

## **NCPH annual conference 2013: Teaching public history working group**

### **Case study: University of Hertfordshire - Alix Green, Lecturer in History & Policy**

The University of Hertfordshire is a new university with origins in the 1950s as a Technical College specialising in engineering and computing. Humanities teaching was introduced early as part of a liberal arts enhancement to core programmes and in the 1970s became a programme of study in its own right. Alongside Astrophysics, History is now the strongest research area for the university, with a small group of faculty within the School of Humanities. Students enter on a module Humanities degree but can specialise into single honours History or take History as a major or minor. Institutional context and identity – very much outward-facing - has shaped the history group, giving rise to early involvement with community groups, public engagement, digital and public history relative to the English HE sector as a whole. Currently, the History group is validating a new undergraduate minor pathway of 6 modules (2 per year) in Public History (the first in the UK).

The first public history module – an introduction to public history, memory and heritage – was developed in 2007 as a final year option through the innovation and commitment of one member of faculty (an 18<sup>th</sup>-century historian). A work experience module, *Making histories*, followed in 2011. The subsequent arrival of two fixed-term fractional lecturers (both from hybrid academic-professional backgrounds) has allowed the group to develop provision further, with a first-year module on English Heritage (with site visits and guest speakers) serving as preparation for a second-year module, *History and Heritage in Practice*, to provide students with the theoretical and conceptual skills vital for a successful work placement. Two new final-year modules (to be delivered for the first time next academic year) will complete the pathway and aim to challenge students to set their learning so far in different contexts: one on *Public History in International Perspective* (which involves collaboration with graduate students at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington or students can go to UNCW that semester) and a second on *Thinking with history: applying historical insight to real-life issues*. The collaboration with UNCW is an exciting one, with the plan being to have overlapping course content, student collaboration on assessments as well as an embedded work experience element. The challenges are mainly to do with university structures and processes; can these support rather than inhibit such academic entrepreneurship? Also in development is an inter-disciplinary Professional Doctorate in Heritage. The success of these new programmes in attracting students and of staff in securing research and development funding will determine whether a case for permanent, full-time posts in public history can be made.

I raise three issues for discussion that have arisen during this process:

#### **1. Institutional/disciplinary 'fit'**

Both for new and established fields, the question of the 'fit' between the field and its departmental/disciplinary and institutional settings seems to me to be a central one in terms of intellectual and material sustainability. For public history, very much new in the UK and tentatively defining its parameters and priorities, the question is a pressing one. How does 'public history' relate to 'mainstream' history teaching and research activity, or to institutional strategies around public engagement and impact? Can it not only make subject boundaries more permeable to interdisciplinary work but also those of the university more so to community groups, businesses and heritage organisations?

In developing the pathway, we had some interesting discussions about which came first, which provided the better grounding for students: 'practice' (for example discussing heritage organisations or museums) or 'theory' (the 'locational' work relating the field to the discipline and disciplinary debates). The faculty member who had come from a heritage funding background took the former view, others the latter. Having a newly-configured *Introduction to Public History* as the first module of the pathway, followed by *English Heritage*, indicates that the latter perspective won out. I think this decision has symbolic as well as educational importance. It signals that public history has vital (in both senses of the word) intellectual, methodological and cultural connections with the discipline of history, and that the discipline of history itself is thinking seriously about the integration of 'theory' and 'practice', of scholarship and application, of academic and public endeavour.

But it's also important that there is alignment with institutional mission. Having defined ourselves as a 'business-facing university' around 7 years ago, building on our Technical College heritage, there was a period during which the School of Humanities had to go through a process of interpretation and reflection. What does 'business-facing' mean for us? The case for developing the pathway and the Professional Doctorate can be made within the framework of 'business-facing', even though the language of institutional mission has since shifted, which has proved helpful. Public history is now one of the clearest examples for explaining business-facing humanities (indeed, it was the piece of evidence that clinched the title of Entrepreneurial University of the Year for Hertfordshire in 2010).

## **2. Defining public history**

Public history in the UK is not yet a fully defined field. Few faculty have 'public history' in their titles or embrace it as a label. It does seem to be conflated with local and community history, with outreach activities and with co-production of history with identity groups, or alternatively as 'popular history': history represented in film, exhibitions and the media. The early *policy* commitment of public history in the US has not found resonance. An issue in teaching is thus how far we push against these preoccupations. The third-year modules represent a conscious attempt to do so, but perhaps such a challenge needs to be done earlier, and linked into scholarship? Should we be more ambitious for our work placements and invest more resources in developing relationships with a greater diversity of employers? How would ambition translate into assessment practices?

## **3. Public history, the humanities and student choice**

Radical changes in the financing of higher education have begun this year, meaning almost all funding for teaching now comes through students' tuition fee loans. Applications for humanities courses appear to be down in many institutions, with demand up for more vocational/applied subjects (science and professionally-accredited subjects). It is too early to say whether this is a trend or a blip, but it does offer a prompt to humanities departments to think about how they articulate their offerings to prospective students, parents and teachers. Public historians seem to me to be in a strong position to lead this effort, to work collaboratively with careers services and outreach offices and to be highly visible as advocates for the purpose and benefits of studying history and the humanities. It is also in our own interests as we seek to shape a dynamic new field to which historians want to belong.

## **Case Study: NCPH Working Group - Teaching Public History Ottawa, 17-20 April 2013**

**Dr Geoff Ginn, Senior Lecturer (History)  
University of Queensland, Australia**

### **Initial statement:**

I am interested in the status of Public History teaching as part of the traditional academic emphasis of university history programs. In the past decade, several Australian universities have experienced a contraction in the range and comprehensiveness of their Public History teaching, largely as a result of staffing pressures and limited student demand. A number of substantial programs established in the 1980 and 1990s have been withdrawn, reduced in size or collapsed into other teaching programs. As the member of a broad-based history discipline grouping at a major research-intensive university, when faced with these pressures I decided to reduce UQ's public history teaching to an Honours (4<sup>th</sup> year) unit and a final year work placement option (3<sup>rd</sup> year Bachelor of Arts). This may appear a poor substitute for a wide and comprehensive program of undergraduate, Honours-level and post-graduate training in public history (as existed formerly), but I question whether such a narrow and sectional emphasis is itself a worthy ideal. Work-placements (and techniques to maximise their effectiveness) as part of undergraduate history studies is the particular theme I would like to address in the working group.

### **Introduction to case study:**

My case study reflects on the challenges we face teaching public history in a "rationalised" (ie reduced and streamlined) curriculum environment. While these circumstances certainly apply to the Australian setting, they may also be pertinent to colleagues internationally. In the discussion I aim to do a number of things: 1) introduce the case study by explaining the public history program at UQ, in particular how its curriculum has been significantly re-directed, 2) explain how the internship model worked in the older curriculum (2003-2007), and 3) explain how it works in the new curriculum (2009-12). I will consider the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and draw out some experiences and insights that might inform effective internships and work placements.

### **PH teaching at UQ, old and new:**

I was appointed in 2002 to run a research and consultancy centre, the UQ Centre for Applied History and Heritage Studies, and to teach single-handedly a large suite of courses in public and community history at the undergraduate, 4<sup>th</sup> year Honours and postgraduate levels. The suite of courses established by my predecessor embraced local and community history, architectural history, cultural heritage management, museums and public interpretation, environmental history, and theory and methodology in public history. It attracted modest enrolments, but nevertheless was subsequently expanded as part of UQ's strategic commitment to vocational graduate coursework. In 2004 I designed an enhanced postgraduate coursework (PGCW) program in local and applied history that was offered as a

Graduate Diploma between 2005 and 2007. Enrolments for this program were modest, totalling about a dozen students in that three-year timeframe.

A review of UQ's Bachelor of Arts (BA) program in 2005-06 saw a major re-alignment of course offerings and the History curriculum in general. Along with other majors, the History program was considered by the review to be too broad and unfocused, and History staff were considered to be "over-teaching." A gateway-elective-capstone structure was established for each BA major, including History, to establish a clearer structure for students over the three years of their degree. Elective courses with unsustainable enrolments were discontinued, as was the practice of "double-coding" courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Consequently it was no longer possible to sustain the range of PH courses previously offered in either the Graduate Diploma in Local and Applied History or as part of undergraduate studies in History.

With these changes a shift occurred in our PH teaching: rather than appearing as a fully-fledged "stream" in the History program, public history now featured as a placement option and methodology course in students' third year (their "capstone").

#### **Internships under the old model (2003-07):**

To my knowledge there were no formal work-place placements undertaken by my predecessor. In 2003 I introduced the new course HIST3202 Applied History Internship, a course with enrolments capped at two students only. Initially students were employed in cataloguing, administration and editorial duties in the Centre, but from Semester 2 2003 external placements were offered in the second half of each semester. The first of these were with the Brisbane City Council Heritage Unit, where the students undertook on-site and archival research for sites nominated to the local heritage register supervised by BCC staff (later internships occurred at museums and libraries as well as cultural heritage offices and consultancies).

This approach continued until the major reform of the UQ history curriculum in 2006-7. In essence it was based on 1) capped numbers; 2) close scrutiny of the student's initial work (six weeks) and final assessment (Week 13) by myself as the responsible staff member, and 3) workplace supervision (six weeks) by others. The strengths and weaknesses of this model will be explored in the Working Group seminar.

#### **Internships in the new model (2009-12):**

The new "capstone" structure for the History major commenced in Semester 1, 2009. This required all graduating History students in their third year to complete one compulsory final year course, plus either one or two others (depending on whether they were doing the single or extended major). In 2009-11, I taught a broad-based research methods course, while colleagues taught the 'Historical Project' course. Last year (2012) we merged those two in order to teach method and practice in a single course (WRIT3613: Making History). My role in that course was concentrated on managing and supervising 24 students in work-based placements at Queensland's major state library and museum.

In contrast to the earlier internships, I was able to closely supervise the work placements and student projects in WRIT3613 at every stage. The placement occurred over the whole semester, during which students worked either individually or in small groups on specific research projects set for them by the host institution. The strengths and weaknesses of this model will be explored in the Working Group seminar.

**Overall Considerations:**

In the Working Group seminar discussion, I plan to consider some future directions for the internship component, but also for public history teaching in general, namely:

- Clarifying the place of PH, and PH content, within broad-based History pedagogy;
- Re-thinking community/professional exposure and engagement for PH students; and
- Establishing meaningful cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaborations for teaching and learning in PH.

**Participant:**

Dr Geoff Ginn is a Senior Lecturer and History Discipline Convenor in the School of History, Philosophy, Religion & Classics at the University of Queensland. Formerly Director of the UQ Centre for Applied History & Heritage Studies (a school-based centre self-funding through consultancy work in public history), he is presently Deputy Director of the UQ Centre for the Government of Queensland. A member of the Board of the Queensland Museum, Geoff teaches British history, urban history, public history and the history of heritage practice. His book *Archangels & Archaeology: JSM Ward's Kingdom of the Wise* (Sussex Academic Press) appeared in 2012.

<http://www.uq.edu.au/hprc/dr-geoff-ginn>

## **NCPH Annual Conference 2013: Teaching Public History Working Group**

### **Public History at the Free University Berlin**

Presenter: Hanno Hochmuth <[hanno.hochmuth@fu-berlin.de](mailto:hanno.hochmuth@fu-berlin.de)>

History outside schools and universities and within the public sphere is not a new phenomenon, yet it took universities a long time to include forms of public history within the German academic system. History departments at German universities had trained students to become a teacher or a professor. However, most students did not end up working in schools and universities. They entered the field of public history. Due to the Bologna process, that introduced new B.A. and M.A. programs all over Europe, German universities had to face a fundamental modification of the structure of academic studies. In this period of change, new possibilities arose to include public history in academic education.

In 2006, Paul Nolte, Professor of Contemporary History at the Free University Berlin (FU), and Martin Sabrow, Director of the Center for Contemporary History in Potsdam (ZZF), started to discuss the chances of a new master's program at the Free University, dedicated to history *in* the public and history *for* the public. They implemented a new program that should account for the growing interest in media representations of history and the increasing interest in museums, memorial sites and other spaces of historical commemoration and education. It should reflect on the aesthetic, political and commercial dimensions of history and allow a deeper insight in practice fields of history. Students should be able to gain knowledge about the workings of historical culture but also on historical learning. Thus, an emphasis on history didactics was very important. Furthermore, the students should strengthen soft skills such as presentation techniques, and gain knowledge in planning and project management. Finally, the master's program should stimulate the teamwork ability of the students.

The program's focus on the history of the 20th century meets current public interests, especially in Berlin, a city that has been shaped so much by the last century. However, the focus on modern history also results from the exceptional cooperation between the Free University Berlin and the Center for Contemporary History, which is a major independent research institute on German and European contemporary history. After almost three years of intensive planning, in the winter semester 2008/09 the Public History Master's program at the Free University Berlin was launched. It was the first Public History program in Germany.

In order to apply for the Public History Master's program we require a Bachelor's degree in history or a related field. There is no fee charged. The program starts each winter semester. After four semesters the students gain a Master of Arts (M.A.) in Public History. They have to complete 120 credits and seven modules. In the last year, we received 110 applications, but we can only accept twenty students per year, which is the optimal class size for the various teaching methods, field trips and so on. Hence, an excellent B.A. is required to study in our program. Most of our students come from Germany, but there are also students from Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Ukraine, Australia and the U.S. The language of instruction is mostly German. Fifty percent of the program is concerned with more theoretical problems and questions. In the other fifty percent the students approach areas of practice. The following case study linked the theoretical and practical aspects of our Public History program.

### **Case Study: The Student Project "Kudamm'31"**

"Embodying History" was the title of a workshop that inspired twelve students of the Public History Master's program and their instructors Christine Bartlitz (Center for Contemporary History Potsdam) and Sebastian Brünger (Rimini Protokoll) to reconstruct an historical event, that has up to now seldom been addressed in public: The so-called Kudamm-Pogrom of 1931, two years before the Nazis seized power. It was on September 12, 1931, the Jewish New Year's Eve, when hundreds of Nazi SA-men gathered on Berlin's most famous boulevard Kurfürstendamm (called "Kudamm"). The mostly young men shouted anti-Semitic slogans and attacked passers-by whom they suspected of being Jewish, beating, thrashing, and clubbing them. The Kudamm-Pogrom already marked the decline of Weimar Republic and a "prelude" of the Pogrom Night in 1938.

The students, who were in their third semester, started their research in several archives and searched for newspapers and contemporary witnesses. After the material had been collected and the historical context had been outlined, the group started to develop their concept. Among the many ways to present history to a wider public the students agreed on an audio project. Files and newspaper articles, that reconstructed the historical event, were selected to be read and recorded on audio files. Interview partners – as contemporary witnesses or as experts – contextualized the material sources. In addition, various original sound recordings were collected from German broadcasting archives. Then, the group developed a script for the

public presentation of the topic. Audio clips with a length of about three to ten minutes were conceptualized. Specifically designed texts were then recorded by professional narrators, before the single sequences from narrative, interview and background noise were edited.

All sound documents were put on a digital city map of Berlin and can be downloaded as a free *radio aporee* App for the audio walk. GPS-technology in smartphones allows to locate the visitor's mobile phone so that the sound documents start playing just when the visitor is actually walking around the spots marked on the city map. An additional brochure with a city map provides the titles and the locations of the audio texts. Visitors can move freely around Kurfürstendamm without having to follow a prescribed route or sequence. Unlike pre-composed audio guides, the visitors can decide how they want to arrange their audio tour, when they want to change from one audio clip to another, and what to skip.

Another part of the students' project was its comprehensive logistical framework. When preparing the presentation, the students used methods of cultural management and public relations that they had learned in the Public History Master's program. They designed the materials for advertising and publicity as well as the website. They wrote press releases, contacted sponsors and founded their own private partnership. The project was presented to the public on March 14, 2012 in the Literaturhaus Berlin, close to the historical sites of Kurfürstendamm. On the following three Saturdays visitors could try the audio walk on Kudamm. In addition, the contents remain accessible on the website [www.kudamm31.com](http://www.kudamm31.com).

The project has received an positive feedback overall. Because the archive material and interviews are vivid and tangible, visitors responded that their impressions were very intense. Most of them had never heard of the 1931 Pogrom on Kudamm before and were interested to learn something about it. Further usages of the project are planned. The German Historical Museum wants to make it available for a larger audience in 2013. The Jewish Community of Berlin has contacted the Public History Program in order to talk about a possible cooperation. Hence, the project turned out to be a great experience for the students and a big success for our Public History Master's program.

**Melissa Bingmann, Director of Public History, West Virginia University**

**Case Statement proposal for NCPH working group “Teaching Public History”**

**Broad Issues:**

I propose to explore the value and challenges of an interdisciplinary approach to community projects as an important means of conveying what it is that historians do as compared to museum professionals, historic preservationists, landscape architects, graphic designers, and other degree specialists within a university. Too often, we discount the value of historical work by advocating that public historians must be historians first but also specialists in multiple disciplines. In preparing historians for work in the public sector, I am looking to strike a balance between practical skills and an understanding of multiple disciplines in order to be effective practitioners of history.

**Case Studies:**

The public history program at WVU was recently revived in 2009 and there is one full-time faculty member (me) and a full-time non-tenure-line program coordinator for an interdisciplinary certificate program in Cultural Resource Management (CRM). We have a traditional MA program and recently added a PhD field. One of the challenges is meeting the needs of MA students, certificate students who may not have any background in history, and PhD students who often want the option to teach and working in the public sector. One of my strategies has been to focus on researching historical narratives, rather than how to design an exhibition, for example. This is how I was trained and believe in this approach. In order for students to develop a portfolio of work, I have created projects that teach them how to work with other specialists who they will most likely collaborate with if they choose employment in the public sector. The CRM classes often attract student outside of history, have been more hands-on and focused on historic preservation, for example. One way of expanding our faculty and the breadth of experience for students is by partnering with other schools and departments.

I am currently involved in two community projects with faculty from Graphic Design and Landscape Architecture that employ the approach that historians do research and learn to present it in a format that can be used by exhibition designers and landscape architects. At the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum (TALA), graduate students in history bring their historical skills for the purposes of creating a storyline and are working with graphic design students who use visual communications skills to design and produce the exhibition. There are many complicated layers to this project and the graphic design faculty member I am working with has greatly assisted in community engagement. The TALA contacted the history department to conduct oral history interviews, however, when visiting the site to learn more about their goals and future plans, I learned that there was some opposition to the site from the community. A private family bought the building at auction and chose not to run it as a non-profit. They do make a profit, but it all goes into preserving the site. Most of the revenue comes from ghost tours, an October haunted

house, mud bogs, and other special events. I believed that we could separate our project, which would be more scholarly, from the events. In addition to creating a far superior exhibition, the graphic designer has more experience with community engagement that has greatly benefited the project.

Arthurdale Heritage Inc, a New Deal homestead community, needed a trail and outdoor markers. Landscape architecture students designed the trail based on the geography and visitor needs, but worked with a graduate student in history to determine the best points of view to place markers to interpret the landscape. In both cases, faculty from these disciplines better understand what historians can bring to these projects, whereas in the past, the historical research and interpretation was an afterthought. Public history students learn to adapt research into a product that can be used by professionals and better understand the needs of and skills of graphic designers and landscape architects.

### **Making History the Core rather than the Fringe:**

In both cases, the Landscape Architect and Graphic Designer have experience with similar projects, but have not worked with historians. I get the sense that they both have the perception that historical scholarship and interpretation based on research is an extra benefit, but the work of historians is not essential to the outcome. After all, they have done these projects in the past without working with historians. I think both have responded positively to the improved quality of the historical content, however, I am concerned that the time constraint may dissuade them from such a collaboration in the future. With the landscape architect in particular, there is the perception that the historical research can be added to the landscape design, rather than drive the design. In a previous project working with a mine disaster site, he and a colleague designed a trail to get from a memorial to the actual mine explosion site and then asked us to develop the content for plaques. Luckily, the research had already been completed for a booklet and could be easily translated, but it was difficult to relay the content to what visitors would view, because the design was already in place. One of my challenges working with the TALA exhibition have included a misperception about conducting oral history interviews. In her mind, interviews are for community engagement and for interesting quotes. She has never conducted oral history interviews with the intention of constructing a source of history to be donated to an archives, and has never gone through the IRB process. As a historian, it is difficult to accept this approach. The other challenges have been convincing her that it is worth the time to look for a photograph of a miner from TALA, rather than just use an available photo of a West Virginia miner, for example. I am also learning that there is a difference in being viewed as a researcher and as a historian.

### **Working Across Different Program Requirements:**

The constraints of the semester and program requirements have also been a challenge. We recently implemented a practicum in order to give students the time to complete an actual public

history project. Both the graphic designer and landscape architect face this challenge as well, and we have all been relying on students willing to sign up for independent study. This creates additional work for faculty, as we are essentially doing this work outside of our teaching loads. In all three projects, because they are on-going, there has been a lot of student turnover. Students are able to build on the work of previous classes, however, there is a significant amount of time for each new student to get up to speed on the progress of the project and the historical background. Because these projects are client-driven, it is rare that students come with expertise in the historical content.

**Benefits:**

There is significant benefit to students working with clients and experts outside of history because this experience most replicates the professional challenges they will face working as historians in the public sector. I believe there is also value in conveying what it is that historians do to future graphic designers and landscape architects, but am cognizant that they can easily be turned off by working with historians who may seem particular and too scholarly at times.

## “Bridging ‘History’ and ‘Memory’: A Dutch Case Study”

Paul Knevel

University of Amsterdam, Department of History

In September 2008 the History Department of the University of Amsterdam started a new Master’s program in Public History, the first one in the Netherlands. Thanks to a financial contribution by ANNO, a public history organization popularizing Dutch history, we were able to develop new courses for this program. From the beginning we presented Public History as an important branch of history-making, firmly integrated in the History Department, and clearly different from already existing heritage and media studies. In developing the new curriculum we aimed for a fruitful combination of theory and practice, resulting in the incorporation of various real public history projects (like making short documentary films on the history of Amsterdam, developing website exhibits and doing oral history projects) in the compulsory core course of the program. The curriculum consists of a compulsory core course, a course on a specific Public History theme (for instance History and Actuality, Dealing with History in South Africa, and Digital History), an elective (chosen from the courses offered by the History Department and the other Departments of the Faculty of Humanities), a three-month internship and a Master’s thesis (18 ECTP). Every year we select 16 students from about 25 to 30 applicants.

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A public historian should in the first place be a damn good historian. So when Robert Kelley in 1978 had to describe this new kid on the block, he stressed the importance of the historical method: ‘In its simplest meaning’, Public History refers to the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia’.<sup>1</sup> Public historians, in other words, are in the first place professional historians, maybe working in peculiar circumstances, but with a clear opinion about their own professionalism. Every study-year, most of the new Amsterdam master’s students in Public History define themselves in their first mission statement as historians translating scholarly research to a larger public.

But then they start to find out about ‘outside academia’ and to discover that in Public History far more is at stake than simply using the historical method and its corresponding code of ethics in public. Moreover, ‘outside academia’, even the historical method itself can be a main problem. More than once, (public) historians have been criticized for asking the wrong questions or giving false answers. Sometimes, as in the history wars in the United States, these conflicts reveal a disjunction between a scholarly approach to history and the public’s more personal, or even semimythic view of the past;<sup>2</sup> whereas at other times, as in the debates following the broadcasting of the recent Dutch tv-series ‘The Slavery’ (2011), ‘outsiders’ (i.c. postcolonial scholars and members of the Afro-Dutch

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kelley, ‘Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects’, *The Public Historian* 1,1 (1978) 16.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Boyer, ‘Whose History is it Anyway? Memory, Politics, and Historical Scholarship’, in: Edward T. Linenthal, Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars. The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1996) 115-139.

community) question the 'objective', based on sources and facts, historical research of the (public) historians involved, in this peculiar example as a traditional 'white' perspective.<sup>3</sup> Who indeed owns history?

And even more problematic: what is history? As a response to the traumatic twentieth century history, that infamous Age of Extremes, the clear division between 'history' and 'memory' has become blurred, and 'history' has lost a lot of its natural authority in the process.<sup>4</sup> Mastering the historical method is, in other words, no longer enough for public historians. New lessons have to be learned, and every public historian, at least, needs to acquaint him/herself with the broader and multi-layered historical culture he/she is functioning in.

There is, happily, no lack of relevant study material on these topics. But only by involving students in practical projects concerning contested topics, they will learn to understand the historical culture they will become part of and start to define their role as public historians and the code of ethics needed. Let me give an example.

Two years ago I designed with the help of Sara Polak and Sara Tilstra a short oral history project on the Dutch legacies of slavery as part of a master's course on Public History. The starting point was simple: the sixteen students involved were divided into eight pairs and every pair had to interview two different people about their relationship to (the legacies of) slavery. On the basis of the transcripts of the interviews, the students had to write a portrait of every interviewee in which his/her opinions were clearly presented. The preparation was short and simple: an introduction in interviewing techniques and some reading in the historiography of Dutch slavery, that was all.

The project was a success; it even resulted in a publication.<sup>5</sup> But more importantly, the project proved to be an instructive introduction into historical culture. By interviewing various persons and writing the portraits, the students discovered automatically a wide range of 'voices': they spoke with active Afro-Dutch for whom slavery and its legacies were an essential part of a politics of identity, but also with other 'Caribbean' Dutch who on the contrary underlined the necessity to forget ('no future without forgetting') and with white Dutch people who at a later stage in their lives were, through work or friendship, confronted with a topic they had always considered something of a long gone past. 'Memory', the students found out, was not as uniform and clear as some scholars seem to suggest.

Moreover, probably for the first time in their lives, the students (all but one white) talked extensively with outspoken members of the vivid postcolonial memory-community that has manifested since the 1990s in the Netherlands. For most, it turned out to be a confrontational experience: 'I (...) found myself pushed into a pigeon-hole, whereas I always try to think without pigeon-holes'. Or more outspoken: '[I found] his line of reasoning and pattern of thought incomprehensible. Consequentially I felt myself discriminated against as a "white" Dutchman...'

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<sup>3</sup> Guno Jones, 'De Slavernij is onze geschiedenis (niet). Over de discursieve strijd om de betekenis van de NTR-televisieserie *De Slavernij*', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 127,4 (2012) 57-81.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Verlag C.H.Beck: München, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Knevel, Sara Polak, Sara Tilstra, eds., *Meerstemmig Verleden. Persoonlijke verhalen over het Nederlandse slavernijverleden* (KIT Publishers: Amsterdam, 2011).

As a reaction, one or two of the students stuck to the all too familiar role as historian and stressed the necessity for objective facts as a counterforce to 'black emotionalism'. But most of the students involved did try to overcome the false dichotomy between 'white history' and 'black memory' and were willing to reflect on their own attitudes and the limits of the dominant historical approaches to slavery. They started to realize that knowledge and representations are 'situational', always connected to specific groups, positions and power relations. 'I have learned a lot', one of the students reflected later, 'not only about emotions you did not realize before, but also about the complexities and sensitivities of history'.

Reflections like these came close to the hidden ambition of the project: to bridge the familiar history of slavery (as found in the historiography) with memories and perspectives most of the students (and white Dutch) are unaware of, simply because they are marginal in academia and society. 'Perhaps history and memory in the end may act usefully upon each other', Bernard Bailyn wrote more than ten years ago. 'The one may usefully constrain and yet vivify the other. The passionate, timeless memory of the slave trade that tears at our conscience and shocks our sense of decency may be shaped, focused, and informed by the critical history we write, while the history we so carefully compose may be kept alive, made vivid and constantly relevant and urgent by the living memory we have of it. We cannot afford to lose or diminish either if we are to understand who we are and how we got to be the way we are'.<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by these words our project aimed to give various individuals and groups a voice, in order to come to a more inclusive and many-voiced history of Dutch slavery and its legacies. Of course, a lot of work has to be done, but the project at least helped the students advance in their process of becoming a public historian. These are things that literature cannot prepare you for.

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Bailyn, 'Considering the Slave Trade: History and Memory', *The William and Mary Quarterly* third series, 58,1 (2001) 251.

## **Creating international partnerships for postgraduate Public History programmes – a wishlist.**

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M.Phil in Public History and Cultural Heritage  
Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

In this short discussion paper I aim to briefly outline our masters in Public History at TCD, and then sketch out three things that I hope will generate constructive discussion and debate ahead of our meeting in Ottawa.

1. The desirability of creating international links
2. The aspects of that process that might be achievable in the medium to long-term
3. Problems I foresee in relation to twinning short-duration programmes

### **Context.**

Our M.Phil in Public History and Cultural Heritage is a new development at Trinity College Dublin – and the first PGT programme of its type in Ireland. Last academic year was its first full academic year, recruiting students from a variety of nationalities and at various points in their career cycle. This year we have doubled the number of students, meaning that we now have a very viable programme which is beginning to make its presence felt in Dublin cultural institutions through the 3-month internships built into the programme. As with many other PH programmes the intake is about 70% national, 30% international, and thus far we have drawn students from North America, China, and Cyprus. One of our main motivations for exploring links with other programmes is to remain an attractive option for our *national* students, rather than our international students who have already travelled some distance to study in Dublin and are in fact uninterested in going elsewhere during the 12 months of their study-period.

Public History in Ireland is at a sort of a pre-adolescent phase. It is underdeveloped as a field even in relation to Britain, where several programmes have carved out a role for public engagement and where job advertisements are beginning to feature outreach and media-activity in their ‘desirable’ criteria. The impetus for developing the TCD masters came from the forthcoming ‘Decade of Commemoration’ 1912-23, which covers the revolutionary period in Ireland, through the First World War, Irish War of Independence to the Civil War. This has led to an unprecedented public interest in commemoration and public manifestations of history and it is this energy that we seek to tap into for our national intake.

## The TCD M.Phil in Public History and Cultural Heritage

As it is still evolving I will give just the briefest description of our taught masters, in order to explain how we might be able to twin with various other programmes without much difficulty. Our course has several components.

*Course Structure:* The course consists of the following three elements:

- (i) **Compulsory Modules (30 credits): two modules carrying 5 credits each and two modules carrying 10 credits each.** This comprises of two small research training modules, along with a compulsory core course which is team taught between university staff and external partners at a variety of collaborating cultural institutions in Dublin
- (ii) **Optional Modules (30 credits): students will select three options (10 credits each) from an approved list.** This means that students will choose one module from three options in the first semester, and two modules from a list of six modules in the second semester. These optional modules are a mixture of options designed specifically for our Public History masters and others which act as shared modules across several programmes.
- (iii) **Dissertation (30 credits):** MPhil students will be expected to write a dissertation of between 15,000 and 20,000 words on an approved topic relating to the programme. Ideally this will connect with their internship, details of which are explained below.

In addition to these assessed options students will complete several other pieces of coursework and partake in two other important activities in the second semester.

- (i) **Attend a Practitioner Workshop**, where external practitioners come in for 1-2 hours and explain to the class how they integrate history into their working lives. This list includes museum directors, artists, film directors, TV and Radio producers etc, and runs weekly through the second semester
- (ii) **Internships.** Students take up work placements at one of our (10-12) collaborating cultural institutions. These include a variety of archives, libraries, tourist attractions, museums and galleries – including the National Museum of Ireland, National Gallery of Ireland. These ordinarily timetable at one day a week for 12 weeks, but there is some flexibility here.

## The desirability of creating international links

There are a number of reasons why I want to explore the possibility of twinning with other programmes. It is now a realistic possibility in the post-Bologna era to have modules that can be taken elsewhere for equal credit.

1. **Student gain.** If a similar programme elsewhere could be relied upon to expose the student to similar career and academic gains as what we try to achieve in Dublin then it is in the obvious interest of the student (particularly a domestic student) to add another high profile academic institution to their CV and to gain experience of public history in another jurisdiction which may have a very different take on what public history is and how we ought to teach and learn it.
2. **Staff gain.** I am a big believer in collaboration with colleagues – both in teaching and research. For a stand-alone and somewhat experimental programme with no nearby equivalents or rivals (yet) the TCD programme could only stand to gain from closer collaboration with both experienced and inexperienced public historians in other contexts.
3. **Institutional gain.** University authorities are very keen to link up with international partners – and though this may be connected to a somewhat sinister and competitive rankings-game I have no objection to it if it is in the interests of the students on our programme and those coming from elsewhere. Virtual module-sharing would also be cost-efficient for collaborating universities.
4. **Collaborating institutions.** It is also a current priority of many of our cultural institutions to twin with international programmes and universities in a bid to prove ‘impact’ and reach to their paymasters. This may also work in our favour, and the CIs stand to gain from international students coming in, whether it is for the right reasons or not!

## The aspects of that process that might be achievable in the medium to long-term

1. **University-City fit.** I think this sort of collaboration will work only if it is with 1-2 programmes in cities of similar size to Dublin, and with universities of similar type and reputation as Trinity College Dublin. Since we are going to be sending out students who are native English speakers (mostly) at least one of those institutions ought to be English-speaking or offer English-language module options.
2. **Semester swap** of 1-2 students – this logically makes most sense for a F/T student in the second semester, allowing them to settle into the PH course in the domestic course but experience the internship in an institution in a different city. Any of the four semesters would work for a P/t students, as would a summer internship – but many of them are either financially constrained or have families/commitments.
3. **Staff swap.** Theoretically, and if funding was secured – this too ought to be possible for directors.

4. **Virtual module sharing.** I know very little about the process by which this could be made possible, but can see the potential for pooling resources in these days of Skype, blackboard etc. This would certainly help shore up areas where we lack expertise (film, oral history)

## Potential problems

1. **Practical.** Accommodation of visiting students for short durations – our college accommodation is set up for one-year visiting students, but certainly not for 3-6 month stints in the middle of the academic year.
2. **Bureaucratic.** The awarding of ECTS across various institutions may well be a convoluted process. Perhaps others know more and can advise?
3. **Funding.** Who will pay for staff or student mobility between institutions and how can costs be kept to a minimum. Will students paying high PGT fees wasn't to fork out even more to go elsewhere and why should they?
4. **Academic.** The cross-pollination of degree programmes can be a difficult sell up the line of a department, and HODs may well find the prospect of staff mobility prohibitive.
5. **Internship management/thesis supervision.** The prospect of students arriving and departing to very different situations/supervision presents a host of potential problems. How can their internship be monitored from the home institution? Who will supervise their thesis as it is being formed in Semester two?

## **Thinking through public history: *The Companion to Public History***

Last year I was invited to edit a volume on public history in Wiley-Blackwell's popular series of *Companions*. In this short paper I speak about my thoughts as I worked a (successful) proposal for the publisher, and identify three areas that posed particular challenges. I also report on my recent revision of the table of contents. The outline for the book drew on my teaching experience as one of the founding members of Carleton University's MA in Public History (now celebrating its tenth year), as the founder of a research centre, the Carleton Centre for Public History, and as a supervisor of over twenty public history MA research students who have contributed far more than they know to my understanding of the field. In rethinking the proposal, I worked collaboratively with Elizabeth Paradis, a recent award-winning graduate of our MA.

### **Introduction: Why a *Companion to Public History*?**

By 2012, when I was asked to consider editing the volume, several introductions to the field of public history had been recently published, or were/are still in the works. Some were single-authored surveys, but most were collections of a dozen or so essays offering case studies of key areas and topics from around the world. What appealed to me about the *Companion* was simply that its scale (35 chapters), offered the opportunity and challenge to bring together a large group of international scholars and practitioners, with a variety of experiences and disciplinary backgrounds, to offer teachers and students a wide ranging introductory text that would also serve as a reference work for those interested in the state of the field. The challenge was to come up with a comprehensive, inclusive and coherent collection, and in thinking and re-thinking the outline a number of issues became clear, three of which I would like to highlight here: the varying histories of public history; the tension between sites of public history and doing public history; and the related issue of theory, method and practice.

### **The Varying Histories of Public History**

When I began teaching public history one of the most useful books was a collection of essays on public history in New Zealand where I did my first two degrees and taught for one year).<sup>1</sup> It comes from a country, New Zealand-Aotearoa, with a tradition of public history as activism (both academic and popular) as well as a tradition of official and institutional public history. As is well known, in Britain (where I studied and taught for fourteen years) and Europe, and in many colonial-settler states, public history is associated with the varied movements and impulses often lumped together as history (or politics) from below. In North America, public history has more often been associated with official, local/state/federal government impulses, and with public history institutions. Both tendencies are evident everywhere, but public history as experienced in what we used to call non-Western countries has its own varied, particular and unique history. How to tackle this issue - which is of course a foundational and definitional one? My first impulse was to adopt the strategy of the editor of the *Companion to World History* by offering an opening section with chapters organized by geography. In the end I rejected this for a number of reasons: it artificially highlighted difference rather than shared histories; it created the impression that there might be a singular "European" or "Pacific" (etc.) experience which could stand for all (a particular problem when authors would undoubtedly speak to their own area of expertise); and it proved exceptionally difficult to create an acceptable, inclusive cluster of chapters (what do we mean by "Asia"? by "Africa"? Should Armenia or Israel be considered part of "Europe" (as in the Eurovision song contest) and so on. Besides being problematic, such a section would cause many more problems than it would solve. Far better, I decided, to incorporate a range of local, regional and national experiences through the chapters focusing on particular themes and topics.

## **Sites of Public History, Doing Public History**

As one of the foundational members of our two year MA programme in public history, one of the earliest in Canada, I remember our conversations as to what would constitute a great public history programme. We settled on a structure that involved a compulsory *Introduction to Public History* seminar; the choice of two optional core seminars (one on museums, the other on archives, which to our 2002 selves seemed to be the two ‘key’ sites of public history);<sup>2</sup> a number of optional courses focusing on important topics in public history;<sup>3</sup> a summer internship with a public history institution; and a research essay (40-60 pages) based on original research. This structure has remained more or less in place for the past ten years. In addition, students take our two general history seminars, one on research methods and practice, the other one on theory. Most of our seminars require students to engage with substantive issues, theory, and practice, the latter often gained through a project involving collaboration with public history professionals working in public history institutions. All of this led me to submit a proposal that offered sections with chapters exploring sites of public history (museums, archives, digital, visual, heritage houses, parks etc.) as well as ways of doing public history (oral history, re-enactment, sharing authority, surveying the public, memory etc). Both sections were well received by the reviewers. However, in our re-thinking of the volume, we became dissatisfied with this approach, fearing that there would be a lot of repetition and over-lap, and, much worse, that the dynamic of public history seemed to always come from above, with public historians shaping the history the public received. While site specific chapters are still present, these have been re-organised into a structure that seeks to highlight the public as activists in public history making as well as consumers.

## **Theory, Method and Practice**

The work of public historians is often theoretically engaged and informed, and this is reflected in the structure of our MA (a theory course), in our teaching (each seminar focuses on theory as well as practice) and our mentoring as supervisors. At first, then, I proposed two sections, one on theory and one on methods. The theory section contained those theoretical approaches which I considered essential for public history students to know about (for example, identity, memory, narrative, and governmentality). That on methods narrowed in on oral history, digital history, visual history, filmic history etc. The problem with these two sections was simply that none of this was particular to public history – historians of all kinds engage with these theories, and use these methodologies. I’ve now come up with a theory section that focuses on theories and methods which, if not unique to public history, have been especially shaped by the work of public historians. It has chapters on trauma and memory, empathy, authenticity, objects and agency, and the senses. There is now no methods section at all; methods and approaches are now subsumed into other chapters as the authors feel the need to explore them.

## **Conclusion**

The sections on theory, method, and sites seemed to be obvious inclusions given my experience as a teacher of public history. Since the proposal received very positive comments from reviewers who were also experienced teachers and practitioners in the field internationally, this was not an unfounded assumption. However, once it came down to reviewing the outline to begin the commissioning process, it became clear that changes had to be made. In part this was because rather than offering “how to” chapters for students, I now thought it was more important to highlight what is unique about, and special to, our field. Moreover, the structure risked relegating the public to the role of consuming rather than making public history. I’m sure the original outline would have

served well, but I'm much more excited by the new, and of course further changes might be necessary. I would very much welcome comments and reactions to it, and so have posted it separately from this paper for your perusal.

David

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<sup>1</sup> Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips (eds), *Going Public. The Changing Face of New Zealand History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> These are offered in alternate years. I teach the one on *Museums, Public Memory and National Identity* and the archives course has always been taught by a professional archivist from Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>3</sup> We usually offer two of these a year. I teach a seminar on *Narrativity and Performance in Public History*, while colleagues offer seminars on *Photography; Digital History; Local History; and Oral History*, each reflecting our own research interests and changing concerns in the field.

## **NCPH annual conference 2013: Teaching public history working group**

### **Case study: Ghent University & Objectives and Attainment Targets of a Study Programme in Public History**

**Bruno De Wever, Professor in History & Teacher Training, Ghent University**

#### 0. Introduction

This paper has three objectives: 1. To present a very brief overview of the university courses in Public History in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium); 2. To elaborate on the Public History course of Ghent University; 3. To formulate objectives and attainment targets of a study programme in Public History.

#### I. Public History at Flemish universities

Public History was introduced into Flemish higher education from 2004 on with the introduction of a Bachelor and Master structure as implementation of the Bologna Declaration of the European Ministers of Education (1999):

- The University of Antwerp (UA), *'Heritage and Public History'* (6 ECTS) in the MA History;
- The Catholic University of Leuven (KULeuven), *'History for a Broad Public'* (7 ECTS) and *'History for a Broad Public: Analysing Historical Practices'* (3 ECTS) in the BA History. The MA History has a course entitled *'Public History: History and Education'* (6 ECTS), which is also in the programme of the Teacher Training for History, Arts & Music;
- Ghent University, *'Research Seminar Public History'* (10 ECTS) in the MA History

With a reform of the MAs in view, the Departments of History decided to organise an inter-university trajectory in Public History of 60 ECTS embedded in a MA in History of 120 ECTS. This was foreseen for 2013, but has been delayed due to political disagreement until (at least) 2015 and without the assurance of an MA in History of 120 ECTS.

Conclusion: Public History in Flanders is embedded in the History Departments and limited to one (UA; UGent) or three courses (KUL) with a minimum of 6 ECTS and a maximum of 16. There is no separate trajectory in Public History at this moment. There are plans for a trajectory of Public History of 60 ECTS, but no formal commitment.

Elements of Public History are part of other courses, especially in the field of heritage education. The Brussels Free University (VUB) has a course *'Archaeology and Industrial Heritage'* (6 ECTS) and a course *'Heritage and Ethnology'* (6 ECTS). Some Flemish University Colleges programme a specialised course on heritage: <http://www.faronet.be/dossier/opleidingen-versie-26-juli-2011/erfgoedvakken>.

Public History and Heritage Studies are related but nevertheless have separate goals. Heritage Studies focus on tangible and intangible traces from the past and how they are meaningful in the present. Public History has a broader definition of the impact of the past. The way the *'Research Seminar Public History'* at Ghent University is conceived makes this clear.

#### II. Public History at Ghent University: <http://www.ipg.ugent.be/onderwijs/ugent>

The *'Research Seminar Public History'* deals with historical practices outside academia in the present and the past in every public domain where history or historians function. Students learn about Public

History in classes (5 ECTS) and in internships (5 ECTS). The study implies a broad theoretical field and a variety of analytical and practical skills and internships:

#### 1. Theory

- Continuity and change of history and historians in society
- The birth of the historical profession and processes of professionalisation
- The social functioning of history
- History and collective memory
- History and identity
- Historical cultures and modes of historicity
- History and heritage

#### 2. Analysing historical practices

- History/historians in politics
- History/historians in museums and exhibitions
- History/historians in the press
- History/historians in film and television
- History/historians in literature
- History/historians in art
- History/historians in cyberspace
- History/historians and leisure practices
- History/historians in education

#### 3. Historical skills

- Discourse analysis
- Image analysis
- Oral History
- Writing history in various contexts and for various purposes
- Legislation on privacy, copyright, heritage etc.
- Budgeting historical projects
- Analysis of historical interest

#### 4. Internships

- Observation and analysis of historical practices by means of work placement in an organisation or specific environment.
- Goal-oriented teamwork in an organisation or specific environment where history goes public

The classes imply formal learning through lectures, seminars and literature.

The internships imply informal and situated learning. Students learn by doing and experiencing, and achieve competence in a specific and authentic context. The social setting is crucial: students learn by observation, by performing tasks and by communicating and evaluating their deliveries and performances.

### III. Objectives and Attainment Targets of a Study Programme in Public History

Embedded in the Study of History, Public History is academic by nature. Reflexivity and theoretical grounding are important. By the same token, Public History must offer a professional formation. Therefore the learning outcomes of a study programme in Public History should reflect the profile of a professional Public Historian.

What follows is merely an attempt to define the profile of a professional Public Historian and to fuel further discussion on this theme.

1. The public historian as a content expert

- Mastering and further developing the domain of history-specific knowledge and skills
- Applying the specific knowledge and skills of an historian in the public domain
- Being cognisant of the results of historical research that is relevant to the various domains of public history
- Approaching heritage on an interdisciplinary level based on awareness of and insights into the evolution, possibilities and limitations of disciplines, including Art Sciences, Archaeology, Heritage Studies, and Media Studies

2. The public historian as innovator-researcher

- Applying and implementing innovative elements
- Questioning and redirecting one's personal professional approach

3. The public historian as a member of a professional team

- Collaborating and negotiating in a professional team
- Discussing a professional team's approach to history
- Discussing and respecting task allocation in a professional team
- Facilitating consensus-building with various stakeholders
- Critically analysing international conventions, laws, decrees and policy texts on heritage, privacy and history in the public domain

4. The public historian as a member of a community

- Participating in the societal debate about history and heritage themes
- Communicating on the profession of the public historian and its place in society
- Participation in culture

Theory and Practice for Mature Students in a Public History Program: A personal case study  
by Sanna Guérin, Carleton University

Introduction

Mature students are not uncommon in university classrooms. In a program such as public history, where there is an emphasis on the theoretical and the practical, mature students can present both particular challenges and advantages to the classroom dynamic. In particular, when the mature student is bringing with them a background of professional experience in the public history field, in particular experiences the instructors may only share on a theoretical level, this can create interesting tensions in the classroom that may highlight the limitations of academic pedagogy.

For this case study, I am presenting my own experiences as a returning (and thus mature) student at Carleton University. I will detail my background and professional experiences, and also my motivations for applying for the Public History Masters program, as well as the expectations I have on the program. I will then highlight some of my experiences in my 1.5 years in the program, and how they have differed from the typical Masters student. I will also bring in some of the educational discourse regarding mature students, and finally will make some suggestions on how instructors might consider engaging experienced students in their public history classes.

Background

I graduated from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan with a history B.A. in 2001, where I concentrated on ancient and medieval history, with a focus on material culture through archaeology. After moving to Ottawa in 2002, I enrolled in the Applied Museum Studies program at Algonquin College, which is a professional program meant to introduce students to the different branches of museum practice, such as collections management, exhibition development, conservation, and educational programming.<sup>1</sup> The program also featured placement options, which I completed at municipal museums such as the Bytown Museum and Nepean Museum, and with a group of labour activists seeking to create a workers' museum; my placement with the latter began a long-term working relationship that continues to this day. I also had employment as a tour guide giving historical tours in the downtown area of Ottawa, and as I completed my program, I was hired at the Canadian War Museum as it re-opened in its new facilities in 2005. Since then, I have worked as a part-time curator (including experience in staff and volunteer supervision, grant applications, and

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1 The program features two streams: one for recent high-school graduates, and one for university graduates.

collections experience) with the workers' history group (with three exhibitions successfully curated), and at the War Museum I have had the opportunity to be a tour guide, an educator, a program animator, facilitator for events, first-person interpreter, and a participant in several kinds of exhibition evaluation.

I returned to university in 2007 with the eventual goal of completing my honours degree in history at Carleton, with the goal of applying to the Public History program after finishing the required courses part-time. At the time, as I had already met the program's prerequisites with my previous schooling, I was able to take a selection of courses related either directly or indirectly to public history. My motivation for entering the public history program was to find theoretical approaches to challenges I had encountered in curating; I was accepted into the program in 2011. My research is centred on the representations of women in the Imperial War Museum in London, England, particularly in their First World War exhibitions past and present.

In addition to theoretical knowledge I hoped to gain, I wanted to also use my Masters program as a means of networking beyond the heritage community in Ottawa; I wanted to meet historians and other professionals with the hope of future work and contacts. I also found myself considering a further path into academia after completing my program.

### Life as a Masters Student

The first thing I realized when I returned to school was that my style of learning had changed; in many courses, I found I could relate more of my life experiences to the content matter, and it helped me to both retain and comprehend theories more often. For example, in a fourth-year seminar, in a discussion about a First World War exhibition at the Canadian War Museum, many of my classmates missed the purpose of the large programming space in the rear of the gallery; my familiarity with the area meant I could provide insight into how it was intended to be used, and why particular elements functioned the way they were. I felt I was able to provide insight into the space, from a point-of-view that my classmates had not considered. In another situation, I was amused to hear a new classmate refer to a situation I had lived through in purely theoretical terms.

In retrospect, and in researching the learning styles of mature students, I have learned that this is a very typical of older students. Among characteristics of mature students are tendencies to be "self-directed," and to draw from "a rich reservoir of experience that can serve as a resource for learning."<sup>2</sup> This is something that distinguishes mature students from most typical students at the undergraduate and graduate level, especially those who have gone directly from high school to undergraduate to

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2 Susan Imel, as quoted in "Learning as an Adult: Learning to Series," <http://www.studygs.net/adulted.htm> [accessed January 14, 2013].

graduate levels.

However, at the graduate levels, I began to experience a reluctance from some professors in bringing "personal stories" or "anecdotes" into the seminar discussions, despite when I would try to balance it with examples drawn from assigned readings. In public history courses, which were more open to the reflexive experience, it was confirmed to me that I possessed experiences that most of the professors did not have; in fact, in 2007 when I first enquired into the program, I was told by a faculty member that I could bring a completely different viewpoint to the program through my professional experience.

For the most part, I do feel that's true. In a theoretical discussion about what constitutes a museum, for example, I could draw in real-life and governmental considerations about what a museum is by way of funding requirements: policies, planning documents such as strategic plans, hours of operation, a physical location, an active membership and some kind of collection. These practical considerations were stated alongside theoretical considerations, too, in a class where online resources such as Pinterest and sites of memory such as Canada's Vimy Ridge Memorial in France were being considered museum-like.

However, even practical experience in public history sometimes has its limits; there were often moments when I felt that relevant examples – still germane to the discussion – were politely listened to and then set aside for more theoretical concepts. Despite this, many of my classmates and colleagues, themselves just beginning their own paths in public history to a certain extent, have told me that they value the examples that I bring to discussions. Talking about theory is good, they agree, but sometimes it's the real life examples that illustrate and drive the point home.

### Suggestions

Sharing authority is one of the many terms used in public history, and although I am not suggesting that professors cede authority to students regarding of experience, there is the need for reconsideration when it comes to traditional pedagogy<sup>3</sup> at the graduate level. It does not work for every student, especially in a situation where a mature students holds more professional and practical experience in a public history context.

Pedagogical theories have put forth that idea in the past. Paulo Freire's "critical pedagogy," for example, challenges universities and colleges to consider other forms of knowledge. As summarized by Henry Giroux, the following is equally applicable to considerations of mature students in a

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3 I also query the use of the word "pedagogy" when it comes to the university level.

university setting:

That means personal experience becomes a valuable resource, giving students the opportunity to relate their own narratives, social relations, and histories to what is being taught. It is also a resource to help students locate themselves in the concrete conditions of their daily lives while furthering their understanding of the limits often imposed by those conditions. Experience is a starting point, an object of inquiry that can be affirmed, interrogated, and used to develop broader knowledge and understanding.<sup>4</sup>

Freire's point about students being able to "locate themselves in the concrete conditions of their daily lives" echoes some of the research conducted on the learning skills and objects of mature students. A summary of this research, created for York University in Toronto, Ontario, drives home the point that prior experience is an important part of their learning process.<sup>5</sup> In a public history context, where reflexivity is encouraged, professors may want to help guide their experienced and mature students into a level of sharing that is both conducive for their own learning and for the dynamics of the class in order to find balance between "anecdotes" and theory.

In summary, based on my own experiences and some of the research I have done in recent weeks regarding pedagogy and its counter-part of andragogy (the teaching of adults),<sup>6</sup> I would suggest some of the following:

- Become familiar with the concepts of andragogy and how it reflects on the dynamics of the class and the content being discussed
- Encourage the mature students to share their professional experiences while being germane to the academic conversation
- Let the mature student know if there are more appropriate ways to channel their experience into the classroom dynamics, such as leading activities that relate to their experience (ie, based on my experience, I suggested a group activity that observed visitors' behaviour in an exhibition hosted in the department; the activity related to the course topic)

On the whole, I have enjoyed my experience in my Masters program, and do feel that for the most part I have been valued for my contributions to the discussions. This case study highlights some

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4 Henry Giroux, "Lessons from Paulo Freire," *Chronicles of Higher Education*, Volume 59, Issue 9 (October 22, 2010), p2. <https://coms221--instructionalcomm.wikispaces.com/file/view/Giroux,+H.+Lessons+From+Paulo+Freire.pdf> [accessed January 15, 2013]

5 "Learning Strategies, Skills and Experiences of Mature Students," York University, 2010. <http://www.yorku.ca/acmaps/pdfs/research/Learning%20Strategies,%20Skills,%20and%20Experiences%20of%20Mature%20Students%202010.pdf> [accessed January 14, 2013]

6 A good definition of andragogy, and what it consists of, can be found here on page 17: <http://www.insightjournal.net/Volume2/Andragogy%20and%20Pedagogy%20as%20Foundational%20Theory%20for%20Student%20Motivation%20in%20Higher%20Education.pdf>

of my disappointments, and is meant to highlight possibilities for future public history professionals in similar circumstances.

**Conference title:** “Knowing your Public(s)—The Significance of Audiences in Public History”

2013 Annual Meeting, National Council on Public History,  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, April 17-20, 2013

**Paper Title:** Looking the Tiger in the eye: The challenges of connecting the past, present and future for an urban audience in India<sup>1</sup>

**Presenter:** Dr. Indira Chowdhury

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### **Context and Background**

The Tiger Comes to Town is a Public History project undertaken by the students of the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology with 11 under-graduate students for a full semester [August- October 2012]. The project was partially funded by the Archaeological Survey of India which was at that time celebrating 150 years of its foundation. This was a site specific project undertaken at the Bangalore Fort. It evoked the nearly forgotten “Tiger of Mysore” as Tipu Sultan, the eighteenth century ruler was called. Tipu ruled over the Mysore Sultanate from 1782 to 1799. A legend in his times, Tipu was feared as much as he was admired. Not surprisingly, a cluster of myths grew around him. 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

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Aliyeh Rizvi whose passionate interest in Tipu Sultan and Bangalore set the project off. I also thank Nikita Jain, Meera Sankar, Vinitha Mokshagundam, Chitradip Pramanik, Sonalee Mandke, Ramesh Kalkur, Aarthi Ajit, and all our students of the “Tiger comes to Town Project”.

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.

Bangalore Fort was the site of the Third Anglo-Mysore War in 1791. 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 interest in the Fort was rekindled.

### **Course Design**

The course was created for undergraduate students of Design. This was not a course designed for Public History students. The students began with popular history by going on a walk with Arun Pai – who 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 were trained in oral history methods and had to conduct hour-long interviews with people who lived in the Fort area. In the next phase of the project – students did group work - creating narratives for a Fort Walk, making up a dramatic narrative about the fall of Fort in 1791, designing Shadow Puppets and designing a booklet about the project. The students were trained in how to do a docent walk by Rama Lakshmi – an oral historian and freelance museum consultant who herself was trained at the Smithsonian. They were also trained in voice control and body movement by Vijay Padakki, Director of the Bangalore Little Theatre. They worked with the design of Shadow puppets with a former student of Srishti – Nikita Jain who created games for children with Shadow puppets in her final year diploma project. 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”. 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. On 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October they presented the Shadow Play to schoolchildren who were invited to visit the Fort, they also took the visitors on a Fort Walk. A second iteration of the project was undertaken with volunteers on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> December. At this point the project also invited the Bangalore Little Theatre to perform “Tiger, Tiger” a play by Dina Mehta at the Fort. This paper will focus on the student project and the pedagogy devised to enable students to understand, interpret and communicate about the historical period associated with the Fort.

The mixed pedagogy was necessary given that we had to work with the skill sets of design students. But 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 as the next section will demonstrate.

## **History, Oral History and Story-telling**

Tipu's summer palace and the Bangalore fort are both now part of a congested market-place at the heart of the urban centre. We began with the question: what part does local history play in defining our collective identity in an isolated urban environment? What is the context by which local communities engage with their past? What are their experiences of it? How can these 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 as remnants of a spectacular and significant past fostering no connection with present-day landscape that has been reshaped by the forces of history. Moreover, these sites are divorced from latter-day human history and as a result, there is very little understanding of the relationship between the archaeological site and human habitation around it. The students of this project attempted to understand how legends survive migration and other forms of socio-economic disruption. Drawing together different sources and traditions of knowledge, the project attempted to use oral histories to interpret the history of the site and the meaning it still holds for those who live in its vicinity. As we developed an interpretative framework within which to place these oral histories we were struck by what lay beyond their articulation.

The oral histories told us more about the present and the ways in which people perceive the past. For example: Sayed Ajaz who lives in Chamrajpet [an area adjoining the Fort] and works at the Hazrath Syedda Sydani Beebi Ammaji Rehmatlaale Dargah near the Fort, freely intermingled legend and history in his interview. This interview, like several others demonstrated how earlier cycles of change are perceived by those who witness changes in their own lifetime. On the other hand, 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]. that the Hindu artisanal community shared with the Muslim families The interview with Alasingari Bhatta, the priest at the Kote Anjaneya Swamy Temple in Kalasipalyam [the area of the Fort], demonstrates the ways in

which local communities bring a specific understanding to a historical character who lived in a warrior society, a society very different from their own. These narratives were included as audio excerpts that played in the Guard room during the second iteration of the project on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> December. Although it drew in a curious audience, most did not stay to engage with the recordings. This alerted us to the fact that the audiences who visited the project came with varied expectations – some felt that the Shadow play was more attractive, others were drawn to the information panels which were put up during the second iteration. This kind of audience engagement led us to conclude that the audiences were seeking more visual forms of engagement and were not interested in listening to local legends recounted by the local community. This is a problem that we intend taking forward later.

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. However, they 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 were to revitalize and reawaken an interest in this neglected architectural 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 and Tipu’s *Dream Diary* – making it appear as if there was continuity between the events of 1791 and Tipu’s dreams. While this approach enhanced the dramatic elements, we decided that one of the purposes of a Public History project was to make the audience aware of historical evidence. The dramatization of Tipu’s dreams from his *Dream Diary* were separated 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.

### **The Challenges of Public History in the postcolonial Indian context**

1. In India there are four distinct streams that engage with the historical:
  - a) Academic history where historians speak with other historians,
  - b) Political groups that are often involved in “re-writing” history motivated by ideology and

c) Interest groups that promote very positivist notions of particular events or people in history – for example the Tipu Sultan United Front and d) Popular television programmes that represent historical periods or events.

There is no critical discourse on public history that has emerged in India. Public history does not exist as a discipline or as a genre of writing in India. So any group attempting to do this experiences both the advantages and the disadvantages of the pioneer – on the one hand, it is an open terrain that can be explored and on the other there are no available bench-marks or standards against which any Public History programme can be assessed.

2) Postcolonial history of India has focused for a long period, almost exclusively on nationalism and on developing a critique of nationalism. This has had serious consequences for the teaching of history – all histories of the pre-colonial period are cast in the same mould and viewed through the lens of postcolonial theory. Modernity is only identified as a moment inaugurated by colonialism and colonial modernity is the only possible form modernity can take in India. Recent work by Sanjay Subramaniam has now urged us to explore the notion of the “Late Modern” – a concept with which to understand figures like Tipu Sultan.

3) 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?

4) How can we use oral history effectively to explore the history of archaeological sites? Would this enable better community participation and ensure more effective dissemination?

5) How can public history pedagogy engage with controversial figures in history – especially those who invoke controversy within the present context?

## **Conclusion**

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 promote historical understanding, we need to engage audiences with the mundane, the exotic and the controversial. We also need to build audience awareness of the more academic debates. Therefore, the field of Public History involves an engagement with historical debates through different forms of communication – textual, visual and aural. The toolkit of the Public Historian therefore needs to be equipped with a range of skills. Public History, therefore, requires a pedagogy that is multi-faceted and an attitude that does not shy away from the controversial.

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Paul Litt

### **That Sinking Feeling: When a Collaborative Project Goes Under**

This working paper describes a collaborative project with a national museum that was the major assignment for a public history graduate class at Carleton University in Ottawa in the fall of 2012. The project positioned the students as researchers contributing to an exhibition in development. An initial orientation at the museum introduced the students to curators and the exhibition artifacts. They were then asked to prepare a research proposal that was vetted by the course instructor (Paul Litt) and the museum curator (John Willis). The students presented their research to museum staff and the department of history community at a mini-conference at the end of the fall term, then, taking feedback from that exercise into account, completed substantial research essays (5000 words). The project worked as anticipated to give students exposure to “real world” public history practice and provide the community partner with valuable background research for its exhibition. There were also unanticipated benefits. Even though each student researched a distinctly different aspect of the topic, having a shared object of study allowed for knowledge sharing that replicated workplace teamwork, gave each student more time for higher level analysis, and developed the *esprit de corps* of the class.

The Carleton Masters in Public History is designed to equip historians with an enhanced awareness of the specific challenges of applying historical knowledge and methodologies in the public sphere. Applicants come from across Canada; typically six to eight students are admitted a year. They take a two-year program consisting of an initial academic year of coursework, a summer in between first and second year during which students do an internship and begin research on a major research essay, and a second year in which students complete their course work and their major research essay. Students take regular graduate history courses along with specialized public history courses to build their understanding of public history. Course content is international in scope,

Paul Litt

situated within transnational comparative frameworks and designed to foster an understanding of public history as an integrated field of theory and practice.

The Carleton program benefits from ready access to the capital's national cultural resources—museums, archives, historic sites and monuments—as well as local historical resources of the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, the City of Ottawa, and numerous voluntary bodies. Its faculty are active researchers who publish widely in the field of public history. They work closely with history institutions, groups and activists in the region, pursuing research interests that include public memory, digital history, archives, visual culture, local history, narrativity, oral history, commemoration, museums, performance, place, and social media. The Carleton Centre for Public History, a research centre associated with the history department, is central to this enterprise, bringing graduate students and faculty from many disciplines together to pursue public history projects in collaboration with community partners.

Collaborative projects are also a key feature of public history graduate courses. They give students practical experience in the field while providing the partner with a motivated and knowledgeable project team dedicated to producing a specific product. The course in which this project was undertaken was the core course, *HIST5700 – Introduction to Public History*, that introduces incoming students to the field of public history. For the fall term of 2012, the instructor liaised with staff at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec (the former city of Hull, across the Ottawa River from Ottawa) to develop a project that would give the students exposure to a public history work environment and the challenges of developing a major museum exhibition while providing the museum with valuable background research for an exhibition in development for 2014.

The opportunity for this collaboration arose when the museum acquired a collection that provided the basis for an exhibition on the *Empress of Ireland* planned for the hundredth anniversary of its sinking in 1914. The *Empress of Ireland* was one of a fleet of ocean liners operated by Canadian Pacific. It regularly carried over 1500 passengers and crew on a trans-Atlantic route between Liverpool and Quebec City. On an outgoing voyage down the St. Lawrence River in May of

Paul Litt

1914, it collided with a Norwegian collier, sustained a long gash in its hull, and sank within fifteen minutes. Over a thousand passengers and crew drowned, making it a maritime disaster comparable to the sinking of the Titanic two years earlier. There are many fascinating dimensions of the Empress story, not least of which was captured by a question posed to the students by the head curator for the exhibition: why has the Empress been largely forgotten while the Titanic looms so large in public memory?

The students were told to consider themselves as consultants to the curator, i.e. a public historian hired to help solve one of the challenges of developing the exhibition. They were given considerable latitude in their choice of a research topic. They could tackle a question relating to the historical circumstances of the sinking of the Empress of Ireland, study past representations of the event to investigate how it had been depicted in public memory, develop a plan for how to present and interpret a particular aspect of the subject to the public in a museum setting, or propose some other way in which they could contribute to the project. While the assignment was “real” in the sense that it had practical application to an actual exhibition, at the same time the students were required to follow academic standards in the development and presentation of their research, including due consideration of literature in the field, theoretical perspectives, and methodological issues.

The students quickly developed their own avenues of inquiry about the Empress. The topics they ended up settling on included:

- public mourning in the wake of the disaster
- how representative figures from the passenger list could bring to life for a museum audience the experience of different classes of passengers on the Empress
- marine archaeology and heritage protection for the wreck
- how to interpret such a tragedy to children
- shipboard etiquette as an entrée into issues of social mobility in the Edwardian era
- the Empress as part of the steam technology of Empire

The range of these topics points to one of the benefits, aside from free research, that the museum can derive from such a collaborative project. In general terms, the graduate students’ choices of topics were influenced by their recent experience in the academy. In choosing what aspect of the Empress to cover they were directed to do the background reading necessary to properly

Paul Litt

contextualize their subject in the scholarly literature. This gave the museum some idea about how contemporary academic scholarship would interpret the object of its exhibition. The same process applied with regard to the public history issues and concepts to which the students were being exposed week in and week out in their first term in the program. These were top of mind for the students as they considered the implications of the history of the Empress of Ireland, not least because their instructor's evaluation of their work included consideration of how well they integrated relevant course work into their research project. In addition to targeted research, then, the museum was getting a broad exposure to how its exhibition intersected with current issues in the field of public history, including an early heads-up on some potentially controversial aspects of its upcoming exhibition.

An end of term mini-conference offered students the chance to workshop their essays as they neared completion. The students organized themselves into panels based on thematic connections, and each made a short (5 minute) presentation on their research to museum staff, the rest of the class, and other members of the department. The students shared issues they had encountered in writing their papers and sought peer input to help finish their writing. Each panel presentation was followed by a Q&A session.

The similarities between a class project such as this and the teamwork required in a public history work environment are self-evident and need not be belaboured here. The least anticipated and most gratifying outcome of this assignment was the amount of energy and enthusiasm students put into it. Why they did so is open to speculation. The romance and tragedy of the Empress story may have contributed. No doubt another factor was the attraction of making a contribution that would be recognized at a high-profile national museum exhibition that would attract substantial public interest. The sociological dynamics of group learning also played a part. Everyone got caught up in a communal effort, felt responsible for contributing to the whole, was excited by participation in a collective intellectual effort, and was regularly gratified by the continuous revelations of the ongoing inquiry. In any event, the collaborative project contributed greatly to the creation of strong

Paul Litt

bonds among the incoming cohort of public history students, one of the extracurricular objectives of the introductory core course of any academic program.

The resulting *esprit de corps* had in turn a substantial academic payoff. The students shared their individual research results. In some cases this meant giving classmates bibliographic references or hard-to-find resources that they alone had been able to secure. In others it meant passing on tid-bits of information that related more to a classmate's topic than their own. As this collective research ethic evolved, every student in the group was spared some of the frustrations and much of the time that typically go in to solo research efforts. This freed resources for redirection into higher value-added activities such as analysis, theorizing, and narrative enhancement with anecdote, telling detail, and colour. On this level too students shared, developing perspectives, insights and themes that cut across various topics, enriching all. The whole was, certainly, greater than the sum of its parts, but that tired axiom fails to capture the dynamism and excitement of the process as the research individually and collectively and, above all, interactively, spun its way toward completion.

Two cautionary notes. First, such projects are dependent on the expertise of museum staff, if only to provide a rough understanding of public history practice in their institution that student can use to frame their work in a relevant fashion. The availability and responsiveness of the museum staff support is a factor beyond the control of the course instructor. Promises made up front and all the good will in the world cannot easily synchronize the lock-step progress of a semestered academic course with the comparatively unpredictable workflow of a public history institution. The other caution relates to the complementarity of the demands of exhibition design and research topics, an issue that might be conceptualized more generally as a form-content dichotomy. Generally the practical requirements of the exhibition provided a useful frame by which to discipline the analysis and presentation of research. Papers that fore-grounded presentation issues at the expense of content were less successful. In other words, the demands of form helped give meaningful shape to content, but exercises that concentrated primarily on form at the expense of knowledge-in-depth proved to be less substantial and satisfying.

Paul Litt

Despite these caveats, you will by now have gathered that the title of this paper is no more than a bad pun on the unhappy fate of the Empress of Ireland. The class project on the Empress conducted in collaboration with a public history institution steered safely into port with a rich cargo. Not only did it give students an applied history experience, it replicated the type of teamwork characteristic of professional work in a major public history institution. The pedagogical payoff constituted the scholarly equivalent of the benefits of economies of scale. Impossible to quantify, but equally impossible to ignore, was the emotional side-effects: the peer group seduction and shared excitement of a communal inquiry that took on a life of its own.

# **The Challenges of Teaching Public History in a Society in Transition out of a Traumatic Past**

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## The South African Context

The course that I teach, Introduction to Public History (final year History students), arose specifically out of the special circumstances of post-apartheid South Africa. Until the end of apartheid 19 years ago, all historical information in the public domain was geared toward the glorification of European domination and achievements, while people, events, place names and places of cultural significance for the majority African population scarcely received any mention. The democratic government undertook rigorous efforts to fully transform the heritage sector, but efforts to date have been slow.

Over the past year or so, South Africa has experienced a growing awareness that the changes made in the society so far are somewhat superficial, leaving untouched aspects of the legacies of the deeply racist past. Issues such as both blatant and subtle forms of racist behavior, widespread corruption and vandalism of public property, a culture of dependency and entitlement and eruptions of violent conflicts centered around issues of pay and social services all indicate that something is still not right. The national government is now placing a good deal of emphasis on building social cohesion through new forms of 'active citizenship.'

The potential of using knowledge of the past in a sensitive and transformative way could be seen as the core mission of public history in South Africa. Thoughtfully done, it serves to highlight the achievements of the marginalized black majority, put colonialism into a different perspective, offers people from different cultures a chance to understand each other better and gives a cathartic release from past injustices.

## Course design

During a 6-week term, students work in groups with a 'client' from the non-university community to produce a 'product' which includes the presentation of historical knowledge. It is up to the client to decide the type of output wanted and then the students have to produce the best possible product within their time and cost limitations.

Lectures during the first half of the course give students a basic introduction to the world of public history. Each year a particular theme is chosen for all groups, about which some generic information is provided. Lecture sessions cover the particular needs of South African society, student analysis of websites, project management, and the essence of public history with a strong emphasis on the need for ethical accountability, while being interesting, informative and entertaining.

The value of the group-work and client approach:

- 1) By working under the direction of a client, the ownership of the knowledge is placed in the community and not the university. Peoples' feelings, perceptions and personal needs are at the center.

2) Clients care enough about a topic to give it time and attention, as well as assist with networking to find informants, visual material and documentary information. They provide the heart and tone of the project.

3) The final output ensures that the client benefits, both from the acquisition of new historical information and because the output is useable by them. Fears of being exploited by academic researchers are minimized.

4) Students gain exposure to the realities of the world outside of the university, including limited financing, poor access to technological resources and community dynamics around who 'owns' history, as well as getting acquainted with a sector of the population they may have known little about.

5) Students face the challenges of overcoming the racial divides of the past and must learn to use all resources in a sensitive and constructive manner. By working with a client, the nuances of interpretation and meaning get tested on an ongoing basis.

6) The many facets of effective project management are experienced by students as a group must execute a project that is fully do-able within the constraints.

#### Case study

One year the theme was local NGO's and their work to help alleviate hardships experienced by low-income communities. One group assisted the Raphael Center, which services people living with HIV/Aids in a variety of ways. The students and Director negotiated a final product which was an informative calendar, combining photos taken by residents with short, pithy descriptions of the Center's program. It was designed as both a gift for volunteers and participants, as well as a colorful and accessible way for potential donors to see what the Center was about.

It gave a clear and strong message of a vibrant and caring place which helped people to manage their difficulties in a positive way. The experiences and perspectives of the patients took center-stage in a moving way, using life histories. Another version was developed as a power-point presentation to help introduce the Centre to newcomers and possible funders.

Some of the students got so deeply involved that they kept going back as volunteers long after the course finished.

#### Drawbacks to this approach

1) It is hard work to identify viable topics and clients. Clients need to be fully briefed about their role and how to work with students, as leading a public history project is generally entirely foreign to them.

2) Students often lack the technical skills to meet their goals. They know enough to get by, but need better support.

3) There is never enough time. Students always under-estimate how long it will take to get tasks done, especially when it involves people outside of the university.

4) The end products are never fully-polished. In the rush to meet deadlines, students do not always proofread carefully enough. To be more useable, most products would need to be handled by a professional editor.

5) Students too readily fall back on superficial descriptions and remain shallow on analysis.

6) Subtle and sensitive issues related to transforming the way the past can be used are often viewed quite differently by students and by clients. More often the students live in a comfort-zone and have not been exposed to how people 'outside' really feel. Not all tensions can be resolved satisfactorily.