

The Museum of English Rural Life is part of the
University Museums and Special Collections Services



Rural crafts today

A film project at the Museum of English Rural Life 2006–08



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B Rural crafts today. Graphics banners for an exhibition at the Museum of English Rural Life, 2008



Rural crafts today

A film project at the Museum of English Rural Life 2006–08

Background

There is a body of work on recording and collecting rural crafts that stretches back through the twentieth century. From the personal accounts of George Sturt (*The wheelwrights Shop*, 1923) and Walter Rose (*The Village Carpenter*, 1937); through studies commissioned by the Agricultural Economics Research Institute at Oxford in the 1920s (*The Rural Industries of England & Wales*, Randolph & Hay, 1926) and The Rural Industries Bureau in the 1930s; to the collectors such as Dr John Kirk, Edward Pinto, and R.A.Salaman and the museums that followed them: charting these crafts as they struggled for survival in a changing world has been an ongoing fascination. The landmark text from a museum perspective was J.G.Jenkins' *Traditional Country Craftsmen* of 1965. Based on extensive fieldwork from his time at MERL, and focusing on the people, the techniques and the tools, this was the inspiration for a generation of curators and others and spawned a whole genre of further research, publication and museum presentation. Encouraged by the most recent investigation, namely *Crafts in the English Countryside: Towards a Future* (E.J.T.Collins (ed), Countryside Agency, 2004), we developed the idea of re-visiting the Jenkins approach to take a look at crafts and craftspeople in today's world but with the added assistance of contemporary technology.

Top: Ernie Sims, rake maker of Pamber End, Hampshire recorded in 1957 as part of an earlier crafts project at the Museum led by J.Geraint Jenkins

Bottom: Oak basket maker in Worcestershire, 1935. Photographed by Marjorie Wight (1889–1973). From the MERL collections

Bottom right: H.J. Pearce, a Berkshire saddler, photographed in the 1940s by C.F.F.Snow (1903–84) for the Rural Industries Bureau.



Another strong influence was the need recognised by rural museums to refresh their appeal if they are to engage effectively with today's audiences. Collections, in this case of craft tools and equipment, do not automatically find a response from visitors, particularly the younger members for whom these things are entirely beyond their experience. The Rural Museums Network has initiated its Building Relevance Programme for the purpose of understanding and meeting this very challenge. Connecting otherwise lifeless museum objects with real people and real skills is one way of building relevance. Hence the idea of a filming project as the means to that end was born.

In recent years, MERL has gained experience and confidence in using film as a medium. As part of its comprehensive redevelopment, which has included a new site and a new exhibition building, the Museum has deployed a variety of contemporary film techniques in its displays and invested in measures to make its own extensive film collections more accessible. Finding an opportunity to work with some filmmakers out on location seemed a logical next step. The means was provided by a grant from the Designation Challenge Fund administered by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council under its Renaissance programme. An added bonus was that the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum in Sussex was awarded funding for another film-based project, thus enabling a measure of active collaboration between the two.

The completed project has resulted in the addition of many hours of new film footage to the reference archive of the Museum. Edited versions of the ten films can be viewed in a special exhibition in the Museum's main gallery and copies have also been distributed to the other member museums of the Rural Museums Network. An online exhibition about the project is linked to the Museum's website (www.merl.org.uk) and includes footage of each film.



Craft objects from the MERL collections

Rural crafts filming project 2006–7

Film diary



The hay rake maker

Trevor Austen, (And featuring his brother, David)

The Rake Workshop, Church Rd, Smeeth, Ashford, Kent TN25 6SA

Date of filming: 24 May 2006



Ernie Sims, hay rake maker of Pamber End, Hampshire, photographed in the 1930s

Hay rake making has been a favourite craft of mine, ever since visiting Ernie Sims in the Hampshire village of Pamber End in the early 1980s. This heathland area on the Hampshire/Berkshire border was once the home of countless woodland craftsmen – besom broom makers especially – but is now dominated by the ominous presence nearby of the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, a bizarre contrast on former days. Ernie Sims was the last in a long family line of rake makers stretching back at least 150 years. The workshop, yard, and even the house had remained largely untouched by the twentieth century and Ernie himself, then well into his 80s, was still making a few rakes. He was almost completely deaf by that stage and had little to say about a lifetime spent in the craft, preferring to talk graphically and at great length about his experiences of the trenches in the First War. MERL has a very good photographic record of Sims, beginning with a series taken by the Rural Industries Bureau in the 1930s, another set taken by Geraint Jenkins from the museum in the late 1950s, and the record of my visit twenty or so years later. Jenkins featured Sims in a chapter of his *Traditional Country Craftsmen* (1965), and Jack Hargreaves made a short film of Sims at work for Southern Television in the 1970s. More footage, taken by Sam Hanna in the 1960s, exists within the Hanna collection at the North West Film Archive.

Trevor Austen visited MERL one day in 2004 with his friend Mark Cottrell, a local woodland craftsman from Oxfordshire. (In the early days of the portable video camera, I had experimented with trying to make a film of Mark's father cutting coppice and making hurdles near Henley. I'm embarrassed to note that the rather unsatisfactory results are now part of the MERL archive!). They were most interested in the Sims material and Trevor made some very illuminating comments about the differences in detail between their respective methods of hay rake production. Trevor had a slur to his speech, almost as if he had suffered a minor stroke, and encouraged me to visit his workshop in Kent as his health might prevent him from continuing to make rakes for much longer. I duly visited Smeeth in November 2004 by which time it was suspected that Trevor might be suffering from motor neurone disease. It was a cold day but Trevor was very welcoming and cheerful, considering the obvious strain and uncertainty he was under, and very anxious to demonstrate the unique attributes of that historic workshop and talk about his life with the craft past and present. Clearly, he knew what was coming and wanted to make sure that a record was made.

The subsequent confirmation of Trevor's illness shortly afterwards and the inexorable deterioration in his health brought home to me again the need to make a contemporary record of crafts such as this. It wasn't just the traditional and possibly dying nature of the craft itself, it was the combination of the person and the place that presented an exceptional circumstance worthy of capture for ever. So it was this experience of this craft over many years, and which culminated in that day spent with

Trevor, that was the inspiration for the filming project. It was fitting then that as soon as funding was available, the first film to be made would be of rake making at Smeeth. Sadly, Trevor by this time could neither talk nor walk with ease but he remained just as cheerful as ever and determined to do his bit. The day of the shoot was noticeably chilly for late May, with a strong cold wind, and it was raw inside the Smeeth workshop. David Austen, who has helped his brother out with rake making on and off for many years, did the demonstrations to camera but we did manage to get one short clip of Trevor drilling holes in the rake head.

The works at Smeeth seems to have been a rake making workshop since 1871. The business was started by a Mr Heathfield and by the time of the First World War was being run by two of his sons. By the Second War, only one brother remained, his sister married a London toolmaker called Spicer, and the business subsequently became Heathfield & Spicer.

In the early 1960s, Trevor Austen -who had started out as a local farm worker - was in the coppice trade and from 1966 was supplying the rake making business with its wood. He took over the business in 1971 when Heathfield and Spicer retired. They left him with an initial order for 144 dozen rakes for Bartlett & Partners of London. British Rail was also one of the big customers for rakes at the time as they were used for clearing grass on railway embankments.

From the later 1970s, Austen combined rake making with the job of milkman in order to provide sufficient income to support his family. In the 1980s, he began to make a name for himself as a demonstrator of the craft at events and shows. This helped to bring in more orders and in 1994 he gave up the milk round to concentrate on rake making again full-time. Other products in his line up included wooden mallets, garden lines and hop shovels, used in the oast houses of the area. He also used to supply sawn oak to Crofords, the large wheelwrighting business in Ashford.

Trevor Austen of Smeeth in Kent with rakes and a hop shovel. More recently, illness has forced him to give up the craft



David Austen assembling a rake



Smoothing the rake handle using a semi-automated device in the old workshop at Smeeth

The swill basket maker

Owen Jones

Spout Meadow, High Nibthwaite, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 8DF
Tel: 01229 885664 Email: owen.swills@virgin.net

Date of filming: 13 July 2006

I met Owen Jones at the Living Crafts Show at Hatfield House in early May 2006. This was one of his regular shows and he had come down for the three days to demonstrate the craft and sell some baskets. He was obviously a seasoned exhibitor and had a very well organised pitch out in the open, and slightly apart from the marquees full of the costume jewellery, scent makers and other contemporary craftspeople who seemed to constitute the majority of exhibitors. The name of Owen Jones had cropped up several times previously, when I had been asking around for likely subjects to film, so this was a fortuitous meeting and in no time we were discussing arrangements which were subsequently firmed up via email and phone.

The timing of our visit to Cumbria in mid-July was dictated by Owen's other show commitments and by some courses in basket making that he was teaching from home. One course in fact had come to an end the previous day. The weather was perfect and we spent an idyllic day with Owen in the workshop that he shares with the house goat at High Nibthwaite, just up from Lake Coniston. We probably saw the life of a craftsman in the best possible conditions. A cold, wet and misty day would no doubt have cast an altogether different and perhaps depressing light on the prospects of trying to earn a living in this way.

Owen Jones is clearly the embodiment of a modern traditional craftsman in that the actual making of the product is only part of what he does. Travelling around the shows and the teaching bring the change of scene, the variety and the human contact necessary to balance the otherwise rather solitary and mundane aspects of long hours in the workshop. There is a sense too in which he sees himself now as the guardian of a tradition which he is happy to demonstrate and transmit on to a new generation. All of which made Owen a perfect subject for filming. He is well used to explaining the techniques involved and happy to talk at length about his background and his way of life whilst weaving a basket. He does it all the time at shows or with a class so doing it in his own workshop in front of a camera presented no difficulty. We took several hours of footage almost effortlessly in this way, which now forms part of the archive for this project.

From left to right:

Owen Jones, with another basket nearly complete

The billets of oak have to be boiled before they can be split or 'riven' into thin strips for weaving

Trimming the oak strips, or 'spelks', to shape



The country potter

Mary Wondrausch OBE,

The Pottery, Brickfields, Compton, Guildford, Surrey GU3 1HZ
Tel: 01483 414097

Date of filming: 23 August 2006



It was more than ten years earlier that I first met and visited Mary Wondrausch. She had studied the MERL collection whilst researching her book on slipware pottery and was fascinated by the museum's holdings of kitchenalia – a subject close to her heart. She was anxious for the museum to see, and ultimately perhaps to acquire, her own collection so a colleague and I went along one day for lunch. It was the kind of experience that stays in the memory long afterwards so when in the early summer of 2006 a copy of Mary's latest work, a little book about her house and garden, arrived in the post I resolved to take the opportunity of renewing the acquaintance. I was greeted like an old member of the family and, once again stepping into Mary's unique world that is her house and garden, felt that here was a subject just made for film. Over several glasses of wine, and as Mary expounded on her latest outdoor creations with her usual mixture of disarming yet formidable playfulness, I tentatively raised the subject of the filming project and was delighted when she leapt at the idea. The one condition was that next time I would have to supply the wine.

The aspect of modern craftsmanship that Mary most personifies is the cultivated eccentricity, the element of performance. Everything she does is a kind of performance, whether there is an audience to witness it or not. Nearly all the crafts people I have visited are performers to a degree. They have to be to survive. They have to engage with their customers, demonstrate their craft to them and publicly live the craft life in order to make their sales. They have opted, whether by choice or not, for a rather different way of life to the rest of us and maintaining that sense of difference is part of the game. Mary embodies all these characteristics in magnified form. It is not affectation for hers is a genuinely creative and unconventional spirit which loves to amuse and shock and tease. She represents the craftsperson as Personality which is why, quite apart from the undoubted skills evident in her work, she has been included in this series.

From top to bottom:

Mary Wondrausch outside her pottery

Slipware plates and dishes by Mary Wondrausch, follow in a tradition of English pottery that goes back to the seventeenth century

Mary's home and garden of 50 years are brimming with creative energy

Trailing slip onto a decorative plate



The hurdle makers

Alan & Steve Brown

Wool, Dorset. Tel: 01929 462761 Email: alan@brownshurdles.co.uk

Filmed on location in coppice woods at Druce Farm, near Puddletown, Dorset.

Date of filming: 20 September 2006



Alan Brown and his son Steve, who was also a hurdle maker until recently

I was put on to the Browns by Professor Ted Collins (University of Reading) who had visited them in 2004 as part of his *Crafts in the English Countryside* survey. I subsequently met both of them on a beautiful May morning in 2006 when the Dorset woods they worked were carpeted in bluebells and at their finest. They readily agreed to be filmed and suggested September as a suitable month because by then they would be cutting the coppice again as well as making hurdles.

Hurdle making is a classic subject for this programme because there could hardly be a better example of a no-frills traditional rural craft that served the agricultural community and sustained the woodland landscape. Moreover, it is a craft that has apparently survived through finding new non-agricultural, and indeed suburban, uses for its product. Back in the 1980s, I had recorded Peter Luff, a Hampshire hurdle maker from Kings Sombourne, and often cited him as an example of a traditional craft in a modern setting. The hurdles were being made in the same way from the same material but for a different purpose. In those days, coppice areas in southern England were under some threat as the economics of agriculture put more of them under the plough. That has all changed now and coppice woodland is appreciated much more for its contribution to ecological diversity. Coppice is now in fashion, but still it needs a market and a purpose if it is to be maintained. Those who work these woodland areas are therefore a wonderful and perhaps diminishing resource of skills and knowledge.

Two further points make the Browns exceptional. They work what might be termed the perfect coppice landscape. Indeed, Druce Farm where this footage was shot, is a location that figures in Thomas Hardy's 1887 novel *The Woodlanders*. Alan Brown, who knows this landscape better than the back of his hand, will point out features that Hardy uses and describes and Alan himself could have been a Hardy character. That sense of continuity with the past is the other factor about the Browns. Here they were, father and son, following on in a family occupation that stretches back many generations. Alan had been brought up with the craft to the point where it was his life. Steve was born into a different world and had been through University and experienced professional life. But still he had come back to hurdle making and was the essence of a modern rural craftsman using his commercial knowledge and the internet to carve a living for himself and his young family in the face of unforgiving market forces. He spoke movingly of the woodland spell that had been with him from boyhood.

By filming Alan and Steve, we had the opportunity to explore these connections between the present and the past, and between the landscape and the people who work it. As a poignant postscript, Steve contacted me on Valentine's Day 2007, five months after the filming, to say that rising costs and falling demand had forced him to give up hurdle making and get a 'proper job' to support his family. But still he hoped one day

to return. The news came as a stab of reality into what might otherwise have been an over-romanticised story. The fact is that demand for garden hurdles is limited and can for the most part be satisfied by the big DIY and garden centres through cheap imports from eastern Europe. It leaves little leeway for the independent producer to make a living.



Alan Brown is a sixth generation hurdle maker

The blacksmiths

Leonard Mew, F.B.Mew & Sons,

The Forge, St Mary Bourne, Nr Andover, Hants, SP11 6AR

Nick Peppitt, Welding & Fabrication

The Old Forge, Hollington Cross, Highclere, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 9SE
Tel: 01635 255455

Date of filming: 14 and 15 November 2006

It seemed to me that this project had to include a blacksmith, a craft that was synonymous with 'traditional' rural life and for which our affluent modern society can still find a niche. There are a number of training courses available that attract young people, including women, and artist blacksmiths with their ornamental scrollwork and domestic ironwork are a common feature around the country shows. The question was which one to choose and what story to tell? I came across the Mew & Sons website one day which opened with the words 'Hi! This is the web site for the world's best blacksmith' and its ensuing pages contained such a combination of family warmth and humour, history and modern business that the firm demanded a visit. So I went to St Mary Bourne to meet with Leonard Mew and knew instantly that the search was over. Not only was this as good an example of a traditional rural business as one is likely to find but it was also about to succumb to the realities of modern life and be replaced by a new housing development. Leonard spoke quite openly and with some bitterness about this turn of events. He clearly felt a sense of sadness and almost, it seemed, some embarrassment at selling up in this way. His brother was also in the business but Leonard evidently took the lead when decisions were to be made, and there was now no sign of the younger generation of Mew blacksmiths, spoken of so brightly on the website. I had the impression of a man ground down by the economic pressures of trying to keep a business like that afloat and feeling that he was at an age where he no longer had the heart to keep up the fight.

Leonard Mew firing up the old forge at St Mary Bourne, Hampshire

The forge at St Mary Bourne was originally part of the Earl of Portsmouth's estate



Weighed down by these concerns, Leonard was very reluctant at first to participate in the project and only changed his mind after some gentle persuasion and persistence. Once on board, he was a very enthusiastic and cooperative subject. We agreed that we would film him making part of a small fire basket for the Museum. When I returned shortly after Christmas to collect the finished work, the firm was still operating – full planning permission for the new development was still awaited – and with some irony Leonard reported that since news of the closure had come out, business had been brisker than ever.

The addition of Nick Peppitt into all of this was entirely fortuitous. The road back from St Mary Bourne to Reading passes through Highclere and there in this typical home counties affluent commuter village, with the pub practically next door now a Marco Pierre White restaurant, was evidently an old blacksmith's shop still in operation. So I stopped to investigate and met Nick. The contrast with the situation in St Mary Bourne was immediate and worthy of exploration. This was a younger man who had trained in metal fabrication in Newbury, then branched out on his own, and subsequently added blacksmithing to his skills base. He had done this by attending courses at Cannington College in Somerset, by seeking help and advice from others, and by trial and error on his own. From the old blacksmith's shop which he leased, he offered a jobbing service providing gates, fences, weather vanes, lamp stands and anything else that the customer might want. He was still doing the fabrication, and this was the backbone of his income, but eager to expand the blacksmithing element and take it as far as he could. His outlook was optimistic but at the same time realistic about the limitations in prospect. He was happy to talk about himself and his work and agreed to be filmed making part of a garden style bench.

The contrast in circumstances between the two businesses and the personalities involved thus became the thread in this story.

Nick Peppitt using the power hammer at his forge in Berkshire

Nick Peppitt's forge at Hollington
Cross dates from 1825



The horse collar maker

Terry Davis, Saddle, Harness and Horse Collar Maker

Bridle Cottage, Leamoor Common, Wistanstow, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 8DN
Tel: 01694 781206 Email: terry@davis3950fsnet.co.uk

Date of filming: 2 & 3 April 2007

A leather working craft was another one of those essentials to be included in the project and I was put on to Terry Davis by Diana Zeuner, editor of *Heavy Horse World*. Terry was well known in those circles as one of the very few remaining working-horse harness makers left in this country. He also has connections with the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, formerly run by Diana's late husband Chris, which supplies the rye straw he uses for stuffing collars. I visited Terry in late May 2006 to discuss the project and without too much hesitation he agreed to be filmed.

This craft is perhaps in a slightly different position to some of the others in that it has a fairly secure market amongst a very specialised clientele. As long as interest and enthusiasm in working heavy horses continues, and there is no sign of it disappearing, there will be a demand for the specialist harness maker. It is also a craft that requires many hours of painstaking close-up work that does not lend itself so easily to public demonstration. So on both these counts, although he has done it, Terry doesn't have the need to go to shows and 'perform' in front of the public. It is essentially a rather solitary occupation which Terry pursues in a workshop next to his house which itself is in a beautiful but quite out of the way part of Shropshire. For all that, Terry is a natural communicator and, with a soft Irish accent that is perfect for filmmaking, was able with ease to provide a running commentary on the work in progress.

We had a couple of false starts in fixing a date for the filming, mainly because of Terry's commitments overseas. This isn't explored fully in the film because it is a whole subject in itself but Terry's work with aid organisations and charities, on developing improved and sustainable forms of working harness for use overseas, opens up fascinating new dimensions on the role of traditional crafts in the modern world. This work has taken Terry around the globe and it was an extended trip to Ethiopia and Tanzania in late 2006 that postponed our filming until the following spring.

Like any other manufacturer, Terry depends on his suppliers and with only one maker, for example, of horse hames left (Claude Huskinson of Walsall), there could be difficulties in the future. His leather mostly comes from Baker Brothers of Colyton in Devon. They are the last genuine specialist oak bark tanners left in the country – some say in Europe – and

Terry Davis is one of the very few horse collar makers left



on Terry's advice I subsequently paid them a visit. They too would be worthy of a film in this series but it is a very long and complex process to capture visually and in any case some footage already exists (produced by I.A.Recordings in 1993 and now available on dvd). Coincidentally, Owen Jones, the swill basketmaker we filmed, is a supplier of oak bark to Bakers.

Although we filmed Terry over two days, we were only able to capture a part of the collar-making process and this is indicative of the labour-intensive nature of the craft. We acquired one of Terry's collars for the Museum and its sale price of £450 seems scant return for the 25 hours or so of skilled labour that went into its production, not counting the cost of materials etc. The price seems to be restricted by the conservative nature of the market and what it will bear, and by the threat of cheap, albeit inferior, American imports. Undercutting from East European imports, so often heard of nowadays, doesn't apply in this case because the draught collar is not widely used there. Terry can survive by living simply and by keeping overheads and ancillary costs to the very minimum. One of the consequences is that there is little capacity to take on an apprentice and ensure the continuation of his skills and experience.



Terry works mostly on his own from a workshop behind his cottage but has also travelled the world widely on overseas projects

Completed harness awaiting dispatch



The weaver

Mary Kinipple

4 Warren Farm Cottages, Rectory Road, Streatley, Berks RG8 9QG
Tel: 01491 872148 Email: mkinipple@aol.com

Date of filming: 22 May 2007

I found Mary through local searches and identified her as a potential film subject because she satisfied three criteria: she was involved in textile crafts which, with the relevance to our collections, I wanted to be represented amongst my ten films; she was local and I thought it was important to have at least one Berkshire craftsperson represented; thirdly, and apologetically, I needed another female subject otherwise the male bias amongst my selection would I felt be greater than could be justified.

So I arranged to visit Mary just before Christmas and immediately felt that the setting and the person were suitable. To my relief, Mary herself was flattered and nervously excited to be asked and we were soon discussing details of the arrangement. I wanted to get the full process and the whole location into the story so an early summer date seemed appropriate.

In the event, we were very lucky with the weather. May proved to be a very unsettled month but the 22 was absolutely glorious. We spent most of the morning in the garden concentrating primarily on the plants used for dyeing. It was simply perfect – a wonderful backdrop of greenery and colour, warm sunshine, and the sounds of livestock and birds all around. This is a significant part of the story. Even in crowded Berkshire, a matter of only 25 minutes or so from Reading, it is possible to find as remote and spectacular a rural spot such as this. And there did seem to be a real and organic kind of connection between Mary, her way of life, her craft and the landscape.

Shearing the sheep





Mary uses plants from her garden to dye wool from her own Shetland sheep

Mary Kinipple of Streatley, Berkshire, weaving a rug for the Museum

Another reason for selecting this craft was to explore the border areas between the professional and the amateur craftsperson. Mary sells her work and regards herself as a commercial producer in that sense, as opposed to someone who just does it for fun. However, she will freely admit that she is a 'kept' woman and relies on her husband, an engineer, to be the main breadwinner. I think she is not alone in this respect - she is plugged into a number of networks of people like herself - so, quite unlike some of the other crafts we have studied, this is not one that is threatened with extinction on economic grounds. The household has other sources of income and is not dependent on craft sales and commissions which are bound to be unpredictable.

The textile crafts do perhaps carry with them still some echoes of the hippy era. Mary, whose teenage years span the '60s, doesn't disappoint. Her fascination with, and frequent trips to, Nepal is everywhere evidenced in her work and around the house and garden. And she rolls her cigarettes with an air of eastern stoicism. Our perfect day in Mary's company did seem a little like Nirvana. Even the dogs were laid back as they snored loudly through most of the afternoon's session.



The wheelwright

Douglas Andrews

The Workshop, The Hub, Three Cups, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 9RD
Tel: 01435 830776

Dates of filming: 15 May, 26 June, 12 July, 2 August 2007



Tying the wheel

The inclusion of Douglas Andrews was a happy coincidence. Taking a look at a modern wheelwright was really an obvious choice for the project given the importance attached to this craft in the traditional countryside and in the MERL collection. So the opportunity to film new wheels being made for a threshing machine belonging to our project partner, the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, was too good to miss. It also meant that we could use the young film crew that the Weald & Downland had recruited for its own project.

Douglas Andrews was also a very good subject because he is a relatively young man working in a very ancient craft and there is a welcome air of looking forward rather than harping back to the past. Moreover, Douglas has a young assistant, Daniel Lambert-Gorwyn, also a trained wheelwright, and they are considering taking on an apprentice in the near future. The feeling, then, is of expansion and development rather than retrenchment and fading away.

We arranged with the crew to shoot the footage of Douglas over a series of sessions to allow for getting as much as possible of the complete process. The first day's shooting turned out to be very wet and dark, and not by any means ideal especially for outdoor work. Nevertheless all sides persisted in good humour and we obtained reasonable footage with explanations of making a pattern for the spokes, and bending the tyres.

The second session was quite short. We were mainly shooting the multiple cutting of spokes by machine. This is quite a contraption – very noisy and menacing – which in a previous existence had been used by a local cricket bat maker for cutting out bats. It works rather like a bigger version of those key-cutting machines to be found in the high street where the original, or in this case the pattern, is used to guide the cutting heads as they pass over a line of blanks. After that Douglas talked about a market garden wagon that they had been repairing in the workshop.

The third session was July 12. Once again, Douglas' dog Stanley starred, constantly bringing us things to be thrown and chased after until ultimately he tires and goes off somewhere to sleep. Daniel's dog is a young and very lively collie pup that spends most of the time locked in a pen. When he is let out for a run at lunchtime, havoc ensues and it is not long before he is back in the pen in disgrace. Douglas was fitting spokes into the hub. Each one had to be shaved and adjusted slightly before being driven with great force into the cast iron hub. At the same time, he was questioned about the operation of the business. He had previously cut out the felloe blanks so we were able to observe these being completed and then fitted to one wheel.

In the course of this, Douglas mentioned almost in passing his planning application to re-locate the business so we made sure of drawing him out further. David Bysouth, the former wheelwright with whom both Douglas and Daniel had served apprenticeships, still owned the workshop – it was

adjacent to his house – but was wanting to sell up and move to a smaller property. The price was beyond Douglas’ means so he was negotiating to buy some former farm buildings not far away in Vines Cross, provided that planning permission for appropriate change of use was forthcoming. He and Daniel would then do most of the necessary conversion works themselves. At the time we were there, discussions with the planning authority had reached a critical stage, given the sensitive nature of the rural area involved. Douglas was nervous about the outcome but subsequently permission was granted.

The fourth and final session took place on August 2 when the wheels were tyred. I hadn’t seen this in real life before and it certainly is a spectacular process so lots of dramatic footage was shot. I also hadn’t fully realised just how nerve-wracking a job it is for The wheelwright. A mistake now and many hours of work on making the wheel are wasted. There are lots of opportunities for things to go wrong, especially at the point where the hot tyre is hammered down over the rim. These were exceptionally wide and heavy wheels, requiring equally heavy duty tyres, and it would not be often that four new wheels of this type were done at one session. David Bysouth – the original wheelwright under whom Douglas had trained – was there helping out. The extra pair of hands were needed but also, with all his experience, I think he acted as a reassuring presence in case of mishap. Douglas is a pretty calm guy but he was noticeably relieved when the job was completed without mishap. The wheels have since been painted and added to the threshing machine.

Douglas Andrews with David Bysouth, under whom he served his apprenticeship as wheelwright

Setting the spokes into the hub.

Final adjustments to the felloes that make up the rim of the wheel



Dry stone walling

Tom Lord

Lower Winskill Farm, Langcliffe, Nr Settle, N.Yorks BD24 9PZ
Tel: 01729 822694 Email: tomlord@daelnet.co.uk

Date of filming: 20 June 2007

This subject is a departure from all the rest in that Tom Lord is a farmer and not technically a craftsman himself, though he does have experience of dry stone walling. I had met him the previous September when the Society for Folk Life Studies conference, based for 2006 in Skipton, spent an afternoon on his farm. In warm sunshine, and amidst the farm's spectacular setting, Tom transfixed the whole party with his discourse on stonewalls. Until then, I wouldn't have thought there was too much to say about stone walls but Tom gave them a context, a history and an individuality which was irresistible. So it wasn't exactly the craftsmanship that was the key here; rather, it was the understanding and the sense of time and place. Not only that, the walls are a factor in the way that the farm is currently managed in accordance with the changing emphasis on support for conservation measures. This is very relevant to the whole agenda of sustaining craft skills. It was a natural choice for filming and when I broached the subject with Tom later that day he was very receptive to the idea. I then called him in early 2007 and he suggested the best time for filming would be in the late spring when the weather would be fairly reliable and the meadow grasses and flowers would be at their best.

We hadn't bargained for the wettest June in history! On the 15 June the area received a month's worth of rain in a few hours and there was no sign of an improvement. I had booked accommodation for the crew in Skipton for the evening of the 19 June. That morning, just as I was about to begin the journey north, the hotel telephoned to say that they had flood damage and had re-booked us into an alternative hotel in Ilkley. It was further away from Settle and rather inconvenient but we had no choice. The Ilkley hotel had a distinct air of faded grandeur, with pensioner tour groups apparently the main clientele, but in other respects it was fine and we had a decent meal that evening. I was awakened about four in the morning by a terrific storm with spectacular thunder and lightening. Shortly afterwards, I was dimly aware of a dripping sound but ignored it until I realised that water was dripping onto the bed. When I turned on the bedside light, I could see the water coming out of the main light socket in the ceiling and dropping onto the bed. Almost immediately, the fire alarm sounded so all guests were soon gathered in the hotel lobby. Emergency over, Mark the cameraman was greeted by such a bad leak back in his room that

Every wall has a story to tell





Tom Lord is increasing public access to his farm as part of the stewardship scheme

The earliest walls on the farm incorporate a lip at the top which originally was to stop wolves from climbing over and killing the sheep

the ceiling was almost coming down and he had to be re-located. It was a rather sleepy group that met for breakfast in the morning.

From these inauspicious beginnings, the day's filming turned out really rather well. We had a couple of showers but at around lunchtime so they didn't create too much of an interruption. It was quite a breezy day with sunny intervals mixing with rapidly changing and dramatic cloud formations which seemed right for that upland landscape.

Tom was on good form. He is very obliging, quietly spoken and not over-demonstrative. But he knows how to pass on a lot of information in an engaging way and it wasn't very long before Adrian and the crew had warmed to him and were every bit as enchanted by the stone wall story as I had been previously. There was no need for much structuring of the shoot. We in effect just followed Tom round the farm and he did the rest. I think we managed to capture an essence of what living and working in that landscape is about through the medium of those ubiquitous dry stone walls.



The edge tool maker

Richard Morris, A.Morris & Sons

The Iron Mills, Dunsford, Exeter EX6 7EE Tel: 01647 252352

Date of filming: 4 July 2007



From top to bottom:

Richard Morris outside the works at Dunsford

The waterwheel still turns, but now just for show

Cutting out the blanks that will be formed into billhooks

I first visited Morris & Sons in 1982. I was investigating sites of rural industry and saw the scythe-making Finch foundry at Sticklepath in Devon at about the same time. We have one or two Morris tools in the collection, together with one of their product catalogues, and I remember being astounded to find the firm still listed in the telephone directory. So I rang Mr Morris and arranged to drive down to see him.

It was Alec Morris, father of Richard, who met me and showed me around that day. I was struck with how extraordinary and eccentric the place was – like some throwback to the days of the industrial revolution. Many would find it hard to associate such places with the countryside but I have grown accustomed over the years to seeing some remarkable industrial survivals – whether it be an iron foundry, or a brewery, textile mill or tannery – in the unlikeliest of rural settings. Traditionally, the countryside hosted much industrial activity and, where it remains so, it is often the special features of the countryside, such as lower costs or closeness to materials and niche markets, that make it possible.

So when thinking of a craft industry that might be included in the film project, it didn't take long for the memory of that visit to return. A simple Google search on the internet showed – much to my amazement once again – that the firm was still trading. Another visit was therefore arranged. This time Richard Morris was my host and it was clear from the start that the business had lost none of its idiosyncratic character. He showed me around with great enthusiasm and goodwill and afterwards in the company office, which has the permanent appearance of having just been ransacked by vandals, he pulled out various books and papers relating to the history of the firm.

Richard was very receptive to the idea of filming and a date was arranged without too much difficulty. There were no weather incidents this time, although the local show, which was due to take place in the field behind the works at the end of that week, had had to be re-located because rain had prevented the grass from being cut for hay. I had booked accommodation in the village pub which turned out to be very hospitable – unfortunately I was on the losing side again at the pool table. I think those film makers must get a lot of practice. The shoot went very well and we were able to capture some atmospheric footage of all the processes. Richard did most of it but his nephew Andrew, the one other member of the business, was shown doing the hardening and the handle turning.

Unexpectedly, Richard refused from the outset to say anything to camera, citing the way that reality TV shows and similar were edited in such a way as to make people look stupid. So there was some work to be done building trust and confidence in the crew and by the end of the day he was quite happy to be recorded talking about the company and its story in sound only, with the camera pointing out of the window. Being able to see Richard speak would enliven any screen so it was a pity and slightly odd, but in character. This whole project had been about characters so it was a fitting end.



From top to bottom:

Using one of the hammers that were originally water-powered

Grinding billhooks on a wet wheel

A batch of hooks and billhooks ready for finishing

A page from a 1950s catalogue for Morris & Sons



Film credits

The films and all black and white images used are copyright The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading

The hay rake maker

Haymakers, 1785 by George Stubbs (reproduced by permission of the Tate Gallery)

Sales figures ledger of Welnetham Rake Factory (John George & Sons Ltd), from the MERL archive TR JGS/113-14.

Jack Hargreaves 'Out of Town' series vol 4, includes the rake maker film. Currently available on dvd from Farming Books and Videos Ltd. Extracts included courtesy of Contender Home Entertainment.

The swill basket maker

Owen Jones has written a detailed description of the history and practice of swill basket making, copies of which are obtainable direct from him (owen.swills@virgin.net).

The country potter

See Mary Wondrausch's books, *Brickfields. My Life as a potter, painter, gardener, writer and cook* (2006, ISBN 0-95-48237-0-2) and *Mary Wondrausch on Slipware*, (A&C Black, 1986, ISBN 0-7136-2813-8).

The edge tool maker

Morris & Sons sales catalogue, 1950s, in the MERL collection: 2MRL P2/B/M17

Film makers

Adrian Bowles of Motivation.
www.motivation81.co.uk

Wheelwright film: The Weald & Downland Open Air Museum film crew (www.fleetfilms.co.uk)

Acknowledgements and thanks

This project was a wonderful excuse to roam the countryside and spend time with some fascinating people in some glorious locations. It was a journey of discovery and I think all of us involved felt enriched by the experience.

I am very grateful to all the craftspeople we filmed for their cooperation, patience and good humour. Together, we have captured a little piece of the present to hand on to the future.

Thanks also to the filmmakers – particularly Adrian Bowles of Motivation, with Mark Insoll the cameraman and Simon Wood, 'Woody', on sound. For The wheelwright film, I am indebted to Tim, Ollie and James who comprise the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum's project film crew.



Adrian Bowles and the Motivation crew



The Weald & Downland crew

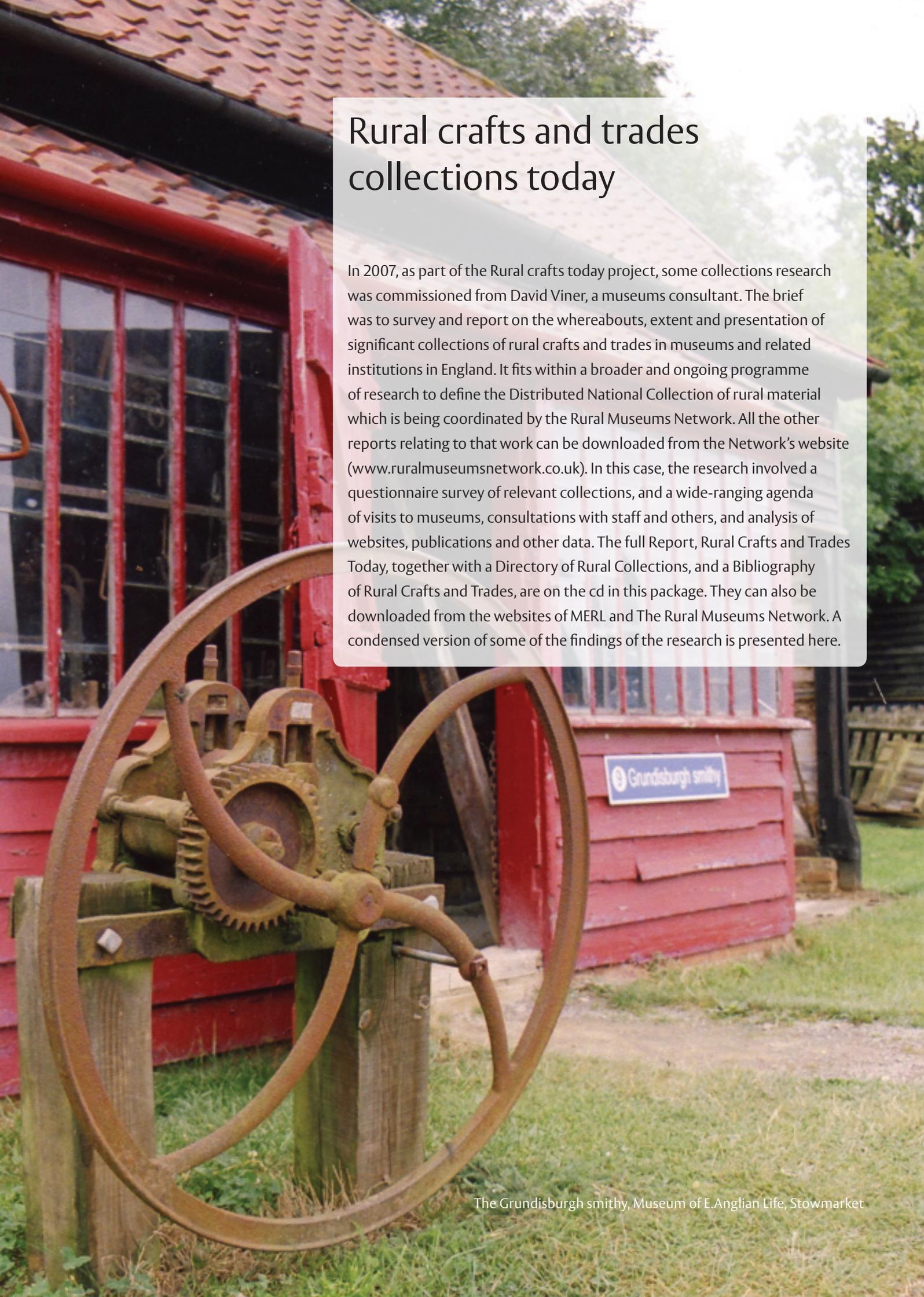
David and Linda Viner have produced some very valuable research to stand alongside craft collections.

We have worked closely with colleagues at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum during the course of the project. Many other curators and friends have provided help and support along the way.

The project was made financially possible by the Designation Challenge Fund.

Roy Brigden

Museum of English Rural Life



Rural crafts and trades collections today

In 2007, as part of the Rural crafts today project, some collections research was commissioned from David Viner, a museums consultant. The brief was to survey and report on the whereabouts, extent and presentation of significant collections of rural crafts and trades in museums and related institutions in England. It fits within a broader and ongoing programme of research to define the Distributed National Collection of rural material which is being coordinated by the Rural Museums Network. All the other reports relating to that work can be downloaded from the Network's website (www.ruralmuseumsnetwork.co.uk). In this case, the research involved a questionnaire survey of relevant collections, and a wide-ranging agenda of visits to museums, consultations with staff and others, and analysis of websites, publications and other data. The full Report, Rural Crafts and Trades Today, together with a Directory of Rural Collections, and a Bibliography of Rural Crafts and Trades, are on the cd in this package. They can also be downloaded from the websites of MERL and The Rural Museums Network. A condensed version of some of the findings of the research is presented here.

An overview by David Viner

Museums have been acquiring crafts and trades material for generations and a number came into being specifically to act as focal points for recording and preserving crafts and trades history. The museum at Bewdley (opened in 1972) is an obvious example; so too is the earlier Gloucester Folk Museum, opened in 1935, and each in its way reflected (and in many ways still reflects) the fashions of their time. The work of individuals looms large in much of this story too, not only in gathering together collections of objects and supporting documentation but subsequently either forming museums themselves or donating personal collections to existing institutions. Excellent examples include the collecting and recording work of T.W. Bagshawe in and around Bedfordshire, which influenced a whole group of museums in that area (not least in Luton), and of collectors such as the Tickenhill collection of the Parker family and later of Raphael Salaman, whose life's work of collecting tools and trades material found permanent homes respectively at Hartlebury in the Worcestershire County Museum and at St. Albans in the (then) City Museum.

It is the purpose of this report to gather together the evidence of museum acquisitions and in particular to seek to quantify the present state of holdings in museums around England of objects, archives and supporting documentation of rural crafts and trades in a rural context. In so doing, it is hoped that the accumulated evidence will also stand as a record of what has been achieved over the years, as well as indicate the potential which exists for future development and exploitation of this resource for greater public benefit. So the data related to a particular trade, for example that of The wheelwright, can be traced through the various Appendices in this report, offering a researcher pursuing this particular trade a detailed database of material, and providing a sense as to how well each of the crafts and trades studied in this report has fared in terms of physical preservation and presentation in a museum environment, i.e. beyond the viable, commercial working activities they once were or set out to become.

Categories

J. Geraint Jenkins' study of *Traditional County Craftsmen*, first published in 1965 and revised in 1978, examined 44 crafts and trades, and these form the basis of this present study. Although others could be added, these remain the core of the range of rural trades which the author could find in his research for 'the country craftsman [who] was, until recently, an essential member of every rural community'. With relatively few exceptions, where museum cataloguing held its own peculiarities, this group of crafts and trades could be located within museum documentation systems and so identified in terms of quantity and range for the present survey. In hindsight, one or two separate trade listings might have been integrated with others down to – say – a total of forty categories.

Groupings of museums emerged from this current study, offering another rich resource for further research. The relatively small group of so-called ‘folk’ museums is one such; only five are listed in The Directory with the word folk in their title (examples include Helston and Gloucester), although others have dropped its use over time, sometimes relatively recently (e.g. Swaledale Museum at Reeth). Folk Museums carry various connotations, among them an essentially rural tag, and one which also suggests a lost world of vanished activity, which in this case directly relates to the decline of rural trades of various kinds. So the title, whether in present or only in earlier use, reflects a perception of the past which is directly relevant to the wider aims of this study.

A later concept, of ‘heritage’ as an asset, widened many a museum planning brief creating another obvious grouping very much of its time, where the preservation of an industrial building(s) no longer in use was and is as much part of the presentation as the supporting object collections. The majority of these museums or heritage centres relate to the 1960s and 70s, and also form part of a developing public interest in industrial archaeology. In this study they provide a group noteworthy because of the specific or indeed single-purpose character of the crafts and trades preserved and presented in them. Good examples include the Forge Mill Needle Museum in Redditch, Stott Park Bobbin Mill in Cumbria and Finch Foundry at Sticklepath in Devon, each devoted to a very specific trade or group of trades.

Equally central to the recording and preservation of specific and significant trades are those museums which reflect in their collections the principal if not dominant trade for which that particular area, town or village has been historically associated. Here one might expect to find a level of expertise on that particular topic which raises the museum’s role to more than local or regional and perhaps to national significance. The leather and associated trades of Walsall are so reflected in the Walsall Leather Museum, as an example. Chair bodging and chair making are equally strong themes in Buckinghamshire museums including Aylesbury and High Wycombe. Shared-purpose exhibitions, trails or events built around specific crafts and trades such as these are an important opportunity for the educational and interpretative work of a museum.

The majority of the 192 entries in The Directory represent museums which are much more general-purpose in the scope of their collections, but in each case seek to reflect at least some local crafts and trades. Taken together, the Appendices show the quantity of objects brought to light as part of this study, and attempt some qualitative assessment of them, and also summarise what proportion is on display or held in the reserve collections. A summary of that data is given below:

		Number of Resposes	Number of Objects	% Display	% Store	Rated 1	Rated 2	Rated 3
Woodland crafts	Chair Bodger	11	158	29%	71%	2	3	2
	Clogger (sole maker)	20	608	36%	64%	13		
	Wattle hurdle maker	16	88	38%	62%	9	1	
	Hoop maker	5	35	100%	0%	3		
	Charcoal burner	7	85	28%	72%	5	1	
	Thatching spar maker	13	90	31%	69%	6	1	
Village woodcrafts	Osier basket maker	25	1356	50%	50%	11	4	3
	Spale basket maker	8	41	79%	21%	3	2	
	Trugger	5	87	25%	75%	2	2	
	Bowl turner	14	1085	44%	56%	5	1	1
	Spoon carver	6	904	40%	60%	3	1	
	Rake maker	8	70	81%	19%	6	1	
	Gate hurdle maker	14	146	44%	56%	8	1	
	Broom squire/brush maker	27	2737	37%	63%	10	5	2
	Cooper	55	3304	32%	68%	28	8	2
	Coracle builder	7	105	18%	82%	2	3	
	Wheelwright	69	15317	40%	60%	33	11	8
	Chair maker	16	715	30%	70%	6	5	3
	Metal & straw crafts	Blacksmith	77	16390	44%	56%	37	15
Farrier		51	5003	35%	65%	26	9	
Brass founder		18	3877	31%	69%	9	5	
Pewterer		11	735	19%	81%	5	3	
Tinsmith		28	2045	30%	70%	14	5	2
Thatcher		47	1291	28%	72%	27	4	2
Lip worker		1	20	100%	0%		1	
Straw plaiter		27	456	27%	73%	18	4	
Clock & watch maker		52	3082	37%	63%	31	7	2
Stone & clay crafts	Clay pipe maker	28	13220	17%	83%	14	7	1
	Brick maker	49	3922	23%	77%	25	7	3
	Potter	40	508130	25%	75%	10	12	5
	Stone mason	36	3394	18%	82%	16	3	2
	Monumental stone mason	18	404	34%	66%	7	5	
	Dry stone waller	7	26	33%	67%	3		
	Slater	30	196	17%	83%	13	1	
Textile crafts	Wool worker	33	1684	27%	73%	18	3	3
	Rope maker	29	367	23%	77%	15	2	
	Net maker	17	293	28%	72%	6	4	
	Lace maker	47	13275	21%	79%	23	5	4
Leather crafts	Tanner	27	296	23%	77%	11	3	
	Currier	15	358	12%	88%	5	3	
	Saddler	59	6168	31%	69%	30	2	7
	Boot maker	60	11577	38%	62%	30	8	5
	Clog maker	21	1289	44%	56%	10	2	
Other crafts	Horn maker	13	732	35%	65%	7	1	
	Totals	1167	625161	36%	64%	565	171	63

Preservation – quantity and range

A minimum total of 625,161 identified objects have been listed, which rises to 633,786 if the total for the additional range of crafts is added. However, it must be borne in mind that a round figure of half a million objects is specifically listed for one craft (the potter) in one place (Stoke on Trent Museums – for which it is Designated of national significance), which nevertheless gives residual totals of 125,161 (133,786). Some crafts such as lace, clay pipe production, etc will always be numerically higher in terms of object numbers than others and this too must be a factor. Without doubt the total number of objects preserved in museums which are directly related to the range of crafts and trades listed here is much higher than these totals (e.g. from amongst the 57% of non-respondent museums), and a total (net of Stoke's own holdings) of around half a million would seem a reasonable extrapolation. This is both a positive legacy and a conservation and preservation challenge.

Presentation

A further fundamental issue in this study is what proportion of these total holdings is on display on a reasonably permanent basis at any one time. Here the results are particularly instructive. Whilst there are wide variations in percentages running throughout the 44 listed categories, a net average figure of 36% listed as on display and 64% as in reserve or in store emerges. Rounded off to a one-third/two-thirds split, this result suggests rather more material on display than might have been supposed, even allowing for the exhibition of objects in quantity in reconstructed workshops etc which has been one traditional and popular form of presentation.

Even so, there are some obvious missed opportunities to display significant groups of material, and it must be remembered that the recovery of the contents of a workshop (often involving substantial numbers of tools and equipment) creates obvious challenges of long-term storage, care and access, and has frequently been an enforced exercise undertaken for the primary purpose of preservation against loss rather than with any immediate or even long-term prospect of display.

Open storage

Open storage, where reserve collections are accessible to visitors on an occasional if not regular basis, represents a growing and welcome trend in UK museums and is of particular relevance to this study, in that it can afford access to quite large quantities of stored material, such as craft tools and implements. The Gridshell at the Weald & Downland Museum is an excellent example, requiring the percentage splits shown in the returns from that particular museum to be read in a slightly different context from others i.e. the frequently 100% returns shown as material in store are in fact in a form of accessible display. Equally if conversely, the returns from the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading make the similar point in that all the collections are deemed as on display (and are shown thus), the collections in reserve being accessible on request as part of any museum visit.

Continuing collecting

Respondents were asked whether there had been changes in collecting policy(ies) in recent years, seeking to establish, inter alia, whether there had been any cutback in collecting as a matter of policy, as distinct from practice. Little evidence for the former was forthcoming, although comments reveal that practical and logistical issues of storage, conservation care, costs and potential duplication were certainly factors for consideration. It must be of value to museums to have access to any wider analysis of collections, such as this report seeks to offer, in order to establish the significance of their own holdings and so be able to assess the merits of material being offered in the wider as well as the local context.

Star rating and the Distributed National Collection

The Distributed National Collection concept plays a key part in any such analysis, in that it is based on the premise that objects and groups of objects not housed in either a national museum or a Designated museum collection may nevertheless have more than local significance on a regional or national level.

Respondents were asked to offer a self-certified rating for collections relating to specific crafts and trades. Even allowing for non-responses (and some significant collections therein), this nevertheless provides a framework upon which a Distributed National Collection [DNC] for rural crafts and trades might be further refined, and it is strongly recommended that this be pursued as a logical next step. It is part of the purpose of this study to identify and 'bookmark' such collections so that they might be further enhanced and better resourced in relation to their overall significance.

This schedule has 63 entries from 24 different museums, of which three are also Designated for all collections. To this should be added the equally significant collections forming part of the museum holdings of other Designated museums. There will be other candidates too, not least from museums which have recovered or sought to recover whole workshops and their contents as re-creation and re-erection projects within an open air museum environment e.g. Museum of East Anglian Life at Stowmarket (rake manufactory and contents, etc).

Even taking these qualifications into account, it is clear that a good indicative list has emerged, which taken together with some strong candidates listed as Two-Star (for which there is a respectable total of 171 entries), suggests a strong argument for more formal recognition. To this might be added the particular interest shown with the 'other crafts' listings offered by respondents which carries its own significance, not least in terms of regionally important material. The woodland crafts and trades particular to the Lake District are a good case in point.

The percentage of material from this particular schedule of Three Star returns as either on display or in reserve/store produces a higher balance in favour of display than the overall results already noted, viz 47% on display and 53% in reserve/store, an indication perhaps of recognition of this material and its role as iconic representation through display of the collections as a whole.

Three star responses are shown as follows:

Aylesbury, Bucks County Museum

Chair maker

Bridgwater Museum

Brick maker

Colchester Museums

Clock & watch maker

Cromer Museum

Wool worker

Farnham, Old Kiln Museum

Wheelwright

Gloucester Folk Museum

Tinsmith

Boot maker

Gressenhall, Museum of Norfolk Life

Broom squire & brush maker

Wheelwright

Chair maker

Blacksmith

Brick maker

Saddler

Hatfield Mill Green Museum

Osier basket maker

Potter

Wool worker

Saddler

High Wycombe

Chair bodger

Chair maker

Hutton le Hole, Ryedale Folk Museum

Cooper

Wheelwright

Blacksmith

Tinsmith

Lace maker

Saddler

Boot maker

Norwich, Bridewell Museum

Wool worker

Penzance, Penlee House Museum

Potter

Portsmouth Museums

Wheelwright

Reading MERL [Designated]

Osier basket maker

Bowl turner

Wheelwright

Blacksmith

Thatcher

Stone mason

Lace maker

Saddler

Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum

Lace maker

Soudley, Dean Heritage Centre

Clock & watch maker

Stafford, Staffs County Museum, Shugborough

Wheelwright

Blacksmith

Saddler

Boot maker

Standlake, Oxfordshire Museums

Chair bodger

Broom squire & brush maker

Cooper

Wheelwright

Blacksmith

Thatcher

Stone mason

Lace maker

Saddler

Boot maker

Stoke on Trent Museums [Designated]

Potter

Taunton, Somerset Heritage Services

Osier basket maker

Wheelwright

Blacksmith

Brick maker

Potter

Telford, Ironbridge Gorge Museums [Designated]

Clay pipe maker

Tenbury Wells Museum

Boot maker

Walsall Leather Museum

Saddler

Worcester City Museums

Potter

Audiovisual archives

Appendix Five of the main Report gives details of various groups of audiovisual archives which offer a major resource when seeking to study, enjoy and record traditional crafts and trades in action. Although not subjected to the analysis afforded to object collections as above, this listing nevertheless reveals a rich source of material created by and deposited in museums around England, in significant examples forming an integral part of the Three Star grading self-selected by various museums. An associated archive or records (or both) would seem a pre-requisite for achieving some form of DNC status.

Exhibitions, demonstrations and resident craftspeople

Respondents were asked to comment on their use of demonstrations by crafts and tradespeople as part of their museum programmes e.g. whether in support of special exhibitions, other associated events or otherwise as activities in their own right. Of the 103 responses some 53% confirmed such a programme, however occasional, and it is known that a number of non-respondents run active demonstration and events programmes; this seems a reasonable response given some of the constraints listed below.

Very few employed craftspeople (whether freelance or on the staff) as *permanent* (as opposed to occasional) features of the museum 'offer' to visitors, but it is clear that there are a number of active participants in museum event programmes for whom the demonstration of a craft is an important sharing of traditional skills. The survey results can only offer a snapshot of a topic which would repay more detailed scrutiny, especially where museums might improve their links with crafts and trades associations for mutual benefit.

The value of live demonstrations interpreting collections in the educational, outreach and lifelong learning environments in which museums operate and flourish need not be further emphasised here. It remains, however, a constant challenge to create relevant links between the educational curriculum of the day and craft and trade collections gathered over many decades.

Although not specifically researched in any detail here, it is appreciated that for a number of museums with long standing demonstration and events programmes, the issue of continuity and sustainability of demonstrators is very real, and is no doubt a widespread problem, especially in a volunteer environment. In addition, various constraints, not least legislative requirements of one form or another (Health & Safety particularly), mean that some workshops originally set up or recreated with active demonstration in mind can no longer be used for that purpose. A classic example is the extensive brass foundry at Bewdley Museum, now a static exhibit where demonstrations ceased for exactly this reason in 1995; a notice seeks comments from visitors to the idea that 'we would now like to recreate a image of a working brass works in this part of the building'. This will not be the only example where the original intention to create a working exhibit can no longer be sustained, for this or other resource reasons.

Publications

In an environment increasingly moving away from the printed word to accessing of information electronically, the concept of the detailed published guidebook is worthy of comment here too. It seems detailed guidebooks are distinctly out of fashion, not only for this reason but also for reasons of cash flow etc. A further factor must be the inflexibility which accompanies published detailed site descriptions where changes to exhibits or site layout may subsequently be introduced, leaving the text appearing out of date. In a number of museums observed, the guidebook previously published had not been renewed nor was it planned to do so.

However, major open air sites such as Ironbridge and Beamish have continued to enhance their respective museum guidebooks into a polished, detailed and worthy souvenir of any site visit, and these remain

model examples to follow. Other quality examples include Shibden Hall at Halifax and Ryedale Folk Museum, both in Yorkshire.

Also largely vanished is the published catalogue of specific social history collection(s) permanently housed in museums. Here the greater access to on-line databases offers rather more of an alternative. Even so, this study revealed a mass of useful – and historically important – data tucked away in long out-of-print museum catalogues, such as *Yorkshire Crafts* published by the Castle Museum in York in 1967. Nor does there appear to be any central archive for the preservation of such often ephemeral material, although the collections at MERL form a good base; could it not be further expanded to comprehensively address this task?

Although its subject matter may not be directly relevant to this study, one highly recommended catalogue (with detailed object illustration) which bucks this trend is that undertaken as a project by Peter Brears on the historically significant Devon Farmhouse Collection, long housed in Torquay Museum, under the title *The Old Devon Farmhouse* (Devon Books 1998 – ISBN 1-85522-626-X).

There are various ways of presenting information in catalogue format, directly or even incidentally. The Bibliography (Appendix Eight – Part Three – of the Report, see cd) contains many examples of detailed work by specialists; two good examples are the various publications, again by Peter Brears, on country pottery and by William/Bill/Bernard Cotton on the country chair making traditions of England, in a series of regional studies in the 1980s.

A more site specific example is *Take it to Moody's of Sheepy Magna: a village wheelwright remembers* by Dorrien Carr Moody, published in the Leicestershire Remembered series by Leicestershire Museums in 1999, and related directly to the recovery and re-erection of The wheelwright's shop from Sheepy Magna at Snibston Discovery Park (ISBN 085 022 4217). Another approach flourished in the Life & Tradition series of books, belonging to the 1960s and 70s, where authors invariably had close affinities to the museum collections they were using as source material. A number were museums curators themselves. The link between the objects illustrated and discussed in the seminal *Life and Tradition in the Yorkshire Dales* (Dent 1968 – ISBN 0 460 03807 9) and the collections of the Dales Countryside Museum at Hawes virtually represents a catalogue, as the authors Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby presented what became the core collection to found the museum.

A final point on publications should be made with regard to their value in association with exhibitions or activities which are not of themselves part of a museum's permanent displays. In recent years, the very welcome funding for special exhibitions by bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund has created an opportunity for an accompanying guide or catalogue, of value as a permanent record in itself. An excellent example is *Pots, Brooms and Hurdles from the Heathlands*, a study of Verwood and District Rural Industries by Jo Draper in 2002, which accompanied a touring exhibition during 2002/03 with collections drawn from various sources but with no permanent collective museum home. This publication is the permanent record of that endeavour and is especially relevant in this survey of regionally significant crafts and trades.

Best/innovative practice & pointers for the future

Whilst some concerns were identified during the course of this study, there were also a number of positive pointers to the future. Amongst the problems might be listed the variations in quality of the information supplied by respondents. A number were remarkably conversant with their collections, and produced not only closely assessed data but summary notes in support of the various crafts and trades under discussion. It has to be said that most of these respondents were long established in post and thereby represent a body of social history curatorship without which the museum profession would be the poorer. Other respondents were less able to quantify, and in some cases even to classify, object collections and this must be a cause for concern.

In terms of display, the concept of recreating entire workshops has been the most obvious and standard approach for some decades, and its development in Yorkshire museums, where there are some iconic sites, has been thoroughly documented in *Treasures for the People* by Peter Brears and Stuart Davies, published by Yorkshire & Humberside Museums Council in 1989. This shows how the developments at the Castle Museum in York, creating whole streets in which specific craft or trade workshops were recreated, set a trend in turn followed by a number of other museums, such as Keighley and Abbey House in Leeds. At Shibden Hall, the original concept of a 'Folk Museum for West Yorkshire' included the recreation of a number of workshops within the Hall outbuildings. At Hutton-le-Hole, the Ryedale Folk Museum developed on the open-air museum concept, including the recreation of a number of craft workshops.

Several decades on, there have inevitably been changes, most notably in the reduction in the number of workshops shown at Abbey House in Leeds (see The Directory entry), and more recent refurbishment at Keighley (ditto). Although the Leeds changes represent a net loss of such crafts and trades material on show (which in the context of this report should be regretted) the collections have been retained with some transferred to a new home at Beamish.

In Keighley a new approach to presentation relevant to current philosophies will re-present rather than remove the workshop material. A similar approach is being followed in Luton where Stockwood Park Museum, housing displays inspired by the Bagshawe and other collections, was closed in autumn 2007 for a comprehensive refurbishment to re-present the crafts and trades of the area in a new but still object-rich format. When these two, and perhaps others, re-open later in 2008, there will be an opportunity to consider what trends for the future have been developed here.

Some individual collections stand out as primary resources, for detailed study as well as popular presentation. The Salaman collection of tools is a nationally-important resource in the Museum of St Albans, as the refurbished City Museum became in 1992, and although strictly outwith the limits of the trades under discussion here, the various tools collections in Sheffield should be considered, especially the Hawley Collection, an accessible study collection in the care of the city's university. The Directory contains a number of other good examples.



From left to right:
 The hay rake maker, The swill basket
 maker, The country potter.
 The hurdle makers, The blacksmiths.
 The horse collar maker, The weaver,
 The wheelwright.
 Dry stone walling, The edge tool maker.

Rural crafts today

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- Horse collar maker
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- Weaver
- Dry stone walling

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A An assessment of preservation and presentation in museums and archives. By David Viner

- Part One – Report
- Part Two – Directory
- Part Three – Bibliography

B Rural crafts today. Graphics banners for an exhibition at the Museum of English Rural Life, 2008.

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