight I think it did a little bit too much, a bit literally, maybe. Instead of thinking "this is amazing, how is it right for now?" I would think "this is amazing, I want to recreate it." I think that was kind of a learning curve'.

Figure 4 - Jacket, Holliday and Brown, spring/summer 2007. © Holliday and Brown © Holliday and Brown

At the end of 2005, Stockdale became Design Director at Holliday and Brown, a British firm which started making men's accessories in 1926. Again, Stockdale had access to an extensive archive of fabrics, 'the wildest weaves and prints', which he used to inspire his designs. He also used as a reference point the historic menswear in the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection at Kensington Palace. He studied examples of 19th and early 20th-century men's court uniform, closely examining details such as braid, epaulettes and embroidery. 'Holliday and Brown just seemed so regal and British, and court dress was just the perfect thing', he recalls. Stockdale introduced similar details into his first menswear collection at Holliday and Brown, having them subtly woven into the fabrics he designed. One jacket featured a ceremonial sash, cutting diagonally across the front and an understated hint of epaulette at one shoulder (fig.4). He consulted the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection again for Holliday and Brown's autumn/winter 2008 womenswear collection, incorporating braid, and gold cord aiguillettes into his designs.

Historical references remain an important feature of Stockdale's work at Jaeger, where he has been Design Director since 2008. Each season, the Jaeger by Jaeger collection includes garments which are directly influenced by items in the Jaeger archive (fig.5). For example, the brand's autumn/winter 2009 advertising campaign featured a shearling and patent leather coat inspired by a coat the firm produced in the 1960s (fig.6).

Figure 5 - Ensemble, Jaeger by Jaeger, autumn/winter 2010. © Jaeger. Coat inspired by 1960s garments in the Jaeger archive

Figure 6 - Coat, Jaeger 125, autumn/winter 2009. © Jaeger. Inspired by a Jaeger archive jacket, which was modelled by Jean Shrimpton in the 1960s.

While Stockdale prefers to keep the collections more current, his strong interest in fashion history remains a key influence. 'I still vintage shop all the time but in a different kind of way. We have a good archive of vintage pieces, we have a really great vintage collector in New York, and sometimes we hire vintage pieces in Paris'. Stockdale's research helps to generate a meaningful collection underpinned by dialogues between Jaeger's past and its present. These dialogues form part of an overarching narrative about the sustained presence of Dr. Jaeger's original working principles of producing high-quality garments made of natural fibres. This narrative unfolds against a background of a creative tension behind old and new. The designer cherry-picks and sometimes subverts elements of the company's heritage in order to reinvigorate it. This clever use of material from Jaeger's own archive works to reinforce the company's identity as a heritage brand. It emphasises a continuity between Jaeger, as it appeared during the second half of the 19th century, and the considerably more fashion-conscious image it has now.

Menswear designer Barry Tulip has used garments from the Dunhill archive in a similar way to Stockdale at Jaeger, incorporating details of cut and decoration into his new designs in ways which emphasise the brand's history. Tulip has referenced historic fashion throughout his career. His interest in historic clothing developed early. From the age of five, he would sit at family gatherings, passing the time sketching outfits for people he knew. 'I was obsessed with Charles I … by the proportions, by the detailing - the pearls dripping off of lace, and all those weird shapes they had [later] in the eighteenth century, like panniers', he recalls. 'I think that's where it all started, this idea of messing around with shape, form and proportion, and having this obsession with luxury and status'.[19]

After completing a foundation course at Ravensbourne and a work placement at Alexander McQueen, Tulip took a BA in womenswear and marketing at Central Saint Martins, continuing his education there with an MA in womenswear. His degree collections involved some detailed historical research on surviving garments designed by American designer Claire McCardell at the V&A. After graduation, he moved to Milan to work as Wovens Designer for Z Zegna at the Italian men's luxury clothing brand Ermenegildo Zegna. Under the leadership of the company's creative director, Tulip was given ample time to research and develop new ideas. He travelled, bought vintage clothing and hired garments from private archives such as Carlo Manzi in London. In Italy, he made regular visits to Angelo, and their archive collection of Pucci, Capucci gowns and 1970s eveningwear and acquired vintage garments at Belgioioso market near Pavia (a key source for many of the world's top fashion houses). He also made regular research trips to Los Angeles, where he purchased vintage denim and casual clothing at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. Back in the studio, Tulip used the vintage garments had had collected for inspiration. As he recalls, 'it could be a particular detail, something about the fabric, the fit, the pockets…certain elements would be reproduced somewhere along the line'.

For Tulip, developing a clear concept behind a collection based on thorough research is crucial. 'It is really, really important to have a thread running through the collection', he argues, 'you put your concept and your research together and from that idea you create a garment that you make commercial. That garment then ends up in the store and gets sold and worn'. At Zegna, beyond providing a grounding for the initial idea, a research garment could also function on a practical level. As many designers do, Tulip would develop a technical specification for the new garment and send it to a manufacturer, specifying fabrics, proportions, stitch lines and precise instructions for how to make it. He would sometimes send the research garment directly to the manufacturer, along with the technical sheets. 'You'd be surprised at the permutations that people manage to create from those notes', he explains. 'If you've got the actual thing to send them, the job gets done a lot more quickly and precisely'.

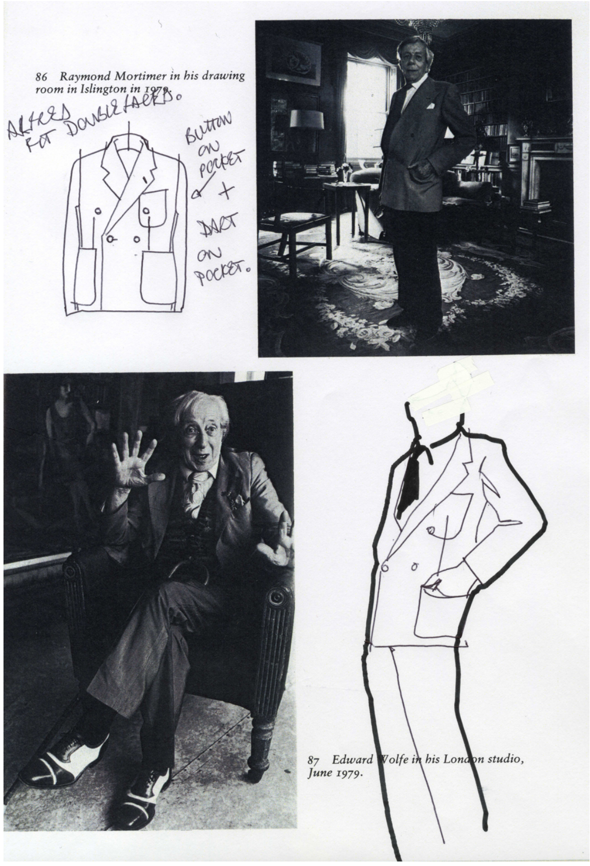

Figure 7 - Sketch, Dunhill, spring/summer 2011. © Dunhill. Research into the Bloomsbury Group informed Dunhill's menswear designs. © Dunhill

In November 2008, Tulip returned to London to take the role of Senior Designer for the men's luxury brand Dunhill. The brand's heritage is central to everything it produces, and behind every collection is a story that relates in some way to the history of the company. Research for Dunhill's spring/summer 2011 collection focused on the work and lives of members of the Bloomsbury Group. Under the guidance of Creative Director Kim Jones, Tulip and the design team visited Charleston, the home of Bloomsbury Group members Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, which became a meeting place for artists and intellectuals such as Roger Fry, Edward Wolfe and E. M. Forster. The connection to Dunhill was a lighter in the company archive, featuring an image of Dora Maar by Picasso. 'The idea of Dunhill being linked to that art scene, to that art group, to being relevant as a luxury commodity at that time, in that period, really influenced the collection', Tulip explains. Through their research, the team built a knowledge base and extensive visual record of the Bloomsbury Group and their work, and they drew on this material to inspire their designs (fig.7).

Dunhill's autumn/winter 2011 collection will draw on the lives and experiences of the arctic explorers, referencing details of their clothing and lifestyles as pioneers. For their research, the team viewed hundreds of photographs in the Royal Geographical Society archive, using elements of explorers' garments to inform the design work for their current season. While this research may inform the line of a lapel, the colour palette of a collection or the way a jacket fits, a connection to the brand is essential. 'The fact that it's got a link [to the company's history] brings a significance, a power to it', Tulip argues.

These historical references enable Tulip and the Dunhill design team to build a narrative behind their new collections – a story which explores the social, intellectual and visual links between, say, a group of innovators like the arctic explorers and Alfred Dunhill, the founder of the Dunhill brand. But the research also contributes to a broader narrative which emphasises Alfred Dunhill's continued influence on the company's output, and a triangular discourse between him, today's Dunhill design team and the references which have inspired the new collections. In a similar way, Stuart Stockdale boosted Pringle's cultural value by linking conservative golf knitwear with the rebellious image of the teddy boys. By pairing these opposing ideas, Stockdale brought new meaning to the company's stiff image through the narrative he created, which suggested that the man wearing the golf jumper was a rebel. Like many other London designers, Stockdale's and Tulip's use of historic British dress and cultural movements as inspiration gives authority to their work. By helping to promote their Britishness, these references also reinforce their respective brands' established place in the nation's cultural makeup.

Beyond using historic clothing as a source for primary research, knowledge of the history of fashion is an important base for many designers. As part of their critical and historical studies, first year MA students at the Royal College of Art attend fashion history lectures.

Wendy Dagworthy emphasises the enormous benefit of fashion history in understanding silhouette, cut and materials. This knowledge base becomes particularly important when her students take inspiration from other designers' work. 'It's really, really important to have a good sense of the history of fashion', Dagworthy argues, 'and to have a sense of what it is that you are referencing'.[20] Barry Tulip shares this view. 'You can't really design clothes at an influential level without having any knowledge of what has gone before. You just can't. You have to be aware of what other designers have done and, if you're referencing something from the past, what the connotations are'.[21]

This broad awareness of fashion history, together with solid, original and personal research is, in part, what enables some designers to permeate their collections with real meaning. Their ability to take elements of the past to create something new can make a successful graduate collection, produce highly inventive ideas, and even reinvigorate a heritage brand, making it relevant to the modern-day consumer. Surviving garments, whether in museum collections, vintage shops or company archives provide an invaluable lexicon of reference material to draw from. The dialogues these designers create between past and present engender a new set of narratives. Narratives which will, in due course, return to the archives to be re-used by the designers of the future.

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Kütahya ceramics and international Armenian trade networks

Yolande Crowe, Independent scholar

Abstract

Although 18th-century Kütahya ceramics have gradually begun to find their place in collections both in Turkey and the Gulf, little scholarly attention has been given to their unique designs and shapes. There are over seventy pieces in the Victoria & Albert Museum's collections, offering the possibility of studying the ceramic production of this relatively small Anatolian town on the Anatolian plateau, some hundred kilometres south-east of Bursa and Iznik.

Figure 1 - Dish, 1715–1740, Kütahya, Turkey.
Museum no. 596-1874

Although 18th-century Kütahya ceramics have gradually begun to find their place in collections both in Turkey and the Gulf, little scholarly attention has been given to their unique designs and shapes. In 1957 Arthur Lane simply wrote that 'the [Kütahya] factories specialized in rather slight and trivial wares, with a side-line in tiles'.[1] There are over seventy pieces in the Victoria & Albert Museum, offering the possibility of studying the ceramic production of this relatively small Anatolian town on the Anatolian plateau, some hundred kilometres south-east of Bursa and Iznik. Iznik has for a long time been the only reference to Ottoman ceramics recognised in the West, with its impressive production of colourful tiles and dishes made in the 16th and 17th centuries to enhance mosques and palaces of the Sultan and his court. Yet Evliya Celebi in 1670 recalls among the thirty-four quarters of Kütahya one being 'the quarter of the infidel china-makers'.[2] Earlier records state the existence of an Armenian community in Kütahya already by the end of the 14th century when the Cilician kingdom of Lesser Armenia collapsed under the Mamluk thrust and Armenian families were scattered once more throughout the Mediterranean and Ottoman territories. In 1444 records mention a potter's gift to the Holy mother of God's church in Kütahya. Furthermore the decoration on the two famous pieces dated 1510 and 1529 in the British Museum, comes close to that of the Iznik production of the time. Shards from excavations in Kütahya have brought to light similar patterns which would prove that potteries in that town added to the production of those overworked in Iznik.

By combining the V&A's collection, which comprises an interesting variety of shapes and colourful decorations, with an earlier study of blue and white examples of jugs and dishes from other museums, a considerable archive of objects is created on which we can comment.[3] The most ubiquitous design on these ceramics is of a cone shape; this is used repeatedly on dishes and bowls. This cone pattern migrated from Chinese export porcelain to late Safavid Persian wares as can be seen in the dish on figure 1(a particularly early example). This migration came about because Persian potters were exposed to it from the late 17th-century Kangxi (r.1662–1722) models. Christian potters who were threatened by the religious intolerance of the Safavid rulers, may have moved to Kütahya bringing with them their new decorative vocabulary. At this time Kütahya welcomed religious minorities, thanks to the relatively tolerant policies of Suleyman III and his vizier Fadil Mustafa Pasha Köprülü (1637–1691). This infusion of new blood and ideas must also have given Kütahya potters a greater awareness of the world beyond the limits of the Ottoman Empire.

Figure 2 - Bottle, 17th century, Iran. Museum no. 1248-1876

If this is the case then the 'sudden' apparition of new patterns such as the cone, on blue and white Kütahya ceramics would make sense. The transition from Persia to Turkey can also be illustrated by a group of three late Safavid pieces in the collection, each of them with the Armenian monogram of Paron Sarfraz; he was the wealthy head of a New Julfa merchant family from 1701 until 1727, which provides helpful dating.[4] One of the pieces, a Persian broken water sprinkler, is decorated with three cones and the Sarfraz monogram (fig. 2). The appearance of the cone pattern on Kütahya pieces may then date to the early years of the 18th century.

Further dating of another type of blue and white decoration has been gathered from four polychrome narrative dishes, one of which belongs to the Museum (fig. 3). The other three are kept in the Armenian monastery of San Lazzaro in Venice, the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels and the Cincinnati Art Museum. Although the narrative is painted in polychrome it is worth examining the back of the dish not only for a possible signature but also for its decoration. In this particular case, with the Islamic date equivalent of 1718 painted on the front rim, we have a date for the use of the blue and white flower spray pattern on its back. Consequently the blue and white dish (fig. 4) can be dated to around that period of time. The flower spray offers another example of the influence of Kangxi export wares.

Figure 3 - Dish with image of Archangel Michael, 1718, Kütahya, Turkey. Museum no. 279-1893

Figure 4 - Dish (rear view), 1718, Kütahya, Turkey. Museum no. 279-1893

The polychrome dish in the Safavid group, which depicts the figure of the Archangel Michael receiving the soul of the dead man, is one of a series given to the Armenian cathedral of Saint James in Jerusalem by Vartabed Abraham in 1168–1718 according to the inscription (fig. 3). The naïve style of painting appears to relate to the religious narratives on tiles covering some of the walls of the said cathedral. It has been suggested that the long tradition of gospel paintings in Armenian monasteries would have been a source for such narratives. Yet such themes taken from the Bible or Armenian Church history illustrate the scrolls of more popular prayer rolls, some of which date back to the 17th century.[5] The quality of their design is closer to folk art than to the long tradition of stylized monastic painting.[6]

Figure 5 - Jug, 1715–1740, Kütahya, Turkey. Museum no. 335-1892

A further unusual pattern appears on pourers such as a jug and a coffee pot in the collection (figs 5 & 6). Once more the original design used as a border originates on a Kangxi jar such as on an example from the Topkapi Saray Museum collection no.2094. Whether pairs of leaves, wings, wishbones or pincers, it is hard to understand such a repeat pattern, which may explain its short life in the Kütahya pattern book. One similarly decorated coffee pot belongs to the Kerr Collection (C.107 1988). Its shape lacks a lid but the free-hand painting repeats the pattern more regularly.

Despite earlier attempts to explain the links between blue and white Kütahya pieces and Chinese Kangxi export wares, the polychrome production in the first half of the 18th century with its striking motifs, continue to baffle specialists. Yet in the light of the Armenian trade network across Eurasia, it is possible to discover other influences besides those of far-eastern ceramics. Indian painted cottons, known as chintzes, had conquered the Eurasian world of fashion and by now were part of a worldwide trade. Could it be that the designs on these fabrics also attracted the Kütahya potters?[7] This suggestion was made in the 1980s by Jean Soustiel who proposed a link between the textile production of the Indian Coromandel Coast and Kütahya ceramics, but he did not pursue this original approach any further.[8]

Understanding the Armenian trade network

Figure 6 - Ceramic coffee pot, Turkey, 1700–1800. Museum no. C.73 & A-1944

Early in the 17th century Shah Abbas of Persia with great foresight, transported the population of Armenian Julfa, a prosperous trading town on the northern bank of the river Arax, to the heart of Persia. The core of the Armenians who survived the winter crossing of the river, were resettled either in Gilan, south of the Caspian, or in the region of Isfahan. About twenty merchant families of great wealth were moved briefly to Isfahan before being allowed to create a New Julfa - Nor Djougha - across the river from the Safavid capital. Besides normal trade, these families were to be responsible for the silk trade of the realm which brought prosperity to the country until the decline of the Safavid dynasty in the last decades of the 17th century and its fall to the Afghans in 1722.[9]

Although the Julfa Armenian community was profoundly disrupted by such events, their existing international network which stretched from Lisbon to Canton was not unduly threatened; some families had even lived in Lhasa for over thirty years as the extortionist policies of Nadir Shah (r.1736–48) eventually undermined the prosperity of the Armenian merchants of Persia. Earlier generations of Armenians, as mentioned above, had already settled in several Anatolian towns not withstanding a large number in Istanbul. In Venice the first Armenian printed book was produced in 1512, and in 1666 the first Armenian Bible was printed in Amsterdam where Armenian merchants had traded in their own market since the 1550s, the eastern market.[10] They were known as Christian Persians and by 1713 had built their own church of the Holy Spirit.

In India by 1563 an Armenian church was standing in Agra and factories were active over most of the subcontinent. Although in the 17th century the Gujarati port of Surat was indeed an international hub for all trade including painted cottons, by 1661 a number of foreign factories moved to the new English possession, the island of Bombay, being the Portuguese dowry of Charles II's wife, Queen Catherina.

On the eastern side of India what was eventually to become the town of Calcutta also offered increasing trading facilities. And as more problems beset Surat, the Coromandel Coast gradually gained in importance. One particular aspect of its production was the fineness of its painted cottons providing goods for a large foreign market including the whole of Asia and Europe. The conditions for manufacturing these cottons were excellent. Once the monsoon was over and the flow of the rivers had calmed down, the quality of their waters was exceptionally suitable for the rinsing and dying of cloths destined for the various export markets of Japan, Indonesia, Malaya, Persia, Turkey, the Mediterranean and North Sea worlds.

In his Histoire philosophique des Etablissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes, l'abbé Raynal wrote in 1770:

> *'Ces 'négotians [Arméniens] avaient entrepris depuis longtemps le traffic des toiles. Ils n'avaient été supplantés, ni par les Portugais, qui n'étaient occupés que de pillage, ni par les Hollandais, dont les épiceries avaient fixé toute l'attention. On pouvait craindre, d'ailleurs, de ne pouvoir soutenir la concurrence d'un peuple également riche, industrieux, actif, économe. Les Arméniens faisaient alors – ce qu'ils ont toujours fait depuis. Ils passaient aux Indes; ils y achetaient du coton; ils le distribuaient aux fileuses; ils*

> *faisaient fabriquer des toiles sous leurs yeux; ils les portaient à Bender-Abassi, d'où elles passaient à Isfahan. De-là, elles se distribuaient dans les différentes provinces de l'Empire, dans les états du grand-seigneur et jusqu'en Europe, où l'on contracta l'habitude de les appeler Perses; quoiqu'il ne s'en soit jamais fabriqué qu'à la côte de Coromandel.*[11]

This text once more underlines the vast network of international trade manned by a remarkable group of merchants consisting of faithful members of the great Armenian trading families and their agents contracted to them by the commenda system.[12] Whether by sea or by land, for personal or church use, Indian painted cottons and chintzes reached the realm of the grand-seigneur, in other words the Ottoman empire, Kütahya and far beyond.

An exceptional incense holder

The lobed incense burner is one of a few examples of objects expressly made for the Armenian community over a short period of time, probably in the first half of the 18th century; which would explain the small number still in existence. The V&A has two pieces, one in blue and white with six lobes and a square-section handle as high as the body itself; the other in polychrome made up of four lobes and with an unusual vertical solid grip for a thumb and index hold (fig. 7a). The deep shape of these lobed containers reflects the need for a protection against the burning incense; both inner and outer walls are decorated and six-winged seraphim fill both centers. The specific design of an angel, also painted on many egg-shaped hangings, decorates in yellow and green the five lobed outer walls of another incense burner from the Monastery of San Lazzaro dated 1740.[13] This piece lacks its square-section handle. Blue and white floral designs fill the inside of the piece, not unlike that of the V&A's blue and white incense holder (inv. 595.1892).

Figure 7a - Incense holder, 1740-45, Kütahya, Turkey. Museum no. 35-1892

Figure 7b - Incense holder (detail), 1740–45, Kütahya, Turkey. Museum no. 35-1892

Apart from the seraphim in the centre and on the handle, the bizarre painting on the V&A's polychrome incense burner differs from earlier examples of ornament noticed on dishes. At first sight, these bold red patches with green and yellow additions (fig. 7b) hardly make sense; there appears to be no other ceramic production of the time which could have influenced such designs. Yet by searching beyond the field of ceramics, it is possible to find a link between painted Indian cottons and the unusual design on the incense burner. Early in the 18th century the fashion of chintz had conquered the whole of Europe, and these Indian painted cottons were also part of the Armenian world trade. In fact some Armenian communities ordered church altar curtains with borders displaying patterns of leaf and flowers similar to those on large palampores.[14] That the potters of a small township like that of Kütahya should have responded to such a visual challenge demonstrates how the keen eye of a craftsman can pick out new ideas from unusual textile patterns and adapt them to the shapes of the day in his own ceramic world.

For example, in this typical fragment of chintz from the V&A's collection (fig. 8a) we can easily appreciate the connection between textiles and ceramics. The details of such strange leaves and flowers could not be reproduced faithfully on the small ceramic surface of the incense burner, thus the potter only recreated the strong visual impact of the contour and the deep red colour. The serrated leaves are green and the use of a striking bright yellow adds to the warm colouring of the display. But was such a strong tint also part of the painting on chintzes? No longer visible today, the colour has faded away on surviving cottons; but unexpectedly the memory of its brightness has been fired into the unblemished decoration of this incense burner. Beyond colour, a closer inspection of the handle pierced in two places (fig. 8b), has brought to light what could be a four-lettered Armenian date painted black on yellow in reverse. It reads as 1174 corresponding to 1725 and placing the incense burner in the creative period of Kütahya. Only one other piece in the V&A collection comes close to this striking polychrome decoration: a bowl 16cm. wide (inv. C403-1910) which makes use of the deep red to enhance four overblown cones with yellow veins amidst red spotted leafy elements.

Figure 8a - Length of chintz. Museum no. IM. 51-1919

Figure 8b - Incense-holder (detail), 1740-45, Kütahya, Turkey. Museum no. 35-1892

Polychrome pilgrim flasks and coffee cups

Figure 9 - Pilgrim flask, 1750-75, Kütahya, Turkey. Museum no. 777-1892

The special shape of the pilgrim flask or gourd has a long history in Eurasian culture; in western Asia there are slight variations in size and thickness reminiscent either of Indian metal shapes or Persian ones. A late 15th-century Iznik piece with six lugs belongs to the Musée National de la Céramique de Sèvres: the whole body is covered with a dense decoration of blue and white leaf scrolls in reserve (inv. 15472). By contrast in the 18th-century potters of Kütahya seem to have fancied the shape, and over the years the Museum acquired a number of them with shapes slightly different in thickness and number of lugs, mostly decorated in polychrome. Two pieces (inv. 598-1894 and inv. 903-1907) recall the Iznik shape, but the decoration is closer to well known Ottoman textile embroideries; a banal flower painting fills the broad shape about 7cm wide, with a double recess on both sides. The profile of another type of gourd (inv. C2035-1910) is narrower with six lugs for hanging; on either side a female figure stands between two stylised trees. The example reproduced here is closer in shape to the two first examples with its double recessed centre on either side (fig. 9). Yet the design is far more elegant with attractive flower sprays in blue, white and yellow on the shoulder. The red colouring in the flowers and rosettes of the circle is hardly visible. The six-petal centre is also reminiscent of the Iznik period, but very different from the petal-panels of earlier lotus flowers typical of Iznik wares.

Better known pieces of Kütahya production are the coffee cups and saucers which owed their popularity to the discovery and import of coffee beans into Asia in the 18th century. Despite the prohibition of coffee drinking (Mecca in 1511 and Cairo in 1532) by the middle of the century the new beverage had become a favorite drink in the Ottoman Empire.

> *'Until the year 962 [1555], in the High, God-Guarded city of Constantinople, as well as in Ottoman lands generally, coffee and coffee-houses did not exist. About that year, a fellow called Hakam from Aleppo and a wag called Shams from Damascus came to the city. They each opened a large shop in the district called Tahtakale, and began to purvey coffee'.*[15]

Figure 10 - Coffee cup and saucer, 1700-1800, Kütayha, Turkey. Museum no. 607 & A-1874

Some of their designs are more sophisticated than others. The cone shape appears regularly as well as small flower sprays. The V&A's cup and saucer illustrated here, is a standard example of the better quality from the Kütahya kilns (fig. 10). The painting is meticulous and the design well proportioned. The cups have been classified into two main groups, those with holders either in metal or ceramic, and those without holders either standard or a little taller, but with saucers.

Decoration seems to have differed according to the destination of shipments: as can be noticed in a wreck discovered in the 1980s in the bay of Kartal not far from Istanbul. Yet such was the success of these ceramics that shards of them have appeared across the world from excavations in Williamsburg (USA), Aleppo, the ports of London, Ostend and Amsterdam to the mounds of Fostat near Cairo, the shores of Malaysia and shipwrecks of East Indian companies off the coast of South Africa.

Conclusion

Besides catering for the Armenian community, the potters of Kütahya understood the requirements of a Mediterranean market. By responding to the leading fashions of the day they succeeded for a short while in producing ceramics for a world market. Drawing on Indian painted cottons as an inspiration for polychrome designs, they enhanced the best of their production.[16] Furthermore the social requirements for the newly introduced drinking of tea, coffee and chocolate led the potters to copy some European shapes besides money boxes modeled into small coffer shapes. With Ottoman lands being a halfway house between Europe and Asia and the remarkable area covered by Armenian merchants, it is not surprising that for a short time the fame of Kütahya spread across Eurasia.

Unfortunately, by the middle of the 18th-century European competition from Meissen and other European porcelain centers made Kütahya productions look less attractive. It was becoming more and more difficult to attract the international market with the production of porcelain having started in Saxony around 1710. Furthermore, the cheaper technique of transfer printing, discovered in Liverpool by John Sadler in 1755, had made ceramics cheaper to acquire for a wider public. By this time Kütahya potteries were offering indifferent patterns and coarser brushwork which could no longer rival the more sophisticated wares produced on an industrial scale. By the 19th century and to this day the decorative vocabulary of Kütahya has reverted to the patterns made famous in 16th-century Iznik. Yet further studies should be undertaken on the production of Kütahya in the early 18th century. It is to be hoped that more detailed work on shapes of ewers, gourds, coffee pots, bowls, cups and saucers will yield further information on those fast changing tastes in Europe. The classification of numerous folk figures animating dishes, gourds and ewers, would also bring forth a great fashion parade!

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X-radiography as a tool to examine the making and remaking of historic quilts

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Abstract

During preparations for *Quilts 1700–2010* (20 March - 4 July 2010), many of the Museum's quilts were taken out of store for the first time in decades so that they could be photographed and examined prior to conservation. Following the publication of *X-radiography of Textiles, Dress and Related Objects* in 2007, many textiles have been X-rayed to gain information about them. Quilts in particular have been singled out for analysis because of their multi-layered construction. This article discusses three 18th- and 19th-century quilts in the V&A's collections, whose histories of making were revealed through X-radiography, as much as the materials they were made of.

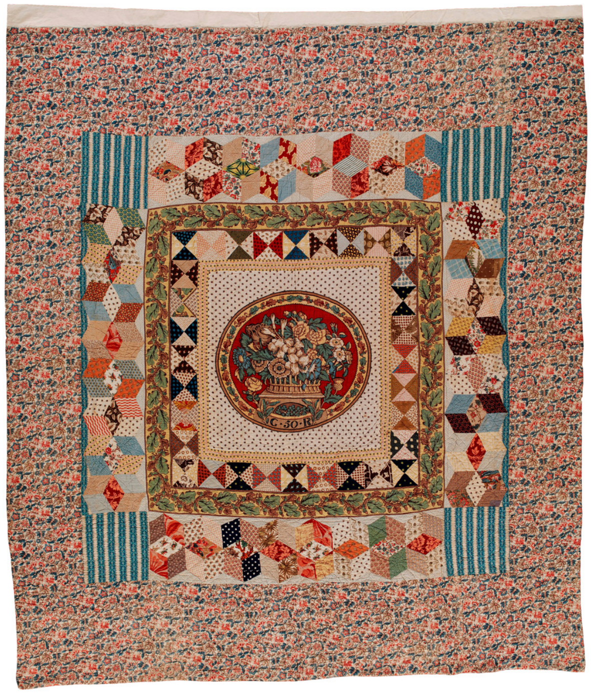

Figure 1 - King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961

The examinations that form the basis of this article were prompted by the observation that a quilt to be featured in the exhibition Quilts 1700–2010, made from fabric printed for the celebration of King George III Golden Jubilee (fig. 1), had a different quilting pattern on the back of the quilt than that on the front. Close inspection of the edge of the quilt revealed four layers of textile - the present top, a previous quilt top, a mysterious secondary textile, and the original lining.

It is generally understood that a quilt is defined as two layers of fabric, sometimes with a layer of padding between, all sewn together so that the sewing threads pass through all layers. The sewing used to bind the layers together often forms decorative patterns. An X-ray is a picture of relative material density, with denser materials appearing white and voids or breaks appearing dark. Folded areas of fabric are denser and appear lighter on an X-ray. Patchwork is made from an arrangement of fabric pieces and the way that the fabric is sewn together is known as piecing. The technique of piecing over paper, which is found in many British quilts, involves folding fabric around a paper template, basting it in place with long stitches, and then joining the basted pieces together edge-to-edge with tiny whip-stitches. The basting stitches are then removed and the paper is either removed or retained inside the quilt for stiffness and warmth. Using an X-ray image it is possible to see that the individual tumbling block pieces in the inner border of the quilt are pieced over paper – with the seam allowance on either side of the seam, while the tumbling block section as a whole has been applied to the quilt top as a strip with the seam allowance folded to one side (fig. 2).[2]

This seemed to be a useful tool to employ in the examination of the George III Jubilee quilt (fig. 1). Obvious construction details such as seams within the fabric of individual pieces and quilting threads are clear to see, however, with X-ray investigation, much more subtle details such as wrinkles in the previous quilt top and different density of dyes in prints can also be seen (figs 3–6).

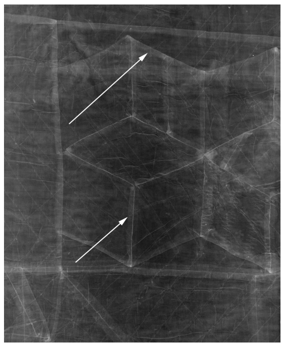

Figure 2 - X-ray detail of seam construction, King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961. The top arrow indicates an applied seam where the fabric is turned under, the lower arrow indicates a seam where the fabric was pieced over papers and then whip-stitched together resulting in seam allowance on each side of the seam

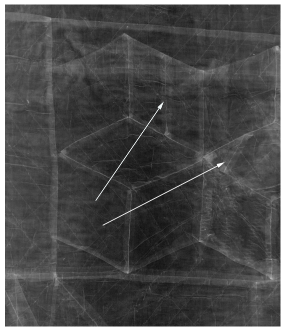

Figure 3 - X-ray detail of piecing within patches, King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961. Two patches are indicated that are made from two pieces of fabric seamed together

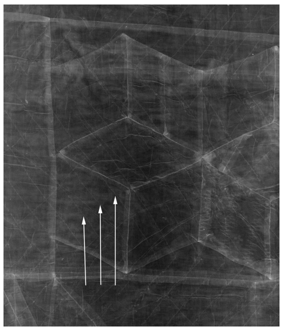

Figure 4 - X-ray detail of quilting, King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961. The arrows indicated parallel lines of quilting in the original chevron pattern

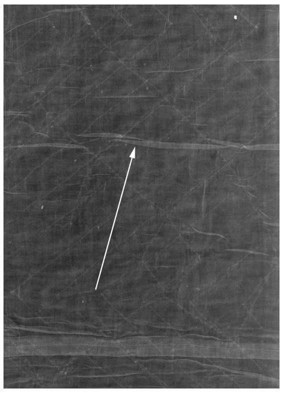

Figure 5 - King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961. X-ray detail of creasing in the original materials

The bed cover, made in around 1810, features a commemorative central panel surrounded by printed cottons dating from the early 19th century. The front is quilted with a pattern of interlocking circles, whilst the reverse is quilted in a chevron pattern, indicating that this bedcover had a previous top, perhaps hidden below the quilt top which we see now. Glimpses of underlying fabrics were exposed through small holes in the top and lining (figs 7–8). Purple and white striped cotton could be seen though holes in the border and a brown and cream printed fabric could be viewed through a hole in the lining in the centre back of the bedcover

The key to understanding the original top of the George III Jubilee quilt was found in an X-ray showing several intersecting long seams in the border of the quilt (fig. 9). Taking into account seams visible on the present top and lining, any additional seams appearing in the X-ray belong to the previous top.

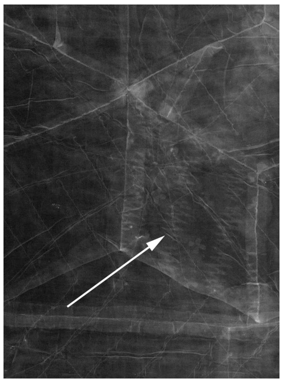

Figure 6 - X-ray detail of printing inks, King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961. The arrow points to an area where zigzag patterns and floral sprigs can be seen, probably due to metallic mordant used to fix the dyes

Figure 7 - Detail of a purple and white striped cotton fabric from the previous quilt top seen through a hole in the present border fabric, King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961

Figure 8 - Detail of a weak, white cotton with brown printed design seen through a hole in the reverse of the quilt lining, King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961

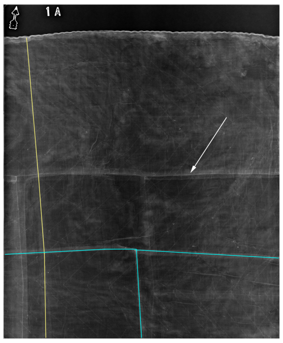

Figure 9 - X-ray detail of previous seams, King George III Golden Jubilee Quilt, 1810, England. Museum no. T.25-1961. The yellow line indicates the seam in the lining, the blue line indicates the seams in the present quilt top, and the remaining seams, indicated by the arrow, are the seams in the original quilt top presently hidden from view

By taking further X-ray images along one edge of the quilt and several from one edge into the centre, it became clear that the previous quilt had a plain centre surrounded by two concentric borders. There was no central medallion on the older quilt top and the bedcover was simply quilted all over in a chevron pattern. X-ray images of the centre of the quilt indicated considerable wear and damage to the fabric and glimpses of the older quilt top seen through holes in the face of the quilt confirmed that the fabric was weak cotton with tendering brown printed areas.

Figure 10 - Quilted patchwork bed cover, 1810–45, England. Museum no. T.17-1924

Having enriched our understanding of the George III Jubilee quilt using X-Ray images other quilts were examined for evidence of re-used materials. A patchwork and quilted bedcover dating from the early 19th century was examined next (fig. 10).

This quilt, made over a long period of time, contains over 3,000 patches. The central medallion, commemorating the Battle of Victoria in 1813, is pieced beside printed cottons from the 1830s.

The quilt contains a large variety of prints with subtle variation on a single design, this and the presence of a printer's stamp on one piece suggest that the maker bought fabric directly from the factory or from peddlers selling printer's ends specifically for quilt making (fig. 11).

The quilt is wadded with woollen materials that could be seen through a tear in the lining of the quilt and at one corner where the lining was loose (fig. 12).

Clearly defined ridges in the wadding could be felt approximately 30 cm from the bottom edge of the quilt. X-rays taken along the edge of the quilt revealed that an entire woollen blanket with rolled hems at top and bottom and a butt-joined seam down the centre had been used as the main part of the quilt wadding. As the blanket was smaller than the finished quilt, pieces of other woollen materials had been seamed together to fill in the gaps around the edge (fig. 13).

An X-ray of the very edge of the quilt illustrates that this pieced addition to the blanket had not been quite big enough and a further narrow border of strips of woollen material 3 cm wide had been added to the edge.

Figure 11 - Detail of printer's mark on cotton patch, patchwork and quilted bedcover, 1810–45, England. Museum no. T.17-1924

Figure 12 - Detail of wool flannel and woollen blanket seen through a hole in the lining and where the lining was loose at one corner, patchwork and quilted bedcover, 1810–45, England. Museum no. T.17-1924

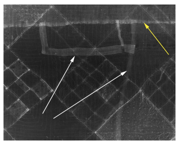

Figure 13 - X-ray details of the construction sewing in the blanket wadding, patchwork and quilted bedcover, 1810–45, England. Museum no. T.17-1924. The yellow arrow indicates the rolled hem at the end of the blanket, the white arrows indicate seams in the wool flannel materials pieces together to fill in the gap between the blanket and the edge of the quilt

Figure 14 - The Sundial Coverlet, 1797, England. Museum no. T.102-1938

Lastly, a magnificent, coverlet dated 1797, was examined and X-rayed. This coverlet, known as the Sundial Coverlet, is one of the better known bedcovers in the V&A's collection (fig. 14).

There are such a wide variety of printed dress cottons in the quilt, all with a predominately pink, brown and blue palette, that it has been speculated that the maker was in some way connected to the textile trade, either through cotton manufacture or via a linen merchant, or, that the fabric was specifically bought from dress makers for making patchwork.[3] The maker appears to have been an educated person of taste and with advanced needle skills. The complexity of the piecing is extraordinary, even the detailed maps of Britain and the world are pieced over paper, which suggests a maker with ample leisure time as this type of construction is extremely slow (fig. 15).

On examining the reverse of the coverlet it was determined that the lining had been made up from many pieces of worn cotton and that the back was covered with dozens of areas of darning. X-ray examination confirmed that the darning, including some very large and neatly done patches not visible on the surface of the coverlet, was not related to damage on the face of the coverlet (figs 16–18).

The person who had applied the lining to the coverlet had not even taken the time to remove the scraps of previous textile trapped by the darning. They had simply cut around them and left the remnants in place (fig. 18). This seemed inconsistent with the effort made with the front of the coverlet.

Figure 15 - Detail of a map of England, The Sundial Coverlet, 1797, England. Museum no. T.102-1938. The map is pieced over papers and embroidered

Figure 16 - Detail of the area of the coverlet in the X-ray image in Figure 17, The Sundial Coverlet, 1797, England. Museum no. T.102-1938. The face of the coverlet is completely undamaged

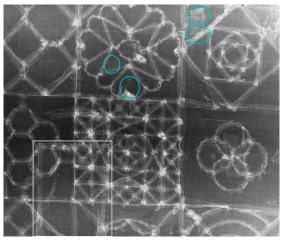

Figure 17 - X-ray detail of the area of the quilt seen in Figure 16, The Sundial Coverlet, 1797, England. Museum no. T.102-1938. The blue circles contain areas of darning, the white box outlines a large neatly done patch in the lining not seen from the reverse

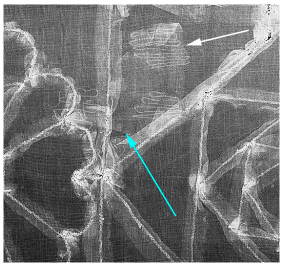

Figure 18 - X-ray detail of one of the areas of darning in Figure 17. The Sundial Coverlet, 1797, England. Museum no. T.102-1938. The white arrow indicates an area of darning and the blue arrow shows the edge of the piece of fabric still attached to the darning but belonging to an earlier textile

These quilts were made by women in different circumstances and over varying periods of time, but each quilt required many hours of labour and considerable investment in materials, so one might question why such poor quality and worn out materials had been used to line and wad their needlework? While some quilts could be classified as having been made with scrap materials out of economic necessity and other quilts might simply have been made hastily from whatever was conveniently at hand, the use of shoddy materials in quilts such as the Sundial coverlet must have involved some other motivating factor.

The Battle of Victoria Quilt perhaps best conforms to our idealised version of an historic quilt. Something made from discarded scraps and bits and pieces of fabric over a very long period of time. The wadding is made of pieced sections of blanket out of necessity. The use of blankets as wadding is a feature of quilts made in rural areas, especially Wales, where wool is abundant and blankets are locally made.[4] The maker wanted a warm quilt and worn out blankets were readily available and had little value. The recycling of an entire quilt to form the wadding and lining of the George III Jubilee quilt suggests an opportunistic use of a material. It is likely that the new quilt top was swiftly made to set off the commemorative panel and to extend the life of a worn-out and perhaps unfashionable item of household linen. The piecing is not complex and in some areas is directly applied to the original quilt below.

It is the Sundial coverlet that poses the most questions. The maker appears to have been affluent with abundant leisure time and clearly had access to the materials necessary to make a splendid work of art, yet recycled materials are used for the lining. Plain cotton calico was a relatively cheap commodity in 1797 but the lining on this coverlet, which would have been seen by visitors to the maker's home, is shabby. Perhaps the maker was making a point about the morality of thriftiness to compensate for the display of conspicuous consumption evidenced on the front of the coverlet? *The Workwoman's Guide*, a practical handbook to making household linens published in the 1830s, certainly thought that the thrifty disposition was a moral one and should be diligently cultivated.[5] Alternatively the coverlet may simply be an example of the aesthetic values of the day.

Late 18th-century case furniture may be highly ornamented and polished on the face but completely unfinished on the reverse with marks from the plane and chisels clearly visible.[6] This may be a textile example of this lack of finish on unseen surfaces. Another possibility is that someone else may have both supplied and applied the lining. In the late 18th century, a good deal of the time of both the mistress and the housemaids of a genteel family would have been devoted to the making and mending of household linen such as shirts, shifts and sheets.[7] It seems likely that once the aesthetically rewarding work of planning, piecing and embroidering the coverlet top was finished, the work was passed to a domestic servant to line with plain calico. Having no emotional investment in the item, the servant simply did not bother to remove the old repairs from the lining fabric before it was applied and we must assume that the maker either did not see, or mind, the striking contrast in handiwork presented by the finished quilt.

Endnotes

1. Mary M. Brooks, Sonia O'Connor and Josie Sheppard. 'X-Radiography of patchwork and quilts' in *X-Radiography of Textiles, Dress and Related Objects*, Sonia O'Connor and Mary M. Brooks. Elsevier, 2007. See also Tina Fenwick Smith and Dorothy Osler. 'The 1718 silk patchwork coverlet: Introduction in Quilt Studies' in *The Journal of the British Quilt Study Group*. 4/5 (2002/3).

2. All X-radiography done by Paul Robins, photographer and radiation protection supervisor at the V&A. X-radiography done at 30 KV for 12 seconds FFD of 75 cm.

3. Prichard, Sue (ed.). *Quilts 1700–2010*. V&A Publishing, 2010: 176. See also Barber, J. 'Fabric as Evidence: Unravelling the Meaning of a Late Eighteenth Century Coverlet in Quilt

Studies' in *The Journal of the British Quilt Study Group*. 3 (2001): 17.

4. Jones, Jen. *Welsh Quilts*. Towey Publishing, 1997: 11.

5. Lady, A. *The Workwoman's Guide*. (Second Edition). Birmingham: Thomas Evans, 1840: v.

6. For example, the commode made by William Vile for Prime Minister George Grenville between 1762 and 1764. (V&A W.32-1977). The commode, made from highly finished mahogany with gilded brass mounts and doors with silk panels set behind gilded brass grills, has a completely unfinished back on which marks from hand planes can be clearly seen.

7. Vickery, Amanda. *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*. Yale University Press, 2003: 150–151.

A patchwork panel ‘shown at the Great Exhibition’

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Abstract

This article investigates a 19th-century panel worked in the demanding technique of ‘intarsia patchwork’ that overturns our assumptions about patchwork as a craft practiced by female amateurs, used to decorate the house and to reinforce emotional ties. The panel forms part of a group of patchworks made by male professionals and exhibited for personal profit, and to promote social causes such as Temperance and Electoral Reform.

Figure 1 - Wool intarsia panel depicting a farmyard scene, maker unknown, about 1850. Museum no. AP.27-1917

This small panel of 'intarsia patchwork' (fig. 1) is evidence of a tradition of patchwork made by male professionals and exhibited in public for profit. It highlights divisions between working-class craftspeople and middle-class critics over the definition of 'art' at the Great Exhibition of 1851. It reminds us that what seem to be individualistic artefacts were understood by their original viewers as part of continuing technical traditions and of contemporary visual culture.

The panel, measuring 43cm by 46cm, has a 23cm by 27cm central image of a farmyard, with a man in a red waistcoat milking a cow in the company of another farm worker, horses, pigs, geese and chickens. The shapes of the men, livestock, and farm buildings are executed in wool fabric, with details of foliage and features highlighted with silk embroidery stitches. This scene is contained in a frame of red wool with a scrolled motif outlined in silk chain-stitch.[1] The rather naive depictions of animals and men were worked in the demanding technique of intarsia patchwork. This technique, also known as 'cloth intarsia', 'mosaic needlework', 'inlaid patchwork', 'inlay patchwork' and 'stitched inlay', involves cutting motifs out of wool cloth and stitching them directly to each other with no seam allowances and no backing fabric.[2] On this panel, details like the spots on the cow have been inserted into holes cut in the fabric and oversewn to hold them in place, so that the finished surface is flat rather than raised as it would be with appliqué.

Intarsia patchwork is only possible with wool fabric that has been felted so that it does not fray, with a surface nap that can hide stitches worked from behind.[3] These conditions were fulfilled by the wool broadcloth used for high-quality tailoring in the early 19th century, and the fabrics used in the panel are similar to those in gentlemen's coats or army officers' tunics. Professional tailors were expected to hand-sew wool fabric with invisible, perfectly flat seams. Tailoring manuals advised working with seam allowances of 2mm for closely fitting garments. So the panel could have been worked by a tailor demonstrating his sewing skills, and his thriftiness in using fabric scraps.

Intarsia patchwork has been known in Europe since the early 15th century, and was produced in 18th-century Prussia and Saxony and in Britain from the 1830s to the 1880s. However this technique, especially when made by male professionals, has been hard to assimilate into a narrative of quilt history based on cotton patchworks made by women, and was mentioned only briefly in seminal texts such as Averil Colby's Patchwork and Barbara Morris' Victorian Embroidery.[4] The first discussion of British intarsia patchworks as a group was by Margaret Swain, who in Figures on Fabric identified the sources of many of the images used. Janet Rae in Quilts of the British Isles discussed intarsia patchwork as the product of working-class men from Scotland and Wales.[5] My own earlier research examined the links between British and European intarsia patchworks, and between some of the images used and the visual culture of Radical politics.[6]

Intarsia patchworks were not fully integrated into British and European quilt history until 2009–10, when they were displayed in two groundbreaking exhibitions.

Quilts 1700–2010, Hidden Histories, Untold Stories (Sue Prichard (curator), London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2010) showed them as part of a survey that included patchworks with figurative and political scenes made by 19th century women and military patchworks made by men from soldiers' uniform fabrics. Catalogue articles by Linda Parry, Jenny Lister and Jacqueline Riding brought out the ways in which patchwork and quilting have been used to display the makers' knowledge of design trends and of current social issues, as well as their needlework skills.[7] There was also a recognition of the role of patchwork as therapy, from Newgate prison in 1821, through the military camps and hospitals of the 1850s, to the Fine Cell Work Project at Wandsworth prison today.[8]

Inlaid Patchwork in Europe from 1500 to the Present (Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow (curator), Berlin: Museum Europäischer Kulturen, 2009–10) was the result of a thirty-year research project that published details of over 70 surviving examples of the technique, and exhibited over 50. This exhibition gathered together inlaid patchworks produced in central Europe in the 18th century and in Britain in the 19th and showed that these textiles were alike in originating from non-domestic workshops run by nuns or by male tailors, and in reflecting specific social or religious concerns through their images. Intarsia patchworks produced in Görlitz, Silesia in the mid-18th century were a response to the political unrest of the Seven Years' War, and to competition to the town tailors' guild from unregistered newcomers.[9] A hanging made around 1800 for the Royal House of Prussia reproduced images of people, animals and birds copied from books, and seems to have been used as an educational tool for the young Prince Friedrich William IV (born 1795).[10] An 18th-century hanging with religious images was displayed for money, with its owner living off the proceeds.[11] These uses of intarsia patchwork as a statement of the maker's skill, as an educational resource, and as a source of continuing income, are important precedents for the 19th century British examples.

Intarsia patchwork at the Great Exhibition

The farmyard panel in the V&A collection was donated with a statement that it had been exhibited at the Great Exhibition in London. This is surprising if we think of the Exhibition as a space for displaying the best of manufactured products: textile machinery, porcelain vases, and carved furniture. Indeed, its main halls were taken up with large set-pieces sponsored by manufacturers, and by the governments of European nations, China, and British colonies. There were, however, many items on display made by individuals, either professionals or amateurs. These had been offered for exhibition through 297 local committees that forwarded works for consideration by the London subcommittees dealing with the thirty different categories of objects to be exhibited.[12] Many of the items in Class XIX, ‘Tapestry, Lace and Embroidery’, were submitted by individuals who described themselves as ‘Inventor and Manufacturer’, including thirty soldiers or policemen.[13]

Figure 2 - ‘Stokes Tapestry’ or Royal Table Cover, Stephen Stokes, 1833–51, intarsia patchwork in wool. Museum no. 1960.42 © National Museum of Ireland

Among the unusual textiles on display were five pieces described as table-covers or counterpanes, made from wool cloth in the technique of ‘mosaic needlework’. The makers’ statements emphasised the size and complexity of the work, and the time taken to complete it. For example number 218, made by J. Johnstone of 102 Graham Street, Airdrie, Scotland, was described as a 'Table-cover, consisting of 2,000 pieces of cloth, arranged into 23 historical and imagined characters…The design and execution is the sole work of the exhibitor, and has occupied his leisure hours for 18 years'.[14] Number 382, by John Brayshaw, a tailor from Lancaster, was a 'counterpane of Mosaic needlework, 12 feet long by 10 feet wide, divided into 44 compartments, each representing a popular print'.[15] However the description of number 307, by Steven Stokes, a Dublin policeman, emphasised not the work involved, but the patriotic themes represented: 'Table-cover of mosaic cloth-work, composed of cloth fine-drawn together, representing the royal arms; the royal family at a review; the capture of the French eagle by the Royal Dragoons at Waterloo; a sketch from Ballingarry; a war chariot, etc'.[16] This piece has survived, and was presented to the National Museum of Ireland by Stokes' descendants in 1960 (fig. 2).

With it came documentation showing that all or part of the textile was shown to Queen Victoria on her visit to Ireland in 1849.[17] This event is probably commemorated in the central panel, which shows the Queen and Royal Family mounted and in uniform at a military review. After its display in London in 1851, where it was awarded a bronze medal, Stokes' panel was shown in the Irish Industrial Exhibition in Dublin in 1853, where it was praised by reviewers.[18] It was also exhibited for charity in 1881, and a pamphlet explaining it was printed in 1895, probably to accompany further displays.[19]

The motivation for Stokes' work, which apparently took him 24 years to make, is not addressed in the pamphlet or in press accounts.[20] As he was a police officer who rose to the level of Inspector, it was probably not financial. There are several references in the patchwork scenes to the destructive effects of excess drinking, so it is possible that the project was begun as a form of escape from the alcoholic 'canteen culture' Stokes had experienced when he served in the British army from 1802 to 1836.[21] The scenes depicted in this textile are not the peaceful landscapes suggested by the 1851 description of 'A Scene at Ballingary' and 'Donnybrook Fair', but highly politicised renditions of the efforts of the Irish Police to enforce order in the face of Republican opposition. A scene showing a Republican uprising at Ballingarry is visually opposed to one from the battle of Waterloo, equating Irish rebels with Napoleonic troops. Thus the display of this textile in public would speak not only of the skill, patience and patriotism of its maker, but of the legitimacy of English rule in Ireland.

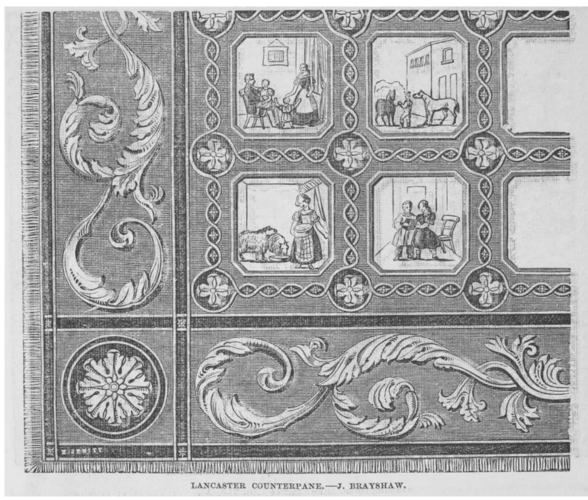

Figure 3 - Lancaster counterpane, J. Brayshaw, engraving from 'Needlework in the Crystal Palace', Illustrated Exhibitor, no. 21, 25 October 1851, p.391

In spite of Stokes' medal, the only example of intarsia patchwork to receive a favourable notice in the Illustrated Exhibitor, a 550 page catalogue of the exhibition, was the hanging by Brayshaw. A brief description of the piece was supplemented by an engraving of one corner, showing four of the pictorial panels, and the internal and external borders decorated with a 'handsome scroll' (fig. 3).[22]

One of the scenes, showing a man and two horses, is similar in subject and composition to the farmyard panel, and the scrolled internal border is also very similar. The Illustrated Exhibitor was lukewarm in its appreciation of Brayshaw's textile as 'a work of immense labour', while praising an embroidered copy of Leonardo da Vinci's 'Last Supper' made by a lady amateur as 'artistic' and evidence of 'great skill and taste'. The article went on to disparage the taste of working-class exhibitors as a group:

> *'Many of the exhibitors, indeed, appear to have been under the delusion of believing that the size of a piece of work and the number of years that had been wasted over it, were the causes that would principally entitle it to a place in the Exhibition; and this notion has doubtless caused this display on the walls of our great Palace of some of the trash which is there to be found'.*[23]

Brayshaw's textile may have escaped the general condemnation by using high art as a source of inspiration. The reviews of his work in local newspapers state that the pictorial panels were taken from prints by the 18th-century artist George Morland, and the layout of the whole, with elaborate scrolling frames around each scene, replicated late 18th-century arrangements of prints in interior decoration and in furnishing textiles.[24]

Financial motivations for intarsia patchwork

Stokes' patchwork is the only one exhibited at the Crystal Palace known to have survived in one piece. In October 1851, near the end of the Exhibition, there was a leak in the glass roof, 'to the great discomfort of some of the exhibitors'.[25] As the patchwork panels were displayed hanging from the roof to allow them to be seen in full, they would have been liable to damage from leaks.[26] This may account for the disappearance of the other examples, which are not mentioned in newspapers after 1851, and are not preserved in museum collections.

The damage to goods displayed in the Great Exhibition would have been a severe blow to exhibitors who had invested time and effort in producing items that they hoped would earn them money. John Brayshaw's patchwork hanging had been completed by November 1850, when 1000 people paid to see it in Penrith, Cumbria.[27] Brayshaw had taken the textile on a tour of North-West England, publicising it with advertisements and editorials in the local newspapers:

> *'J Brayshaw begs to announce that having perfected the ORNAMENTAL COUNTERPANE intended for the May EXHIBITION OF INDUSTRY, he intends to exhibit it to the public of Preston, commencing on Thursday, February 6th, 1851, Wednesdays excepted. During the Exhibition a band will be in attendance. The Exhibition will open at 10 o'clock in the morning, and close at 9 in the evening. Price of admission sixpence. Visitors are requested not to touch the Needlework. To understand the different representations parties visiting can refer to the Bill'.*[28]

This notice makes it clear that Brayshaw's exhibition was a commercial venture: 1,000 visitors paying 6d a head would give gross takings of £25, a considerable sum when a skilled working man might earn less than £1 per week. Brayshaw's practice was modelled on the 'mechanics' exhibitions' held in industrial areas from 1837 onwards, in its claims to present both a technical innovation and a work of art, and in charging a 6d entrance fee.[29] The printed guide or 'Bill' would add to the educational value of the event. This patchwork was exhibited around Lancashire throughout February and March 1851 before being delivered to London, where it had been accepted for the Great Exhibition.[30] As the opening day approached, the Preston Guardian carried several reminders that Brayshaw's textile would be on display, and that visitors should not miss this work of local interest.[31]

The strongest evidence of all for the financial value of inlaid patchwork comes from the case of Michael Zumpf, a Hungarian tailor living in London. In 1875 Zumpf was involved in a court case to reclaim three inlaid patchwork table covers from a trickster who offered to sell them to the Duchess of Edinburgh, but instead sold them to a pawn shop and kept the proceeds.[32] These textiles were valued by Zumpf at £300, an enormous sum. According to court reports Zumpf and a friend had made eight inlaid textiles, one of them a copy of the 'picture of Lord Palmerston and the members of his Ministry in the House of Commons'. In 1888 these pieces were included in an exhibition of 'high-class tailoring from London and the provinces' organised by the London Practical Foremen Tailors' Association: 'On a dark blue ground Zumpf has reproduced, with the help of thousands of pieces of cloth, some of the minutest description, a well-known picture of the Privy Council'.[33]

Artisans' patchworks in other exhibitions

There were many other exhibitions both before and after 1851 that aimed to show the public the best examples of British technical and aesthetic innovation.[34] As at the Great Exhibition, exhibitors ranged from large-scale manufacturers to individual working men and women. The Crystal Palace itself was moved to Sydenham, where it became a venue for 'rational recreation' such as Temperance festivals, choral concerts, and exhibitions that aimed to attract a broad cross-section of British society.[35] Detailed catalogues of these exhibitions do not survive, but publications from regional events such as the 1865 Working Men's Industrial Exhibition, Birmingham suggest that the taste for exhibiting elaborate patchworks continued. The Birmingham exhibition included a 'Table Cloth and Bed Cover, the latter containing 17,000 squares of cloth, was made from old regimental suits', submitted by a former soldier, and a

‘Patchwork, Bed Quilt, and Cover, production of leisure hours’ by a wire welder.[36] Although the descriptions do not say whether either of these pieces included pictorial panels, the references to the number of pieces included, and their production in leisure time over a number of years, are similar to the catalogue descriptions of intarsia patchworks at the Great Exhibition.

Figure 4 - ‘Royal Clothograph’ table cover, John Monro, 1830–1840, intarsia patchwork in wool. Museum no. E.1979.101. © Culture and Sport Glasgow (Museums) © Culture and Sport Glasgow (Museums)

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s there were exhibitions of intarsia patchworks staged by individuals, similar to those organised by Brayshaw in 1851. John Monro, a tailor from Paisley, listed his occupation in the 1851 census as ‘Assistant Exhibiter of the Royal Table Cover’, implying that he saw this as a money-making venture.[37] This textile is now in the collection of Glasgow Museums, and is composed of seven panels with ships, figures, and landscapes surrounded by geometric borders, all worked in intarsia patchwork (fig. 4).

These are surrounded by an outer border of plain fabric, which is embroidered with hundreds of names of writers, scientists, theologians, and jurists, and a statement of the maker's personal philosophy. Monro's motivation for spending 18 years of leisure time on this textile is further clarified by newspaper reports of a lecture he gave to the Belfast Revival Temperance Association in November 1860, when he used his patchwork as an example of 'what patience and perseverance could accomplish, and urged upon the young men present to practice these virtues; and, in order to do so, they should become total abstainers'.[38] Menzies Moffat of Biggar made two elaborate intarsia patchwork hangings in the 1860s, the Royal Crimean Hero Table Cover and the Star Tablecover.[39] These were exhibited by him for money, as a surviving publicity poster demonstrates. But the Star Tablecover was also carried as a banner in a procession backing the 1884 Reform Act with 'The Franchise Bill is the Tailor's Will' stitched on the back in beads.[40] An anonymous intarsia patchwork in the V&A collections has references to both Temperance and contemporary politics, with representations of Father Matthew the Temperance preacher and of Wat Tyler, leader of the Peasants' Revolt of 1380, and an allegory of the Anti-Corn Law League (which ostensibly campaigned to bring down the price of bread) (fig. 5).[41]

Figure 5 - 'Royal Standard' hanging, maker unknown, 1850s, intarsia patchwork in wool. Museum no. CIRC.114-1962

The repeated references to Temperance in these patchworks reflects the cultural importance of this movement in Victorian Britain, with a nationwide network of groups that offered lectures, meetings, social activities, and services such as life insurance.[42] These were intended to provide a substitute for working men's friendly societies and trade groups based in public houses, which often led to abuses such as compulsory 'treating'.[43] Finding non-alcoholic leisure activities would have been a particular problem for soldiers and policemen living in barracks far from home and not permitted to marry. There is some evidence that patchwork was promoted as a form of therapy for soldiers trying to avoid alcoholism. The British Workman, a Temperance magazine aimed at educated working people, published several articles in the mid-1870s on this topic. In 1873 it featured Private Roberts, who, when he gave up alcohol, reckoned that 'I must be employed, or I shall get into mischief' and made three patchwork quilts, one with 28,000 pieces, which he sold to his commanding officer for £10.[44] The accompanying image shows a geometric patchwork similar to one in the V&A associated with Private Francis Brayley.[45] Sue Prichard's research suggests that servicemen were encouraged to produce craft items for display in Soldiers' Industrial Exhibitions as a distraction from drinking; this may account for the numerous surviving geometric patchworks with military associations.[46]

The rational use of working men's free time was also a political issue. The period when the intarsia patchworks were being made, from the 1830s through to the 1860s, was one when the working-class majority of the British population was largely barred from political representation. Alongside political initiatives, rallies, and petitions to Parliament to extend the vote there was a widespread movement to educate the working classes as future voters.[47] This was carried out through Mechanics' Institutes, lectures and study groups, and through mass market periodicals such as the Penny Magazine.[48] In this context, viewing a textile representing military heroes, celebrities, and exotic animals might be seen as an educational, or at least rational, way of spending leisure time, especially when the textile was itself a testimony to the maker's sobriety and hard work.

Intarsia patchwork seems to have been a purely masculine craft in 19th-century Britain. Women were represented at exhibitions from 1851 onwards, both as professional needlewomen and as lady amateurs, and some of their products sound as elaborate and as time-consuming as intarsia patchwork: 'no. 217, Maria Johnson, Hull - Patchwork quilt in 13,500 pieces of silk, satin, and velvet, with white embroidered flowers'.[49] However more typical women's exhibits were made from materials such as cotton crochet, and described as imitations, rather than as independent creations: '140: Crick, Ellen – A Veil worked by the needle, in imitation of Honiton lace, and in the hope that it may be the means of giving employment to many poor needle-women'.[50] The numerous pictorial embroideries exhibited by women were described through their scriptural subjects, or as copies of a painted original, as if the work needed to be given validity by association with art or religion: 'No. 349: Lady Griffin Williams, 'The Last Supper, from the painting by Leonardo da Vinci'.[51] Some women exhibitors were clearly professionals hoping to showcase their talents through group exhibitions. After the closure in 1845 of Mary Linwood's Leicester Square gallery devoted to her needlework renditions of oil paintings there seem to have been few opportunities for women to present themselves as textile artists.[52] Even when women's work included images with political relevance, like the slave and the distressed sailor on Ann West's appliqué coverlet, it does not seem to have been used to argue for a political end. This reflects the exclusion of most women from the political process, notwithstanding their involvement in causes such as the abolition of slavery. Female exhibitors' silence over the time taken to produce their work – in contrast to the emphatic statements of Monro and other men – also reflect contemporary valuations of female labour. The commonest female employments, domestic service and dressmaking, were seen as extensions of women's innate skills in home-making, rather than as professions regulated by trade bodies and by employment law.[53]

As the clothing industry moved towards mass-production from the 1840s onwards, low-paid female seamstresses were used to undercut the wages of male tailors.[54] So the hand-stitched intarsia patchwork of Brayshaw, Monro or Zumpf would help to promote 'high-class [male] tailoring skills' in the face of mass-produced [female] competition. The images rendered in the patchworks would demonstrate the maker's knowledge of history, art, religion, the natural world, and patriotic themes. The persistence and sobriety required for a lengthy patchwork project would be evidence of the maker's ability to withstand the temptations of the drinking culture that pervaded workshops and barracks. All of these claims, and their implications for the anonymous maker's status as a rational citizen worthy of the vote, can be read in the seemingly innocuous farmyard panel. As a review of the 1888 exhibition of Zumpf's intarsia patchworks stated: 'They are worthy of a place in one of our National Museums, and will compare favourably with many much vaunted tapestries'.[55]

Endnotes

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2. Bruseberg, Gisela. 'The Technique of Textile Pictorial Inlay' in *Inlaid*

Patchwork in Europe. 31-5. For the origins of the technique, see Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow and Salwa Joram, 'Cloth intarsia in Europe, an Overview' in *Inlaid Patchwork in Europe*: 21-30; Jennifer Wearden and Patricia L. Baker. *Iranian Textiles*. London: V&A Publications, 2010: 62-5 and 150-8.

3. Intarsia patchwork is also made in non-woven felt by many central Asian traditional cultures. The earliest known examples are from the Scythian culture, preserved in the 7th – 2nd Century BC frozen tombs of Pazyryk, Siberia, See Burkett, Mary. *The Art of the Felt Maker*. Kendal: Abbot Hall Art Gallery, 1979.

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8. Prichard, Sue. 'Creativity and confinement' in *Quilts 1700-2010*. London: V&A Publications, 2010: 92-5.

9. Anders, Ines. '1755 Inlaid Patchwork from Görlitz Cultural History Museum' in *Inlaid Patchwork in Europe from 1500 to the Present/Tuchintarsien in Europa von 1500 bis heute*, edited by Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow, Salwa Joram, Erika Karasek.

Regensburg/Berlin: Schnell & Steiner GmbH/Museum Europäischer Kulturen, 2009: 67-75.

10. Regine Falkenberg, 'Textile Edification, Inlaid patchworks from the Royal House of Prussia', in *Inlaid Patchwork in Europe from 1500 to the Present/Tuchintarsien in Europa von 1500 bis heute*, edited by Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow, Salwa Joram, Erika Karasek. Regensburg/Berlin: Schnell & Steiner GmbH/Museum Europäischer Kulturen, 2009.

11. 'Wolfshagen Cloth hanging, Wolfshagen-Hetzdorf parish church, Germany, catalogue D29' in *Inlaid Patchwork in Europe from 1500 to the Present/Tuchintarsien in Europa von 1500 bis heute*, edited by Dagmar Neuland-Kitzerow, Salwa Joram, Erika Karasek. Regensburg/Berlin: Schnell & Steiner GmbH/Museum Europäischer Kulturen, 2009: 240-4.

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13. Breward. 'Sewing soldiers' in *Quilts 1700-2010*. London: V&A Publications, 2010: 86.

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24. For example in the 'Print Room' at Uppark, Sussex, and the printed cotton Les Monuments de Paris, Louis-Hippolyte Lebas, 1816. Museum no. 1622-1899.

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41. *Quilts 1700-2010*. London: V&A Publications, 2010, No.46: 205. Museum no. Circ.114-1962. For the politics of this piece see Rose, 'Exhibiting Knowledge', 91.

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An adorned print: Print culture, female leisure and the dissemination of fashion in France and England, around 1660 – 1779

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Abstract

Marie-Thérèse Perdou de Subligny (1666 – 1735) was one of the first opera dancers, with a career that began in around 1688. Her presentation in an adorned engraved print (fig.1) provides an ideal platform for the discussion of cultural life between 1660 and 1779, bringing together diverse issues such as the production and

consumption of French prints, opera, celebrity, the dissemination of fashion and female domestic craft. This paper sets the Subligny print in its cultural contexts, and rejects the notion that decorated engravings such as this one, disseminated contemporary fashions.

An adorned print of Marie-Thérèse Perdou de Subligny (1666 – 1735)

Prints adorned with fabrics have largely been treated as extensions of the 'fashion plate', by historians, but this terminology fails to do justice to their complexity.[1] American museums have favoured the term 'dressed plates', but this phrasing too belies the complexity of the object, suggesting only a surface alteration, when, in fact, the majority of the decoration was placed underneath the print.[2] This article will use the terms 'adorned prints', 'modified prints' and 'decorated prints', although like 'fashion plate' and 'dressed plate', none of these terms were used by contemporaries.

Figure 1 - Engraving, Mademoiselle Subligny dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), about 1688-1709, hand coloured with applied silks and bobbin lace. Museum no. 1197-1875

Figure 2 - Engraving, Mademoiselle Subligny Dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), Paris, about 1688-1709. Museum no. 4956-1968

Jean Mariette (1660 – 1742), printer, published the Subligny print in the late 17th or early 18th century. It was enhanced by the careful cutting out of sections of the dress and placing of silks behind the print to fill the gaps. Additional hand colouring was applied, further panels were cut out and textiles were placed behind and on top of the print, while a sheet of paper was attached behind. Ribbons were also placed into slits in the print. Silks were layered to create texture. Silver and white bobbin lace was attached around the sleeves and at the edges of the dress. These modifications could have been made at any point between 1688, when the first edition of the print appeared (it is not clear if this version is the first edition), and its acquisition by the V&A in 1875. X-Ray Fluorescence analysis has revealed that the gold-coloured paint on the feathers is brass paint, while a small painted line above Subligny's shoe is tin paint, but both substances were used for centuries.[3] Further scientific analysis using RAMAN to discover which pigments were used to colour the print, and thereby narrow the date range for the print's decoration is possible, but has not yet been done. Combined with the difficulties inherent in dating silks conclusively, only a broad date range of 1660 to 1779 can be suggested as a date for this object.

Figure 3 - Engraving, La Veüe, Robert Bonnart, Paris, late 17th century. Museum no. E.21383-1957

The unembellished version of the print shows Subligny stood in front of an open window near a pilaster. The walls of the room are decorated with scrolls. She stands in a dancing pose with arms outstretched and the tip of her foot visible. Her left sleeve hangs down showing its contrasting lining, while her right sleeve hangs behind her arm. Her gown is encrusted with jewels and decorated with leaf scrolls. Comparison of fig. 1 and fig. 2 reveals the substantial changes made to Subligny's costume in the adorned print. In the undecorated print, her dress is covered with jewels and is decorated with leaf scrolls and flower shapes, which could have been embroidered or woven. The silks used to decorate the print in fig. 1 both feature the same pattern, but it is more delicate than that shown on the original dress. The placement of the silver bobbin lace on the decorated print alters Subligny's outfit further, as only thin bands of textile were used to edge the dress in the undecorated print. Likewise, the ribbons on the bodice and sleeves of the decorated print are additions that did not feature in the original print.

The place of the print's adornment is also uncertain. The Subligny print could have been sold and modified in England or France. In the late 17th century, French prints and books were frequently imported into England. Anthony Griffiths stresses the 'omnipresent' importation of prints in the seventeenth century, arguing that customers of print sellers in England would have seen more imported than English prints.[4] The Oxford booksellers Thomas Bennet and Henry Clements both traded in Paris, while the print seller Peter Stent (active 1642-1665) sold French goods including Francis Barlow's Book of Birds, published by Pierre II Mariette.[5] The Mariettes even had a family connection to the importation of French art into England, as Jean's mother was the widow of François Langlois (1589-1647), print dealer and publisher, who supplied master drawings to English collectors. Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), diarist, built up a large collection of prints that included the Jean Mariette's series The Four Times of the Day that featured Le Matin. Dame de Qualité a Sa Toilette, an image similar to other allegorical prints with detailed depictions of clothing. Pepys also owned the MODES DE PARIS series, which have been tentatively attributed to Mariette.[6]

Adorned prints are comparatively unusual. While the V&A owns hundreds of 17th-century French costume prints, it only holds two images that were decorated between 1688 and 1875 and an album of prints that were modified at some point in the 19th century. The V&A's other adorned print was published by Trouvain, and depicts a woman in warrior garb outside a palace (fig. 4).

The silks share a similar colour palette, with more silver and gold woven silks applied to the Trouvain print. The print was also painted in similar colours, with green, blue and silver predominating. Aspects of the decoration suggest that the Trouvain print may have been decorated by the same person as the Mariette, with the same thin silver bobbin lace used on both prints. However, although they were donated by the same person, they were not decorated in the same way as the V&A's 'Bonnart album' of decorated prints. This contains twenty prints mostly published by the Bonnart brothers (fig. 5).[7] The fabrics used to decorate these prints date from the mid 18th century to the mid to late 19th century and include textiles dyed using aniline dyes, which were only invented in 1856.[8]

Figure 4 - Engraving, unknown woman with spear, Antoine Trouvain, late 17th century. Museum no. 1196-1875

Figure 5 - Engraving, Charlotte Landgrave de Hesse Cassel Reyne de Dannemarc, Antoine Trouvain, published in Paris, late 17th or early 18th century. Museum no. E.835-1900

The silks and bobbin lace used on the Subligny print present some considerable puzzles – while the linen bobbin lace may have been made in the 17th, 18th or 19th centuries, it is not of the same high quality as the other materials used and seems incongruous, although as it is placed into slits into the print, it is integral to the decorative process and cannot have been a later addition.[9] Nevertheless, French and Italian silks held by the V&A, dating from the period 1650-1700, do show some resemblance to those used to decorate the Subligny print.[10] The design on the brocaded silk in fig. 6 is reminiscent of the pink and silver silk and the green and gold silk used for the gown on the Subligny print, with its pattern of repeated hexagonal shapes, scrolls and dots. The silks in fig. 7, with its stylized flower motif and dots, and fig. 8, with its curling leaf pattern, are not unlike the fabric used to decorate Subligny's dress. Moreover, the swatch shown in fig. 9 gives an indication of the original colour of the faded pink silk.

Figure 6 - Brocaded silk, woven with silver thread, France or Italy, 1690s. Museum no. 1077c-1888, photography by Alice Dolan

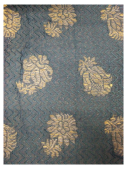

Figure 7 - Brocaded silk, France, Italy or Spain, 1625-1650. Museum no. 1112-1899, photography by Alice Dolan

Figure 8 - Brocaded silk, Italy, 1625-1650. Museum no. 726:A-1884, photography by Alice Dolan

Figure 9 - Brocaded silk, France, 1675-1699. Museum no. 221-1895, photography by Alice Dolan

The silks used to decorate the Trouvain print may also date from the 17th century, as they have a high metal thread content, similar to the fabrics shown in figs 10-12. Again, it is possible to make comparisons between the design of the silks and those used to decorate the print. The scrolling stem and foliage motifs that characterise the silks in figures 10 and 11 are similar to those used on the mantua and the bottom of the petticoat on the Trouvain print, while the silk shown in fig. 13 shares common design features with fabrics applied to both the Trouvain and the Subligny prints.

Figure 10 - Brocaded silk, France, 1660s. Museum no. T.132-1985, bequeathed by the late John Compton, photography by Alice Dolan

Figure 11 - Brocaded silk, possibly French, 1670-1690. Museum no. 1604-1900, photography by Alice Dolan

Figure 12 - Brocaded silk, France or Italy, 1650-1675. Museum no. 506-1884, photography by Alice Dolan

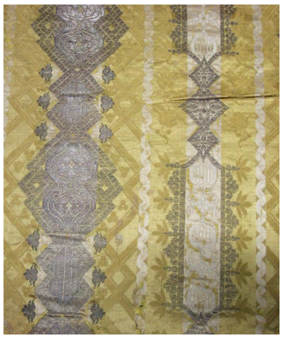

Figure 13 - Silk damask, France or Italy, 1670-1699. Museum no. T.23c-1962, photography by Alice Dolan

Figure 14 - Detail of engraving, Mademoiselle Subligny dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), 1688-1709, hand coloured with applied silks and bobbin lace. Museum no. 1197-1875, given by Lady Wyatt, photography by Alice Dolan

Metal lace is a rare survival as it was often melted down for its precious metal content. Figures 14-16 show the bobbin lace used on the Subligny and Trouvain prints.

Both prints feature an identical thin scalloped bobbin lace, which was used to decorate the edges of the gowns and sleeves, perhaps suggesting that both prints were decorated by the same maker. Broad metal bobbin lace is used at the bottom of both petticoats. Fig. 17 and fig. 18 are examples of metal bobbin lace used in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Figure 17 has thin scalloped edges similar to the thin bobbin lace in fig. 14 and fig. 16 although the broader bobbin lace used on the Subligny and Trouvain prints is more ornate than that pictured in fig. 17 and fig. 18. The trend for metal fringed petticoats in the 1690s supports the notion that these prints were decorated soon after publication, although it is possible, too, that decoration occurred at a later date using old textiles.[11]

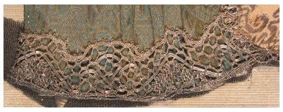

Figure 15 - Detail of metal bobbin lace on the underskirt of Mademoiselle Subligny dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), 1688-1709. Museum no. 1197-1875, given by Lady Wyatt

Figure 16 - Detail of unknown woman with spear, Antoine Trouvain, late 17th or early 18th century, hand coloured with applied silks and bobbin lace. Museum no. 1196-1875, given by Lady Wyatt, photography by Alice Dolan

One can only speculate on the origins of the fabrics used to decorate adorned prints. The pieces used may have been off-cuts from the production of a new dress or furnishing of a room, bought especially for the purpose, or scraps cut from old clothes. They may also have been pieces of fabric retained for future alterations, as suggested by the example of the Sixth Earl of Coventry. On 28 April 1779, William Morse, a tailor, charged the Sixth Earl for a series of alterations and repairs which include: 'altering a suit olive green mixt cloth', 'altering a green velvet dress coat & breeches', 'd[itt]o to a tissue waistcoat & pieceing wider the [length?] & side', 'D[itt]o to a dress suit & spring velvet' and 'altering a buff silk waistcoat d[itt]o'. It would appear that the unfortunate Sixth Earl had put on weight and consequently needed his garments to be 'piece[d] wider'. As he was only charged for silk serge and calico – the lining materials – it seems likely that Morse or the Earl had kept off-cuts or surplus fabrics for this very purpose.[12]

Figure 17 - Detail of image cloak, possibly France, about 1720s. Museum no. T.58-1921, photography by Alice Dolan

Figure 18 - Detail of chalice veil, possibly France, 1680s-1690s. Museum no. 1252-1877, photography by Alice Dolan.

Elsewhere, the high cost of fabric explained its reuse in the decoration of prints. The Museum of London holds an adorned print of Marie Sophie Palatine, which was decorated with a blue-green silk woven with metal thread, which also features a fold with stitch marks on either side.[13] The reuse of textiles was common in the 18th century. Many goods were sold second-hand, including textiles.[14] According to

Beverly Lemire, it was a ‘common feature’ of life across the social spectrum. There was a strong second-hand market for clothing and tailors ‘routinely’ sold their client’s second hand clothes. Although Lemire’s research focuses on the clothing owned by non-elites, it is possible that the scraps of silk used on the Mariette print were obtained from the second-hand clothes market.[15]

Although alternative routes for the purchase of silks are difficult to trace, as Mercers’ advertisements in contemporary newspapers fail to mention craft materials or scraps of fabrics, larger pieces of fabric were bought for quilt making, cut up and made into patches, which means that it is not unlikely that smaller pieces of silk were also available through shops.[16]

Fashion plates and the dissemination of fashion in France and England

Figure 19 - Engraving, Du Moulin en habit de Paysan, Jean Mariette (publisher), Paris, about 1660-1742. Museum no. 4954-1968, given by Dame Marie Rambert

Although some historians have argued that prints of figures with detailed depictions of clothing were 'fashion plates', there is much scholarly disagreement about the genre. John Lea Nevinson has located the origins of the fashion plate in the 16th and early 17th centuries, while Aileen Ribeiro associates them with 17th century France. By contrast, Vyvyen Holland, D. Langley Moore and Neil

McKendrick situate the development of the genre in late 18th century England.[17] Definitions of what actually constituted a fashion plate have also varied, with Ribeiro claiming they were only general representations, while McKendrick argued for their accuracy in depicting the detail of new fashions. Scholars are, however, unanimous in the belief that fashion plates functioned to inform people about fashions which they then emulated.[18]

Those historians who place the origins of the fashion plate in the 17th century stress the importance of images in the Mercure Galant, later named Le Nouveau Mercure Galant, a monthly periodical that featured articles about fashion. This publication included images of sumptuously dressed men and women, which were accompanied by descriptive text. Unlike Mariette's print of Subligny, these were clearly intended to educate the viewer about fashion. The work of Jean Bérain (1640-1711), engraver and dessinateur de la Chambre du Roi, suggests that there were differences between fashion engravings and those showing theatrical costume. Bérain's engravings for the Mercure Galant (1677-78) depicted suitable dress for the different seasons, but crucially included descriptive captions.[19] An engraving of the opera dancer Henri Du Moulin (fig. 19) signed Bérain, appears not to be a fashion plate, as it is not annotated and Du Moulin wears an opera costume. Rather than fit into the category of 'fashion plate', prints of opera dancers might best be classified as costume plates or prints depicting historical fashions, occasional dress or national costume.[20]

The Subligny print might best be considered, then, in the context of prints showing operatic subjects (fig. 2, figs. 19-21), such as Mademoiselle de Subligny danseuse de l'Opéra, produced by Henri Bonnart. Held by the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the print showed the dancer in a pose reminiscent of Mariette's print – stood by a window, with a column behind her, and both arms outstretched. Her costume is, however, markedly different. The Bonnart print depicts Subligny in sleeves and a bodice with scalloped edges, with fabric billowing from behind her head. She also has fewer jewels, which vary in size and in how they reflect the light. There are three layers to her skirt, with the top layer cut into an unusual shape, and incorporating neoclassical decoration, fringing and embroidery. Below this layer is a plain textile with fringing. The under-skirt is decorated with acanthus scrolls and sparsely placed jewels.[21] The Mariette and Bonnart prints may have been inspired by each other, but the differences in dress, faces and style of the work indicate that one did not copy the other: they are different interpretations of the same individual.

Figure 20 - Engraving, Mademoiselle des Mastins Dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), Paris, late 17th century. Museum no. E.4960-1968, given by Dame Marie Rambert

Figure 21 - Engraving, Mademoiselle Moreau Dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), Paris, about 1660-1742. Museum no. 4957-1968, given by Dame Marie Rambert

Mariette also produced other prints of personalities associated with the opera, such Subligny's dance partner, Jean Balon, also after Bérain, Mademoiselle des Mastins (fig. 20) and Mademoiselle Moreau (fig. 21). Like the image of Subligny, des Mastins and Moreau were captioned with the phrase 'dansant a l'Opera', suggesting that Mariette may have published a set of prints of famous opera dancers.[22] The background in the Moreau print is similar to that in the Subligny, and because they are both 'dancing', it suggests that a theatre set is pictured behind both figures (fig. 2 and fig. 21). Subligny, Du Moulin and Mastins wear opera costumes (fig. 2, figs. 19-20).[23] These types of engravings cannot be categorised as 'Les Modes' - the contemporary term to describe engravings of allegorical and real individuals - which Madeleine Ginsburg defines as 'always in fashionable dress'.[24] It is clear that neither Mastins nor Du Moulins are depicted in fashionable dress. Instead, these engravings reflected contemporary interest in the opera, just as interest in theatre and masquerades led to the production of images of the costumes, as in volumes such as Loüis Riccoboni's Historie du Theatre Italien, 1728, and H. Le Comte, Costumes de theatre de 1670 à 1820.[25]

Historians have argued that 'fashion' or costume plates played an essential role in the promotion of French luxury clothing throughout Europe. Diana De Marly argues that 'fashion engravings' and the Mercure Galant were used in the late 17th century to disseminate French fashion abroad.[26] Ginsburg acknowledges that the profusion of 'large-scale popular prints' may have filled the gap between the first appearance of 'illustrated fashion articles' in the Mercure Galant in the 1670s and their next appearance in magazines in 1729, but she also lists 'proxy' information, such as observation and fashion dolls, as the most common means of learning of new fashions in the late17th century.[27] Ribeiro concurs with De Marly, stating that costume plates were descendents of the French luxury trades, depicting changing textiles and styles, 'in response to the royal imperative decreeing the arts of fashion as an essential part of French cultural propaganda', but, like De Marly, she recognises that they had uses other than the dissemination of fashion, providing the example of Pepys as a collector who considered these prints 'works of art' in their own right**[28]** Daniel Roche contends that engravings of dress by Bérain and the Bonnarts were 'one of the signs of French hegemony in Europe', and argues that these engravings eventually came to replace fashion dolls.[29]

It seems highly likely that French prints, such as the Subligny print, were popular with collectors due to their association with a fashionable culture, especially as imported prints were more common in

England than English prints in this period.[30] French ballet and opera were hugely influential throughout Europe from the late 17th century, and although Louis XIV's retirement from active participation in the ballet in 1670 reduced the prestige of dance within the court, he created the Académie Royale de Danse in 1661 and the Académie d'Opera in 1669 (later renamed the Académie Royale de Musique), which professionalized dance in France. Jennifer Homans posits that ballet was the 'perfect artefact of 17th century French aristocratic culture' with the 'reminders of etiquette [...] imprinted in the steps'.[31] She contends that there was a deliberate attempt to 'extend French influence' throughout Europe, placing the Academy of Dance in the context of the other academies for painting, fencing, music and architecture.[32] Likewise, for Ivor Guest, the regulations introduced in 1713 to improve the administration of the Paris Opera confirmed it as 'an institution of state and an official expression of French culture'.[33] These arguments echo those made by De Marly, Ribeiro and Roche, suggesting that it is, perhaps, more useful to consider engravings such the Subligny print as part of a broader attempt by France to permeate and even dominate the cultures of other European countries, rather than as disseminators of specific fashion advice.

And yet, English collectors were motivated by curiosity, rather than sycophancy to French culture, in their purchase of prints. Angela McShane and Claire Backhouse emphasise that the range of engraved subjects with detailed depictions of clothing 'complicates' theories of the emulation of prints. These prints provided information on 'countries, people and customs', and were used for decorating rooms, or were copied in order to practise drawing.[34] Prints were advertised in the late 17th and early 18th centuries as 'curiously engraven', a title applied to sheet music, copy books, maps, poems, images of monarchs, monuments and playing cards.[35] Pepys' ownership of prints provides a valuable case study for attitudes to French engravings in the late 17th century. He owned costume plates that could be termed fashion plates as well as many other types of prints. His collection of sixteen prints, labelled the Habits de France d'environ l'Année 1670 initially suggests that Pepys has assembled this series to garner information about the newest fashions, but this assumption is challenged by the wider context of his collecting practices, as Pepys did not make regular collections of dated sets. The next two sets showing Parisian clothing cover the period between 1688 and 1695. Pepys also owned costume plates, catalogued as 'HABITS', which included historical figures, Oxford academic dress, previous monarchs and allegorical prints. These showed dress from 1640 although he only started collecting prints in the 1660s.[36] He owned 'Habits. of both Sexes and of Divers Countrys and Ages', which include Roman, European, Middle Eastern, African and Indian clothing. In addition, Pepys owned three sets of the 'cryes' of London and one set of 'les cris de Paris' that depict figures in great detail.[37] This pattern of ownership suggests that it was the desire to collect rather than emulate French fashions that inspired Pepys' acquisition of French engravings, challenging the assumption that these images were 'fashion plates'.[38]

Furthermore, there were much more effective and practical ways of disseminating information about clothing than through prints, adorned or otherwise. Design information was often conveyed by the written and spoken word, while purchases of clothing were routinely made by proxy.[39] Even in the late 18th century, the written word was still important for the transmission of information about objects. In 1793, the engineer and manufacturer Matthew Boulton wrote to his buckle-maker, 'As you and I shall often have occasion to speak of forms and proportions of buckles, it is necessary we should settle a distinct language of visual description'.[40] The use of images was even unusual in periodicals like the Mercure Galant, where text remained the primary medium for discussion of changing fashions in textiles and accessories. This can be attributed to the high costs incurred in producing images. And finally, looking at what other people were wearing often superseded the usefulness of prints. On 4 May 1662, the ever-observant Pepys walked with his wife 'to Grays Inn, to observe fashions of the ladies, because of my wife's making some clothes'.[41]

Female leisure and the adorned print

Figure 22 - Papercut, Anna Maria Garthwaite, England, 1707. Museum no. E.1077-1993

The context of female domestic craft may offer the most likely explanation for who decorated the Subligny print, and why. It also offers explanation for why it so difficult to locate modified prints in contemporary documents. In addition to the hybrid construction of the prints themselves, their absence from contemporary sources could also be linked to the typical exclusion from contemporary sources of 'women's work', if not the women who made them.

Pepys provides crucial evidence regarding the modification of prints in 17th century England. These prints were often used to decorate the home, where they were a huge source of pleasure. Satirical prints made people laugh, while others would beautify or inform. On 2 July 1662, the diarist spent 'all morning dressing my closet at the office with my plates very neatly, and a fine place now it is, and will be a pleasure to sit in'. He varnished his prints to protect them, a common practice which eventually caused their destruction.[42] Contemporary English newspapers also advertised prints that could be used to decorate a range of items including tobacco boxes, cabinets, baskets, screens, chimneypieces, closets and studies.[43]

Pepys also encouraged his wife, Elizabeth, to engage in similar activities.[44] On 7 November 1666, Pepys bought 'prints for my wife to draw by this winter'.[45] To 'draw' the prints could imply copying them, or it could indicate that she coloured them in. A number of the prints in the section of 'Habits de France' have contemporary hand colouring. In some instances, Pepys owned two copies of the same prints, such as 'Mademoiselle d'Armagnac' published by Antoine Trouvain in 1695, and the extra copies have been hand-coloured.[46] Roger Chartier stresses the intimate relationship that individuals had with print within their homes: prints 'penetrated their private world, mobilizing their sentiments, fixing their memories and guiding their habits'.[47] That Pepys and his wife took pleasure in and modified contemporary prints demonstrates that prints were not just for gazing at, but were used to beautify the home.

Figure 23 - Detail of gown and the bottom of left sleeve, Mademoiselle Subligny dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), 1688-1709. Museum no. 1197-1875, given by Lady Wyatt, photography by Alice Dolan

Adorned prints, like the Subligny print, are also examples of another type of domestic craft, cut-paper work. In fig. 22 we see how the areas outlined in black are from the engraving, with thin lines of paper kept to maintain the outlines and drapery of the original print. Cut-paper work (découpure in French), was one of a plethora of domestic craft activities undertaken by women in the 18th century.[48] Anna Maria Garthwaite, the silk designer, produced the example shown in fig. 22 in 1707 at the age of seventeen. Although her work is much more accomplished than the adorned prints considered by this paper, the tree on the left, towards the centre of her composition, has leaves formed out of black feathers, which is not dissimilar to the use of textiles in the Subligny print.

Understanding the pride and emotional attachment that women invested in their cut-paper work also enriches our reading of the Subligny print. Mrs Delany, a gentlewoman, recalled in about 1740 that as a young woman she 'took great delight in a closet I had, which was furnished with little drawings and cut paper of my own doing; I had a desk and shelves for my books'. Her work brought her great personal satisfaction and held significance for others too. She recalled a Mr Twyford, who became depressed because he could not marry her. On his death 'they found under his pillow a piece of cut paper, which he had stolen out of my closet at the Farm'.[49] The use of expensive silks with metal threads also suggests the high value placed on these objects. Modified prints could have been used to decorate the home or be brought out for friends to admire. Both the Subligny and Trouvain prints were decorated with silks with metal threads, and would have come alive in candlelight, as fig. 24 and fig. 25 illustrate. The adornment of these prints therefore enhanced the decorative function of the original engraving, allowing it to enhance a room during the day and at night.

Figure 24 - Detail of gown and the bottom of left sleeve, Mademoiselle Subligny dansant a l'Opera, Jean Mariette (publisher), 1688-1709. Museum no. 1197-1875, given by Lady Wyatt, photography by Alice Dolan

Figure 25 - Detail of the skirts of the unknown woman with spear, Antoine Trouvain, late 17th century. Museum no. 1196-1875

Decorating Subligny's print could be regarded as an act of homage by one of the dancer's many admirers. Her celebrity status clearly made it financially worthwhile for Mariette to publish her portrait as an engraving. As Judith Milhous convincingly argues, foreign opera dancers were huge celebrities in England and attracted sizeable audiences when they performed there.[50] Subligny's visit to London to perform in the winter of 1701-02 was deemed remarkable enough to feature in a periodical published over two years later in 1704.[51] Her reputation was duly reflected by high earnings. While the architect and dramatist Sir John Vanbrugh estimated the annual cost of keeping seven dancers in 1703 as £500, Mademoiselle Subligny received in the region of £420 to dance during her five-week stay in England.[52] It was France, however, where she danced for most of her professional life, receiving from L'Academie Royale de Musique an annual salary of 1500 livres, around £112. 10s., by 1713. This was 800 livres more than the next highest salary for the female opera dancers, showing just how extraordinary she was by contemporary standards.[53]

Like all the domestic crafts, cut-paper work was censured by contemporaries. Alexander Pope's poem 'On the Countess of Burlington Cutting Paper' offered the following critique: 'Alas! One bad example shown, / How quickly all the sex pursue! / See, madam, see the arts o'erthrown / Between John Overton and you!'.[54] Pope's reference to the publisher John Overton could be read as an attack on the increasing popularity of the print as a domestic object. In 1741, the bluestocking Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, referred to this poem in a letter where she described her domestic and writing activities, remarking that 'some of my employments are of the same importance as cutting paper; indeed, for me you should read blot paper rather than cut paper'.[55]

Conclusion

It seems likely that the Subligny print should not be categorized as a fashion plate. It did not share the explicitly didactic function of that genre and, as we have seen, there were other more effective ways to transmit information about fashion. Instead, as one of a number of engravings of opera dancers, it should be seen as part of a broader French attempt to influence the culture of other European countries, as French prints of ballet and opera stars were routinely imported into 17th century England. More specifically, the Subligny print is an example of an adorned print. Employing similar construction techniques to cut-paper work, it is likely that these prints were bought for and adorned by wealthy women in the home, either in England or in France, and then used to enhance the domestic environment and to display their virtuous accomplishments. Perhaps Subligny's fame as a celebrated dancer suggests that the engraving was also partly decorated as an act of homage. At the same time, this study of the V&A's Subligny print may open new avenues for research. Without scientific analysis of the pigments used to colour the print, it has not been possible to date the decoration of the Subligny print conclusively, but a strong case can be made for the likelihood of its decoration before the 19th century. Nevertheless, it is still compelling to ask why 17th century French engravings were decorated in the 19th century as the items in the V&A's 'Bonnart album' definitely were.

Endnotes

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2. The Pierpoint Morgan Library (New York) and the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), use the term 'dressed plates'.

3. The Pierpoint Morgan Library (New York) and the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), use the term 'dressed plates'.

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7. V&A Museum no. E.826 to E.845-1900, the album includes prints published or designed by Nicholas Bonnart (c.1637-1718), publisher; Robert Bonnart (1652-1729), printmaker; Jean Dieu de St Jean (1655-c.1695), printmaker; P. Valran; Jean Mariette and Antoine Trouvain.

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9. These issues were discussed in personal correspondence with Clare Browne, V&A Museum senior textiles curator, 03/12/2010 to 09/12/2010.

10. V&A Textile Drawers 1186 to 1198, viewed 04/01/2010.

11. Angela McShane and Clare Backhouse, 'Top Knots and Lower Sorts: Print and Promiscuous Consumption the 1690s' in *Printed Images in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Interpretation* edited by Michael Hunter. Ashgate: Aldershot, 2010: 348-9.

12. Worcester County Record Office, reference number 705:73, BA number 14450, box number 40, bundle 33, bill 14b; Dolan, Alice. *Reassessing the aristocratic male consumer: the Sixth and Seventh Earls of Coventry and their clothes, 1759-1830*. Unpublished BA dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2009: 42.

13. 'Marie Sophie Palatine, Reyne de Portugal', engraving, G. Valek, decorated by unknown, 1694. Museum of London, 2002. 139/356.

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16. For example, 'Advertisement'. *Spectator*. 8: 613 (27 October, 1714): 1188, see entry for Richard Chamberlayne; 'Advertisement'. *London Journal*. 220 (12 October, 1723): 4, see George Wise; 'Advertisement'. *Universal Spectator*. 470 (8 October, 1737): 1370, see Thomas Hinchcliff; Angela McShane, Ann Christie, Abigail Turner, 'The Chapman Coverlet: texts, myths and mysteries' in *Quilts 1700-2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories*, edited by Sue Pritchard. London: V&A Publishing, 2010: 125-126.

17. Holland, Vyvyen. *Handcoloured Fashion Plates 1770-1899*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1981; Langley Moore, D. *Fashion through Fashion Plates 1771-1970*. London: Ward Lock, 1971: 12; McKendrick, Neil. 'The Commercialization of Fashion' in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* edited by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb. London: Europa Publications Limited, 1982: 47-48; Nevinson. *Origin and Early History of the Fashion Plate*, 67-78; Ribeiro claims that fashion plates could 'more accurately' be called 'costume plates'; despite this she continues to use the term 'fashion plate'; Fashion and Fiction, 18-19. This type of misuse of the term is common, for example it also occurred at Nicholson, Kate. *Refashioning Fashionability: Women's Portraiture, Fashion Prints, and Allegory in France at the Turn of the 18th Century*. Art History Research Seminar, University College London, 13 January 2010.

18. See for example, De Marly, Diana. *Louis XIV & Versailles*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1987: 47-48; McKendrick, Neil. 'The Commercialization of Fashion' in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* edited by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb. London: Europa Publications Limited, 1982: 47; Ribeiro, Aileen. *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England*. London: Yale University Press, 2005: 19.

19. Gaudriault, Raymond. *La Gravure de mode feminine en France*. Paris: Editions de l'Amateur, 1983: 18.

20. Holland. *Handcoloured Fashion Plates*, 22; Langley Moore. *Fashion Through Fashion Plates*, 10; Ribeiro, Aileen. *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England*. London: Yale University Press, 2005: 18-19.

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Seating and sitting in the V&A: An observational study

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Abstract

Good public spaces accommodate, and attract, lingering. National museums in the UK are civic spaces, where seating is provided in circulation areas for visitors to wait, rest or otherwise pause. Different areas and kinds of seating support a range of uses by visitors in addition to sitting. A pilot study conducted in late 2009 investigated three circulation areas in the V&A - the Grand Entrance, Grand Entrance Steps, and the Sackler Centre reception, to explore how these spaces and the styles of seating provided are used by museum visitors. The study shows that differentiated spaces with varied styles of seating are an important aspect of the Museum’s visitor provision.

‘Seating is an explicit invitation to stay, either with others or by oneself’[1]

Seating in public spaces is an easily overlooked aspect of our urban environment as we go about our daily lives, yet we use public seating for all sorts of reasons – to rest our feet, wait for a friend, eat a sandwich or tie a shoelace. Seating gives us a reason to pause and rest. National museums in the UK – the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) included – belong to the diverse spectrum of spaces which make up the public realm. We may not immediately consider museums to be ‘public’ in the same way as streets or parks – museums have thresholds, security staff, few issues with ‘anti-social behaviour’, and access is structured around opening hours. However, it is also true that the external public realm is not the openly accessible place we would ideally expect it to be. Much the same as entering a train station with a ticket or a café with an order of coffee, entering a museum is a contractual gesture – we may view the obligatory bag check on entering the Museum as the signing of an unspoken agreement between visitor and building. Museums have the remarkable privilege of being public spaces with access enough to allow visitors to move about freely, and invigilation enough to prevent damage to the building fabric.

In *Civilising the Museum*, Elaine Gurian draws on the early planning theories of Jane Jacobs to advocate for greater emphasis on the civic role of museums, pointing out that museum visitors spend a large portion of their time doing something other than engaging with exhibits or programmes.[2]

Comparing museum interiors to 'streetscapes', she suggests that what Jacobs calls 'ad hoc' use, 'seemingly unprogrammed social activity that arises within public space', is of great value to museums, and that simple gestures to support this activity - such as the provision of free seating - greatly enhance the welcome of the museum.[3] Gurian cites Jacobs' argument that 'formal public organisations in cities require an informal public life underlying them, mediating between them and the privacy of the people of the city'.[4] In 'non-programmed' areas in the museum, such as foyer spaces or thoroughfares, seating allows visitors to pause and rest, but it is also an invitation for them to stay – which, as we will see, is a starting point for other uses.

The presence of people in public spaces has long been considered an important indicator of a healthy public life. Danish architect and academic Jan Gehl, one of the most influential researchers of public space in Europe in the 20th century, regards lingering (not to be confused with the more pejorative 'loitering') to be the key indicator of how well a public space is working, because it shows that a space offers enough interest (something to watch) and comfort (somewhere to sit) for people to choose to spend time there. Gehl regards seating as one of the most important provisions in public spaces to encourage lingering, because '[o]nly when opportunities for sitting exist can there be stays of any duration. If these opportunities are few or bad, people just walk on by'.[5] In outdoor spaces, weather plays a decisive role in how attractive a space may be on any given day. Because of this, one of the key indicators used by Gehl Architects in studies of cities around the world is whether or not a space shows a large discrepancy in use between winter and summer months.

Often, it is other people that provide the main attraction in public spaces. Gehl argues that, 'compared with experiencing buildings and other inanimate objects, experiencing people, who speak and move about, offers a wealth of sensual variation'.[6] Gurian calls this desire to be around others 'congregant behaviour'. She writes, 'we human beings like to be, and even need to be, in the presence of others. This does not mean we have to know the other people or interact directly with them. Just being in their proximity gives us comfort and something to watch'.[7] Jane Jacobs writes extensively on the importance of 'people watching' in public spaces, arguing that, quite apart from an enjoyable pastime in itself, 'people-watching aids in [producing a sense of] safety, comfort, and familiarity for all'.[8]

In the early 1980s, American urbanist and researcher William Whyte studied a selection of New York's outdoor plazas and their patterns of use by the public, in order to find out why some were lively and busy while others languished in disuse. After much trial and error analysing a series of variables such as the availability of sunshine or the amount of open space, Whyte discovered a relationship between the amount of 'sittable' space in any given plaza and how popular it was as a place to spend time in, concluding his analysis with the apparently obvious insight that 'people tend to sit most where there are places to sit'.[9]

Whyte was careful to include 'integral' seating in his research, which he defined as ledges or steps that were not overtly designed for sitting, but which were appropriate for the purpose nonetheless. Indeed, integral seating can play a very practical role in cities. Some of the liveliest public spaces in cities around the world are the steps of civic buildings, used by visitors to these institutions and non-visitors alike. Architectural critic Paul Goldberger observed, '[t]here are some stairs in the city - like those in front of The Metropolitan Museum of Art… that are arguably more important urban events than the buildings to which they lead'.[10]

The V&A has two excellent examples of outdoor integral seating: the deep stone edges of the pond in the John Madejski Garden, which are particularly well patronised in the summer months for sandwich-eating and people-watching, and the Grand Entrance steps leading into the Museum from Cromwell Road, which are similarly well-used, with the added benefit of being accessible to the public (visitors or otherwise) even when the Museum is closed. Integral seating is an effective way to balance commercial café seating with free seating in outdoor areas, however, it should be noted that integral seating places a high demand on the sitter, and tends to be avoided by people with mobility impairments. Gehl Architects' 2004 report *Towards a Fine City for People* pointed out that London's streets were seriously lacking in quality public seating, and that in the context of the city '[a] high level of [integral] seating is a symptom of a benchless city – a city without seats'.[11] Lack of seats means a lack of opportunities for staying, so the urban realm becomes little more than a thoroughfare. Indeed, another key finding in Whyte's research is that 'circulation and sitting… are not antithetical but complementary', and should therefore not be separated through urban design.[12] A lively public space needs to invite people to linger, as well as allowing them to pass through.

The Grand Entrance is the most-used and most central threshold to the Museum, connecting major galleries and the Museum Shop, as well as providing services such as ticket sales, general enquiries and a designated meeting point for gallery tours. The Grand Entrance interior was redesigned by Eva Jiricna Architects as part of Futureplan (completed 2003) to create 'a brighter, more welcoming arrival point for visitors' and to rationalise circulation through the space.[13] The architects designed curved, bench-like seating for durability and ease of movement – to accommodate both sitting and circulation. The benches have accompanying round tables, which can also be used as seats. Bespoke seating is custom-made for a specific area – these are one-off designs that will not be repeated or used in other contexts.

As a precursor to a larger body of research into public space in the V&A, in late 2009 a pilot study was conducted to see how three different circulation areas with contrasting styles of seating were used by visitors to the V&A, over a period of approximately three weeks; the Grand Entrance (interior), the Grand Entrance Steps (exterior), and the Sackler Centre for arts education reception area (interior). These areas have contrasting styles of seating, which can be described as 'bespoke', 'integral' and 'mass-produced' respectively. Every fifth visitor who entered the seating areas was observed using tracking sheets, creating data for people who sat down and people who either remained standing or did not pause at all. For each observation, the route taken by the visitor was tracked and the amount of time they spent in the seating area was recorded. The activity they displayed while in the seating area was also noted, including any interaction, whether directly with other people or indirectly via a mobile phone.

The Grand Entrance Steps mediate the Museum and the street and are subject to changes in weather and season. This area was chosen for the study as an example of integral seating, and it is the only outdoor location in the study. The Grand Entrance steps were redesigned (also as part of Futureplan) by PRS Architects with the express purpose of accommodating disability, which the architects achieved by a long, gentle incline favourable to wheelchairs and low-rise steps favourable to all users, including sitters.[14] Consultants for the project advised that people who use walking sticks often find steps an easier task than slopes, so both were used in the design. Significantly, the architects wanted the steps to be ‘a place for people to meet each other, write postcards, and generally hang out’.[15] In the early stages of the project there was some discussion about not having steps at all, in favour of slopes, but it was universally decided that the steps were necessary – not only as an alternative means of entry to a slope, but as a sociable space. It was felt that handrails would hamper sociability, so only one was installed – at the midpoint of the steps.

A relatively new space in the Museum, the Sackler Centre was completed in mid-2008. Designed by Softroom, the space is a dedicated education centre over two levels, incorporating a series of studios on the lower level and seminar rooms, artist-in-residence studios, and a gallery space on the upper level. The Sackler Centre is located at the base of the Henry Cole Wing, below street-level to the rear of the Museum. It is most easily reached via the Exhibition Road Groups entrance and the Tunnel Entrance, and serves as a thoroughfare between the Exhibition Road entrances and the Café, The Robert H N Ho Buddhist Sculpture Gallery and Ceramic Staircase. The Sackler Centre was chosen for the study as an area with 'mass-produced' seating, which means it is made by factory processes and is commercially available. The reception area in the Sackler Centre features a number of contemporary designs by Ron Arad (MT1 chair), Simon Pengelly (hm85a chair) and David Chipperfield (hm991k daybed). This was the only space in the study with moveable or swivel seating, as well as the only space with soft seating.

Findings of the study

After the pilot observations, categories of visitor behaviour were developed for 'Sitters' and 'Non-sitters'. Many activities were common to all spaces, such as waiting, idleness, reading; and some were particular to a space – such as looking at the Dale Chihuly chandelier in the Grand Entrance, and smoking on the Grand Entrance Steps. An early finding of the study was that 'waiting' was distinct from 'being idle', as people who were 'waiting' tended to be 'waiting for someone'. A person who may have appeared 'idle' initially was considered to be 'waiting' if that person then met a friend in any given space. People who were observed to be ‘idle’ did not show any significant activity or interaction throughout the observation.

Visitor activities common to all spaces (Sitters and Non-sitters)

- Waiting
- Being idle
- Interacting with friends or strangers (‘direct interaction’)
- Interacting using a mobile phone (‘indirect interaction’)
- Reading
- Writing
- Adjusting clothing
- Looking in or resting a bag on the seats
- Yawning (‘fatigue’)
- Personal (such as nose picking, kissing, or on one occasion, pulse-checking)
- Eating or drinking
- Pausing (to collect leaflets, look in a bag, look at a sign, etc.)

Visitor activities specific to spaces (Sitters and Non-sitters)

Grand Entrance

- Looking at the Dale Chihuly Chandelier

Grand Entrance Steps

- Smoking

- Using the ends of the steps in a ‘stepping stone’ fashion
- Dancing

Sackler Centre

- Holding a meeting
- Touching a chair
- Using a laptop

Figures 1–6 below illustrate the variety of activities Sitters and Non-sitters were observed to engage in for each space in the study. Activities are recorded by number of times observed. For example, a single visitor may read, interact and take a photograph during the course of an observation.

Figure 1 - Grand Entrance most commonly observed activities for Sitters

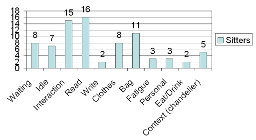


Figure 2 - Grand Entrance most commonly observed activities for Non-sitters

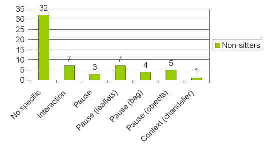


Figure 1 - Grand Entrance most commonly observed activities for Sitters

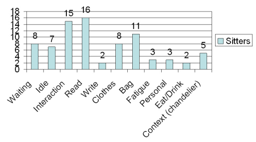


Figure 4 - Grand Entrance steps most commonly observed activities for Non-sitters

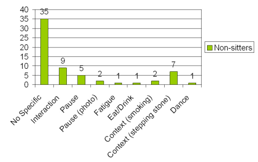


Figure 5 - Sackler Centre most commonly observed activities for Sitters

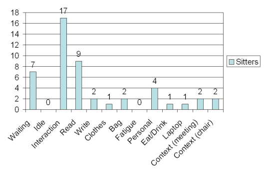
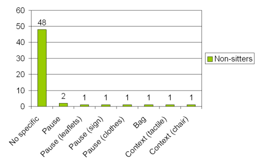


Figure 6 - Sackler Centre most commonly observed activities for Non-sitters



The study found that seating areas are used for many different purposes, for which sitting is only a starting point. Unsurprisingly, the study confirmed Whyte’s observation that ‘people will tend to sit where there are places to sit’, though, as the tables indicate, there were differences in how the seating areas in each space was used by visitors. The average sitting time for the Grand Entrance was 4 minutes 91 seconds, compared with 3 minutes 89 seconds in the Sackler Centre, and 17 minutes 27 seconds for the Grand Entrance Steps. To take Gehl’s argument that the duration of stays is important because activity in public space is self-reinforcing, it would appear that the Grand Entrance Steps are the most effective of the spaces in the study.[16] However, it should be noted that the 17 minute figure is based on only two Sitters, whereas the sitting durations in the interior spaces are based on 27 Sitters in the Grand Entrance, and 25 Sitters for the Sackler Centre. The longest stay observed in the Grand Entrance was 21 minutes and 10 minutes in the Sackler Centre. So, the average sitting time cannot be relied upon to give an accurate picture of lingering in each space, indeed, there was evidence of both fleeting and extended stays in the interior spaces.

In the Grand Entrance, Sitters were most commonly observed to be reading, interacting and looking through their bag. This was also the area with the most evidence of people simply lingering in the space as well as the area with the most varied activity. The Grand Entrance seating areas were very much linked to the wider V&A, providing visitors with current marketing material, acting as a meeting place for the start or end of a visit, a place to don hats or coats, as well as the designated meeting place for guided tours. There was plenty of activity in the space to watch – people walking by, joining a queue, talking, taking photographs. Most people chose to look into the centre of the space from the seats, and would only use the wall-facing side of a seat during busy periods. At particularly busy times, younger visitors were observed to use the pillars in the Grand Entrance as impromptu seating – though these structures would not generally be considered integral seating, they did provide an apparently attractive opportunity for leaning. Sitters would generally display a range of activities throughout each observation. One visitor in the Grand Entrance used a bench to take off his jacket, look through his bag, rest his feet on the seats and eat a packed lunch.

The most commonly observed activities on the Grand Entrance Steps for Sitters were outdoor activities (such as eating, smoking, putting on coats or hats) and interaction. This was the only space in the study where Sitters did not appear to be waiting or idle; the Steps appeared to be a destination in themselves, unlike in the interior spaces where seats appeared to be used at different stages of a visit.

The integral seating was definitely the most casual of all spaces and invited the longest stay. Though only two people were observed to sit down in the study, both were observed around midday in fine weather, and both used the steps to smoke and eat a sandwich. The small number of Sitters observed on the Grand Entrance Steps should not be considered a failing, especially considering the long duration of each stay. The study was conducted in late November, when the weather was chilly and sunlight scarce, and as Gehl argues, successful outdoor public spaces should show seasonal fluctuations in use because this indicates that in good weather, places becomes more attractive.[17]

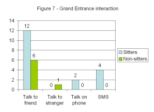
All the seating areas in the study were used by non-sitters to varying degrees. In the indoor spaces, non-sitters used seating areas to collect V&A leaflets, rest their bag on a seat, or to put on (or take off) jackets and hats. The outdoor space, the Grand Entrance Steps, supported particularly varied use among non-sitters and, as expected, were the only space in the study where smoking was observed. The Grand Entrance Steps were the most playful and informal of all spaces. One activity observed for non-sitters in this area was people walking up or down the rounded edges of the steps in a 'stepping-stone' fashion – both children and adults. One person even did a small dance. The Grand Entrance Steps were the only space in the study used by non-visitors to the V&A, which supports the observations about the steps to civic buildings made by Paul Goldberger (1987).

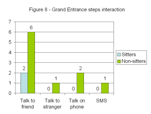
In contrast, the Sackler Centre was the least used by Non-sitters, who used the space mainly as a thoroughfare. As the Sackler Centre appeared to be used by visitors during the course of their visit, there was less evidence of using the seating area to put on or take off clothing. Though leaflets are provided in the Sackler Centre, they are not as often collected by visitors passing through as in the Grand Entrance. The seating in the Sackler Centre was apparently still attractive to Non-sitters, evidenced by people touching the seats as they walked past, and a child who broke away from his school group while they were passing through the space to sit briefly in an hm85a chair.

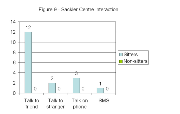
Conclusion

Perhaps the most remarkable and counter-intuitive outcome of this research was that 'comfort' played little part in the kinds of use observed. The area with the most comfortable seating, the Sackler Centre, had the lowest average sitting time in the study (3 minutes 89 seconds) compared with 17 minutes 27 seconds on the Grand Entrance Steps – arguably the area which places the highest demand on the sitter in terms of comfort. There was little difference between the sitting times in the interior spaces, though these spaces offer contrasting seating in the form of hard benches and soft couches. The slightly longer sitting times observed in the busier spaces suggests that interest (something to watch) is perhaps more of an invitation for visitors to linger in the space than comfort, though this is difficult to confirm with observational data.

Figures 7–9 below illustrate the kinds of interaction observed in each space in the study.







All seating areas displayed evidence of 'congregant' behaviour and people-watching. The space which had the most evidence of sitting and circulation, the Grand Entrance, had the most evidence of interaction for both Sitters and Non-Sitters. In all spaces, interaction tended to occur between friends, though interaction between strangers was also observed in all spaces - always for a purpose specific to the space: joining a guided tour (Grand Entrance), procuring a cigarette (Grand Entrance Steps), or taking part in a questionnaire (Sackler Centre). The Grand Entrance Steps had the most evidence of interaction between Non-sitters, in contrast to the Sackler Centre, where there was no evidence of interaction for Non-sitters. On the other hand, the Sackler Centre did have the most evidence of interaction between friends.

The Sackler Centre was also the only space where meetings were observed, making use of the moveable and swivel qualities of the seating unique to this area. On both occasions, the hm85a chairs were oriented to face other members of the group, and an MT1 chair was moved from its usual position. Interestingly, on the conclusion of each meeting the participants left the chairs in this new configuration. There is much written about the benefits of moveable seating in public spaces, because it allows people to create the most suitable arrangement for their particular purpose.[18] In New York, moveable seating has been provided in public parks for many years (with a surprisingly low theft rate). Whyte praises the moveable seat for its ability 'to move into the sun, out of it: to move closer to someone, further away from another'.[19] The sociability offered by moveable seats appears to be attractive to visitors and this study showed that where seats can be moved, they will be moved.

The study was limited both by the observational methodology and by the short duration period for data collection in just one season. This means that it could not reliably evaluate qualitative aspects of sitting such as comfort, or whether Non-sitters did not sit down because of lack of available seating space or for other reasons.

The study did however confirm Gehl's observations that seating, as an invitation for people to linger, is a starting point for the range of activities that can happen in public spaces, such as reading, meeting people, eating, smoking, talking, or people-watching. Although evidence of exclusion was not part of the remit of the study, it is worth noting that all three locations appeared to be inclusive spaces that were self-managing. The study found differences in the activities displayed by Sitters and Non-sitters in the three areas observed, as well as contrasts between the indoor and outdoor seating areas in the study. The interior spaces appeared to be more formal than the outdoor space, which supported the most playful activities.

The study confirmed Whyte's findings about the complementary nature of seating and circulation – the best example of which was the Grand Entrance, which tended to encourage lingering amongst Sitters and Non-sitters, as well as a slightly longer stay for Sitters, more than the quieter space (Sackler Centre). This finding suggests that for circulation areas, busier means more varied activity and thus, perhaps, a more attractive space for staying, though again this is difficult to confirm with only observational data.

One surprising finding from the study was that very few people appeared to use the seating areas to go online – only one person was observed using a laptop during the course of the study, out of a total of 54 Sitters observed. An area for future consideration in the V&A could be to display the wifi symbol in seating areas to encourage more visitors to make use of the free internet access provided by the Museum. The study also found that while reading was prevalent among Sitters, people overwhelmingly read

V&A leaflets. In the Sackler Centre, where reading V&A leaflets was not as commonly observed as in the Grand Entrance, the provision of more varied print material such as newspapers or sample copies of V&A books could encourage visitors to spend more time in the space.

Though more research is needed to evaluate qualitative aspects of the seating provided by the Museum (such as where visitors feel most welcome, the importance of factors such as comfort, and visitor motivations for lingering in circulation spaces), the study gives an insight into the multiple ways visitors use seating areas and highlights seating as an important provision for visitors - not only as places to rest and wait, but as an invitation to participate in the public life of the Museum.

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13. V&A Website, *‘Futureplan Completed Projects’* (accessed January 2011)

14. Eva Jirinca Architects Website, *‘Projects, Public Buildings’.*

15. The incline is technically termed a ‘slope’, as distinct from a ‘ramp’, which would require ironmongery and edge detailing.

16. Penny Richards (6 April 2010), personal correspondence.

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Review: The Actor in Costume by Aoife Monks

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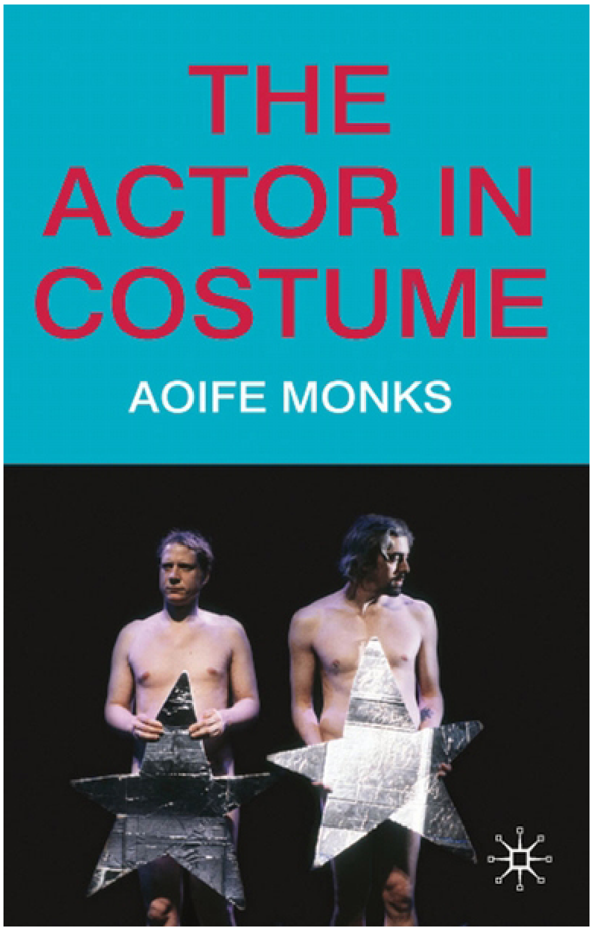

The Actor in Costume by Aoife Monks

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£16.99

Such is the paucity of writing on stage costume that *Costume in the Theatre* (1964), written by James Laver, a former Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the V&A, is still one of a handful of books that are regularly recommended to researchers.

The Actor in Costume is, therefore, a welcome addition to a small field: a concise and considered meditation on the interrelationship of performer, costume and audience in the making of a theatrical experience. Where existing works tend to position either the costume or the actor in a supporting role to the other's genius, this book suggests that 'costume is a body that can be taken off' – a melding of actor and outfit for a specific performance in which the role of the audience is to collaborate in the making of meaning as well as appreciate the performance.

As a theatre scholar, Monks is interested in unpicking the way in which costume is glossed over, seen through or fetishised in theatre scholarship and illustrates the various points in these relationships by focussing on moments at which the actor and costume assume a particular force, for example, onstage nudity or cross-dressing.

She leads her readers through the book from the backstage experience of the dressing-room through the performance and into the museum/costume store using examples from painting, photography and literature en-route. Her case-studies are well-chosen and demonstrate a range of theatrical events from nineteenth century black-faced minstrels to the Wooster Group's re-reading of the tradition, moving from Stanislavski and Modernist theatre through to Forced Entertainment and National Theatre of Scotland.

Each of these case studies opens up a new field of enquiry and promotes the urge to further unpick and unpack the ideas and issues they raise, for example, the relationship between stage costume and fashion theory and between stage costume and textile and clothing production. The fundamental questions about the role of the audience in recognising and therefore discursively producing the costumed performer are predicated on the audience's knowledge of these other areas. *The Actor in Costume* encourages us – theatre-goers, designers, performance scholars – to question our behaviour when watching actors in costume. It also reminds us that a theatre audience is doing many things during a show: admiring the performances, performers, decorative effects and sometimes switching from the theatrical frame back into the real world, for example thinking 'I bet that's uncomfortable' or 'I'd like some cushions in that fabric'. But there are other voices that need to be engaged in the discussion about actors and costume that this volume cannot be expected to encompass.

Inevitably, in repositioning the actor in costume in the centre of the study, rather than considering the actor alone, the role of the costume designer, maker and wardrobe supervisor in creating a character are once again occluded. Monks's suggestions about the way in which audiences meld costume and performer go a long way to explaining why the other collaborators in the costuming process go unconsidered: there is still a level at which stage costumes seem to be considered clothes, while a chair on stage is never seen as just a chair, but is routinely understood as part of the scenography.

What we need now in the field of costume and performance studies is a book that combines Monks's theoretical rigour and imaginative insights with technical expertise, a book that does for performance costume what Christopher Baugh's *Theatre, Performance and Technology* did for scenography, namely providing a starting point from which makers, designers, performance theorists and historians can work towards a more encompassing history and theory of costume for performance.

Review: Not quite Vegemite: An architectural resistance to the icon

Ian Tocher, Freelance Writer

Figure 1 - Kanchanjunga, Charles Correa, Bombay 1970–83. © CTBUH/Antony Wood © CTBUH/Antony Wood

> *‘Is there an architecture of resistance that stands in the face of commercial globalisation: that rejects the iconic image; that celebrates the spirit of individual place?’*

These were the questions that were asked at Sustaining Identity: Symposium II, held at the V&A Museum in November 2009. This was the second in a series of events organised by the V&A, the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) and architect’s Arup Associates. Sustainability in architecture usually means designing environmentally friendly buildings. The cultural organisation UNESCO, however, has coined the term ‘whole life sustainability’, to reflect their concern that architecture should ‘incorporate local identity into the design process’. They argue that the idea of sustainable architecture should be widened to include the way a building relates to its social, cultural and geographic situation.

At this event, major architects from around the world - the USA, Chile, South Africa, Australia, Finland, the UK, Spain, India - provided case studies of architecture that related in various ways to their local contexts. The key-note speaker, Finish architect and author, Juhani Pallasmaa, used the work of Guy Debord to criticise much of today’s architecture as ‘mere representation’. In a recent essay, he writes: ‘Today’s fashionable architecture seeks to seduce our eye but it rarely contributes to the integrity and meaning of its setting'. He gives no specific examples of buildings he dislikes, but does give examples of those that he thinks successfully relate to their context. These include Louis Kahn's National Assembly Building, Bangladesh (1983) and Alvar Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium, Finland (1933).

Distinguished Indian architect Charles Correa gave a stimulating talk entitled 'Architecture is not a Moveable Feast', which celebrated architecture 'rooted in the soil in which it stands, in the climate, in the materials and the technology'. He argued that place is more important for architecture than for any other art form, and gave Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park houses, Chicago, as the supreme example of an architecture rooted in a particular place. Drawing on the work of British architects Alison and Peter Smithson, he emphasised the importance of using the space between buildings, pointing out that people will occupy these spaces and make them their own. His work is inextricably linked to the climate of India, which has led him to develop the concept of 'open-to-the-sky space'. The hot humid climate of India makes it more comfortable to be outside in the evenings and early mornings so that the edge of the street becomes an extension of the house.

Learning from the urban lifestyle of India, Correa has conceptualised a hierarchy of spaces: the private space of the home, transitional space where private meets public (e.g. the doorstep), the local neighbourhood space (e.g. the communal water tap) and the wider urban space of the city. This idea is manifested in his architecture, such as the low-income Incremental Housing at Belapur, New Bombay (1983–85). Clusters of seven houses are arranged around a small courtyard, and further clusters of seven houses are added on to this group to form a community based around a larger outside space.

Correa's Kanchanjunga, Bombay (1970–83), a 28-storey tower block of luxury flats in a city of poverty, may not seem to fit into the spirit of sustaining local identities (fig. 1). But it is a building again influenced by Correa's use of space in response to the climate and informed by vernacular architecture. Orientated east-west, the block captures the prevailing sea breezes and best views (the sea and harbour), but this also means exposure to scorching sun and monsoons. To counteract this, the main living areas are located in the centre of the apartment, protecting them from direct heat, and cooled by breezes entering via the double-height garden veranda. Although the Indian colonial bungalow is an important influence on Correa's work, he dislikes the block's nick-name of 'Bungalows in the Sky'.

Figure 2 - Glenburn House, Sean Godsell, Victoria, Australia, 2004–07. © Earl Carter, photograph courtesy of Sean Godsell © Earl Carter, photograph courtesy of Sean Godsell

An Australian outback house made of concrete and an oxidised steel grid, commonly used for industrial walkways, may not appear to relate in any way to its local context. But the Glenburn House, Victoria (2004–07), is also heavily influenced by its local climate and vernacular architecture (fig. 2).

As architect Sean Godsell explained in his talk, 'The Bush Mechanic', here too the veranda (drawn this time from early Australian houses alongside some Japanese influences) is reinvented so that the house plan becomes, in effect, an 'abstract veranda'. The house is a sequence of spaces – car parking, utility room, a flywire covered breezeway and living and sleeping blocks – that respond logically to the harsh environment while at the same time fulfilling the purpose of providing bespoke accommodation for a wealthy client. As many early 20th century architects did, Godsell also designed the kitchen and furniture for this house, making it something of a gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art. Unusually, Godsell still designs his buildings using old-fashioned tracing paper and pencil, and agrees with Pallasmaa's comment in his acclaimed book, Eyes of the Skin, that something happens between the head and the hand through the pencil.

A further aspect of Godsell's work relevant to sustaining identities are his self-funded 'prototypical housing proposals'. One of these, the Bus Shelter House (2003–04), is a bus stop during the day but turns into a homeless shelter at night (that dispenses blankets, food and water), while the hoarding provides exhibition space for struggling artists. With this project, and the similar Park Bench House, Godsell argues for the creation of what he terms a 'compassionate infrastructure' that acknowledges the existence of a transient population in our cities.

Figure 3 - Floating Pool, Jonathan Kirschenfeld, New York, 1999–2007. © Philippe Baumann, photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirschenfeld © Philippe Baumann, photograph courtesy of Jonathan Kirschenfeld

Compassionate infrastructure could easily have been the title of the talk by architect Jonathan Kirschenfeld, whose work is mainly for the non-profit or public sector in New York. In fact, it was called 'Peripatetic Infrastructure', a reference to the itinerant nature of his projects, particularly The Floating Pool (1999–2007), but also his supportive housing blocks (fig. 3).

At the turn of the last century, floating bathhouses were moored along the East and Hudson rivers in New York so that residents, often from the poor tenement districts, could bathe and learn to swim. The non-profit Neptune Foundation commissioned Kirschenfeld to design an updated version of these bathhouses. Based on the shell of a 260-foot long cargo barge from Louisiana, The Floating Pool has been moored in various New York locations where residents have limited access to pools. Moored at Brooklyn Bridge Park during its eight week first season in 2007, it attracted over 50,000 swimmers.

Although best known for The Floating Pool, Kirschenfeld also spoke about his work on supportive housing projects in New York. These are built on oddly shaped pockets of remnant land in the poorer parts of the Bronx and Brooklyn. Purpose built for mentally ill people, there is an emphasis on creating double-height communal spaces and courtyard gardens. Paradoxically, these low-budget blocks are intended to be anonymous, to fit in anywhere, but are therefore adaptable to their local context. One example is the Marcy Residence, Brooklyn (2001–03), which uses local iron spot bricks (common in New York in the 1930s and 40s), and blends in with the surrounding brownstone houses.

Figure 4 - Die Es, Gawrie Fagan, Cape Town, South Africa, 1960s. Photograph courtesy of Gabriel Fagan

Another architect who provided exemplary examples of buildings that fit into their local context was Gawrie Fagan, whose talk, 'Cape Identity,' refers to the Cape Dutch influence on his own architecture. These include his own house, Die Es, Cape Town, which was built by him and his family in the 1960s using limited resources (including a cement mixer he swapped for an old car). His unique and carefully crafted buildings deserve to be better known outside of his native South Africa (fig. 4).

Other speakers included Paul Brislin from Arup Associates, who spoke about the Druk White Lotus School, Ladakh, in the Himalayas, which was built with the local geographic and cultural context in mind. The Chilean architectural practice Pezo von Ellrichshausen spoke about their unique houses and art installations (such as painting all the drain covers pink in Bon Aries). Iñaki Abalos gave a talk about 'Creating Local Identities' in Spanish cities and cultural organisations were represented by speakers from UNESCO, Venice in Peril and the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

This was a well-organised and stimulating symposium to a capacity audience, including many architecture students. It addressed important issues in contemporary architecture, but perhaps raised more questions than were answered. A clear definition of what exactly sustaining identities means in architectural practice is still far from clear. But perhaps that is precisely the point: it means many different styles and types of architecture, depending on the local context. It was noticeable that while many speakers criticised the proliferation of computer-designed, so-called 'iconic' buildings throughout the world, plonked down in our cities without any thought to their context, no-one seemed prepared to give any specific examples. Sean Godsell made a useful point - anything has got the potential to become iconic – he gave the example of the Australian savoury spread, Vegemite – but, he argued, architects should not deliberately set out to create an icon, that will only lead to ‘stupid buildings’.

Contributors

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Ian Blatchford

- John Thomas and his ‘wonderful facility of invention’: Revisiting a neglected sculptor

Ann Christie

- ‘Nothing of intrinsic value’: The scientific collections at the Bethnal Green Museum

Yolande Crowe

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