

Contemporary collecting

An ethical toolkit for museum practitioners

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Introduction to the toolkit

Contemporary collecting involves people making decisions about preserving lived experience, knowledge, stories and objects and as such can venture into complicated ethical territory. This toolkit explores some of the ethical judgements that contemporary collectors make and offers case studies, reflection, guides and further information for those interested in the subject.

The toolkit aims to be a useful resource for people embarking on contemporary collecting or with some previous experience of the practice. It is also for anyone wishing to learn more about some of the processes. It offers insight from practitioners who have been leading this work and have reflected critically on their practice. This document can be read alongside the [Contemporary Collecting Toolkit](#) by Jen Kavanagh published in 2019 by Museums Development North West.

The judgements and considerations that museums make and take with regards to contemporary collecting have not yet been formally codified or assessed. This toolkit therefore provides a record and some accountability for the work happening now and aims to document some of the judgements and considerations that museum workers undertake in their collecting.

During 2019, in consultation with the Contemporary Collecting Group and through workshops and survey research, we identified a series of topics that intersect with contemporary collecting in different ways. Topics of interest that emerged where contemporary collectors make ethical judgements were: balance, decolonisation, climate, trauma, digital preservation and data protection. We recognise that this is a partial list, and hope that we can update, expand and re-issue this document over time to include more perspectives, more insights and more learning as fields develop. Please feel free to share your comments with us at: documentarycurator@ltmuseum.co.uk.

The toolkit should be considered in the context of: material produced by the [Museum's Association](#) including the Code of Ethics and reports such as Museums Change Lives and Empowering Collections; the work of the [Collections Trust](#); the body of work around ecological and nonhuman ethics; the toolkit on contemporary collecting by Jen Kavanagh and Museum Development North West; significant legislation like the [Equality Act 2010](#); and a variety of policies and procedures specific to

individual institutions. We have also included some references to texts across the different themes, which we hope provide a useful starting point for those keen to learn more.

Ellie Miles,
Documentary Curator,
London Transport Museum
March 2020

Contributors

Contemporary collecting: an ethical toolkit for museum practitioners was produced as part of the Documentary Curator programme at London Transport Museum (LTM) and funded by Arts Council England.

It was written and edited by Ellie Miles and Susannah Corder (Documentary Curators, London Transport Museum) and Jen Kavanagh (freelance curator and consultant), who also authored a case study. Ellie Miles also facilitates the Contemporary Collecting Group. Since her work on the toolkit, Susannah Corder has left London Transport Museum, and now works at the London College of Fashion. The other content and case studies were written by Rachael Minott (The National Archives, UK), Sam Jenkins (People's History Museum), Charlotte Holmes (Birmingham Museums), Laura Boon (Royal Museums Greenwich), Matt and Jess Turtle (Museum of Homelessness), Bill Lowry (Museum of London), Arran Rees (University of Leeds), Elisabeth Boogh (Stockholms Läns Museum), Anni Wallenius (The Finnish Museum of Photography) and Bente Jensen (Aalborg City Archives).



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Hate, ‘both sides’ and the idea of balance

Introduction

Ellie Miles, London Transport Museum

Political opinion is acutely divided, and many people will encounter media and consume culture quite separately to those with opposing views. Museums and museum collections are one place where visitors are witness to the same thing.

Organisations, including museums, have claimed neutrality by presenting ‘both sides’ of a debate. This model typically involves presenting an issue as contentious and then giving space to, and representations of, two or more points of view before retreating from further comment. One of the best documented examples of this strategy in the museum sector concerns the debate in the 1990s around the display of the Enola Gay aircraft that bombed Hiroshima (see Zolberg, 1995). Such representation strategies practices are also now commonplace in broadcast and other media.

These decisions can be misjudged. When this process fails it causes harm by exposing people to hate material and by giving credibility to hate groups.

Sometimes issues are presented as contentious, but must be accepted nevertheless – broadcast media has done this extensively with climate change. Sometimes a debate is presented so that one ‘side’ is compelled to defend their existence. Poor framing can cause harm if the perspectives of certain groups are shown as emotional rather than informed. Museum workers acquiring contemporary material and supporting other museum work should research, consult and judge exactly what constitutes legitimate grounds for debate, and what is hate speech shifting the terms of debate. Museum workers must avoid framing something which is not a question as a debate.

In this section of the toolkit Jen Kavanagh offers practitioners a set of considerations to address when working on potentially harmful acquisitions. These include reflecting on your organisation’s values, motivations, priorities, stakeholders and relationships when collecting hateful material. Sam Jenkins of the People’s History Museum (PHM) presents a case

study relating to the display of harmful material from transgender exclusionary groups. Jenkins’ case study recounts the PHM’s response to the addition of anti-transgender rights material to an exhibit, and how the organisation attempted to acquire both trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusive material into its collection, without causing undue harm to staff, visitors, or community partnerships.

Further reading

Zolberg, L. V. (1995). Museums as contested sites of remembrance: The Enola Gay affair. *The Sociological Review*, 43(S1), 69–82

Collecting ‘hate’. Questions for consideration

Jen Kavanagh, freelance curator and consultant

Collecting contentious, sensitive and potentially harmful content is complex. But if museums are to be representative and balanced, there may be times when they should consider documenting material that relates to opposing sides of a debate. It could mean collecting information for context about the topic or issue that people oppose and are protesting about. Or it could involve acting as a sounding board for opposing views to be heard. Either way, collecting content that relates to hate, or is perceived as harmful or extreme, must be approached with caution.

Consider these questions when embarking on a collecting initiative for content of this nature:

- ◆ What are the values of your organisation? Would collecting this object or material go against these and potentially harm your museum’s reputation?
- ◆ Whose views are of value and relevance? What is the scale and impact of the harmful views? Is it a small isolated group or a larger movement that is likely to be remembered in the future? Would it be unfair or unbalanced to give them a platform over other groups and viewpoints?
- ◆ Where are your priorities when it comes to the people you engage with? Are you working with a marginalised community where trust must be built and maintained? Would collecting something that criticised them (refugees or migrants for example), damage the trust you are working hard to build?
- ◆ How can these hateful views be captured? For example, could an oral history with someone who has been at the receiving end of abuse enable you to acknowledge the viewpoints of the abuser without having to speak to them directly? Are you sufficiently equipped to undertake an interview of this kind?
- ◆ Would hearing the views of the abuser directly add value and context to what you are looking to document and record? Are your staff equipped to manage engaging with someone with extreme and harmful views? What training can you offer? What is your duty of care for those who work for and support your organisation?
- ◆ How can you balance acknowledging a viewpoint through acquiring content related to it, against collecting material and potentially giving the impression you’re endorsing these views? How can your press and communications team support the way in which these decisions are presented to the wider public and the communities you engage with?
- ◆ Are you collecting this material for documentary purposes, or collecting for the purpose of display? If you don’t plan to display the object, is this sending a message that the museum is censoring what the public is able to view and access? If you wouldn’t display the object, is collecting it still valid?

Case study

Sam Jenkins, People's History Museum

Project name

Contemporary collecting modern protest at People's History Museum (PHM)

Project summary

As part of our exhibition Disrupt? Peterloo and Protest, People's History Museum asked the public to submit examples of their protests through objects and comment cards.

A sticker was left on one of these cards in the exhibition and was later removed, due to connections with anti-trans activism and in line with museum policy for this exhibition.

After the museum removed the sticker, a protest was staged outside PHM by the movement ReSisters, with a counter-protest at the same time by Sisters Uncut*. Several objects were submitted from both groups to the Programme Manager, for display in Protest Lab and/or acquisition to the museum's collection.

The museum therefore had to make several decisions: should we display the objects; should we collect them; and how could we do that without potentially alienating an important section of our audience?

*Editors' note:

ReSisters are a group who perceive transgender acceptance as a threat to cis gender women's rights and campaign against transgender people's rights. Sisters Uncut is a British feminist direct action group who are inclusive of transgender and non-binary people and protest for the rights of trans and non-binary people.

Project aims

Collect material from both sides of a contemporary campaign relating to a particular view on women's rights, which opposes trans rights, without actively 'taking a side' in the debate.

Approach to collecting

We were able to use this event as a collecting opportunity thanks to previous conversations with colleagues about what we collect and our procedures for loans and acquisitions, meaning they were confident in what steps to take.

We accepted the objects into our care before decisions were made to ensure that the opportunity was not lost, and staff made sure that entry forms were signed for the objects to be identified, making no promises about the display or acceptance of the objects. The depositors were informed that the objects would be discussed by our acquisitions panel, as required by our collecting policies. This gave us time to consider the ethical issues around the acquisitions.

We first discussed if the objects should be added to the exhibition. The Programme Team, Collections Officer and Director met and agreed that the objects could not be displayed ethically with the limited interpretation available in the space, as the lack of context would increase the risk of alienating visitors. The depositors were then contacted with this decision, and informed that the objects would be discussed at the next Acquisitions Panel – keeping the owners up to date throughout the discussions.

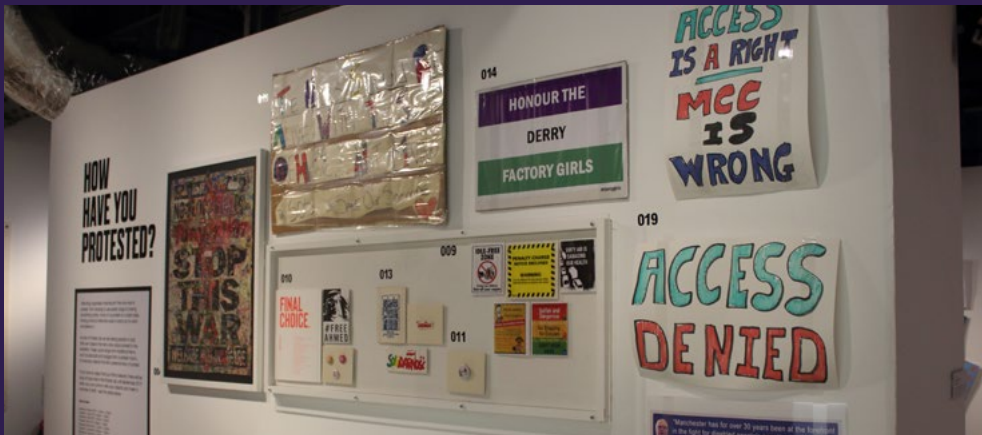
When the Acquisitions Panel next met, we discussed the objects based upon our usual criteria – relevance to the collection, conservation/storage issues, and ethical issues. We agreed that the objects fit with the collecting policy

and were important to represent. However, we were aware that there could be ramifications for the museum by accepting the objects. With social media playing such a large part in both campaigns, it was possible that accepting the objects into the collection would be used as an endorsement of views, potentially alienating visitors or prompting requests to return the opposing view's objects.

Before informing the donors of our interest, we drafted a statement that sought to counter any negative response that might damage the museum's reputation. We then contacted each donor, making sure that all context was fully documented, and staff were aware of the decision made.

Project outcomes

- ◆ PHM accepted objects into the permanent collection from two opposing views on a contemporary campaign.
- ◆ PHM was able to represent a very challenging subject area within the collection.
- ◆ PHM staff were better informed about what we do and do not accept into our collection.



Protest Lab at People's History Museum, 2019

What were the ethical considerations and challenges?

- ◆ Collecting items associated with this campaign could be interpreted as an endorsement of views that could alienate visitors and members of community groups the museum had worked hard to include over the years.
- ◆ When trying to convince a donor to donate objects, it can appear that you might agree with a donor's viewpoint but acting in this way could mislead donors and could be unethical.
- ◆ Could it be unethical to refuse to display objects associated with a challenging topic but accept them into the collection – does this look like the museum is trying to control what is said?
- ◆ When collecting material around an active protest that could lead to a backlash, is it ethical to collect knowing that staff may have to face criticism, complaints or abuse?
- ◆ How do collections and museum staff remove their personal feelings about a subject from the collecting process?

Three lessons learned related to ethics

1. Collecting objects associated with a divisive argument or contemporary protest comes with all sorts of ethical issues; are you being seen to endorse a particular view? By doing so are you alienating or othering any groups*? Can you collect without taking sides, and are you inadvertently misleading donors by suggesting otherwise? All these matters need to be considered by staff involved – and potentially the directorate – for an ethical decision to be made.
2. You need to consider the ethics relating to staff as well. If you are collecting in an area you know might lead to a negative response (complaints, or a backlash) consider the effect it might have on staff in Front of House or Social Media teams who are more likely to face the brunt of it.

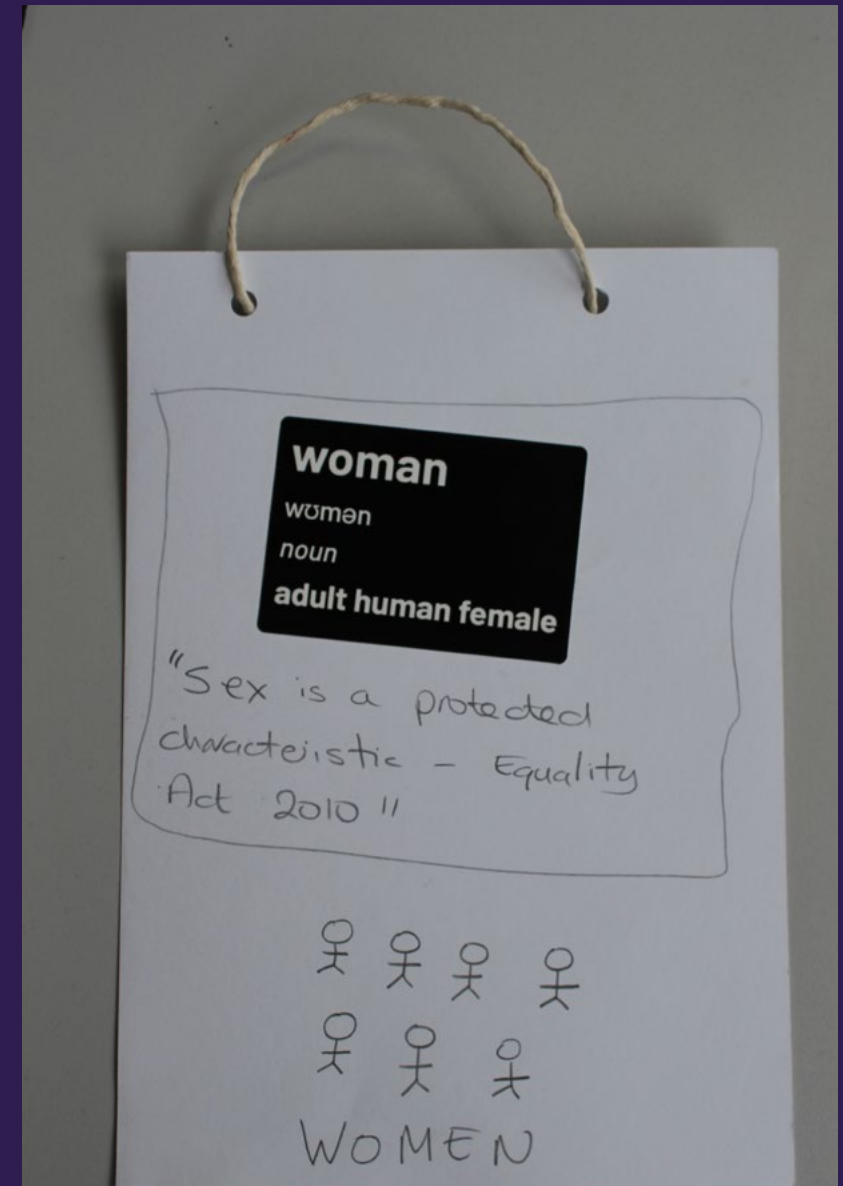
- There is no easy answer to ethics, and everyone will have a different opinion about what is and isn't ethical. Work together to find the stance that fits with your institution, communicate it, and stick to it. Keep staff who aren't involved in the decision informed about it and explain your reasoning, so they understand.

Editors' note:

Othering is a process of stigmatising an individual or a group of people as different, undesirable or inferior to others in a society. It's defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the perception or representation of a person or group of people as fundamentally alien from another, frequently more powerful, group'



A selection of objects deposited from ReSisters/Sisters Uncut protests, 2019



The original sticker removed from Protest Lab, 2019

Decolonisation of museums

Introduction

Ellie Miles, London Transport Museum

The subject of decolonisation is often presented in the media as a question that only concerns repatriation of artefacts. Work towards museum decolonisation includes addressing much more than this, and in doing so provides a useful critical lens to the work of acquiring new collections. Understanding the harm that museums have done as part of colonial apparatus and systems, partly by reinforcing, exploiting and removing cultural property, is important. Repatriation is one way of addressing this damage; contemporary collecting may offer another.

Colonial collecting and historical representation has caused a great deal of trauma. Over time, museums have done harm by: presenting racist views, providing a platform for racists, excluding non-Western forms of knowledge, functioning as hostile environments for visitors and workers, representing trauma and suffering carelessly, and by taking money from sponsors who damage society.

Many of the most damaging colonial collections in museums were acquired contemporaneously. This is a legacy that today's contemporary collectors must learn from. Such collecting practices have informed how museums process and manage acquisitions and information. In the past, collecting practices structured and ordered collections and knowledge to exclude people of colour from having power and authority over cultural objects and values. It was part of a wider imperial system of exploitation, cruelty and harm. This is part of the historical context of collecting today, which a more critical approach to contemporary collecting can avoid replicating. Establishing new forms of equitable and non-extractive collection approaches and finding new methods to avoid re-enacting and re-inscribing damaging methods, are essential ways to decolonise contemporary collecting.

The toolkit offers vital insight from curators Rachael Minott and Charlotte Holmes on how to develop decolonialised collecting methods. The colonial role

of museums means that for many, the museum can never be entirely decolonised, yet decolonisation work in museums can make institutions more accountable, more equal and less hostile. Minott's advice advocates for an awareness and redistribution of power between museums and people who have historically been excluded from those systems. Holmes' case study shows how contemporary collecting in Birmingham disrupted legacy working methods and built new, rich collections.

Further reading

Kassim, S., 2019. 'The Museum is the Master's House: An Open Letter to Tristram Hunt' available at <https://medium.com/@sumayakassim/the-museum-is-the-masters-house-an-open-letter-to-tristram-hunt-e72d75a891c8> [accessed January 2020]

Advice for decolonial practice in contemporary collecting

Rachael Minott, The National Archives (UK)

Decolonial practice is human-centric, democratic, self-reflective, critical and active.

Working decolonially is a priority for all who strive for equality. Decolonising in museums is understanding that the history of colonisation was as much about creating structures and framing knowledge, as it was owning and occupying land.

To establish and maintain political control over a quarter of the world's population, colonisers adopted and promoted a mindset and culture of colonisation. This involved framing any difference of thought, appearance or actions as lesser, threatening or dangerous.

With contemporary collecting we can frame new narratives and offer contemporary histories and technological innovation in decolonial ways, but there is also the danger of replicating colonial structures.

Decolonising in museums is focused on decolonising minds, by inviting multiple perspectives, critical thinking and an acknowledgment (not erasure) of violent histories. Decolonisation is a continuation and development of a long history of best practice. The main change is acknowledging the violence that affected and caused the injustice, exclusion and inequalities we are addressing through inclusion work.

Decolonial practice actively seeks to redistribute power so that we do not continue to work in oppressive ways. Decolonising is a part of the fight for equal rights, but it must consider equity not just equality.

Equity requires acknowledging the historical imbalances in access, recognition and representation. It is not even-handed to provide for both the historically oppressed and the oppressors equally. Historically excluded groups need to be given more attention and resources than those who are currently overrepresented in workforces, narratives and user groups. It needs to be acknowledged that this is a necessary part of the process of achieving real equality going forward.

Decolonising in museums begins with an acknowledgement of colonial histories and how they have affected:

- ◆ How we identify narratives worth preserving (and the absence and erasure of many perspectives while projecting an image of neutrality)
- ◆ The understanding and valuing of expertise in museums

- ◆ By who, how and for whom are these new narratives interpreted
- ◆ Where, and with whom we share knowledge

In other words: knowledge creation, translation, display, documentation.

To do this when collecting new narratives and objects, one should ask:

- ◆ Whose knowledge is being used? Were permissions obtained to use this knowledge, and in this way?
- ◆ Who is being paid and is it proportional?
- ◆ Who is given credit (as individuals, as experts, on the permanent databases)?
- ◆ Who is given control (creative, financial, managerial, and intellectual)?
- ◆ Who do the narratives collected refer to?
- ◆ Who is empowered to make choices over acquisition?
- ◆ Who will interpret these objects?
- ◆ Who is the envisioned audience for these narratives?

- ◆ Are these narratives interpreted by the people whom they refer to, were those people involved in the acquisition process, and are they the envisioned audience?

Therefore:

- ◆ Be human centric, by asking who/whom?
- ◆ Democratise: share decision-making, be that in relation to acquisitions, interpretation, documentation or use of collection
- ◆ But be self-reflective: what are the power dynamics at play? When we understand who is being represented and who holds the power over the representation, we can more clearly see the imbalances of power at play.
- ◆ Be critical: Just because things were done in a certain way before, does not mean they are right today. Always evaluate your practice and refine.
- ◆ Be active: noticing imbalances, talking about imbalances and striving to rectify these by practicing equity, are different things. Be the most active you can be in the fight for equality.

And remember that decolonisation is largely about self-determination and removal of oppressive systems and ways of thinking that are seen as intrinsic to colonisation. So, speak to those whom this affects the most, give up some of your power and some of your space so they can occupy more space and hold more power.



Case study

Charlotte Holmes, National Trust

Project name

Collecting Birmingham

Project summary

Collecting Birmingham was a unique project that, with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Arts Council England (ACE), significantly developed the relevance and accessibility of Birmingham Museums Trust's (BMT) collections. During a three-year project, people from the Ladywood district of Birmingham directly informed the acquisition of 1,801 objects. Collecting Birmingham brought new stories and objects into the permanent collection of the Museum; stories and objects that reflect and resonate with the lived experience of our city. These objects allow the Museum to tell the story of Birmingham in its true colour and vibrancy.

Project aims

- ◆ To strengthen the collection by acquiring objects and associated oral histories which engage local communities and allow us to tell their stories of growing up, living and working in Birmingham (specifically the Ladywood district).
- ◆ To work with partner organisations in the district to develop a shared understanding of significant people, places and events in Ladywood through the over-arching project theme of 'growing up, living and working in Birmingham'.
- ◆ To build sustainable and continuing relationships with new audiences and local community groups through a new process of consultation-led collecting.

- ◆ To increase the relevance and profile of Birmingham Museums to the people of the city, particularly the heritage sites, by using these locations as centres for dialogue and consultation.
- ◆ To develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours of staff and volunteers involved in the project.



Curator Nazia Al (second from right) discusses Mrs McGhie-Belgrave MBE's (second from left) archive and work. © BMT

Approach to collecting

Birmingham is the youngest city in Europe. It is also 'superdiverse' with a long history of migration. BMT has a significant track record of working with Birmingham's diverse communities, but this diversity was not reflected in its permanent collection. Collecting Birmingham was a response to this lack of representation.

The Ladywood district of the city provided a geographical focus for the collecting. Eight key communities of faith and identity (including White English) were represented in the project.

In the first year of the project we invited local people to join focus groups, asking those people what Birmingham meant to them, and what they would like to see in the Museum. This process helped us identify themes around growing up, working and living in Birmingham. Participants in the focus groups tended to be older and already engaged with heritage; they did not reflect the diversity of Ladywood. We also found that discussions tended to reflect 'safe' subjects such as leisure, rather than subjects such as race or faith.

In the second year we decided to change our approach, taking the conversation to Birmingham's diverse communities. We went to Melas, schools, cricket matches, mosques, Pride, dances, and poetry evenings. We brought together contacts from the different events for in-depth round table discussions about key acquisitions. We also invited community experts to join our existing advisory panel of heritage and arts experts. We were open and flexible; sometimes a conversation with a neighbour or colleague would lead to an unexpected opportunity to collect. This approach allowed us to talk and work with a wide range of people. Conversations moved from safe subjects to real and sometimes difficult lived experiences. It also introduced us to some amazing people who were instrumental in shaping new acquisitions.

Project outcomes

- ◆ BMT's collections better represent its diverse communities
- ◆ Strengthened display, status and understanding of community history narratives
- ◆ More intersectional approach to community engagement
- ◆ Developed relationship with new stakeholders
- ◆ Informed the development of new collections development policies and procedures
- ◆ Deepened the trust and relationship with existing stakeholders
- ◆ Challenged the 'us and them' of the Museum and its community



Banner donated by UnMuted, a Queer People of Colour network. © BMT

What were the ethical considerations and challenges?

Are museums safe places for all our histories and material culture?

Initial conversations with members of the public showed a degree of scepticism around the Museum's intentions. Will objects be mis-represented, will our histories be forgotten or mothballed? We had to respond honestly to these challenges. BMT, like many museums, has a long history of important, but short-term projects on marginalised histories. The short-term nature of these engagements, along with reduced funding, meant that many histories were forgotten, displays became tired and connections were lost.

What conditions are needed for members of the public to make meaningful decisions around collections acquisitions?

Most of our interactions with members of the public were one-off. Their opinions were recorded and were listened to. However, there were few opportunities to continue the discussion or to enter into more meaningful dialogue with the institution.

How can the market reflect value?

Collecting Birmingham was able to purchase objects from members of the public. A challenge was attributing a monetary value to objects with significant cultural value, but little market value. We found that members of the public associated museums with the collecting practices of empire; taking, rather than paying a 'fair price' for the material culture collected. They also felt that the higher the price paid for an object the greater the Museum would value it, and therefore the better it would care for an object. Whatever we might say to this, when we think of our large underused stored collections, I wondered if they had a point.

Whose heritage is this?

When talking about communities in museums, we often refer to people not reflected in the Museum workforce. BMT has a relatively diverse workforce, in terms of class and race. Members of staff from a range of departments were able to put us in touch with key donors and vendors. When connecting with our communities and brokering relationships it was important to reflect on 'our' shared heritage in the city. Our diversity as a staff team really helped with this.

Three lessons learned related to ethics

1. Go with the energy: messy and opportunistic collecting can work. Being open and transparent allowed us to make the most of unexpected opportunities to collect. Sometimes activities didn't lead to collecting, but the relationships formed on the project informed other areas of practice.
2. The way museums work is a barrier to inclusion. The pace, lack of transparency around decision-making and short-term nature of projects makes including 'different' people and our histories a challenge.
3. Having a workforce that feels part of Birmingham and reflects its diversity is invaluable.



Members of the public discuss a potential acquisition with curator Lisa Beauchamp, (far right). © BMT

Climate emergency

Introduction

Ellie Miles, London Transport Museum

In 2019 museums in the UK began to join the increasingly wide declaration of a climate emergency. Some used interpretation to spread the message and some began using their programming to support young people on school climate strikes which have been taking place since 2018, usually on Fridays. Collections work is also crucial in these efforts. The causes and material that have resulted in the climate emergency are included in collecting remits even though they may not be mentioned as such; we may come to understand our collecting policies as gathering evidence of climate change. For natural history collections this is established practice, and other museums document this too. Social history collections evidence the advent of mass plastic production. Disposable goods and single-use plastic products all point to the existence of climate emergency in our era, as do objects designed to counteract this.

Alongside the objects that evidence climate crisis, protest material relating to climate justice can be collected too. In 2019 several museums in the UK acquired, preserved and displayed material from the Extinction Rebellion group of climate activists. This material has been collected as examples of design, local engagement and as maritime history, showing how broadly climate protest material resonates.

Some considerations for those engaged in contemporary collecting include thinking about how contemporary collecting activity can be carried out sustainably. Using low- or zero-waste resources during collecting work and plastic free, recycled and sustainable collections management equipment where possible, are all matters that people carrying out contemporary collecting can keep in mind.

As museum workers learn to address the climate crisis in our collecting, sustainable practice advice will improve. The case study in this toolkit, provided by Laura Boon of Royal Museums Greenwich, shows how one museum has used a relationship with Extinction Rebellion to present climate emergency to their audience and help develop their own working methods. The toolkit also includes a list of prompts for planning a low-waste collecting project, which will be updated in future.

Climate emergency questions and prompts

Ellie Miles, London Transport Museum

All collecting projects require resources, and those doing this work might consider these prompts throughout their work.

- ◆ What physical resources do we need to conduct our collecting project? How can these resources be sourced to be sustainable? Can we re-use, reduce or find other alternatives? Are there commitments that we can hold ourselves accountable to? Can we commit to not using single use plastic and avoiding air travel?
 - ◆ Which electronic devices are we using in this collecting project? What is the environmental cost of using these digital resources? Can we loan devices from other projects or organisations if we need to use them? Are there alternatives?
 - ◆ What materials are required to conserve this material? Can this be done sustainably? Do we wish to commit to preserving this in perpetuity given its requirements?
 - ◆ What travel and movement does this project prompt? How can this transport be made sustainable?
 - ◆ What by-products will our project produce? How can we ensure that any resources are re-used, rehomed or broken down? Has this project produced material which may be of use to colleagues working elsewhere, or which might be better homed in other collections?
 - ◆ How does what we collect represent people as actors in climate change? Are they represented as consumers or citizens? Have we got a balance of representations of how people act and express agency?
 - ◆ What material are we collecting that explicitly addresses climate change? What material are we collecting that has implicit connections to climate change? How do we catalogue and document material so that this is recorded and communicated?
 - ◆ Can we collect processes and intangible contributors to climate change? How do we evidence and record nonhuman actors in climate change? How do we hold financial processes, economic practice and corporations to account?
- How can we collect and preserve the effects of climate change? Are there ways we can document and record emergency events in our collections? Can we record the changes to climate in what we collect?

Further reading

Julie's Bicycle, 2017. 'Museums' Environmental Framework'. Available at: <https://juliesbicycle.com/resource-museums-framework-2017/> [accessed January 2020]

United Nations [website] 'About the Sustainable Development Goals'. 2019. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> [accessed January 2020]

Climate Museum UK, digital museum, [website]. Available at: <https://climatemuseumuk.org/digital-museum/> [accessed January 2020]

Green Heritage Futures [podcast], Henry McGhie episode 3, April 2019. Available at: <https://juliesbicycle.com/news/podcast-henry-mcghie/> [accessed January 2020]

Drubay, D., 2019. '18 Provocations to the Museum Community to Face the Climate Crisis' available at: <https://medium.com/we-are-museums/18-provocations-to-the-museum-community-to-face-the-climate-crisis-c2ac76475d54> [accessed January 2020]

Case study

Laura Boon, Royal Museums Greenwich

Project name

Extinction Rebellion: Polly Higgins blue boat at the National Maritime Museum (NMM)

Project summary

The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich displayed the blue Extinction Rebellion (XR) boat, Polly Higgins, nineteen days after collection from a protest site. The boat was displayed at the NMM from 8 August to 8 October 2019, with a traditional style object label and five protest placard style signs.

The Polly Higgins is one of the first six Extinction Rebellion boats. Extinction Rebellion first used a pink boat to block Oxford Circus for five days in April 2019. Even after the boat was impounded by police, the symbol of the boat continued to be used by the protestors. In July 2019 five boats, including the one displayed by the NMM, were used during protests across the UK.

Extinction Rebellion had planned to use the Polly Higgins boat on the afternoon of Friday 19 July 2019 at the school climate strike protest near the Houses of Parliament. In the early hours of Friday morning the police issued a Section 12 (Public Order Act, 1986) notice, which restricted Extinction Rebellion's use of the boat, so this wasn't possible. The NMM negotiated with the police to be able to collect the boat before it was seized.

Project aims

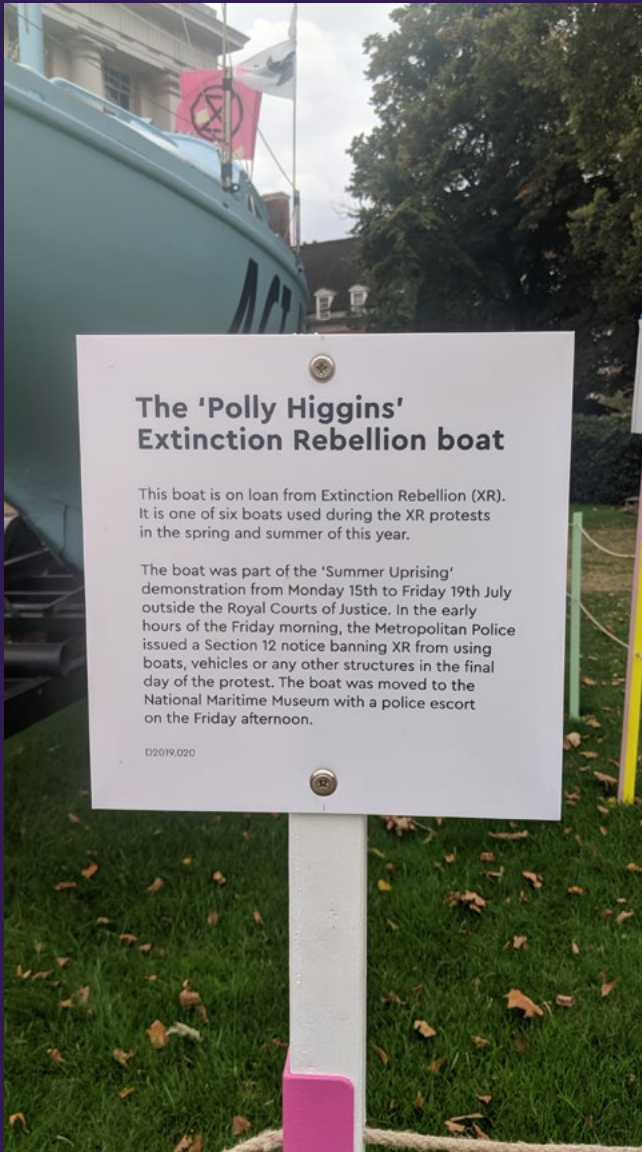
- ◆ The NMM explores our ever-evolving relationship with the sea. Increasingly this relationship is going to be shaped by the climate and ecological emergency. The role of oceans in climate change mitigation and the impact that climate change has on oceans is often not understood or even discussed. The NMM wishes to become a space for this discussion.

- ◆ To use the boat as a platform to discuss the climate and ecological crisis, especially in relation to the ocean.
- ◆ Change the perception of the Museum – the bright boat and interpretation against the backdrop of the classical stylings of the Museum was intentionally disruptive. It also challenged some of our visitors' and local communities' perception of what a maritime museum is.
- ◆ To act as a pilot for rapid response displays.

Approach to collecting

The boat itself was registered as a deposit rather than a loan as this enabled the boat to be displayed outside. Acquisition of the boat was not pursued as it is still an active object; XR wished to be able to use it in the future and from a curatorial perspective the blue boat is of less significance than the original pink boat. The National Maritime Museum also no longer collects small boats, with this part of the collection now closed due to storage restriction.

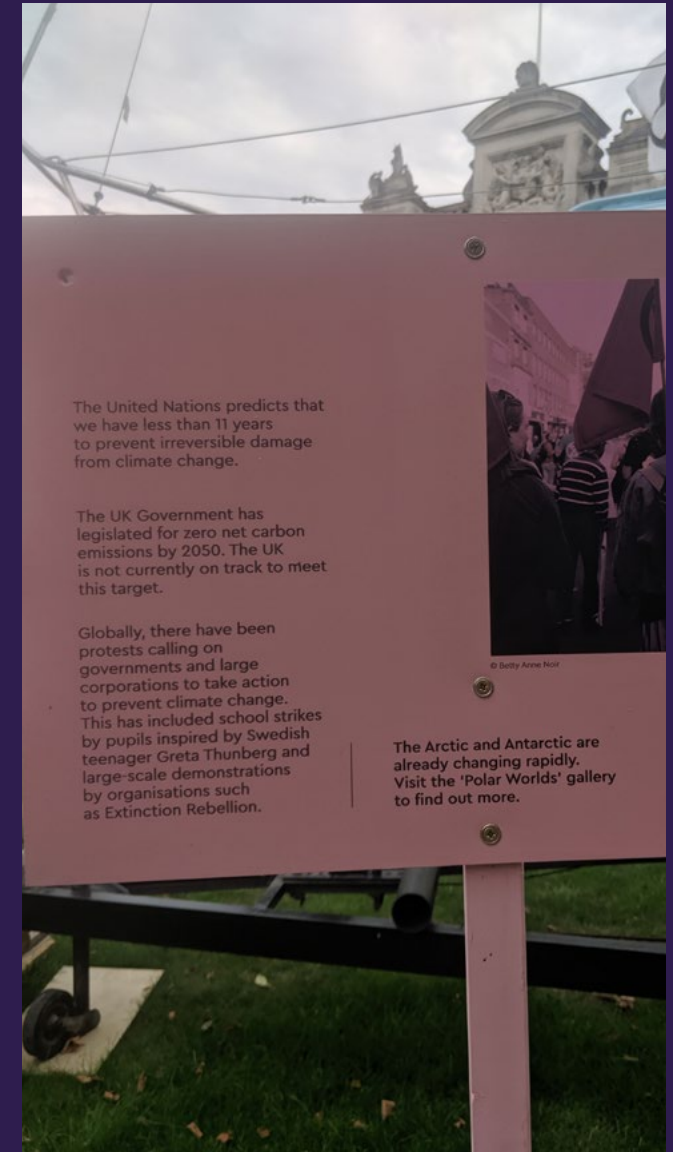
However, the more we engaged with XR the more we realised how central concern for the ocean is for many of their members. This is why we later chose to acquire the ten flags on the Polly Higgins boat, several of which have a maritime theme. We have since acquired an additional three Extinction Rebellion flags from their marine creatures' series, and we are planning to collect any additional marine themed flags produced. As all Extinction Rebellion objects are communally owned, a representative has signed the flags over to the Museum. We will also be recording an oral history with one of the main flag designers. It is unfortunately not possible to record oral histories related to the use of the boats, as the pink boat has been used in an alleged criminal act. The Museum is unable to accept anonymous oral histories, partly due to needing a named individual to assign copyright and being unable to ensure ongoing anonymity.



Introductory panel with display, August 2019
(c) Ellie Miles



The boat on display outside NMM, August 2019
(c) Ellie Miles



Interpretation signage on recycled material, August 2019
(c) Ellie Miles

Project outcomes

- ◆ The NMM has created a cross-departmental working group to evaluate how it can undertake rapid response projects in the future – including staffing, logistics and if a dedicated space is needed.
- ◆ Generally, the response to the boat has been positive – even from people who are surprised to see it at the Museum. It challenged some people’s perceptions, with some visitors assuming the Museum focuses only on the historical. From our local community there was positive feedback that the Museum was engaging with the topic of climate crisis, something many of our visitors feel passionately about.
- ◆ The more we engaged with Extinction Rebellion the more we realised how central concern for the ocean is for many of their members. This is why we later chose to acquire the ten flags on the Polly Higgins boat.
- ◆ Unexpectedly the area around the boat at times became a public space. It is usually an unused piece of lawn, but we had a die-in and protest by Extinction Rebellion at the start of the summer, and a love-in by Extinction Rebellion families in October. These events were independently organised by Extinction Rebellion but, as a positive response to the display, the Museum became a place of relevance in which Extinction Rebellion supporters could meet.
- ◆ Even more surprisingly non-Extinction Rebellion groups also held pre-arranged meet-ups at the boat, without informing the Museum. It was great that it became a community space for those wishing to discuss the climate emergency (a university group on the solidarity strike day of the 20 September 2019) or air quality concerns (a group of local people campaigning against the Silvertown tunnel).
- ◆ Going forward we are continuing to engage with Extinction Rebellion. Extinction Rebellion have since hosted a Christmas toy and book swap at the Museum and we are discussing future potential events.

What were the ethical considerations and challenges?

- ◆ The NMM had previously tried to collect the pink boat, Berta Cáceres, used in the first Extinction Rebellion protest to feature a boat. However, the object was being held as evidence by the Metropolitan Police in an undisclosed location. Ultimately our bid to display the pink Extinction Rebellion boat was unsuccessful due to police restrictions. Working with a group which commits acts of non-violent civil disobedience presents challenges.
- ◆ Ownership – Extinction Rebellion does not recognise individual ownership of objects created for the organisation, such as the flags or even the boat. All Extinction Rebellion objects are communally owned. Therefore, a representative has signed the flags over to the Museum on behalf of the organisation.
- ◆ Engaging with a political organisation – as a national Museum there are restrictions on our activities. Extinction Rebellion is a campaigning organisation. To ensure that we remained factual and unbiased, all the interpretation was reviewed by the NMM’s Executive Management Team.
- ◆ Not being a platform for Extinction Rebellion – in the initial meeting we were careful to have an honest dialogue with the Extinction Rebellion representatives about the restrictions placed on a national museum with regard to engaging with Extinction Rebellion; we also established Extinction Rebellion’s requirements. Spending time with Extinction Rebellion was important to better understand their message, history and what objects we may wish to collect. This conversation was also vital for learning more about the reasoning for using the boat and beginning to build trust. We were very clear from the start that this was not a co-curation project and although Extinction Rebellion would remain the legal owner of the boat, the NMM would have sole responsibility for the interpretation.
- ◆ Police time and costs – the police were very professional and great to work with, which we appreciated, but the negotiations took time and a police escort back to the Museum was a non-negotiable condition. However, the police were happy to support this, as it removed the need to seize the boat which ultimately would have been much more expensive for them.

- ◆ Sensitivity to Polly Higgins' family and friends – the blue boat is named after Polly Higgins (1968–2019), an environmental campaigner and barrister. Higgins spent the last decade of her life working towards making ecocide a crime at the International Criminal Court. There were sensitivities to consider, especially as this was a very recent bereavement. It was important that the written interpretation and online articles reflected this and highlighted Polly Higgins' ongoing legacy.
- ◆ Editing rights – despite the boat remaining the property of XR the group had no editing rights over the content of the interpretation. However, we did keep key contacts informed of our plans throughout the process.
- ◆ Re-using display materials – when displaying the boat, we ensured it was as sustainable as possible, in keeping with the ethos of Extinction Rebellion. All the interpretation was repainted signage from the Museum that otherwise would have been skipped, the metal fence posts have already been reused within the Museum and the barrier rope was from a natural material rather than plastic and likewise has already been reused.
- ◆ Displaying close-up photographs of protestors – as it was not possible to trace individuals, we took the decision not to include any recognisable faces apart from speakers on the main stages. Likewise, we did not include photographs of people being arrested or committing acts of non-violent civil disobedience.

Three lessons learned related to ethics

1. Stakeholder management is vital but very time consuming. A grassroots organisation like Extinction Rebellion has a large and diverse number of stakeholders. The need for this continued throughout the display period.
2. Trust takes time and has to be earned. Initially the NMM was considered by some members of Extinction Rebellion to be part of the 'establishment'. Likewise, Extinction Rebellion was considered to be a high-risk group for the Museum to engage with. However, over time shared values have developed.
3. Conversely it is also important when undertaking rapid response projects to consider the wellbeing of museum staff. Due to the lack of time and the short notice, staff from a wide range of departments had to assist on the project, in addition to their already full workloads. For a unique project this is viable. However, longer term there is a question of how the Museum can ensure that enough capacity remains for short notice projects.

Trauma and distress

Introduction

Susanna Cordner, London Transport Museum

Contemporary collecting often involves being reactive – acting quickly and in response to events or developments, sometimes while they are still unfolding. This approach ensures curators can document in near-real time and collate collections that seek to reflect how things really happened. It also, however, raises issues around sensitivities and safeguarding, particularly when working on topics that might prompt or relate to a person's experience of trauma or distress.

The reactive nature of this kind of collecting means that the usual preparations and due diligence procedures might not always be followed. Museums might not be equipped to give the support required, whether to those directly affected, to their visitors or even to their own staff (who have to both professionally and personally process this material and experience). In some cases, someone might fall into more than one of these camps – perhaps by collecting material that relates to a personal experience they have had or by visiting a museum that has documented an event they witnessed.

In turn, the collection staff, who act as both the collectors of this material and the connection point between the affected persons and the museum, might be expected to fulfil a social or supportive role for the public for which they might feel ill-equipped. While, again, this kind of activity might take place at short notice, it is advisable for museums or a collection team to have procedures in place so that staff and public participants know what to expect and what kind of support might be available to them.

The permanency and uses of a collection that relates to trauma or distress can also result in ethical issues. Material or accounts that a member of the public might give whilst in the early stages of processing an event for instance, might be something they feel uncomfortable having shared at a later date. Similarly, a curator must be careful not to exploit or pressure a person in vulnerable circumstances when seeking material for a collection.

How this material is documented, disseminated and displayed is also very important. To do so without careful consideration of context could have a distressing impact on the source, staff and audience for this work.

Matt and Jess from the Museum of Homelessness offer incredibly important advice on working with people who have experienced trauma. Jen Kavanagh's case study from a project which aimed to collect the stories of disabled activists reflects on the challenges and considerations made.

Working with trauma

Matt and Jess Turtle, Museum of Homelessness

What is trauma? Trauma comes from exposure to difficult, painful or abusive experiences and can stay with a person for a long time. Research by Lankelly Chase in 2015 tells us that 85 per cent of people in touch with criminal justice, substance misuse and homelessness services have experienced trauma as children.

As museums develop more socially engaged work, it is important to think about - and have a good understanding of - trauma. It is also important to bear in mind that people may become homeless in part due to traumatic experiences and then are likely to undergo further traumatic experiences whilst homeless.

What does it mean? The effects of trauma can be emotional or psychological. There is also growing evidence that exposure to traumatic events as a child (adverse childhood experiences/ACEs) is linked to a range of health factors in adulthood such as cancer, diabetes and chronic pain conditions. However, no one individual is the same and no life story is the same. In our work we should not make assumptions about people, but we should be respectful of how much strength and resourcefulness it takes to survive trauma.

Trauma and museums

Trauma is something, therefore, that requires very serious consideration and in our opinion is deeper and more complex than general understandings of 'wellbeing' at play in the sector. The best approaches to healing from trauma require cross-sector work, compassion and people driving the work who have similar experiences, but who have

had the opportunity to process them effectively. This piece, for example, has been co-written by a trauma survivor.

We believe that museums can play a role in healing processes and that collections work can be a part of that. However, it is important to remember that museums can be exploitative institutions and that the act of collecting can,

even today, be experienced as extractive. When done well, it can be validating and empowering. A thoughtful approach is therefore required, placing people at the heart of the process and being mindful of power.

Here are some top tips for working with people who may have experienced trauma, drawn from our own work over the last 5 years:

PRACTICAL BASICS

- ◆ **Design stage** Work with people who have experience of trauma, related to your project theme, to design the project.

Recommendation: Recruit people to co-design the processes/project with you. Ensure you pay fairly for the role. You can achieve this by talking to people about what would work for them. For some people, volunteering is really important; some people need to be paid money for their expertise.

- ◆ **Issues at the door?** Start by asking yourselves what you'll be asking of people. Cultural activities often offer people an escape from the everyday experience, leaving issues at the door. However, collections or story-related work often means re-processing trauma. This can be really beneficial, but it's important to be clear with people about what they are getting into.

Recommendation: Be really clear when you recruit to the project. Think about where there might be 'triggering' points in the project. Let people know what the process will involve so that they can make a conscious choice about involvement.

- ◆ **Reflective practice** Since running projects involves everything from tea-making through to print deadlines, allowing space for people to reflect on what is happening in the project can easily be forgotten. It is important though, to leave space for issues that need more discussion to be unpacked.

Recommendation: Allow moments in the project for people to share and reflect. Try and make sure everyone gets a chance to speak if the project involves group work. If possible, work with a qualified reflective practitioner to run this session to ensure the space can be held safely.

- ◆ **Quiet space** If the project involves group work, or work with the public, having a quiet space for people to take some time out is essential.

Recommendation: Quiet spaces don't need to be grand but do consider accessibility. Does the space have appropriate seating, lighting, and will it actually be quiet?

- ◆ **Signposting** Be aware of the limitations of the museum's role. Whilst cultural activity can be incredibly healing, we are not qualified for everything.

Recommendations: Before you start your project make sure you have good connections with other organisations that you can refer people to if they need help with health, housing or any other things. As you develop the work, ask people about their experiences with partners so you can make sure they are serving people well. The homelessness and social care sector is complex and not all organisations are right for every individual.

- ◆ **Consider boundaries** In doing this kind of work you'll inevitably form bonds with different people. This is one of the joys of the work. However, take care of yourself and ensure you have good boundaries. Receiving stories of people's trauma can be very emotive and difficult work and healthy boundaries are essential for you and for participants.

Recommendation: Establish boundaries for yourself and the work. These could include keeping a balance between work and life, a 'transitional ritual' to help you leave work and enter the personal realm and a mechanism built in for you to process the work, preferably with a qualified practitioner. Whilst this may seem like a luxury, it really is an essential and has a long-established precedent in homelessness and social care. Austerity has hit museums too and lots of staff are already under immense pressure. If museums are serious about doing this work, then leaders must allocate budgets for it to be done properly. Show this to your Director, or Board if you are the Director, to help make the case!

POWER, TRAUMA AND COLLECTIONS

- ◆ **To individualise is to pathologise** People carrying trauma have often been labelled their whole life. In society, 'the problem' is often located with the individual rather than structural inequalities and this can lead to increased stigmatisation. Museums run the risk of enhancing this if we focus on individual stories rather than looking at the bigger picture. At the time of writing, we are living through ten years of austerity. The impact of this on people's lives cannot be underestimated.

Recommendation: It's useful to actively reframe how we think about trauma and where it's come from. Rather than thinking 'what is wrong with you?' think 'what's happened to you?' When co-creating content, look at the wider picture together. For example, when we collect an individual object story for Museum of Homelessness, we always ask the person what they think should change, or what they would like to say to those in power. This highlights the structural as well as the personal and draws upon people's expertise on wider political and social issues.

- ◆ **Who is 'vulnerable'?** Question your assumptions arounds labels such as 'vulnerable groups' or 'marginalised communities', often they are unhelpful. People experience trauma in many different ways and to differing levels. In addition, survivors of trauma are exactly that – survivors. This takes resourcefulness, resilience and creativity.

Recommendation: Avoid an approach which frames people as victims. Build trust with people. Be interested in the whole person, not the trauma story and only ask questions about people's experiences when invited to do so. It is also good to be mindful that colleagues and volunteers may themselves be trauma survivors.

- ◆ **'Being unwell' rather than 'wellbeing'** Sharing stories of trauma can be deeply affecting for everyone involved. It is important to allow space for this in collecting projects and the process will not always be a smooth ride.

Recommendation: Be aware that the nature and depth of this work can create situations that are unpredictable. This can run contrary to the institution's desire to improve people's wellbeing or deliver positive outcomes for funders/line managers and it should be borne in mind. It doesn't mean the work is not powerful or meaningful, but improving wellbeing is not always simple or immediate when dealing with trauma.

- ◆ **Pay attention to power** Be mindful of how people in the project will relate to you and each other. An intersectional group can bring different power dynamics and it is really important to think carefully about this so that everyone feels heard and respected.

Recommendation: For group activity, ensure the facilitator has the skills to manage nuanced power dynamics. For work with individuals, always be mindful of your own privilege and assumptions. Give space and listen.

- ◆ **Consent** People enter collecting projects for all sorts of reasons but their feelings about the project or relationship with institutions may change over time. People's entire life situation may change, and they may not want that previous experience held in the collection. It is important to allow for this in working with people.

Recommendation: Allow entry and exit routes for people in the project. If possible, give people the power to withdraw themselves and their contributions from the process - including objects, photography and other material. This offer will make people more secure about being part of your work, since you are prioritising them over the project outputs. Museum of Homelessness has 'the power of veto' written into our acquisition processes on a legal basis, meaning that people have the right to withdraw their objects/stories from the collection in perpetuity. No questions asked.

- ◆ **Narrative control** How will people be represented? How much can you ensure a story is in a person's own words?

Recommendations: As far as possible, democratise the interpretation process. After consideration, we conclude it is not possible to ever be fully authentic and ethical when telling people's stories. Museum processes have an inherent extractive power dynamic built in. However, processes like power of veto, enabling people to do their own documentation or write their own labels and genuinely putting people at the heart of your own work will help work towards it.

Further reading

Research on severe and multiple disadvantage from Lankelly Chase:
<https://lankellychase.org.uk/resources/publications/hard-edges/>

The original CD-Kaiser ACES study: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acesstudy/about.html>

Piloting and analysis of ACES informed work from Health Scotland:
<http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2676/adverse-childhood-experiences-in-context-aug2019-english.pdf>



Case study

Jen Kavanagh, freelance curator and consultant

Project name

Fighting for Our Rights

Project summary

In 2017, Kingston Centre for Independent Living (KCIL) partnered with Kingston University to capture oral histories and objects that tell the story of disability rights history in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. Kingston was at the forefront of the disability rights movement from the 1960s and was the first place in the UK to trial an independent living scheme. This history had never been formally captured, and so KCIL's 50th anniversary became a suitable moment to collaborate with those who have played a role in changing the lives of disabled people through positive action.

Project aims

- ◆ To capture the stories of people and organisations who have played a role in the establishment of Kingston's independent living scheme
- ◆ To listen to disabled people across the borough and document their experiences of living with a disability in Kingston, in a way that they felt was representative
- ◆ To train student nurses from Kingston University as interviewers, enabling them to conduct oral histories and learn from the interviewees' experiences as part of their clinical training
- ◆ To present this history to the public through a new website, touring exhibition, school resource and permanent archive at Kingston History Centre

Approach to collecting

'Fighting for our rights' was a project initiated by KCIL, an organisation that provides a range of services to make sure that disabled people who live, work or study in Kingston are able to lead independent lives. The aims of the project stemmed from KCIL and its service users, many of whom had been major players in the disability rights movement in the UK. It was widely acknowledged that this important history had never been documented, so through a partnership with Kingston University and funding from the NLHF, the project aimed to address this.

Oral history was at the heart of the collecting approach. Capturing the lived experiences of those who identify as disabled, have campaigned for disability rights, or who work or have worked for organisations and authorities who provide services for disabled people, was critical in ensuring a broad spectrum of views were documented. We were also open to collecting photographs, objects and ephemera which represented the experiences of these individuals, should anything arise.

A group of student nurses from Kingston University were recruited as oral history volunteers on the project. They received oral history training and were supervised by both university and project staff. The time they dedicated to the project counted towards their clinical practice hours, allowing for them to broaden their experience without taking on additional commitments. However, it was also made clear that their role was completely voluntary and that they could end their roles at any time.

Identifying people to interview was done in consultation with KCIL staff, along with direct discussion with individuals who has already been selected as having crucial stories. Everyone approached had the project explained to them in full, either face to face, on the phone or by email, depending on their preference. They also understood their involvement was optional and that they could opt out at any time.

Project outcomes

- ◆ A total of 23 oral history interviews were conducted and acquired by Kingston Heritage Centre
- ◆ Three temporary displays were installed at venues across Kingston
- ◆ A new website was created to give legacy to the content collected (www.kingstonfightingforourrights.co.uk)
- ◆ A school resource was also created for key stage 2 students
- ◆ Five student nurses gave their time to work on the project – it was their feedback that felt like one of the most powerful outcomes. They all gained an understanding of the powerful impact a health practitioner can have on a disabled person's life, in both positive and negative ways. Their reflections included:

'Well, for me it would be to be very diligent and careful when I'm looking after a patient. Try to understand my patient and know the implication of what my actions or what I'm doing and ensure that I keep to what is expected of me.'

What were the ethical considerations and challenges?

- ◆ Who are we working with and what will they gain from the project? The outcomes could not be solely what was expected from a collecting and heritage point of view, but also what the interviewees and student nurses would gain from the experience.
- ◆ Whose story are we telling? Extensive consultation took place at the planning stages to consider multiple viewpoints, including those who campaign against local authority cuts to disability provision and those on the receiving end of the campaigns to give voice to many perspectives.

- ◆ What safeguarding has been considered and what is our duty of care? Working in partnership with Kingston University meant a detailed ethics application had to be submitted before the project could be launched. This allowed the team to consider our duty of care to everyone involved.
- ◆ How were the stories going to be presented to the public? Collaboration with interviewees couldn't stop once the interview was completed. Interpretation and audio extracts were all run past the people referenced, as were any images we wanted to use online or in the displays. This was done in person or in discussion with family members also when required, depending on the needs of the participant.
- ◆ KCIL promote the social model of disability, as opposed to the medical model, and so it was important to communicate this throughout our interpretation. We wanted to ensure wider audiences understood that it is society which disables people and to raise awareness of the challenges this poses on a daily basis.



Student nurses Mimi and Uloma with Theresa Nash and interviewee Jennifer Carpenter at the project celebration event © Kingston University

Three lessons learned related to ethics

1. Collaboration and ongoing consultation were essential. Allowing the participants to review, edit, censor or restrict access to content about them at all stages of the project was critical to it being a fully collaborative initiative.
2. Giving space to the participants and volunteers throughout and ensuring they understood who they could contact should they need support. After each interview the student nurses were offered time and space to discuss what they had heard. Follow-up emails were also sent to check on their wellbeing should an interview have been particularly difficult. Participants were also contacted to check how they were, following an interview, and to allow them to consider what was made public before anything was published.
3. Not stopping at collecting when it comes to accessibility and engagement. A website and a series of printed 2D displays are not accessible for some people with particular needs. Ensuring the website was co-designed by a blind user led to the inclusion of accessible tools. VocalEyes were commissioned to lead audio described tours of the displays once open to the public so that again the content was opened up to audiences who couldn't access the printed 2D interpretation. It was vital to make the content accessible once the project team had disbanded.

Digital preservation

Introduction

Susanna Cordner, London Transport Museum

The ethics of digital preservation centre around social and technological strands. The social strand involves the due diligence and issues of consent that surround sourcing and collecting certain kinds of digital content. The technological strand takes in the ethics around the technical capabilities relating to what we are able to collect and care for digitally.

Some museums, due to misconceptions or restrictions in resources, consider digital preservation as an afterthought, rather than an integral part of the curatorial process. It is important to consider digital preservation as an ongoing, rather than a one-off, process. Digital preservation is also an act of enduring care and collaboration, and collection staff hold an ethical responsibility to continue to ensure that digital material is protected and accessible as technologies and best practice change.

Another ethical consideration in digital preservation is showing due diligence with regard to the people and subjects that relate to the material you are preserving. The digital creates a different sphere of record and potential for access that could, in some cases, outlive an object or a collection. It is important to ensure that, whether preserving born

digital material (like the audio-file of an oral history interview) or a digital record of an object, those connected to the object or account understand this long-term legacy. Likewise, questions around intellectual property rights (IPR) and copyright should be addressed early to safeguard the collection status of this material in perpetuity.

The digital is now a part of our everyday lives and this should be reflected in our collections. Changes in our society also mean that curators are increasingly collecting different kinds of digital material. This may mean that they need to define new models for approaches and considerations, whether in terms of how the material is documented and preserved or around its ownership. For instance, museums are increasingly collecting screengrabs or equivalents that document interactions on social media sites. The ownership and ethics of collecting these items can be contested and this is an ethical issue of our time.

In the case studies below, first Bill Lowry gives essential advice and instruction on how to initiate, manage and evolve the digital preservation process. In the second piece, Arran Rees offers his top tips on

how to ensure that your digital preservation process is ethical, from clear communication methods to running audits and providing access. The series of case studies from the Collecting Social Photo project show how design affects participation and project outputs, demonstrating how ethical considerations are applied to different scales.

Getting started in digital preservation

Bill Lowry, Museum of London

Digital Preservation (DP) is an evolving process. When you first start, you'll be managing your content manually. This will allow you to gradually increase your knowledge of DP and your collection so that you can identify what your collection needs in order to be better protected and more accessible.

There are many sources of Digital Preservation information. Some are focused on types of content such as audio and video. Others are more useful for finding UK specific solutions to problems.

I'll start with 'Levels of Digital Preservation' by National Digital Stewardship Alliance as it's a great resource to begin with and covers all scenarios from managing small collections yourself to outsourcing some or all of the tasks to a provider.

In 'Levels of Digital Preservation' there are five areas of DP. These areas cover all the tasks you will need to undertake to ensure that you are preserving your content. Each of these areas have four levels, Level 1 being the most basic (but most important) to Level 4 being the most complex (although these tasks are mostly expected to be performed by software).

The following areas on pages 33 to 35 are all Level 1 (Know your content).



STORAGE

What the definition says	Practical ways of carrying out these tasks
Have two complete copies in separate locations.	<p>Two exact copies (I'll show you how to make sure they're exact later) stored in two separate locations. This could be one copy stored at your working location and another copy backed up by your IT department and stored in another building that is owned by your institution. If you only have one building, you could partner with another institution and hold each other's backups.</p> <p>Why two locations? The most obvious risk to digital collections might be viruses in which case separate computer systems will help to protect the content but other risks include fire, theft or power problems which would leave both copies of the content at risk if they're still in the same building.</p>
Document all storage media where content is stored.	<p>It's important to document the storage media/formats in your collection as in the future you may decide that some of these media may be at risk and you may decide to implement a policy to migrate content from one media format to another.</p>
Put content into stable storage.	<p>Digital content isn't necessarily stored on a computer. If it's been created in the last couple of decades it could be on optical discs (CD/DVD), memory cards such as those mostly seen in digital cameras or external hard drives that are only plugged into computers when needed.</p> <p>All these formats are at risk of not working when you connect them to a computer. Optical disks such as CDs could be two different formats. The first is the normal music CD found in shops. The risk of problems with these are low but there have been issues with bad batches of discs which deteriorate and become unplayable. The second are CD-R which you burn yourself. These are often manufactured down to a price and even with good brands you should not expect these to last longer than ten years. If you have content in these formats you should plan to migrate it as soon as possible.</p> <p>The most popular storage format for DP is Linear Tape Open (LTO) tape, which allows IT departments to store large amounts of data for a reasonable cost. The best storage for your needs can depend on how much content you have and the level of complexity to create backups of it.</p>

INTEGRITY

What the definition says	Practical ways of carrying out these tasks
Verify integrity information if it has been provided with the content	Data is at risk of corruption when being transferred. This is about making sure the content you're preserving is the same as the content you received. The best way for this to happen is to ask the content creator to create this information and give it to you with the content. This is unlikely to happen but if you have regular donors you could teach them how to do this using the techniques in the next section.
Generate integrity information if not provided with the content	<p>The most common way to create integrity information is through software hashes. These are strings of letters and numbers created by feeding either raw text or files into software which then creates the hash. It makes no difference whether a few characters of text or a large file is used. The idea is that if you run a file through the software you are given a hash. If you run the same file through the hash at a later date or on another computer you should get the same hash and this will prove that the file has not changed.</p> <p>The most popular and easy to use hash format is MD5 (it should be noted that this format can be hacked and is not suitable in high security environments. Other less popular hash formats may be more secure). An MD5 hash will consist of 32 characters and look like 96522cd211898aa35231169bc3d5bd6a (this is the hash of the text 'An MD5 hash').</p> <p>If I change any of the characters in the text or add punctuation I will get a completely different hash. There are many software tools to help create hashes and it is good practice to use one tool for creation and another for verification. This will help you to understand that it is the hash which is important for checking your file's integrity rather than the software that you use.</p> <p>It's important to note that a file hash does not protect your file from corruption. All it does is give you a string of text to determine if anything has changed. If your newly checked file has a different hash you should replace it with a backed-up copy that has the same hash as when it was created.</p> <p>It should be noted that file hashes are not affected by filenames. This can mean that if your file is accidentally renamed you can identify it using the hash.</p>
Virus check all content; isolate content for quarantine as needed	This seems obvious, but you should check all incoming content regardless of whoever has given it to you. Once you have established that your files are virus free you can use your integrity information to know if anything has changed (such as the files becoming infected with a virus).

CONTROL

What the definition says	Practical ways of carrying out these tasks
Determine the human and software agents that should be authorised to read, write, move and delete content	Accidental deletion is probably one of the biggest risks to your content. This is about making sure that only people and computers that need to access the content can do so. The best way to protect the content is by minimising access to it. If content is frequently used it might be worth making a copy of it and making sure that users only use these 'access' copies. If you have large video files it may not be appropriate to have users playing them as it could slow down other systems. Instead make 'access' versions that are much smaller. By following these recommendations, you could cut down the number of people that need to access the 'master' files and reduce the risk of corruption.

METADATA

What the definition says	Practical ways of carrying out these tasks
Create inventory of content, also documenting current storage locations	<p>Metadata is also known as data about data. The two types of metadata that you are mostly likely to encounter are 'descriptive metadata' and 'technical metadata'. Descriptive metadata is about the content of your files. It could include information from your Collections Management System. Technical metadata is used to find information about how to access the file. If it's a video file it would include details about which codecs are required to play the video.</p> <p>Creating an inventory of the content is about identifying and naming files so that you can find them later. If there is more than one file you might create a list of files which could also include integrity information such as software hashes.</p>
Backup inventory and store at least one copy separately from content	Keeping a separate copy of the metadata can be beneficial in that you don't need to access the content to understand what's in it. A separate copy of the metadata would also be helpful in disaster recovery efforts if part of the file is damaged. You could keep this information in a Collections Management System.

CONTENT

What the definition says	Practical ways of carrying out these tasks
Document file formats and other essential content characteristics including how and when these were identified	<p>This is about understanding what your files are and understanding their formats. There's no point perfectly preserving a file for 30 years just to find out that no computer can understand it when you need to open it!</p> <p>Your collection might be simple: an oral history interview in a single hour-long audio or video file. Or it could be complex: a project with multiple audio and video files along with supporting documentation in Word, Excel and PDF files. By understanding what files you have you can check them against a format registry such as PRONOM (maintained by The National Archives). This will enable you to determine whether your file is likely to be readable in the future.</p>

Further reading

National Digital Stewardship Alliance, 2018. 'Levels of digital preservation'. Available at: <https://ndsa.org/activities/levels-of-digital-preservation/> [accessed January 2020]

Digital Preservation Coalition, [n.d.]. [website] Available at: <https://www.dpconline.org/> [accessed January 2020]

The National Archives, [n.d.]. 'Welcome to PRONOM' [website] Available at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/PROM/Default.aspx> [accessed January 2020]

Top tips for ethical digital preservation

Arran Rees, University of Leeds

As we continue to develop our contemporary collecting programmes, we will soon find that many of the items we want to collect only exist in a digital medium. Digital photography, social media, video games and oral histories are just some of the objects we might want to collect, but how we approach collecting and managing born-digital material in museums does require us to think about some of the traditional ethical acquisition considerations in a different way.

A fair starting point would be to acknowledge that although abundant, digital files are more fragile than the vast majority of physical materials museums have traditionally collected. However, there is a thriving digital preservation community that is generous with its collective knowledge. Digital preservation might sound scary, but it is easier to get started with than you might think.

Communication Communicating online or through digital spaces with potential donors calls for the same levels of professional behaviour, respect and ethical conduct as dealing with donors face to face. This might sound like an obvious point to make, but if objects are being delivered via email or through online file transfers, the same level of documentation, correspondence and acknowledgement is required. It is easy for this to feel less formal than a physical handover of objects, but don't let it be.

Storage Digital storage is as important as physical storage! When acquiring physical objects, we know to think about how we are going to store it. You need to ensure you have adequate digital storage allocated for any digital objects you are bringing into the museum. You should speak to the donors to find out how big the files are before accepting them and check with your IT department to ensure you have enough storage space. If you do not have an IT department you should find out how much storage is available on your computer and consider whether or not you need to purchase an external hard drive.

Back-ups Backing up your digital storage is a very important part of digital preservation. Most IT departments will have a back-up regime and if you are going to start storing digital objects in that space, then you should clarify how often they are backed up. They may be able to back up your object storage more regularly. If you do not have an IT department, consider purchasing an external hard drive for storing your object files and keep it away from your computer.

Changes to the object Consider the file format of the objects you are collecting. One of the preservation methods for digital files is called migration. This is where old file formats are updated to newer ones to ensure they can still be accessed as software and technology change and develop. You

should ensure donors are happy with you updating file formats for preservation reasons before you make this a preservation strategy.

Auditing Audit your digital collections as you would your physical ones. This can be done using a tool called a checksum. You can create a checksum for individual files without special software on most PCs. A checksum is a long sets of numbers and/or characters that allows the computer to check whether the file has changed in *any* way since the checksum was created. This would include the file being moved. You can find a lot more information about checksums at <https://www.dpconline.org/handbook/technical-solutions-and-tools/fixity-and-checksums>

Access Digital objects should be made as easily accessible as other objects in the collection. When you collect a digital object, an access copy should be made alongside the master copy to ensure people can open and experience the file as intended without posing any risk to the object itself. The master copy is often referred to as the master preservation copy and this file should be stored in a different storage location to the access copy.

Case study

Elisabeth Boogh, Stockholms Läns Museum

Anni Wallenius, The Finnish Museum of Photography

Bente Jensen, Aalborg City Archives

Project name

Collecting Social Photo (CoSoPho)

Project summary

Social media in combination with smartphones have profoundly changed photography and photographic practices. This was the starting point for the research project Collecting Social Photo, which studied the impact social media has had on photography and consequently how museums and archives need to adapt their work methods regarding photography collections. The project ran for three years (2017–20) and was a collaboration in three Nordic countries between museums, archives and a university: The Nordic Museum (Sweden), Stockholm County Museum (Sweden), The Finnish Museum of Photography (Finland), Aalborg City Archives (Denmark) and the Department of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University (Sweden).

The participating museums and archives conducted eleven case studies in total, divided into three overarching themes: place/location, visual and social practices and viral events. Insights and lessons learned from the case studies resulted in a set of recommendations and best practice on how to collect what the project calls social digital photographs.

Project aims

- ◆ How can collecting policies and practices be adapted to create relevant and accessible collections of social digital photography?
- ◆ How can digital archives, collection databases and interfaces be relevantly adapted - considering the character of the social digital photograph and digital context - in order to serve different stakeholders and end-users?
- ◆ How can museums and archives change their role when collecting and disseminating, to increase user influence in the whole life circle of vernacular photographic cultural heritage?

Approach to collecting

The approach to collecting is exemplified by three of the eleven case studies made in the CoSoPho project:

Case I: #mygandrup

(Aalborg City Archives)

The small town of Gandrup (1,500 inhabitants) near Aalborg in Denmark was chosen as a case in order to answer the question of whether social digital photography is an urban phenomenon in particular and to study the possible consequences for a collection strategy in a small-town setting. The case study was a collaborative project performed by Aalborg City Archives together with the local archives in the area, Hals Archives (Hals Arkiv). Hals Archives are a local archive organised as a member-driven society with an elected board and based on voluntary work.

The local archives decided that the collection should use a combination of Facebook and Instagram as collection platforms. Facebook was preferred by Hals Archives as they already had experience using the platform in their communication with the community. Instagram was included because of the experience from other CoSoPho case studies. The local archives chose #mitgandrup (#mygandrup) as a collection hashtag as they wanted a local, individual gaze on the locality. The collection initiative was promoted in local newspapers and by the Gandrup related accounts on social media. A poster was produced and displayed in public areas and local 'meeting places' such as supermarkets and the school. The advantage of launching the case study in a relatively small place is that it is possible to cover all known media and networks.

The project ran for six weeks and in all 194 photos were shared. Hals Archives decided to collect all the photos. They wanted the original photos from the smartphone or camera and have chosen a pragmatic way to collect to save time, simply by asking people via the two collection accounts to email the photos to the archives with information about the donor and the archive's right to use them. The initiative was concluded with an event and exhibition.

Project outcomes

This case, about a small rural town:

- ◆ Explores how the identity of a place affects the frames of a collecting initiative, and vice versa how the collecting and the collaboration around it can change the perception of a place.
- ◆ Explores how small experiments can create a foundation for building digital skills and embracing new work methods for collecting social digital photography.
- ◆ Discusses the changing role of local archives from gatekeepers and guardians of history to community facilitators.
- ◆ The initiative helped the archives to become digital, contemporary, relevant and sustainable in the long run for future use.
- ◆ The case study demonstrates the advantage of using a small place for a collecting initiative. The archives can be reasonably sure that they covered all the possible media, networks and meeting places in their outreach. If not, they will know which subcultures are not reached or who was not interested. To get deeper into motives and networks, qualitative methods should be used.

What were the ethical considerations and challenges?

- ◆ A concern is how to use the contemporary knowledge about a small place and the people living there in an ethical and professional way for the collecting institution.
- ◆ Project managers need to consider how to address the fact that some people are very active in a project, while others are not. Museums should consider how to motivate non-participants to get involved, and how to make the material representative of a breadth of experience.
- ◆ The images were discussed immediately after upload on the social media collection platforms. The speed emphasises the need to follow the platforms 24 hours a day and communicate with the community constantly during the initiative, which can be time-consuming. This can be a challenge for a volunteer organisation.
- ◆ The challenge is to handle the gap between people showing interest in the initiative by uploading images on the selected platforms and then nudge them to actually take the last step and donate them to the archives with the necessary consents and agreements.



The images shared in the #mygandrup initiative co-created a contemporary image of the small town, which did not exist before. Photo: Tikster_1 CC:0

Three lessons learned related to ethics

1. To be aware of documenting a place in a contemporary mode also requires responsibility for the image created of the place by the collecting institution.
2. To be sure that people depicted on the images have given permission.
3. In an environment with no tradition for sharing photos of the topic (the place), it is important to accept a slow start to an initiative and then consider how much and in what way to speed up the process.

Case 2: Social media diaries

(Finnish Museum of Photography)

When billions of photos are shared on social media every day, how can heritage institutions with their limited resources create relevant collections of social media practices? In the case study Social Media Diaries this question was investigated on the level of individual social media users by The Finnish Museum of Photography. More specifically, the case study investigated three interrelated questions. How do social media users themselves reflect on their practices? What is needed to preserve a meaningful and rich description of a person's visual practices on different social media platforms? How can participatory and co-curatorial collecting methods facilitate this work?

The Museum worked with two study participants, one of whom was found through an open call on the Museum's social media account. The Museum collected all images the participants shared on any social media accounts over two days. In addition to this, the participants were asked to keep a self-narrated video log, where during the course of one day they described their photo-related social media practices. The collected and self-narrated material was complemented by interviews, where the collected material was discussed with the study participants by using the method of photo elicitation.

Project outcomes

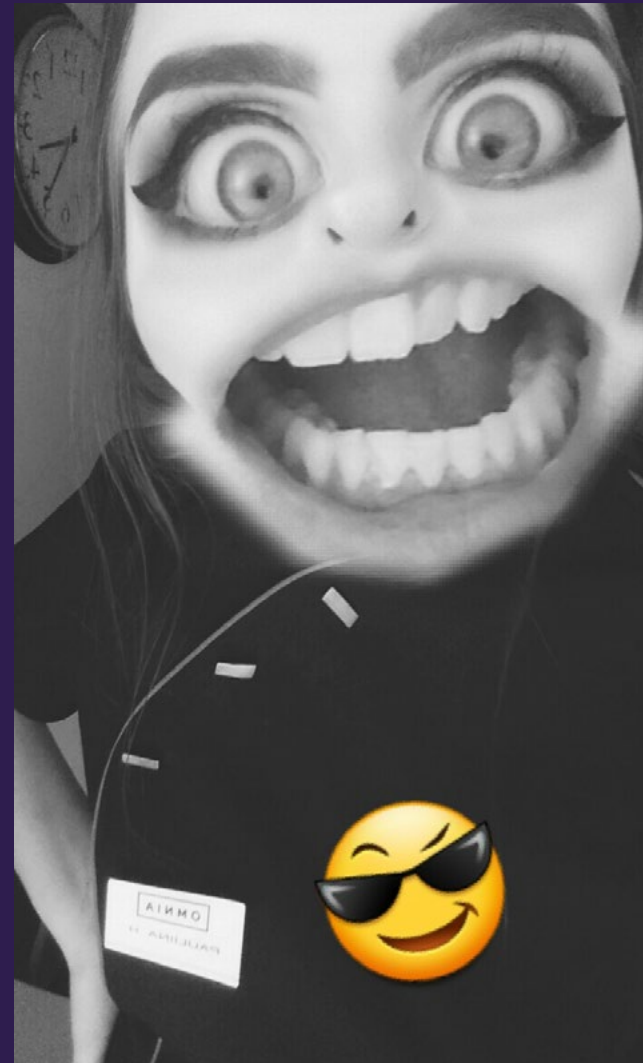
- ◆ This case study emphasised the benefits of including multiple platforms for better understanding personal photographic practices today. Collecting was not limited to predetermined platforms, but instead study participants' real-life practices defined the scope of documentation.
- ◆ The project resulted in a small collection of photographs and screenshots from Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Tumblr. The adjoining video logs created by the participants provide rich description of the reasons and motivations the participants had for creating and sharing these photos. Also, the differences in affordances and practices for the different social media platforms could be understood through these log books and the interviews.
- ◆ The case study stressed the importance of close collaboration with participants to design a relevant collecting initiative.
- ◆ When participants have a central role in the curatorial process, it is vital that the heritage organisation clearly communicates to them the aims and motivations behind collecting and collections.

What were the ethical considerations and challenges?

- ◆ It is evident that working with a limited number of participants (in this case study - two people over two days) cannot produce a representative collection. This aspect of the case study needs to be clearly described and documented, so that the future users of the collected material are able to understand the conditions where the collection was created.
- ◆ In this case study the museum also wanted to collect photos the participants had shared in closed social media groups or in private, one-to-one conversations. To do this, it was essential to build trust. Due to the intimate nature of some of the material, issues related to personal data protection needed to be discussed in detail and the final decision about what was collected was left to the participants.

Three lessons learned related to ethics

- ◆ Discussing the implications of collecting, i.e. what happens to the collected material and how can it be used, with the participants is vital.
- ◆ Time is needed to build trust and discuss methods. There are no shortcuts to successful co-operation.
- ◆ Co-curation with the audience has the potential for creating more diverse collections and extending the scope of contemporary documentation beyond the expertise of the museum professionals.



Close collaboration with participants made it possible to collect from their private social media accounts as well. Here, a screen shot from one of the participants' Snapchat. Photo: Pauliina Honkaniemi 2017, The Finnish Museum of Photography.

Case 3: Stockholm terrorist attack

On 7 April 2017 Stockholm was hit by a terrorist attack, when a hijacked lorry was driven at high speed along a pedestrian street in the city centre, leaving five people dead and many more injured. At the time of the attack, the use of networked photographs during tragic events and uprisings had been identified as a relevant topic to explore by the CoSoPho project. Collecting physical objects from spontaneous memorials is not a new task for museums and archives and in Europe alone there have been several collecting initiatives since 2015 in connection with terrorist attacks, for example in Manchester, Nice, Barcelona and Paris. But with the emergence of social media, atrocities like these are covered in real-time, and people use social media to connect and share information as well as express emotion.

The Nordic Museum and the Stockholm County Museum decided, at short notice, to conduct two parallel collecting initiatives. The Nordic Museum targeted two hashtags, #openstockholm and #prayforstockholm, that were widely used during the attack and in the following days. The Museum published a sponsored post on social media asking people to contribute with photographs to the Museum's collecting website *Minnen.se* (Memories). The Nordic Museum also collected big data by downloading metadata from 7,000 of the 10,000 images shared on public accounts on Instagram. The Stockholm County Museum collaborated with the City Museum and had a more traditional approach by reaching out through newspapers and broadcast media. The County Museum collected digital photographs from the public relating to the attack and the City Museum collected people's written testimonies and text conversations. The photographs were contributed by uploading them to the collecting website *Samtidsbild.se* (Contemporary images). In total 600 photographs were contributed to the two websites.

Project outcomes

- ◆ In total 600 photographs were collected in the two collecting initiatives. Most of the images depict the aftermath of the attack and focus on the spontaneous memorials on the streets. But there was also an element of citizen journalism with photographs of the lorry on fire and heavily armed police.
- ◆ Social digital photography online in connection with sudden, traumatic events can serve as a tool for communication, for expressing grief and coming to terms with what happened on a more personal level. Online repositories such as hashtags can thus function as spontaneous memorials in themselves, and ought to be collected, along with physical objects.
- ◆ Social digital photographs are produced and shared online in a short time span, calling for quick action on behalf of the Museum. They are highly ephemeral, easily deleted or locked into cloud services or social media accounts. It is therefore essential to collect in real time using rapid response collecting. With an agile approach, the collecting initiative can be adjusted as events unfold online.
- ◆ Complementary collection and documentation methods should be employed to gather context for the collected photographs. One example is to save screenshots of photographs posted online as they are essential to understanding the social media service itself and the online conversations.
- ◆ To create this kind of a collection, it is essential to have digital platforms in place for uploading photographs, and they must be fully functioning and easy to use before collecting begins. During rapid response collecting in connection to trauma there is no time to set up a new service with all the necessary legal and ethical considerations.
- ◆ The uploaded photographs were immediately published, and no selections were made. This created a contemporary collection that sparked further incentives for contributions by people wanting to share their photographs.

What were the ethical considerations and challenges?

- ◆ An ethical concern was that someone might upload/contribute a photograph with sensitive content, depicting wounded people or dead bodies. The uploaded photographs are instantly made public as they are uploaded. Therefore, constant monitoring by the Museum staff was required, to immediately unpublish ethically sensitive photographs if necessary.
- ◆ The short time span between the attack and the launch of the collecting initiatives was a concern. Would people be upset, thinking it was not right for the Museum to collect material so soon? Would they think it was not within the Museum's mission to collect from serious public trauma?
- ◆ The overall public sentiment after the attack was one of unity and love, for the city and its people. But how should museums act if the overall response had been anger and hate? How museums respond to the darker sides of social media and society in public trauma has not been resolved within the case study.

Three lessons learned related to ethics

1. For people who were not affected in person, yet touched by the event, digital sharing and access can be a way of processing what has happened.
2. A plan for how to handle ethically sensitive material needs to be in place before the collecting initiative is started, as well as a plan for how to take care of staff put under pressure by facing media and grieving families. Neither was in place in the case study.
3. Making collections representative is essential. Opinions expressing negative views on society and the attack was never submitted by contributors, nor documented by staff, due to limited time and resources. The lack of them is a weakness in the collection and a conclusion is that museums need to be open to discussions about how to deal with undemocratic and populist views when collecting from social media.



Photographs shared with a common hashtag constitute a collective memorialisation and become part of the physical spontaneous memorials. Photo: Mitra, CC:0

Reading group information

The topics covered in this initial edition of the toolkit were selected and developed as a result of consultation and debate within the Contemporary Collecting Group. As a part of the launch of this resource, we would like to encourage further dialogue around this subject by inviting you to host reading groups to discuss the resource.

Please connect with colleagues or other practitioners in the sector in your local or surrounding area and discuss the toolkit and how it relates to your own practice. Do you think you will find it useful? What advice, topic or case studies stand out to you? What would you like to have further information on? Who else do you want to hear from? What other topics, within the overarching subject of the ethics of contemporary collecting, would you like to address in the future?

We are keen to encourage the use of the toolkit to prompt discussion, collaboration and support across the sector, and hope that, as practice and dialogue on the topics included evolve, that the toolkit can evolve, too.

If you would like to arrange a meet-up or connect to a reading group meet-up, then please send an invitation or email to the Contemporary Collecting Group mailing list, or contact documentarycurator@ltmuseum.co.uk for advice.