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Living Memory

Object Handling and
Reminiscence

“You go in to a care home, and the group are just sitting around in silence, but when you get some objects out and hand them around people become really animated and start smiling. You can see the benefits straight away.” Brian Adams, retired Historian, St Albans Museums

“The benefits of reminiscence work are well documented and local museums are very well placed and eager to support this work. Museums staff involved with reminiscence sessions, whether hosting a coffee morning or delivering a session at a lunch club or dementia café, have seen people relax and smile as they have become involved and enjoyed having their memories listened to and valued. The warm and friendly atmosphere at these sessions is often commented on as are the benefits to those who have been involved. Seeing a smile or hearing laughter in these groups can be a great tonic to families and care workers as well as participants.” Jane Munns, Museums Development Officer for Hertfordshire

Why then?

- A social activity
- Funny
- Story telling
- Sense of privilege, trust and respect
- Investigation
- Aesthetic involvement
- Not 'digging for memories'



Hertfordshire Reminiscence Network

Set up by Jane Munns (Museums Development Officer for Hertfordshire) in 2008 to provide support, training and funding to museums wishing to develop their reminiscence services. In 2009 St Albans Museums received some funding through this network.



Photographs from Shopping Box (3 of 20)



Reminiscence Services

- Loan Boxes (Group leader led)
- Booked Outreach Sessions for groups (Curator led)
- Booked Museum Sessions for groups (Curator led)
- Coffee Mornings (Curator led)
- Gallery Handling Sessions (Front of House led)

Feedback:

“The whole club (including volunteers) chatted away about the various items, they really enjoyed it”

“The objects really stimulated their conversation”

“An elderly stroke member at the beginning said she could not remember the War at all, by the end of the session lots of memories came back to her and she obviously enjoyed it”

“The group became animated”

“They have been talking about you since...”



Benefits to the Museum:

- Delivering a positive experience
- Generating community support for the Museum –tie in with other projects (e.g. digitisation, arts projects) and ready-made contacts for engagement/ consultation (e.g. ideas feeding in to exhibition planning, support for funding applications etc)
- Exchange of ideas and knowledge (object knowledge and local history)
- Making collections accessible (to those who cannot travel to the Museum)
- Partnerships with care providers – knowledge and skills exchange

Collections benefits:



'Made in St Albans' project

Funding from MLA through
Hertfordshire Museums Development
Officer

Six week project for retired people
based on working lives in the City

Objects brought from home and
Museum Collection

We paid a drama group to attend the
sessions and each person participated
in various exercises

Storytelling was central

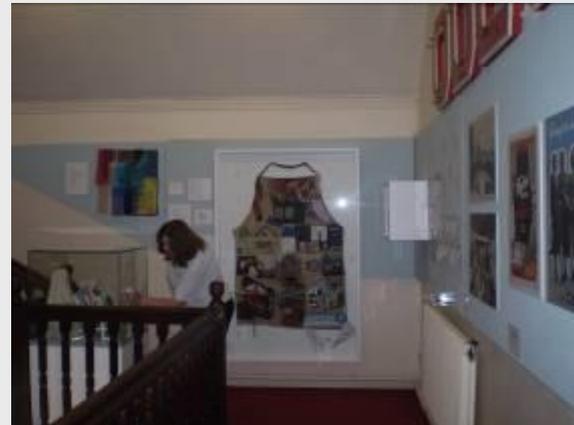
Each person contributed to a group
piece which is currently on display at
the Museum of St Albans



'Made in St Albans'



We all have an apron
It's under our skin
It is called the omentum
And it keeps our guts in
Jen Watts 2011



Key learning:

- Find support
- Be sensitive
- Be informed by carers or group leaders
- Don't underestimate your time commitment
- Be realistic about the value of this work
- If you are working for a museum utilise your primary collection where you can

What is next?



‘Our Museums’ project

The last word for now...



“Reminiscence work sits very well with the need of museums to engage closely with their local communities and museums in Hertfordshire remain committed to continuing to build partnerships and to keep developing this important strand of work” (Jane Munns)