
Surajit Sarkar (India):

Linda Sandino (UK): “‘Art and design for all’: Communist civil servants and museum service.”
Resumen: Este trabajo se apoya en la experiencia de nuestro centro de emprender un proyecto de historia pública de sitio específico en Bengaluru (Bangalore) con un grupo de estudiantes de Diseño de la Escuela Srishti de Arte, Diseño y Tecnología. El proyecto se basó en el sitio de la fortaleza de Bangalore, donde las fuerzas de Tipu Sultán se enfrentaron en una feroz batalla con el ejército británico en 1791. Tipu Sultán (20 November 1750 – 4 May 1799) era el gobernante de Mysore y conocido popularmente como el “Tigre de Mysore”. El Fort Bangalore es ahora parte de un mercado congestionado en el corazón del centro urbano. Comenzamos nuestro proyecto con estas preguntas: ¿Cómo involucrar a las comunidades locales con su pasado? ¿Cómo pueden las leyendas contadas por una comunidad local se incorporarán en el proceso de exploración y la construcción de nuevas relaciones, de estilo contemporáneo con los sitios del patrimonio? ¿De qué manera puede la historia oral explorar el sentido del tiempo y el lugar?

El Bangalore Fort tiene un gran significado para la ciudad de Bangalore y la historia del estado de Mysore. Sin embargo, en la actualidad hay muy poca participación del público con los sitios. La mayoría de los visitantes completan su visita al lugar en 5-10 minutos mientras que los residentes locales lo tratan con indiferencia. Este proyecto concebido como una intervención en la cultura pública utiliza entrevistas de investigación y la historia oral de archivo para crear una instalación de audio de las historias orales. Los estudiantes, liderados por un profesor joven, adaptaron marionetas de cuero tradicionales de Karnataka para crear títeres de sombra de cartón que dramatizó la historia del asedio en 1791. El proyecto creativo reunió a la historia oral, la narración, el diseño de comunicación visual para hacer frente a la historia y el patrimonio cultural. Este trabajo se llevará a una mirada crítica a este proyecto terminado en 2013, con el fin de reflexionar sobre las nuevas cuestiones que surgen cuando la historia pública hace que los espacios de “herencia” como más inclusiva a través de la yuxtaposición del pasado y el presente, los habitantes históricos con residentes actuales.

Abstract: This paper bases itself on our Centre’s experience of undertaking a site-specific public history project in Bengaluru (Bangalore) with a group of Design students of the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology. The project was based at the site of the Bangalore Fort where Tipu Sultan’s forces fought a fierce battle with the British army in 1791. Tipu Sultan (20 November 1750 – 4 May 1799) was the ruler of Mysore and known popularly as the “Tiger of Mysore”. The Bangalore Fort is now part of a congested market place at the heart of the urban centre. We began our project with these questions: How do local communities engage with their past? How can the legends recounted by a local community be incorporated into the process of exploring and building new, contemporary relationships with heritage sites? In what ways can oral history explore the sense of time and place?

The Bangalore Fort holds great significance for Bangalore City and the history of Mysore state. However, at present there is very little public involvement with the sites. Most visitors complete their visit to the site in 5-10 minutes while local residents treat it with indifference. This project designed as an intervention into public culture used archival
research and oral history interviews to create an audio installation out of the oral histories. The students, lead by a young faculty member adapted Karnataka’s traditional leather puppets to create cardboard shadow puppets that dramatized the story of the siege of the Fort in 1791. The project creatively brought together oral history, story-telling, visual communication design to address history and cultural heritage. This paper will take a critical look at this project completed in 2013, in order to reflect on the new questions that emerge when public history renders “heritage” spaces as more inclusive through juxtaposing the past and the present, the historical inhabitants with present residents.
This Public History project was undertaken as a student project at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology with 11 undergraduate students for a full semester (August - October 2012). The project was designed, taught, and coordinated by Aliyeh Rizvi and Indira Chowdhury. The project was funded by the Archaeological Survey of India which was at that time celebrating 150 years of its foundation. Our project was a site-specific project undertaken at the Bangalore Fort. It evoked the “Tiger of Mysore” as Tipu Sultan, the eighteenth century ruler was called. The tiger was a symbol adopted by Tipu. His throne, his armour, his weapons, the uniform of his soldiers, coins and flags were all embellished with the tiger motif. Deeply interested in science and technology, Tipu is known to have used iron-cased rockets in his wars against the British. During his reign he is known to have sent ambassadors to the court of Louis XVI and diplomatic missions to the Ottoman Empire and the Sultanate of Oman. Tipu was known to have allied with the French against the British and also against surrounding powers. Not only was his army trained by the French, he had in 1797 participated in a Jacobin Club headed by Francois Ripaud. The Club had declared him to be “Citizen Tipoo” and the members had sworn “hatred to all Kings, except Tippoo Sultaun, the Victorious, the Ally of the French Republic” and pledged “War against all Tyrants, and love towards your Country and that of Citizen Tippoo.” After his death in the Fourth Anglo Mysore War, the British found a mechanical toy that was made for Tipu – a painted wooden tiger in the act of mauling a British soldier. Bellows attached inside, makes the tiger growl while the soldier gives out a helpless mewl. This toy also hides a small pipe organ inside it. It has been on display at the Victoria Albert Museum, London since 1880.

Today Tipu is evoked politically in several contexts – from the naming of Bangalore’s airport as the Tipu Sultan International Airport in 2012 – a claim put forth by the Tipu Sultan United Front which was ignored, to the naming of a new university after Tipu in 2013. The Tiger of Mysore who ruled from 1782 to 1799 is all but forgotten. A legend in his times, Tipu was feared as much as he was admired. Not surprisingly, a cluster of myths grew around him. And yet we found that most visitors to Bangalore Fort would hardly pause to reflect on one of the sites of Tipu’s resistance, because the Fort fell to British forces in 1791 and shortly afterwards, Tipu lost the 3rd Anglo-Mysore War in 1792. Tipu signed the Treaty of Sringapatnam, under which he ceded territory while two of his young sons were taken hostage by Cornwallis.

There is very little at Bangalore Fort today to remind visitors of the battle that was fought there. There is a marble plaque that commemorates the British Assault that was delivered on March 21, 1791. Indeed, the fall of the Fort was only one among a series of events that ended the Third Anglo-Mysore War. Our project wanted to explore what Tipu meant to the people who lived near the Fort. Was he a hero? Or was he forgotten by and large – invoked only by politicians and special interest groups? Our project attempted to map legends and historical events onto the contemporary heritage site of the Bangalore Fort and understand their relationship to each other. In India, heritage sites are preserved by the ASI but rarely does the ASI attempt to bring the heritage sites alive through historical narratives. Our attempt was to restore human history to a heritage site so visitors could relate to the place differently. But in order to do this we needed to understand the different ways that local history intermingled with the legends that circulated. Students undertook archival research and read secondary material in order to build their understanding of the area. They also tried to explore through oral history interviews how the stories of local communities could be used to revive interest in an archaeological site. However, as we shall see, unexpected outcomes made us rethink the relationship between ordinary lives and a heroic one through different modes of orality that the project took on.

In its final iteration – our project deployed three modes of orality: a guided walk by students, a audio-visual shadow puppetry inside the Fort and an audioscape of oral history interviews with some of the local residents played at the Guard Room of the Fort. The intended audience for each of these oral interventions

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1 I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Aliyeh Rizvi who conceptualized and headed this project with great enthusiasm during her brief period at the Centre for Public History. I also thank Meera Sankar and Nikita Jain without whom the Shadow Play would not have worked. I thank the students who worked tirelessly on the project. This project was made possible by a grant from the Archaeological Survey of India.
was imagined to be a mix of local residents of all age groups and school children, but we found each mode attracted a particular kind of audience.

Not far from the Fort is Tipu’s Summer Palace – the Raunaq-e-Jehan. Although connected by the same historical narrative, Tipu’s Palace and the Fort are now physically separated by a hospital that was built during the colonial period. Standing as it does in a busy market place, Bangalore Fort is a reminder of a past that sharply differs from the present. Focusing on the eighteenth century, the architecture and iconography of the Fort and the military history of the battles fought at this site, the students engaged with the social meanings of legends and stories, in order to experiment with how to make historical narratives compelling enough so that our Public History intervention could present multiple narratives that presented the complexities of the eighteenth century and the significance the events of the past might have for the present.

**COURSE DESIGN AND PUBLIC HISTORY PEDAGOGY**

The course was created for undergraduate students of Design who did not have a background in history. Conceptualized by Aliyeh Rizvi and Indira Chowdhury the project began with popular history by going on a walk with Arun Pai of Bangalore Walks. Pai walked them in and around the City Market area telling them stories about the British attack on Tipu’s Fort in 1791. This was followed by a period of reading of critical texts on the period of Tipu Sultan, followed by research at the State Archives and the Mythic Society Library, Bangalore. During this period, students were also introduced to Edward Said’s idea of “Orientalism” to deepen their understanding of how historical events were represented within colonial and imperial ideology. This served to demonstrate the links between Tipu Sultan the French Revolution and the American Revolution on the one hand and to clarify the reasons why Tipu was demonized in popular discourses of eighteenth and nineteenth-century empire. Students were also introduced to Tipu’s *Dream Diary* – a diary that was found after he was killed in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore war in 1799. Students began to comprehend different aspects of the complex eighteenth century which is now seen as exemplifying the Early Modern – this often called into question their own notions of modernity which until this point they had not seen as being related in any way to India’s colonial past.

With this background knowledge, students were asked to interview people who lived or worked in the Fort area about their understanding of their locality and also what the Fort and Tipu meant to them. To this end, students were trained in oral history methods. Their interviews threw up more complicated questions about not just the relationship between history and legend but about ways of viewing place – especially when many residents were not “native” to the area but had migrated from other places. What then was the sense of place that these interviews presented – was it just about the hustle of city life or about the remembered village? What were the ways in which people laid claim to history? Although students began their interviews with the idea to excavate legends about Tipu Sultan – their interviews yielded a plethora of local legends some connected and others unconnected to the legendary Tiger of Mysore. Oral history broadened the focus of the project and enhanced the interpretative scope of the project.

In the next phase of the project – students did group work - creating narratives for a Fort Walk that would present multiple dimensions of the life of Tipu Sultan.

Through this walk students would take their audiences beyond the four walls of the Fort – and present the terrain that Tipu roamed and the times to which he belonged. The Fort was just a location to rehearse the many dimensions of his life. But this part of the project actually threw up an interesting aspect of Public History: how do we communicate controversial elements? Most of our students were reluctant to discuss the cruel acts of this eighteenth century ruler – perhaps because most had grown up unconsciously absorbing the nationalist stories of the heroism of this ruler and how he had challenged the British. We overcame this reluctance by appealing not to their sense of the past but to their understanding of contemporary controversial political figures and inviting them to imagine how they would be represented three hundred years hence. It was the understanding of present-day politics in India that often plays with the credibility of its audiences and leaves numerous unanswered questions about the origins of communal
riots that actually enabled the students to think about how they would present the contentious and provocative aspects of a ruler they had been taught to admire. The students were trained to create a script of the docent walk through selections from their archival research by Rama Lakshmi – an oral historian and freelance museum consultant who herself was trained at the Smithsonian. This walk was very differently crafted from the guided tours that are officially offered as it spoke about the Fort architecture and the happenings at the Fort but also included other elements of Tipu’s story that were not about the Fort. They used dramatic language to invoke the dungeons in the Fort where Captain David Baird was imprisoned for 5 years from 1780 to 1785. Incidentally, Captain Baird as Major General had lead the siege of Srirangapatnam in 1799 in which Tipu was killed. Unfortunately, the Archaeological Survey no longer allows visitors to view the dungeons. But the dungeons remained part of the story as students walked groups of 10-15 people around the Fort.

If the Fort walk focused on Tipu and his times, the Shadow Puppet show focused on a specific event – the fall of the Fort in 1791. It is here that the students interpreted a larger dimension of local history which they had explored in their research. In their walks around the Fort they had come across the Dargah of Bahadur Khan – who was the Killedar [Keeper] of the Fort when it fell to the British. Bahadur Khan had died defending the Fort. Much admired for his bravery, as noted by contemporary British soldiers:

Wherever gallantry is recorded, Bahadur Khan, killedar of Bangalore, will hold a conspicuous place among the heroes of our times. True to his trust, he resigned it with life, after receiving almost as many wounds as were inflicted on Caesar in the Capitol.\(^2\)

After the battle, Cornwallis had wanted to return the body of Bahadur Khan to Tipu. Tipu is said to have responded to Cornwallis that a soldier must be buried at the spot he fell. Finally, the British had buried Bahadur Khan near where he died. At this spot stands the Dargah Hazrath Mir Bahadur Shah Al-Maroor Syed Pacha Shaheed – the students had visited this Dargah in the middle of the busy market place just off Avenue Road. The burial spot had over time become a Dargah – or a shrine – where people pray. Bahadur Khan had been transformed from soldier to saint. He was therefore an important part of their Shadow Play about the fall of the Fort in 1791. They worked on the script of the Shadow Play with Meera Sankar and with the design of Shadow puppets with Nikita Jain. Shadow puppetry is fairly common in South India.\(^3\) In Karnataka and in the adjacent state of Andhra Pradesh the Shadow puppets are made of translucent leather and painted with vegetable dyes. Guided by Nikita Jain the students used laser-cut cardboard with perforations that cast a filigree shadow on the screen. One of the concerns of the Centre for Public History by virtue of its location within a Design School has been to focus on “Designing for History”. In what ways can we present public history to a local audience? Using a form that was adapted from local practice was an appropriate form of representation.

Apart from the Shadow Puppets, students were asked to create a booklet about the project. They students worked with Sonalee Mandke, Faculty in Visual Communication Design on how to communicate the visual language of Tipu’s time. They also sketched at the Fort and at Lalbagh – the Garden Tipu and his father started – supervised by the artist Ramesh Kalkur. Apart from that they were also taken on a walk around the market area [the pete] by artist and curator Suresh Jayaram.

When students presented their work at the Fort – we had three specific outcomes: an audioscape of oral histories playing at the Guard room – soon after one entered the Fort, a curated story-telling walk around the Fort that included local legends and historical understanding of Tipu and his times leading to a small improvised theatre in an alcove of the Fort where a story about the siege of the Fort was enacted with Shadow Puppets. The entire show engaged three different forms of orality – oral history, story-telling and dramatic performance. Each of these forms of orality focused on different timeframes – the oral histories

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\(^2\) Roderick Mackenzie, *A Sketch of the War with Tipoo Sultaun or a Detail of Military Operations from the commencement of hostilities at the lines of Travancore in December 1789 until the Peace concluded before Seringapatam in February 1792*, Calcutta 1793.

focused on the relationship between past and present – often looking at the past within the present, the
docent walk focused on the past – but the present-day interpretation of the past and the Shadow Play drew
on historical material and re-enacted the past – the siege of the Fort within the Fort as it stands at
present. This constant interplay of past and present created the basis of our pedagogy.

The mixed pedagogy that combined archival research, oral history, visual communication, drama and
narratology pushed us to reflect on the nature of Public History and the designing of learning modules. We
realized quite early on in the project that public history pedagogy needed to engage with different forms of
communication in order to succeed. Making the “Tiger of Mysore” interesting to our audience and bringing
the Fort alive in the contemporary imagination required us to address several inter-linked areas: archival
research, oral history and visual communication design. I shall elaborate only on a specific aspect of the
pedagogy that focuses on oral history, public art and the sense of place. Oral History became for this
course more than a tool – it became a way of understanding what the Fort and Tipu Sultan meant for the
local residents.

HISTORY, ORAL HISTORY AND STORY-TELLING
Tipu’s summer palace and the Bangalore fort – both now part of a congested market-place at the heart of
the urban centre. We began with the question: what part do local histories play in defining collective
identity in an isolated urban environment? What is the context by which local communities engage with
their past and with the history of the place they now occupy? Since many of the local residents are
migrants – how do they relate to a place that has become part of their lives only recently? And how do
residents who have lived here for a longer period relate to the historical dimensions of the place? What are
their experiences of it? How can their memories and experiences be explored to create new, contemporary
relationships with heritage sites and build a sense of shared history? Most often archaeological sites are
perceived asremnants of a spectacular and significant past fosteringno connection with present-day
landscapes that hasbeen reshaped by the forces of history. Moreover,these sites are divorced from latter-
day human historyand as a result, there is very little understanding ofthe relationship between the
archaeological site andhuman habitation around it. The students of this projectattempted to understand
how legends survive migrationand other forms of socio-economic disruption. Drawingtogether different
sources and traditions of knowledge, the project attempted to use oral histories to interpretethe history of
the site and the meaning it still holds forthose who live in its vicinity.4

The oral histories told us more about the present and the ways in which people perceive the past. For
example: Sayed Ahjaz who lives in Chamrajpet [an area adjoining the Fort] and works at the Hazrath
Syedda Sydani BeebiAmmaji Rehmatlaale Dargah near the Fort, freely intermingled legend and history in
his interview with Anukriti Arora. Sayed Ahjaz’s interview demonstrates how earlier cycles of change are
perceived by those who witness change in their own times. Ahjaz spoke of the work on the Bangalore’s
Namma Metro which would change forever the landscape that was familiar to him.

SA : This dargah belongs to the time of Hazrat Tipu Sultan Rehmadlale. It is four hundred years old.
At that time it was a cemetery, and the area behind it belonged to Hazrat Tipu Sultan Rehmadlale.
There were farriers here and Tipu’s horses would get shod there.

The fort that he has in Bangalore is historical. Nobody can make another fort like that ever. Now,
the work of metro construction is going on there and when the metro is constructed then the fort
will not be visible any more and they will not be able to keep it open.

Ahjaz also recounted a miracle story about the building of the Fort he spoke about the mysterious saint
Tawakkal Mastan Aulia who would appear as a labourer during Hyder Ali’s [Tipu’s father] attempt to make
the original mud fort into a stone one. This story of Tawakkal Mastan – a local saint who came from Iran

4Compare for example, Isil Cerem Cenker and Lucienne Thys-Senocak, “Moving Beyond the Walls: The Oral History of the Ottoman
Fortress Villages of Seddulbahir and Kumkale” in Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, Public History and Public Memories, Philadelphia:
with his brother Tipu Mastan and Manek Mastan – was repeated by the Imtiaz Ahmed, the khidmatdar of the Tawakkal Mastan Dargah – not far from the Fort in his interview with Nikita Jain:

Imtiaz Ahmed: We are from Bangalore city. There is a place named Cotton Pete – this is a place where we live. It is in O.T.C [Old Taluk Catcherry] Road and here is the Dargah of the great Tawakkal Mastan Saharwardi Ahmedullale and here, I am his servant. When Astan-E- Hazrat Tawakkal Mastan Shah Saharwadi came here, he was working at the Fort of Tipu sultan which is near to the market, as a labourer. He used to just touch the stones from the huge blocks of rocks and that stones automatically used to sit onto the places where the stones were supposed to sit. He used to work like this and after work, like everyone used to go for wages but Baba never used to take his wages. He only used to take a bite of apple every time, eat it and then leave the place… Haidar Ali was very anxious to know that who is this personality, who never takes the wages; instead he just takes a bit of an apple and lives his life. What is this matter? Then he asks one of his soldiers to go and chase him.

As soon as the work got over, a soldier was asked to follow him. When it is iftari, meaning roza time, he takes a bite of an apple, eats it and then go and sits at that junction. There, his body breaks into three pieces. After seeing this, two of the men, who were asked to patrol Baba went back to Haidar Ali and informed that someone had murdered Mastan Baba. Haidar Ali showed sympathy. But in the next morning, again Mastan Baba came for work. Then Haidar Ali asked him, “Are you Allahwalli?” Then Mastan Baba replied that yeah, I m Allahwalli. From that way, everyone came to know that Mastan Baba is a aulia [a saint].”

Tawakkal Mastan’s dargah is not far from the Fort. Indeed, Tipu was said to be named after Tipu Mastan – the elder brother of Tawakkal Mastan whose Dargah is in Arcot. The stories about Tawakkal Mastan alerted us to the live connections that the Fort has to the surrounding area. A related legend is connected to the Karaga festival of the Thigala community that is celebrated every year. The Thigalas, a horticultural community was brought by Hyder Ali to Bangalore during the creation of Lal Bagh in Mysore and the Rose and Cypress garden in Bangalore by Hyder Ali and Tipu. The Karaga is a Hindu festival that always visits the Tawakkal Mastan Dargah to honour the relationship Tawakkal Mastan had to the Thigalas.

While such stories of shared appeal of a Sufi saint across communities are not uncommon in India, these oral histories alerted us to the importance of seeing the Fort as part of a larger landscape of shared stories. There are however, several controversies about Tipu’s religious policy: the ruthless massacre of Mangalorean Christians and his intolerance towards his British prisoners who were all converted, to mention only a few instances. But he was also perceived as a friend to several Hindu temples and mathas and several of his Ministers including his Dewan Krishnacharya Purnaiya, were Hindus.He also corresponded with the Shankaracharya of Sringeri Matha, sending the Matha cash and gifts when it was attacked by marauding horsemen in 1791. While such details did not surface in the oral history interviews, what did become clear was the reasoning interviewees drew on often came from very practical traditional knowledge. Alasingari Bhatta is the priest at the Kote Anjanaiya Swamy in Kalasipalyam – a temple across the Fort. Alasingari Bhatta has been the priest for several decades, old and weak in health he is no longer able to carry out his duties as before. While the priesthood is hereditary, globalization has placed new constraints – he cannot expect any immediate help from his son in carrying out his temple duties as his son is a temple priest in the USA. His interview with Spandana Sridhar demonstrate the ways in which local communities bring a specific understanding to a historical character who lived in a warrior society, very different from their own.

SS: Now this fort and palace was built by Hyder Ali right and existed during Tipu Sultan’s rule, he is a Muslim ruler right, why do you think he never harmed any of the temples that were so close to his fort and in fact within the fort itself?
AB: Now he was born in Devanahalli, in Devanahalli there were lots of Hindu Artisans, lots of his close advisors were Hindus. Also Tipu would travel a lot, he would stay at one place for more than a few days, so while traveling he would often take shelter in temples, all over Mysore and Bangalore. Also Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar built this temple and Hyder Ali later built this fort and the temple already existed.

Alsingari Bhatta, the priest at the local temple articulated his interpretation of religious tolerance in eighteenth century Bangalore by evoking the close bonds of community in the area where Tipu grew up [not far from the present airport in Bangalore], a place that the Hindu artisanal community shared with the Muslim families.

These narratives were included as audio excerpts that played in the Guardroom during the second iteration of the project on 22nd and 23rd December. Although it drew in a curious audience, most did not stay to engage with the recordings. This alerted us to the fact that we had inadvertently created two competing forms of orality – the shadow puppetry with its strong visual element which was about the heroic Tiger of Mysore and an audioscape about people whose everyday struggles made them no less heroic but whose stories were familiar to the audience who visited. The celebratory context invoked by the Shadow Play seemed to put constraints on a more complex and inclusive interpretation that could include these oral histories within the framework of local histories about the Fort area. Oral histories however, brought other challenges into the project.

**CHALLENGES OF ORAL HISTORY IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY**

One of the challenges we faced while getting students to interview members of the local community was that after their primary research, they perceived themselves as knowing more about Tipu and the Fort than their interviewees who were often of humble origin. Initially, the concept of a “shared authority” seemed difficult to include within the interpretative framework. However, students soon realized that the purpose of oral history was not to gather information but to engage with their interviewees in order to understand what the site and the events from two hundred years ago meant to the local community. Interactions with the local community were fraught with other difficulties: a) our students come from all over India and are not able to speak or understand the local language, Kannada; b) since the Fort area is mainly surrounded the city market, most interviewees would be busy with their shops and not find time for extended interview sessions; c) there were also class and community issues – most of our students belonged to the English-speaking upper classes and also to the Hindu community. Oral histories were conducted with people who spoke Hindi – the national language or with the help of translators.

Since the objectives of the project was to revitalize and reawaken an interest in this neglected heritage site, students had to consciously steer clear of nostalgia. Apart from that the students needed to find a language in which to represent the more controversial aspects of Tipu Sultan’s life – the forced conversion of Hindus and Christians to Islam and his generous donations to Hindu temples and monasteries. This problem of finding a language in which to talk about historical paradoxes was overcome through a comparison with present-day controversial figures and ways in which they might be represented in history written in the future. Addressing these tricky questions convinced us that Public History pedagogy has to address the “after-lives” of historical figures – that often appear like specters in the present. These specters need to be addressed, named and elucidated upon and not treated as academic problems that are confined to academic history. The Tiger, we concluded, had to be looked in the eye.

The most difficult moment in the project presented itself when students worked on the script of the Shadow Play. At first the students wanted to exercise creative choices when framing the story of the Fort. The narrative flowed seamlessly from the events during the siege of the Fort to Tipu’s *Dream Diary* – making it appear as if there was continuity between the events of 1791 and Tipu’s dreams. While this

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approach enhanced the dramatic elements, we decided that one of the purposes of a Public History project was to make the audience aware of different kinds of historical evidence. Tipu’s *Dream Diary* which was found by Colonel Kirkpatrick in his inner chambers at Srirangapatna after he fell in battle in 1799, recorded over 37 dreams in a period of 13 years (1785-1798). Originally written in Persian, the Diary was first translated into English in 1800. The dates in the diary are according to a new calendar the ‘Muwladi’ that was created by Tipu. Tipu’s original Dream Diary is now at the India Office Library in London. Tipu’s dream are varied – they are about battle strategies, about visitations by mystic saints and sometimes about miraculous events. But above all they seem record his preoccupation with the British who he regarded as his main adversaries. We found there was no justification for “fict ionalizing” the dreams and attributing a continuity between a historical resource and the event itself although there was much discussion about the creative licence that we could exercise in the dramatization of events.

It was decided to separate the dramatization of Tipu’s dreams from his *Dream Diary* from the narrative about the Fort. The two narratives spoke to each other but were not represented as seamlessly flowing into each other – the narratorial voice always distinguished between events at the Fort and Tipu’s dreams even as it speculated on what the dreams might mean. We concluded that though story-telling is an essential part of engaging audiences in Public History projects, it was important to find ways of focusing the audience on the processes of history-writing and the archival ingredients that enable the creation of historical narratives.

**PUBLIC HISTORY AND THE SENSE OF PLACE**

This exercise left us with several challenges: interpretative and presentational dilemmas that struggled to steer away from older narrative forms and traditional methodologies. We began with the Fort and Tipu’s times but soon found ourselves moving beyond the Fort into not only elements of local history but also into forms of local knowledge that attempted to explain human engagement with the Fort. It made us look at the deep relationship that exists in India between different forms of orality and how oral history itself is shaped by other oral narratives.

What are the effective ways in which history and archaeological sites be linked? What meanings do archaeological sites hold for the local population? How do we avoid romanticizing the past and place the legends that are repeated by the local community in perspective? Whose perspective do we adopt?

In a post-colonial context, the need to engage with the past with awareness of the interpretative models that have been used in the past is particularly important. Our project convinced us that in order to engage our audiences in new forms of historical understanding, we need to engage with the mundane, the exotic and the controversial. The Shadow Play that used puppets was a new form of historical engagement – which as we have shown threw up its own challenges. We were convinced therefore that The toolkit of the Public Historian needs to be equipped with a range of skills: from archival research to visual communication, craft history and art history. Public History, therefore, requires a pedagogy that is multi-faceted and an attitude that does not shy away from the controversial.


`Art and design for all`: Communist civil servants and museum service.

Linda Sandino (UK):

Resumen: Mientras que estuve entrevistando a un curador jefe jubilada del museo Victoria & Albert (V&A) de Londres, me sorprendió al descubrir que ella había estado viajando a Checoslovaquia y Polonia durante los años finales del 1940, países que estaban entonces detrás de la Cortina de Hierro. Esto me pareció muy curioso porque en aquel tiempo, el Museo estaba bajo la administración del Departamento de Educación y su personal eran, por lo tanto, funcionarios del gobierno. ¿Fue difícil viajar a estos países, le pregunté? ‘No’, respondió, ‘si usted fuese un comunista.’ Su respuesta me dejó pensando: ¿Cómo era posible que un funcionario del gobierno británico fuese un miembro del Partido Comunista de Gran Bretaña? Sin embargo, esta y otras entrevistas revelaron que esto no fue un estado incompatible, porque el trabajo en el museo les permitió a los funcionarios desarrollar su ética de servicio público.

Centrándose en el período 1947-1956, esta presentación explorará cómo las historias orales llevaron a descubrir los ideales comunistas en el Museo Victoria & Albert. Demostraré que el comunismo y el socialismo, combinado con una pasión para el arte, dirigieron la obra de los curadores, especialmente las mujeres, para desafiar las convenciones de su género y de su clase social. Se mostrará cómo sus valores democráticos dieron forma al departamento donde trabajaban y a las investigaciones curatoriales resolviendo la paradoja del funcionario comunista en el museo V&A.

Abstract: While interviewing a retired senior curator from the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, I was surprised to discover that she had been travelling to and making acquisitions in Czechoslovakia and Poland in the late 1940s, countries which were then firmly behind the Iron Curtain. This was especially curious because at the time, the Museum was administered by the Department of Education and its staff were, therefore, government civil servants. Was it difficult to travel to these countries, I asked her. ‘Not’, she replied, ‘if you were a Communist!’ How was it possible for a British government civil servant to be a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain? As this and other interviews revealed, this was not an incompatible state of affairs and indeed fed into an ethos of public service.

Focusing on the period 1947-1956, this presentation will explore how oral histories led to uncovering of the ideals of communist curators at the Victoria & Albert Museum. It will explore how communism and a passion for art enabled individuals, especially women, to challenge the conventions of their gender and class through their work at the Museum. It will show how their democratic values shaped their scholarly and curatorial concerns to resolve the paradox of the communist civil servant.
INTRODUCTION

In 2009 while I was interviewing a retired senior curator from the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, I was surprised to hear her talk about visiting Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland in the late 1940s, countries which were then firmly behind the Iron Curtain.

LS: Was it easy to go to places like this, to Hungary, to the Eastern bloc?
BM: Well, if you were a member of the Communist Party, yes!

I was completely astonished, not least because at the time, the Museum was administered by the Department of Education. How was it possible for a British government civil servant to be a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain [CPGB]? Was this revelation a secret, or was it common knowledge within the Museum? How could someone with these beliefs and values reconcile working in and for an institution devoted to the display and conservation of the decorative art of the elite? However, as this and other interviews revealed, this was not an incompatible state of affairs on an individual or public level.

Focusing on the period 1947-1956, this presentation will explore how oral histories led to my researching the history of communist curators at the Victoria & Albert Museum and their impact on the culture of the institution. It will explore how communism and a passion for art enabled individuals to challenge the conventions of their social class through their work at the Museum. It will show how the interviews revealed the left-wing, socialist values that shaped their scholarly and curatorial concerns to resolve the seeming paradox of the communist museum civil servant in post-war Britain and how that legacy informed another generation of curators. Moreover, it has been the oral history project that has enabled individuals to acknowledge the significance and contribution of their socialist values to the history of the Victoria and Albert Museum as they were now no longer bound by the Official Secrets Act to which civil servants had been subject, at the Museum, until 1984.

THE V&A CONTEXT: HIERARCHIES

The interviewee who revealed her CP membership was Barbara Morris (1918-2009) who had joined the V&A as Museum Assistant in 1947 in the aftermath of World War Two. She, alongside two other young women who like Barbara also happened to be art school graduates, joined the Circulation department (which I shall say more about later). Their role, described by the Keeper (head) of the department, Peter Floud, was ‘to tackle the immediate problem of sorting, classifying, remounting’ material that would be sent on loan exhibitions to art galleries, libraries, and art schools in the regions (Sandino, 2013). The mission of disseminating models and examples of ‘good design’ beyond the Museum walls had always been a part of the V&A’s mission since its inception in 1852, gaining momentum in 1909 when the Circulation department, known popularly as ‘Circ’, acquired its own collection of objects drawn mainly from the other materials-based departments (textiles, furniture and woodwork, metalwork, ceramics and glass, prints and drawings etc). Circ’s main function was to curate exhibitions that would tour to regional museums, galleries, libraries as well as organising displays of modern art and design work for the education and inspiration of art school students. (Floud c.1949; Burton 1999; Weddell, 2014).

Scandalously, the department was closed down in 1976 due to government cuts to the civil service, generating a great deal of protest in the press, and anguish amongst the department’s staff as revealed in the interviews. Rather than spreading the cuts across the Museum, the director Sir Roy Strong, thought he would be able to challenge the Labour government of the time by closing the most outward-facing, popular and populist department with the hope that it would exempt the V&A from the 11% cut (Strong, 1998). However, this plan backfired. One interviewee summed up the visceral quality of the cuts: ‘I know the arguments that Roy was faced with, and I don’t pretend to think it was easy. I mean it’s always a case of either chop off a whole limb or take a slice off everything.’ [JOpie Track 04, 2012] [emphasis added]. It wasn’t just the effect on staff, who as civil servants, would be relocated rather than made redundant, but as the curator went on to say: ‘At the time it felt really bad, and as I say, at the time we thought what’s the rest of the country going to say? It’s the Museum slamming doors.’ A department that had been in service for 120 years could not be saved despite appeals to the Education Secretary (Shirley Williams) and the
Minister for the Arts [Lord Donaldson], and belated campaigns in the national and regional press. Describing a visit to the department by the Education Secretary, the curator recalled

I remember Shirley Williams coming and being shown all the wonderful work we’d done and she agreed it was all wonderful work and so on. Clearly she was going to say it was all down to the Director and it was his call, but I remember we said, “But we’ve all got to be moved. We’ve got to be moved to departments we know nothing about, and she looked at us all in amazement and said, “But that happens all the time.” And it’s true. It did and it does, but some of us were in tears over it that afternoon. (JOpie Track 04, 2012).

For Williams, the staff were civil servants whose duty lay in complying with government regulations and its plans; for the curators, however, their work was a vocation, not just a job, based on commitment to an ideal of public service. Another story clearly demonstrates how this was inculcated in new staff:

The first thing I do remember doing when I first got to Circ was I went with Hugh [Deputy Keeper] on a tour round the libraries in East London and beyond, out as far as Thanet, I think, on a day which it absolutely bucketed down all day, and because it was Hugh we were never going to do it in comfort. We were always getting on and off buses. Well, it’s not that buses are uncomfortable, but in the pouring rain it took forever [...] because we were about to tell them, the libraries, that we could no longer lend to them. Actually we charged almost nothing for those exhibitions and I think it simply wasn’t viable. I guess that Hugh felt he should go round and at least look concerned and show his face, and I was the new girl and it was good for me. (JOpie Track 04, 2012)

THE MYTH OF CIRC.

By the time I came to interview Barbara in 2009, Circ had acquired a considerable reputation, which the dramatic crisis of its closure had highlighted even more. Three other factors also fuelled its mythic reputation: firstly, the untimely death in 1960 of its charismatic Keeper Peter Floud (1947-60); secondly, his success in fostering the department’s scholarship of the decorative arts of the late nineteenth century, which alongside the acquisition of contemporary works, made Circ the one department that subsequently proved to have added invaluable works to the V&A’s collection. It was only until the mid-1970s that the other materials-based departments were persuaded, by the specific allocation of a part of the purchase grants, to acquire contemporary works; previously it had been ‘too soon to tell’ whether anything contemporary was of any lasting significance. The third element was the distinctively egalitarian and democratic atmosphere in Circ, a complete contrast to the deferential, class hierarchies prevalent in the rest of the Museum.

Circ was totally different from anywhere elsewhere. We all talked together which was rare. I found out in other departments if you were a Museum Assistant you didn’t talk to – well you could talk to Research Assistant just about but you didn’t talk to a Keeper; and if there was any point made, then the Research Assistant would approach the [Assistant] Keeper and the Keeper might approach the full Keeper, but you didn’t do that, and in Circ we did. It was always like that all the time. I found for my first year, we all gave Christmas presents to one another which nobody else had ever done. I once in my second year, probably when I was working on the 19th century Primary [galleries] went to a meeting in the Museum with Barbara Morris, and something was discussed at it and I said, I turned sideways quite innocently and said, “Barbara, I don’t think that’s what Hugh was thinking of for this particular thing.” And there was a hiss of an indrawn breath around the room. I had not only addressed a [Assistant] Keeper by her Christian name, but I’d talked about my Keeper in that way and it really didn’t happen in those days. Circ was terribly important in this way because as staff moved out, they spread the good news. [Coachworth Track 04, 2010]

Taking their ‘habits’ with them, Circ staff ‘changed the whole ethos of the Museum...and frankly by the time I left, you were talking to people’ [Coachworth Track 04, 2010] and even calling them by their first names!
The element that fostered Circ’s distinctive character and reputation as a collection’s department was its championing of the decorative arts of the Victorian and Edwardian era, culminating in an exhibition in 1952, that was considered ‘a quite daring excursion into territory from which the V&A usually recoiled’ (Burton, 1999: 206) because, of course, in the 1940s/50s these periods were too recent and for some too ugly. The Museum’s position was that ‘art of the past had to serve time in purgatory [...] before it became worthy of reception in the heaven of the V&A’ (Burton, 1999: 207). While one could see these as battles about taste, Circ’s interest in the late nineteenth century decorative arts was more than just an opportunity to bring to light and make a claim for an under-researched area of the applied arts, or the desire to throw down a perverse challenge. Although the 1952 exhibition provided Circ with the opportunity to establish its area of expertise and to demonstrate that its curatorial diligence and scholarship was as good as that of the other departments, it was also, I will now argue, a field that enabled the predominantly left-wing, socialist and communist members of Circ to resolve the paradox of their political allegiance with their role as government civil servants.

EQUALITY AND BROTHERHOOD

With hindsight it may now not seem surprising that the department pioneered research on the 19C arts and crafts designer and social reformer, William Morris (1834-1896). Morris and his company Morris and Co had a close involvement with the Museum dating to 1865 when his company was commissioned to decorate the West Dining Room. Then in 1884 he was appointed to the Museum’s Committee for Art Referees, which advised on acquisitions. He was not therefore any kind of ‘outsider’. However, in the same year as his appointment to the committee, Morris with the support of Frederick Engels, set up the Socialist League, whose manifesto echoed the collaborative values and goals that I was to hear repeated in various forms in several of the Circ interviews. The manifesto called for the dissolution of the boundaries of class, nationality and sex, and,

that there shall be no distinctions of rank or dignity amongst us to give opportunities for the selfish ambition of leadership, which has so often injured the cause of the workers. We are working for equality and brotherhood for all the world, and it is only through equality and brotherhood that we can make our work effective. (original emphasis) (Morris, 1885).

Despite the failures of the Socialist League and the high costs of Morris’ products, the appeal of his idealism, his dedication to a cause and anti-capitalism cannot be underestimated. By the 1950s his ideas found an echo amongst British socialists who reacted to the increasing rise of mass-consumption and the advance of American cultural imperialism (Callaghan, 2004: 87) Influencing scholars such as the historian E P Thompson and the cultural theorist Raymond Williams.

In several ways, the paradox of Morris’s position has parallels with that of Circ communists and there is no question that he functioned as an inspiration and role model. In a letter of 1955, Floud had written:

I am naturally a sceptical person and very averse from hero worship, and yet I can truthfully say that Morris’s writings, and even more his life, are a direct inspiration to me in a sense that no other are. (quoted in WMS Annual Report, 1961)

Floud in his turn was also an inspiration, seen by many as the great director that the museum never had (Burton, 1999) though for some he was also the ‘one of the most hated figures in the Museum’, an empire-builder and communist (Barkley, 2009 Track 04). In contrast Floud’s memory and reputation lingered influencing the character of Circ even after his death. In 1968, Geoffrey Opie who went on to become Keeper of Education, recalled:

We all, I think, aspired to the character of the first, not first Keeper of Circulation, the first goes way back into the 19th century, but the most charismatic and most important Keeper of Circulation department in the post-war period [who] was Peter Floud. He was a renowned socialist, even a
Floud was educated at an English private school (Gresham’s) coincidentally at the same time as the composer Benjamin Britten and the spy Donald McLean. He was the son of the diplomat Sir Francis Floud, who had been British High Commissioner to Canada (1934-38). Before joining the V&A in 1936, Floud had been at Wadham College, Oxford, during a period of widespread economic depression that, together with the rise of fascism, drove many upper and middle-class undergraduates to embrace the ideals of communism (Deakin, 2012). Although it is not clear when Floud joined the Party, (memberships lists were returned to the Comintern in Moscow) Barbara Morris’ recording provides us with a insightful account of her political engagement as a young ‘rebel’, as she referred to herself, and how this commitment was realised in her museum work.

As a student at the Slade School of Fine Art at University College London (UCL), Barbara joined the UCL Socialist Club and it was, incongruously perhaps, at a Slade Ball that she met her first husband Max Morris who was at the time Secretary of the Communist Teachers Bureau, later going on to become President of the National Union of Teachers in 1966. As Barbara pointed out in her interview, CP membership was not unusual in the 1930s (1937): ‘You were either a Communist or a Fascist’ (Track 02). ¹ Barbara had gone to the Slade against the wishes of her father and of her headmistress who thought that going to art school was ‘a waste of a brain’, but as Barbara said, ‘I’d always been a bit of rebel’. Going to art school, marrying a Jew and joining the Party enabled her to steer her life and identity in its new direction. As the historian Raphael Samuel wrote in his noted memoir, The Lost World of British Communism (1985), to be a Communist was ‘to have a complete social identity, one which transcended the limits of class, gender and nationality’.

As a philosophy of life, it subordinated the self to the service of a higher cause [...] Armed with a knowledge of the laws of social development, Communists were thus uniquely qualified to act as teachers and guides. In a favourite conceit of the time, they were ‘conscious agents’ of the emancipatory process, ‘conscious shapers’ of history, ‘conscious protagonists’ of the struggle that extends throughout society. (Samuel, 1985:11).

Nevertheless, I don’t want to over-emphasise the uniqueness of Party membership at this time when several public figures were members and party membership was strong: In September 1939 it had 20,000 members; by March 1945 this had risen to 45,435, although in 1942 the figure had reached 56,000.² Moreover the 1945 victory of the Labour Party and its creation of the welfare state seemed to foster an atmosphere in which, as the historian David Kynaston has suggested, ‘there was a chance of reasonable equality’ (Kynaston, 2008: 145). However, this doesn’t explain the appeal of Communism for Floud, Morris and the other members in the department, Shirley Bury and Natalie Rothstein, the latter the daughter of the Communist historian Andrew Rothstein.³ What did it provide that membership of the Labour Party did not? Although this is not the place to examine the troubled relations between the CPGB and the Labour Party, the William Morris ‘model’ of activist engagement in the reform of everyday life, its objects, and work relations provided a practical example for reconciling art and work. But what this doesn’t explain is how it was possible to be a Party member and civil servant.

¹ Her second husband, Dave Bowman, was also a CPGB member, becoming leader of the National Union of Railwaymen (1974-77).
² For example, Sir Stafford Cripps, whose aunt was the social reformer Beatrice Webb, held several senior posts in the post-war Attlee government, as well as having been British ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1940-42; Minister for Education Ellen Wilkinson (1945-47) had been a founder member of the CPGB. Membership figures are from Lawrence Parker, ‘Official’ CPGB History: Scotching the Myth’, http://www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/944/official-cpgb-history-scotching-the-myths, Accessed April, 2013.
³ The other known members were Shirley Bury (1925-99), who went on to become Keeper of Metalwork in 1982; Natalie Rothstein (1930-2010), the daughter of the Communist and historian Andrew Rothstein, she became Deputy Keeper of Textiles until 1989.; Ann George, former Secretary to the Minister for Education.
In the post-war period, there was increasing concern in some government circles about whether radical political convictions amongst civil servants were a private matter or not. Was Party membership a form of treason and disloyalty to the state, or was it, as Samuel above proposed, a ‘philosophy of life’? Refusing to be drawn into a witch hunt, in Britain the Lord Chancellor declared that the government’s position had to be more nuanced; in ‘trying to deal with this evil’ he stated, ‘we must not fall into the error of adopting methods from totalitarian states... the prevention of free expression [will] not eradicate the menace’ (The Times, 1950). Rather than being dismissed from their posts, civil servants who were suspected of extreme political convictions, were simply moved from posts where they might have access to sensitive information. The Department of Education, which administered the V&A, was seen to provide suitable alternative areas of employment and communists from other government offices were transferred to Circ (Sandino, 2013). It says much about how museums and art were viewed by the British establishment, that the V&A was considered a harmless place for communist civil servants to go about their business. This brings me back to my initial discovery that Barbara Morris had travelled to Eastern Europe in the late 1940s, and my research in the acquisition and financial records revealed that Peter Floud had also visited Czechoslovakia in 1949 subsequently on his return placing an order for Cezch textiles.

**FELLOW TRAVELLERS**
The discovery of Barbara’s CP membership came about indirectly while she was describing research visits to Scandinavia in preparation for one of the department’s most successful exhibitions, ‘Finlandia’ (1961). On asking her which of the many museums she’d visited in her career she found most inspiring, or had learnt the most from, she cited the Scandinavian museums ‘because of their simple methods of display’ then going on to say,

> And I always remember being – I mean this was a **personal visit nothing to do with the Museum** but I was rather impressed by the museums in Hungary, because I was invited to Hungary together with my first husband who was a historian, and he was invited to lecture of Lajos Koshuth, the Hungarian revolutionary leader who spent sometime in England and he was invited to give this lecture and they invited me too so I took the opportunity to study Hungarian museums while I was there. I meant that was purely private enterprise. It was in 1948-49 and I did write an article for UNESCO magazine on Hungarian museums. [Morris Track 13, 2009] (emphasis added)

Barbara was keen to emphasise that her visits had been ‘personal’, ‘nothing to do with the Museum’, ‘it was purely private enterprise’; but this slightly contradicts the fact of her having subsequently written an article for UNESCO which would have had to have her Keeper’s permission; all civil servants had to clear any publications with their heads of department (Chapman 2004: 211). It wasn’t too surprising therefore that in my subsequent research in the Museum’s archives, I discovered that these trips were officially sanctioned, even containing Barbara’s ‘Report on Visit to Polish Museums, August 1949’.

As a civil servant, the procedure was that she would have had to request permission from her Keeper and this is documented in the memos that confirm Floud’s support as well as that of the Museum’s Director, Sir Leigh Ashton. Leigh Ashton’s response to such trips can be gleaned in a memo about travelling expenses to the Secretary to the Minister of Education in which Ashton noted that, ‘Mrs Morris has not yet returned from her trip behind the Iron Curtain’, but was reassured by the reply that ‘the Secretary [of the Ministry] on general grounds, was very much inclined to favour visits of this sort to countries in Eastern Europe’ (PER 8/38/12). Why did Barbara downplay the significance of her membership? At the time of the interview, I assumed that this was an awkward part of her past since she went on to qualify her political identity as a CPGB member. When did her membership stop, I asked her?

> Well, I suppose it began with the disillusionment at the time of the invasion of Hungary, you know, the Soviet invasion in 1956. And now, I mean I can’t see much difference between any of the political parties. I wasn’t ever really what I call a political animal. It wasn’t – I suspect it was partly through being a rebel and the fact that both my husbands were [Communists] you know and that
just sort of – although I was my own personality. And I suppose also being very interested in [William] Morris, you know, who was an early Communist and socialist, and I say what I always have been is what I call, well no proper category, I’m really a sort of Morrisian, you know, idealist rather than a practical – it was more a sort of romantic view of socialism rather than a hard political feeling (Morris, 2009, Track 13)

Although it’s not surprising that Barbara along with thousands of other communists saw 1956 as the turning point, in this extract the figure of William Morris [no relation to Barbara though she loved sharing the name] functions to represent an impractical, romantic ideal, rather than a political icon.

CONCLUSION: ART AND DESIGN FOR ALL.
In a lecture delivered to the William Morris Society (1959), of which Floud was an active committee member, the radical historian E P Thompson ended by praising Morris’ work which ‘sought to body forth a vision of the actual social and personal relations, the values and attitudes consonant with a Society of Equals, (p. 10), working for ‘practical revolution’ (p.2). This resonates with interviewees’ accounts of the egalitarian character of Circ, but also with the ‘practical’ means of disseminating design education via exhibitions of useful, everyday objects [e.g. biscuit tins, radios, Christmas cards, packaging, advertising posters].

Those first years in Circulation were brilliant. I couldn’t believe my luck. I felt I had landed – I was going to say I felt I’d landed in heaven but that sounds silly – but in terms of my interests and what I believed in doing where the arts were concerned, we did it and we did it right and as best as we could. We all did really believe about spreading the good news about design, architecture, historical information... (Coachworth Track 03, 2012).

Floud and the staff of Circ ensured that the original mission of the V&A to disseminate the ethical values and principles inherent in good design were maintained. As Barbara reiterated, Floud ‘instilled [in us] that our job was to serve the public...that’s what museums were for: to inform, educate, and generally improve public taste’ (BM 07): ‘We were there to help and educate the public’ rather than pursuing our own interests for the sake of it’ (BM 03, 2009). Commitment to socialist values continued right up to the closure of Circ as the interview extracts above reveal. Although research on William Morris’ designs continued, it is significant that Scandinavian design became the focus of another curator (Jennifer) whose parents had been in the same Hampstead cell as one of the Circ curators. Scandinavian design appealed, she stated, because it emerged as part of a ‘social movement’.

I would like to end with an extract from Barbara’s recording responding to the question about why people study the applied arts, as it goes some way to explaining the paradox of the left-wing civil servant and how the V&A provided a space, both literal and conceptual for a practical resolution of the conflict between ideals and politics in which the museum as an engine for social change could be realised:

People can relate to objects because everybody has to use – all your life you use china, you use cutlery, you use glass. Whereas, I mean, pictures, not every home has pictures, and most people have probably inherited things. I’m not talking about stately homes, but even the average middle-class home has inherited some things, you know, belonging to their grandparents or forefathers. And I think people generally are aware of their immediate surroundings. And people have got different tastes but I think the majority of people like to have what they consider nice beautiful things around them. I wouldn’t say everybody paid tribute to [William] Morris’s dictum to have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or to be beautiful, but I think that the reason, that in a way it’s easier to relate to than painting’. (BM 14, 2009).

As Thompson noted of William Morris, Circ was ‘revolutionary without a revolution’ (Thompson, 1959).
INTERVIEWS
The V&A Oral History project is jointly funded by the Victoria and Albert Museum and the University of the Arts London, as well as support from the University of the West of England. The recordings will be made available through the V&A Archive.

Barbara Morris, interviewed by Dr Linda Sandino, 26 January, 16 February, 4 March, 2009.
Geoffrey Opie, interviewed by Anthony Burton, 1 April, 2011.
Jennifer Opie, interviewed by Dr Linda Sandino, 27 February, 2012.

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Those first years in Circulation were brilliant. I couldn’t believe my luck. I felt I had landed – I was going to say I felt I’d landed in heaven but that sounds silly – but in terms of my interests and what I believed in doing were the arts were concerned, we did it and we did it right and as best as we could. We all did really believe about spreading the good news about design, architecture, historical information, and suddenly this was just going. [DC 00: 13.24]