



Anna Carlsson, conference organiser

(Cambridge) delivered a paper on compulsory notification of disease in late-19th-century Bolton; Howard Chiang (Princeton) presented on Western anatomy and conceptions of the body in 19th and 20th-century China; Nicholas Whitfield (Cambridge) gave a paper on images of blood donation in wartime London; Rachael Russel (Manchester) presented on nausea and vomiting in 19th century Britain; Alison Montgomery (Durham) on the male skeleton in the late 17th and 18th century; Teri Chettiar (Northwestern) on hypnotism and medicine around 1900; Sherry Gad Erab (Exeter) on healers in 16th to 18th-century Egypt; Alexander Bacopoulos-Viau (Cambridge) on hysteria in medicine and literature in 19th-century France; and Laura Kelly (Galway) on lady medical students in Irish universities around 1900. On cosmology and astronomy there were also numerous illuminating papers. Jeff Belknap (Cambridge) presented on late-19th-century transit-of-Venus (TOV) observations literature and the introduction of photography in making these observations; Katie Taylor (Cambridge) gave a paper on the development of star maps in the 16th century; and Thad Parsons, III (Oxford) gave an entertaining paper on the chequered history of attempts to build a planetarium at the Science Museum.

Other papers included an exploration of the largely-forgotten 2002 GM controversy in Zambia (Andrew Bowman, Manchester), papers on engineering (Aparajith Ramnath, Imperial College, and Daniel Wilson, Birkbeck College), a paper on Darwinism in 19th-century Denmark (Stine Grumsen, Aarhus), and a paper on patronage of evolutionary biologists in the Dutch East Indies around 1900 (Robert-Jan Wille, Nijmegen).

The BSHS skills session on what to do with your thesis after completion, presented by Joe Cain (UCL) and Duncan Wilson (Manchester) was also a great success, with Joe bringing his inimitable energetic style and Duncan reminding us of the need for dogged persistence with post-doc applications!

Over tea and coffee between sessions, and at the enjoyable evening wine reception and conference dinner, we took the opportunity to network and find out more about each other's work, exchanging useful insights in the process.

Everyone agreed that the conference was a great success. Thanks to the organising committee, the BSHS, and CHSTM. Next year's conference will be eagerly anticipated!

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John Dalton to Joy Division

James Sumner finds new paths for public history of science in the Manchester Histories Festival, 21st March

Beyond science festivals, what?

The annual British Science Festival offers a pattern which has been loosely adapted for local events from Orkney to Brighton. These festivals, of course, present major opportunities for bringing the history of science to a wider audience. They integrate smoothly with university and museum initiatives. They mostly operate on convenient city or campus sites, using existing venues and booking facilities. They draw enthusiastic volunteers, local media coverage, and sometimes (largely because they are seen as economically useful) significant public or commercial sponsorship, at a time when depressingly little else does.

Yet science festivals alone are not enough.

Their audiences tend, inevitably, to be strongly interested in science: a vital constituency, but a minority of the public. School groups are the chief exception, as they will (usually) politely attend what their teachers direct them to. In the National Curriculum, however, the histories of science and, in particular, medicine are associated more strongly with the history syllabus. Only the most enlightened science educators will avoid prioritising 'core' science events over 'optional' history.

The obvious solution is a history festival. And the challenges are equally obvious. The quest for economic salvation which seems to be the mission of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills does not, so far as I can tell, favour strategically expanding the nation's historical enquiry base. Well before the downturn, industrial concerns which used to engage seriously with museums and academia had begun to withdraw support for their scientific-technical heritage. Want of sponsorship scuppered an annual History Festival in Cambridge. Though there is plainly still an appetite for organised celebrations in the UK – consider the current Darwin anniversary – these tend to be one-off commemorations of specific events.

The Manchester Histories Festival, inaugurated in March, demonstrates a remarkable will to find an alternative model. Operating on a budget that would affront the shoe-string industry, the Festival ingeniously threaded together countless contributions in kind. The greatest of these was full use of Manchester's splendid Town Hall for the two days into which events were compressed – one for schools, one for the public. Into this space poured the combined efforts of over a hundred schools, academic institutions, community groups, museums, libraries, archives and local societies, offering lectures, demonstrations, guided walks, wall displays, video screenings and information stands. Most of



Paul Marshall talks television with the Museum of Science and Industry's resident John Dalton impersonator



JAMES SUMNER

The Great Hall provided an impressive backdrop for displays and presentation stalls

the effort was voluntary; all events were free.

The Festival was directed by John Pickstone, my colleague at the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine (CHSTM). With financial support from the Wellcome Trust, and a recent PhD graduate, Tom Lean, closely involved in co-ordination, CHSTM was well represented. Staff and postgrads presented research on the local stories of artificial hips (Julie Anderson), tamoxifen and radiotherapy (Carsten Timmermann, Elizabeth Toon), public health and air pollution (Emma Jones, Gill Mawson) and the regeneration of both wounded tissue and biological research (Duncan Wilson). Michael Worboys provided an overview lecture on Manchester medicine, while schools projects (Mari Lowe, Mike Brown) included the reliably charming topic of epidemic urban cholera.

While the Manchester Science Festival is a science festival for Manchester, the Manchester Histories Festival is a festival for Manchester histories. This imposed some limits: Darwin, lacking local links, was notably absent, and we were unfortunately unable to incorporate current BSHS Outreach work. Yet the Festival's localism provided the key to a level of genuine public engagement I have not seen at any comparable event. Everyone, it seems, found something they recalled, or had heard recalled, or could otherwise relate to, from gas masks to street plans to the vintage TV camera simulation (wielded by CHSTM postgrad Paul Marshall). Presenters without a direct local focus found ingenious sources of relevance, with displays on early Ferranti radio equipment (Emily Hankin) and the Mancunian sci-fi comic hero Dan Dare (James Farry).

Judging from feedback, these histories fitted seamlessly into a programme encompassing football, immigration, women's suffrage, architecture, film, Factory Records and the Peterloo Massacre, and featuring such lumi-

naries as Tristram Hunt, Sheila Rowbotham and Michael Wood. Some 4000 people (twice the best projected estimate) attended the public day. With so much going on in a concentrated space, the atmosphere was frenetic. Highlights for me included narrating John Dalton's early career against heavy competition from a local percussion collective; sheltering behind the CHSTM display stand, frantically folding industrial walking tour pamphlets after the intended day's stock disappeared in two hours; and wondering why my lecture on Manchester computing was attended by two Edwardian street-urchins.

Purely local history, of course, would be of purely local interest. Yet there is no purely local history. Through tales of atom-splitting,

aeronautics, passenger rail, stored-program computers and test-tube babies, explaining the national and global through the local has become second nature in Manchester. Similar approaches underlie public history elsewhere, notably in Liverpool and other maritime centres, and could probably work anywhere. Why not explore your local options?

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Cavendish Society Songs

Melanie Keene reports on the event at the Whipple Museum, Cambridge, 12th March

On 12th March Jeff Hughes spoke at the Whipple Museum of the History of Science, Cambridge, on 'A Function of the Time: The Cavendish Society and their Postprandial Proceedings'. As part of the event the 'HPS chorus' (pictured) performed three of the Society's songs - 'Ions Mine', 'hv', and 'Isotopes' - for the first time since the 1930s.

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JEFF HUGHES

Singers at the Whipple Museum, Cambridge