

Re-exhibiting the museum:  
new perspectives on nineteenth-century exhibition,  
collection, and display

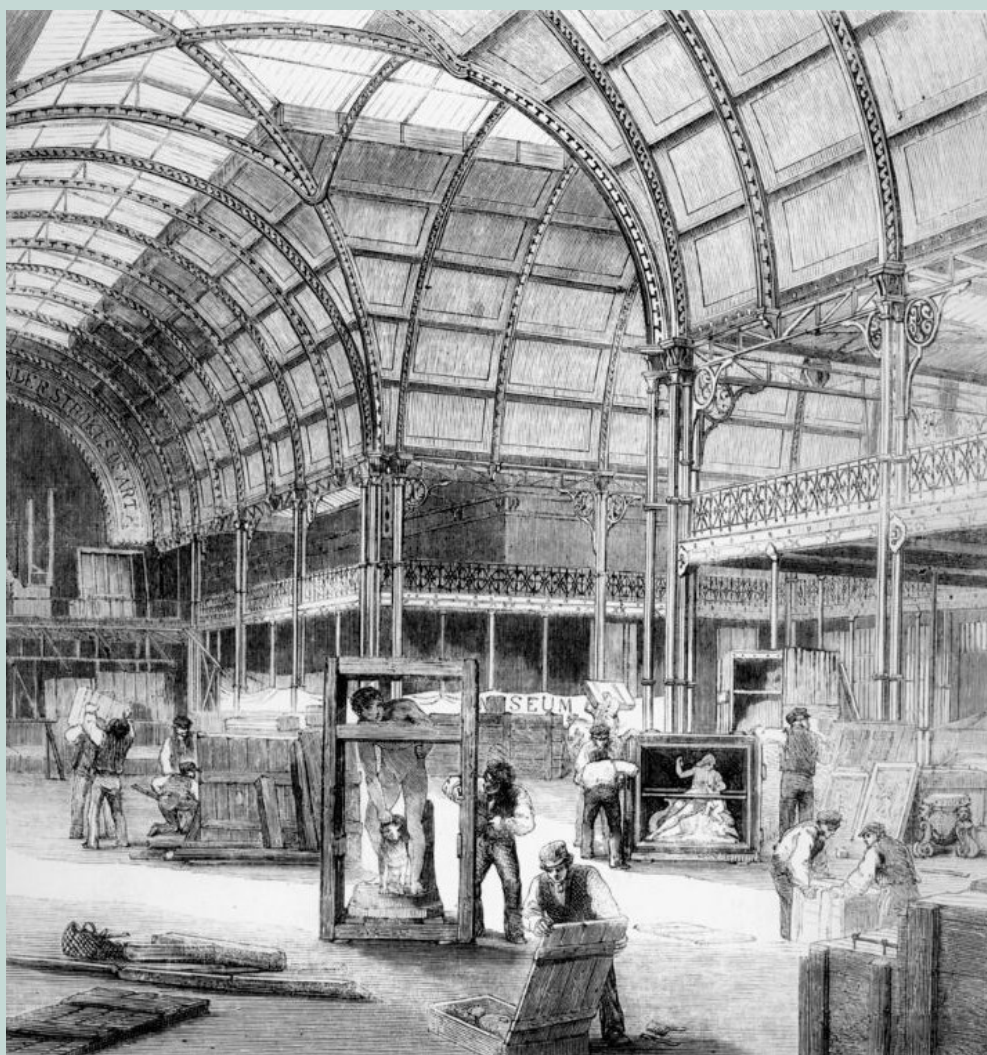
***Conference pack***

Wednesday 12 November 2025

Library of Birmingham, Centenary Square, Birmingham B1 2ND

9:30am-8pm

Venue: LOB101



Unpacking artworks for the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, 1857 (Manchester Archives)

## **Opening remarks**

**Mary Clayton-Kastenholz**, PhD candidate, Warburg Institute and Victoria and Albert Museum

### **Thinking beyond South Kensington**

Mary Clayton-Kastenholz is a part-time CDP student with the V&A and the Warburg Institute. Her PhD project is a reassessment of the South Kensington Museum, looking at that institution holistically rather than as the predecessor of the 20th century V&A and Science Museums. In the other half of her week, she is the Assistant Rare Books Librarian at Lambeth Palace Library.

## **Panel 1 – Regional museums**

**Frances Potts**, PhD candidate, University of Nottingham

### **“Wiping out a little disgrace”: the origins and early history of Nottingham Castle Museum**

In 1872, Nottingham Town Council opened the Midlands Counties Art Exhibition, a temporary exhibition held in Nottingham’s Exchange building and in conjunction with the South Kensington Museum. This exhibition was such a success that it led to the establishment of a permanent museum in 1878: Nottingham Castle Museum.

As a collaboration between the Nottingham Town Council and the South Kensington Museum, Nottingham Castle Museum was the product of both local and national influences. But while many museums are based around a nucleus collection, Nottingham Castle Museum was established without a permanent collection. The opening exhibition in 1878 consisted entirely of loaned collections from both the South Kensington Museum and Nottingham, exhibited under the auspices of the first curator, George Harry Wallis. Wallis was in post for 50 years and so he greatly influenced the formation of the permanent collections.

This paper will explore the origins and early history of Nottingham Castle Museum, looking at the interactions between Nottingham and London, the reasons for establishing the museum, and how the early history has impacted on the present-day museum.

**Speaker biography:** Frances Potts is a final year PhD student at the University of Nottingham working on a Collaborative Doctoral Award with Nottingham City Museums and Galleries. Her thesis is examining the origins and early history of Nottingham Castle Museum and how this history can be used to decolonise the collections. Before

undertaking this PhD, she worked in collections management at the Science Museum and the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese archaeology.



**Dr Anna Reeve**, Research Fellow, Institute of Classical Studies, University of London

### **‘The nucleus of a museum’: the short-lived Leeds Free Public Museum**

Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many museums belonging to Philosophical and Literary Societies were transferred to public ownership, developing into civic museums. The story in Leeds was rather different, with the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society (which continues today) remaining vigorously committed to retaining and running its own museum well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was transferred to Council ownership only in 1921.

Before this late transfer, the question of whether there should be a public museum in Leeds, in addition to that of the LP&LS, was aired periodically in public debate, and in 1882 the Council purchased a collection of antiquities as the ‘nucleus’ of a public museum. Praised by the *Leeds Mercury* as a ‘step which compels of necessity a further advance’, the purchase of a founding collection for a projected Leeds Free Public Museum in fact proved a misstep. This short-lived enterprise, beset by shortfalls in resources, expertise, and goodwill, allows insight into the factors underpinning municipal museum development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It demonstrates that the cultural and financial capital, as well as the energy and enthusiasm, of the middle classes who supported the museums of learned societies was essential for their flourishing when transferred to the public sector, and that the multiple priorities and limited resources of city councils made them a poor substitute. It also provides insight into contesting contemporary views on what a museum was for, how it could create benefit, and for whom; different opinions which were reflected in changing approaches to the display and interpretation of the collection. By providing a counter-example to the broad narrative of steady museum growth over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this paper offers a new angle on the development of municipal museums.

**Speaker biography:** Dr Anna Reeve is a material culture historian whose research interests focus on the excavation and collection of Cypriot antiquities and their reception in the UK, especially in museums. Her doctoral thesis explored the ancient Cypriot collection at Leeds Museums and Galleries, and its histories of excavation, collection and display. She has recently co-edited (with Dr Thomas Kiely and Dr Lindy Crewe) *Empire and excavation. Critical perspectives on archaeology in British-period Cyprus*,

*1878–1960* (Sidestone Press, 2025). She is Co-Chair of the Classical Collections Network, which supports the study and use of Classical collections in UK museums.



**Dr Maialen Maugars**, University of Warwick

**‘A treasure house of examples for reference and instruction’: innovation, progression, and accessibility at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery**

The Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) opened in 1885 with the aim of educating, inspiring, and refining the taste of the city’s artisans, artists, and manufacturers. This paper will examine BMAG’s admission policy, and the curatorial choices made by Whitworth Wallis (1855-1927), its first director, and argue that it was one of the most accessible museums in late nineteenth-century Britain. In doing so, it will challenge the dominance of London-based institutions in the literature on Victorian museums and assert regional and municipal museums’ innovative and progressive identity.

While it is widely recognised that the purpose of industrial art collections was to educate workers, their impact on artistic training and industrial design is rarely examined. Archival research has revealed that BMAG was well received by the public and critics, who praised its collections, displays and cheap handbooks. Close study of BMAG’s relationship with Birmingham’s Municipal School of Art also demonstrates that collections were regularly used for teaching purposes, and informed students’ productions. By investigating how collections inspired local artists and designers, this paper offers a new perspective on the reception of BMAG and highlights its impact on artistic and industrial production in late nineteenth-century Birmingham.

**Speaker biography:** Dr Maialen Maugars recently completed her Collaborative Doctoral Award which was the result of a partnership between the University of Warwick and Birmingham Museums Trust. Her thesis focused on the acquisition, provenance, display and reception of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery’s collection of Renaissance Italian decorative art. Prior to her PhD, Maialen worked in the Impressionist and Modern Art department at Christie’s London.

## **Panel 2 – Colonial museums**

**Anaïs Walsdorf**, PhD candidate, University of Warwick and Science Museum

**James Kiernan**, PhD candidate, University of Edinburgh and Victoria and Albert Museum

### **Palaces of Science, Tools of Empire: the Geological Museum in Britain and Beyond**

Established in 1835, the Museum of Practical Geology (MPG) marked a turning point in the history of British museums: the first state-funded museum devoted entirely to a scientific discipline, and a prototype for how science museums would operate as instruments of knowledge and empire across Britain's expanding global network. Built to hold and display the collections of the British Geological Survey, the MPG quickly became a museological prototype. From the foundation of the British Geological Survey in 1835 under Henry De La Beche to the death of its next Director-General Roderick Murchison in 1871, more than forty colonial geological surveys were sponsored by the British imperial government. Museums modelled on the MPG were established alongside these surveys. First, it was replicated in Scotland and Ireland, and in 1839 the East India Company sent directors to study it as a template for a geological museum in India. Letters to the museum's founding director, Henry De la Beche, describe this Indian counterpart as 'the child of your Museum,' underscoring the circulation of not just objects and staff, but museological epistemologies. In 1870, Head of the Geological Survey of New Zealand James Hector argued that 'one of the most important duties in connection with the geological survey of a new country is the formation of a scientific museum' in part to '[acquire] knowledge of the resources of the Colony'. By tracing this trajectory, from improvised beginnings to imperial export, this paper situates the MPG as a foundational, yet historiographically overlooked, node in the global infrastructure of nineteenth-century museological frameworks. It was not merely a space for education, but a technology of the state, one that naturalised resource control, colonial governance, and national progress as scientific inevitabilities. Finally, this paper aims to contextualise these histories in the present day: these very same museums have now developed into the national museums of countries such as Canada and New Zealand– how might exploring their histories help situate the role of colonial sciences in histories of museums and collecting?

#### **Speaker biographies:**

Anaïs Walsdorf is a AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Partnership PhD researcher between the History department at University of Warwick and the Science Museum in



London. Her thesis, *Metallic Empire: Science, Energy, and Industrial Imperialism in the John Percy Collection, 1817-89*, focuses on the metallurgical collection of John Percy, and explores histories of colonial extraction, collecting, metallurgy, and 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial imperialism. Prior to beginning her PhD, Anaïs worked as a museum, library, and archive professional with institutions such as the 1947 Partition Archive, Wellcome Collection and Library, the Migration Museum, and the International Coalition Sites of Conscience (ICSC).

James Kiernan is a CDP PhD candidate in History of Art at the University of Edinburgh and the Victoria and Albert Museum. His research examines the Museum of Practical Geology's nineteenth-century ceramic and glass collections in relation to colonial extractivism, scientific display, and museum epistemologies. He is particularly interested in the intersections of material culture, geological science, and imperial infrastructures of classification.



**Amalia Wickstead**, PhD candidate, UCL and Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

### **Casting the Empire: Plaster copies of classical sculpture and colonial complicity**

As they've ridden the tidal wave of changing tastes to the back of the museum storeroom, plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculpture have avoided some of the postcolonial scrutiny afforded to other objects in modern collections. Their presence there, especially in collections created for colonial museums across the British Empire, is the result of complex sets of colonial contexts. These contexts, involving legislation, pedagogy, and 19<sup>th</sup>-century ideologies of whiteness, masculinity, and cultural superiority, had dire effects colonised soil the Empire over.

Within the authority of the early-colonial museum, the casts perpetuated a myth of unbroken classical inheritance which legitimised British colonial authority, and British presence outside of Britain. Using the collection in the Auckland Institute and Museum, Aotearoa New Zealand as a case study, this paper traces the material and ideological consequences of casts on indigenous art, education, and identity formation. It argues that re-examining casts as colonial objects, rather than inert replicas, opens space for decolonial interpretation and reveals the quiet bid for power at play on the floor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century museum where these objects once stood in pride of place.

**Speaker biography:** Amalia is a PhD candidate at UCL, co-supervised by the Ashmolean Museum through the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme. Her research

seeks to reassess plaster casts of Greco-Roman sculpture within nineteenth-century collections to highlight their role as colonial tools for the British Empire.

### **Panel 3 – Spaces of display**

**Dr RJ Wade**, Associate Curator (Cultural Collections), University of Leeds

#### **The Yorkshire Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures, 1875**

In May 1874 the Committee of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution and Literary Society decided to hold a major exhibition of art and industry to liquidate the lingering debt associated with the construction of their new building. Led by the Mayor of Leeds, the exhibition was to have two departments: Arts and Manufactures and Fine Arts. Opened on 6 May 1875 by the Duke of Edinburgh under the patronage of Queen Victoria, the exhibition was staged at the eighteenth-century Coloured Cloth Hall. Occupying a central site of 1.5 acres, the exhibition was the most ambitious in scale and extent yet seen in Leeds and succeeded in its aim to clear the debt on the Institute. In this paper I argue that the Leeds Mechanics' Institution returned to—and extended—the model of the polytechnic exhibitions of the late 1830s and 1840s in an attempt to avoid a repeat of the financial failure of the National Exhibition of Works of Art at Leeds in 1868. I attribute its success to having secured visible royal patronage; articulated a clear aim to support the Mechanics' Institution; obtained the support of local social, political and economic elites and constructed a lineage back to the polytechnic exhibitions of the previous generation. Lastly, I argue that criticism of the exhibition in the metropolitan periodical press was based on its refusal to conform to developing ideas about 'correct' classification and arrangement and its appropriation of an 'ugly' Georgian commercial space. These tensions reveal broader cultural anxieties around exhibition practice, taste and provincial agency in the late Victorian period.

**Speaker biography:** I am Associate Curator: Cultural Collections at the University of Leeds and Deputy Editor of *Art History*, the journal of the Association for Art History. I have completed postdoctoral research fellowships with the Henry Moore Foundation and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and held curatorial, collections and research roles with University of Cambridge Museums, Leeds Museums and Galleries and Bradford District Museums and Galleries, in addition to teaching roles at the University of Leeds, Christie's Education and Imperial College London. I have published widely on nineteenth-century museum and exhibitionary cultures, art and design education and the production, circulation and display of teaching collections, including

two single-authored research monographs: Domenico Brucciani and the Formatori of Nineteenth-Century Britain (Bloomsbury, 2018) and An Exhibition History of Victorian Leeds (Liverpool University Press, 2023).



**Dr Susan Newell**, Honorary Associate of Oxford University Museum of Natural History

Oxford's first Professor of Geology gathered hundreds of exhibits for his lecture room-cum museum during the first half of the nineteenth century. Comprising geological specimens, casts, maps and artworks of different kinds, such objects were essential to supply proof of the, often startling, knowledge claims of this relatively recent branch of 'natural philosophy'. This paper will examine some of the people and materials that made this possible – Buckland relied on local, national, and international connections and numerous, mostly unidentified, artisans to collect, pack and transport his items. Often on the road himself, he also relied on his long-suffering wife, Mary Buckland nee Morland, to curate the museum in his absence. The paper will uncover some of the lesser-known aspects of Buckland's teaching museum, generally acknowledges as one of the highlights of Regency Oxford.

**Speaker biography:** I am an independent scholar and an Associate Researcher at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. My 2023 PhD on William Buckland's geological teaching collection at the museum resulted from a collaborative partnership between the University of Leeds and the museum's Earth Sciences Department. Prior to turning to history of science, I worked for three decades as a decorative arts specialist in museums and auction houses. I returned to academia in 2014 with a Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum MA in the History of Design. My dissertation addressed the ceramics collections of the Museum of Practical geology in London.



**Dr Katharine Ault**, independent researcher

**Misattribution matters: Giotto on display in Cheltenham and Manchester**

Lord Northwick's vast, publicly accessible art collection at Thirlestaine House in Cheltenham was, at mid-century, both larger and broader in scope than the National Gallery in London. This paper focuses on Northwick's acquisition of a large panel depicting *The Death of the Virgin*, now attributed to Bartolomeo Vivarini and dated 1484. Northwick's purchase of this painting as a Giotto in 1854 has led scholars to assume



that the elderly collector was ‘out of touch’. I argue instead that Northwick’s purchase resulted from his engagement with the latest trends in collecting and his awareness of mid-century debates relating to the display of western painting. This paper will offer, for the first time, a reconstruction of the Giotto Room at Thirlestaine House, which opened to the public in December 1855. Cheltenham emerges, through this analysis, as an important centre for the development of art historical understanding and display. Two years later, Northwick’s ‘Giotto’ was displayed at the Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester but it was a very different ‘Giotto’, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, now attributed to Lorenzo Monaco and dated 1407-9, which was prominently displayed to mark the beginning of the sequence of paintings at this exhibition. Through an analysis of *The Coronation of the Virgin*’s dialogic function in relation to other paintings on display and its symbolic use during Queen Victoria’s ceremonial visit, I argue that the ultimate aim of the exhibition was to raise Britain’s status as a world power by promoting Manchester as a worthy inheritor of Italian culture and a centre of a new Renaissance. Overall, my paper highlights the need to look at both misattributions and exhibitions outside London to understand the construction of the story of art and its function in building the modern British nation.

**Speaker biography:** Dr Katharine Ault has recently completed her doctorate with a thesis entitled ‘Giotto and Non-Giotto in Nineteenth-Century Britain’ (Open University). She holds a degree in Fine Art from Edinburgh University and Edinburgh College of Art and an MA in Art History (Open University). Her MA dissertation was shortlisted for the AAH prize in 2017. Her research on the fourteenth-century artist Cecco di Pietro is published in *The Burlington Magazine*. She has worked in the cultural sector (including Barbican Art Gallery and Royal Collections Trust) and is a practising artist, exhibiting in and around London.



**Carys Tyson-Taylor**, University of Leicester and National Museums NI

### **Re-imagining the Nation in the Open Air: Artur Hazelius’ Skansen and the Ethnographic Turn in Nineteenth-Century Museology**

Opened in 1891 in Stockholm, Hazelius’ Skansen – widely regarded as the world’s first open air folk museum – was founded with the aim of documenting ‘the different ways of the Swedish people, at a moment of profound social change, by detailed fieldwork in which material culture and oral traditions were given equal attention.’ Exploring themes of nineteenth-century spectatorship, ethnographical display, and architectural typology,

this paper argues that Skansen marked a paradigmatic shift in nineteenth-century museum practice. Skansen serves as an 'ambitious ethnographic project' which aimed to preserve and present Swedish rural life through relocated buildings, reconstructed interiors, and costumed performers; reimagining museum display beyond glass cabinets and gallery spaces and instead presented three-dimension tableaux which invited visitors to engage with recreated scenes of peasant life. As Mark Sandberg argues 'the folklife tableau was one of the defining features of 'visual modernity' in northern Europe during the latter half of the nineteenth century.' Recent scholarship has interpreted Hazelius' ethnographic project as both scholarly and emotive, blending rigorous ethnological collecting with the romantic nationalism of the period. My paper raises key questions on Skansen's meaning as a 'national museum', a notion made complex in the context of the Swedish-Norwegian union (1814-1905) and the broader concept of Scandinavianism. This paper questions what it might have meant to construct a Swedish national narrative during a period of shared governance and intertwined cultural and regional identities? What kind of 'nation' was Skansen representing– and for whom? Skansen's ethnographical model acted as a prototype for the development of open-air museums across Europe, inspiring museums such as Beamish, St Fagans, and the Ulster Folk Museum. In tracing Skansen's pioneering role, this paper reveals how Hazelius' nineteenth-century vision of ethnographic display redefined exhibition practices, establishing a model for open-air museums that shaped curatorial approaches throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continues to inform heritage interpretation in the present day.

**Speaker biography:** This paper is part of a wider CDP studentship with University of Leicester and National Museums NI titled 'A tragedy not to preserve now, while there is still time' – the establishment of a Folk Museum for Ulster, 1929-1964', which aims to produce a critical and nuanced analysis of the establishment and early development of the Ulster Folk Museum, exploring how an understanding of its history might contribute to shaping its future. My research examines the Folk Museum's founding ethos and the key motivators behind its conception – particularly in the context of the Reawakening project – as I explore how these learnings may support and inform the Folk Museum's current and future development. This paper allows me to contextualise the Ulster Folk Museum within the wider European folk museum movement and poses as an opportunity to analyse Skansen which is understood as the foundational prototype of the Ulster Folk Museum.

## Panel 4 – Collections and objects

**Lily Crowther**, PhD candidate, University of Oxford and Victoria and Albert Museum

### **The ‘art-workman’ as expert: curating decorative art in the West Midlands**

As art historian Claire Jones observes, the skilled working-class museum-goer is seldom considered in histories of craft or industrial production; yet museums were important to such audiences as ‘sites of discourse and the construction of professional identity’,<sup>1</sup> because their tacit knowledge enabled them to engage with the objects as specialists. This paper will explore how curators with a background in design and manufacturing were able to shape regional museum collections of decorative art to serve visitors who shared their own interests and experiences. It will focus on ceramic painter Louis Jahn (1839-1911), who became curator of Hanley Museum at the end of a long career in the Potteries, and his son Albert Jahn (1865-1947), a metalworker, painter and art educator who also served as curator of Wolverhampton Art Gallery during the 1890s. As Kate Hill has noted, the atomisation of local and regional museums and the restricted resources available to research their collections have led to a lack of understanding of their institutional history, by contrast with national or university museums.<sup>2</sup> This paper will illuminate the socio-political similarities between the Potteries and the Black Country which enabled skilled designers and craftsmen to take leading roles in their civic cultural institutions, and will suggest how further research might bring to light additional intra- and inter-regional links which could give new context to local collections.

**Speaker biography:** Lily Crowther is Curator (History) at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum, a Research Fellow on the Future Ecologies of Clay project at the University of Westminster, and a trustee of the Brooking Museum of Architectural Detail. She is also reading for a DPhil at the University of Oxford and the Victoria & Albert Museum, exploring the collections and legacies of the Museum of Construction & Building Materials in South Kensington.



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<sup>1</sup> Claire Jones, ‘The Nineteenth-Century Industrial Worker as Exhibition Visitor: Ways of Engaging with Making’, *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 15.2 (2022), pp. 167–80 (p. 169), doi:10.1080/17496772.2022.2093027.

<sup>2</sup> Kate Hill, ‘The “People’s Past”? - How the History of Social History in Museums Shapes Its Present’, *Social History in Museums* 46 (2022), 8.

**Henriette Marsden**, PhD candidate, University of Cambridge

### **Flourishes and Fragility – Venetian Glass in Berlin’s Kunstgewerbemuseum and the Crisis of Industrial Art Institutions, 1867-1921**

It took less than forty years for the museal opinion of the historicist glass vessels made by the Venetian manufacturer Salviati & Co. to shift from whole-hearted admiration to outright disgust (Ill. 1). Considered to be the perfect embodiment of a budding ‘modern’ style during the 1860s, the turn into the twentieth century saw many of Salviati’s neorenaissance glasses condemned to deaccession, devaluation and the depot. The position of Salviati’s glasses within Germany’s first industrial art museum, the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin, offers an important insight into the institutional anxieties surrounding the concept of stylistic ‘modernity’. Acting as tasteful representatives of the museum’s historicist goals during the Kunstgewerbemuseum’s foundation in 1867, their ‘modernity’ devolved alongside the museum’s social relevance in the second half of the nineteenth century. When the museum’s early exhibition strategies were met with public criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the works whose ‘modernity’ had most obviously embodied the institution’s original aims were seen as both mindlessly imitative and tastelessly cluttered. In following the trajectory of these glasses, this paper will trace how ‘modernity’s’ obsolescence affected the Kunstgewerbemuseum’s public authority around the turn of the century. Being ascribed to works when they were contemporary with the museum only to be retracted as the museum outgrew their relevance, the concept of ‘modernity’ reveals the fundamental transience of museal structures of valorisation. In particular, this paper will show how precariously the institutional capacity to identify ‘modern’ works was linked to the museum’s overall power as a producer of both history and taste. While the Kunstgewerbemuseum presented itself as a deeply stable institution that legitimised its educational authority through its ability to make objective statements about the state of ‘modernity’, the valorisation and de-valorisation of ‘modern’ pieces reveals how foundational its institutional fragility was.

**Speaker biography:** Henriette Marsden is a PhD student in History of Art at the University of Cambridge, where she is working on the social history of women’s recreational crafting in Victorian Britain. Generously, her PhD is fully funded through the Vice-Chancellor’s and Newnham College Scholarship, which is being provided by the Cambridge Trust. Previously, Henriette completed a B.A. in Art and Visual History as well as Classical Archeology at the Humboldt-University of Berlin and an M.St. in History of Art and Visual Culture from the University of Oxford. Both degrees were supported by scholarships from the German Academic Scholarship Foundation. After completing her master’s degree, Henriette worked as a Pe-Doctoral Research Scholar at the a.r.t.e.s.

Graduate School at the University of Cologne while teaching as an Associate Lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of Potsdam.



**Dr Lela Graybill**, Associate Professor of Art History, University of Utah

### **Inside the Black Museum: Evidence, Imagination, and the Testimony of Things**

In 1877 *The Spectator* ran a detailed account of a curious collection located in Scotland Yard, which it ominously dubbed “The Black Museum.” Enabled by changes in the handling of prisoners’ effects enacted in the late 1860s, the museum had been established c. 1875 as a subdivision of the Prisoner’s Property Office. This so-called “Black Museum”—still extant, and formally known as the Scotland Yard Crime Museum—comprised an eclectic collection of weapons, archival documents, photographs, plaster-cast death masks, objects used in such illegal activities as gambling and forgery, and the miscellaneous personal effects of notable criminals and victims. The Scotland Yard Crime Museum purported to function primarily as a training collection for the Metropolitan Police. Yet the strict criminological pretext of the museum was belied in its overt courting of the public; the museum hosted non-police visitors from its earliest days, and also had a significant life in the public imagination through journalistic reports and engraved imagery that circulated in the popular press as early as 1877. This paper will examine the tension between material evidence and the imagination in the early history of The Black Museum, considering the stakes of “museumifying” crime in the 19th century. I will situate the emergence of the Crime Museum in a watershed moment of transition in western juridical practice, when the value of direct testimony in the courtroom was supplanted by a rising faith in the importance—and supposedly superior reliability—of circumstantial evidence, the testimony of things. Through a close consideration of the museum’s objects, modes of display, and popular representations, I will explore the ways in which The Black Museum not only reflected, but was also instrumental in producing a modern investment in evidentiary truth that catalyzed the imagination even as it courted the real.

**Speaker biography:** Lela Graybill is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Utah and the author of *The Visual Culture of Violence after the French Revolution* (Routledge, 2016). Her current research looks at intersection of art and forensic science in the 19th and 20th centuries, considering the diverse visual practices and technologies that developed to situate spectators as witnesses and examining their significance in the development of modern constructs of truth.



**Dr Rose Roberto**, PhD FHEA, Northumbria University

**W. & R. Chambers museum artefacts, publications, and the meta-museum experience**

During the 1800s, the W. & R. Chambers publishing firm used museums in interesting ways. They sent illustrators to copy museum objects, solicited museum staff to be authors of their educational content, and published articles on correct etiquette for newly literate working class-readers, aiming to help them get the most out of their museum visits. The Chambers firm provides a fascinating case study in the history of 19th-century mass education and what would become known as the reference book genre. Founded by two brothers, William (1800-1883) and Robert (1802-1871) Chambers, in 1832, the firm grew from a small-time bookseller and printer to become a publisher with a global reputation for quality educational books, periodicals, dictionaries and encyclopaedias. In the early 1980s, the last Chambers family manager placed the firm's archive in the National Library of Scotland, and donated the firms's collection of publishing-related objects to National Museums Scotland (NMS).

The NMS holds over 20,000 artefacts in the form of wood engraving blocks, stereotype and electrotpe plates. This paper shows how studying them, along-side published material, yields insights into Victorian-era processes for constructing information, and the surprising and extended reach of 19th-century museums.

**Speaker biography:** Rose Roberto is a part-time researcher at Northumbria University, previously serving as a lecturer at Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln. She studies the intersection of visual culture with hidden histories related to gender, race and class embedded in the transnational book trade. Her monograph, *Illustrating Animals in the Nineteenth Century: Popular Taste from Bewick to Beardsley* will be published by Peter Lang. She has co-edited *Women in Print: Design and Identities* (2022), and contributed to *Circulation and Control: Artistic Culture and Intellectual Property in the Nineteenth Century* and *Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press, 1800-1900*. Her thesis 'Democratising Knowledge' was an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Project between the University of Reading and National Museums Scotland.

## Keynote lecture

**Professor Kate Hill**, Professor of History, University of Lincoln

*Museums on the periphery: Marginal people, objects and places in nineteenth-century museums*

Over the course of the nineteenth century, museums, museum objects, and museum people, in Britain and its empire, came to be mapped onto a hierarchy with a centre-periphery structure. What is more, museums and their contents did not just reflect this structure, they created it. The centrality of people, objects and places of value was underpinned and guaranteed by the marginalising and devaluing of others.

In this talk I will consider several of the axes across which central-peripheral relations were created in and by the museum, using UK-based examples, as well as showing how overlapping marginalisation occurred. Women's roles in museums, developing over the century, had come to be substantial yet marginal and constrained; branch museums defined poorer suburbs as marginal to the centre of the city or nation, deserving second-rank displays; and certain objects were seen as having not enough value for central museums, suiting particular, marginalised, audiences, such as children or the working class. These distinctions came together in branch museums staffed by women, situated in poor suburbs, which displayed local wildflowers and similarly free and low-value objects, to an audience of working-class children particularly.

Much work has been dedicated to understanding how large prestigious institutions formed national and imperial identities, but we can understand this more fully by looking at and from the periphery as well – national institutions defined themselves against all sorts of marginalities, in order to accrue value. The margins, I argue, are a productive place to work in.

**Speaker biography:** Kate Hill is Professor of History at the University of Lincoln. She is a historian of nineteenth- and twentieth-century museums, collecting and curating; her books include *Culture and Class in English Public Museums 1850-1914* (2005), *Museums and Biographies* (2012), and *Women and Museums 1850-1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (2016). She has also written about masculinity and museums, children and museums, and approaches to studying museum history, and is Co-Editor of the *Museum History Journal*. She is currently working on projects on the history of professionalisation in museum work, and the development of folk and social history in British museums.