

Victorian Street Life
Performance, Browsing and Interaction in the Museum

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The museum exhibit of the reconstructed Victorian street scene is one of the most popular theatres for the interface between the public and the nineteenth-century past and yet it remains unstudied in any depth. This thesis is the first study to outline how meaning is made from the Victorian past on the museum street scene. The thesis is an interdisciplinary comparative case study with a tight focus on four specific museum sites in Yorkshire (where the museum street scene is most prevalent and has the longest pedigree). Inspired by Erving Goffman's dramaturgical sociology, Michel de Certeau's philosophy of the practice of everyday life, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic imagination, and the contextual experience model of the museologists John Falk and Lynn Dierking, this thesis examines the *gestalt* of the museum street experience from the perspective of the various stakeholders involved, from curators to visitors. Using a mix of archival sources and primary on-site research involving interviews with museum staff and recorded observations of museum visitors, the thesis creates an argument that contradicts the prevailing view that 'doing the Victorians' in populist, immersive, and active forms of heritage present a sanitised view of the past which is not open to interrogation from the audience. Instead, it understands the museum street scene as a form of participatory theatre, a recreation of the familiar environment of a real-life street that provides the opportunity for a street-level engagement with the history of ordinary people. It concludes that the reconstructed Victorian street creates a unique form of engagement with the past in which the public can step through the proscenium divide that traditionally separates them from the authority of the museum and participate in the creation of a collaborative, polyglossic narrative, one which points the way toward a more personalisable form of public history.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Figures	5
Introduction – ‘Doing the Victorians’	8
Part I – The Stage	30
Chapter One – ‘Turning the Museum into Shop Windows for the Man in the Street’	36
Chapter Two – On Authentic Reproduction	81
Part II – The Audience	128
Chapter Three – The Narrative of Footsteps	133
Chapter Four – Distress, Discomfort, and Disobedient Bodies	169
Part III – The Performance	199
Chapter Five – Re-enactment and Role-Play: Visitor Roles in Costumed Interpretation	208
Chapter Six – Narrative Authority and the Polyglossic Museum	241
Conclusion – Personalisable Victorians	269
Bibliography	276

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Kirkgate, York Castle Museum	12
Figure 1.2 Stephen Harding Gate, Abbey House Museum	13
Figure 1.3 Leeds 1842 Street, Thackray Medical Museum	13
Figure 1.4 Old Times Street, Hull (1935)	14
Figure 2.1 Original planned layout for York Castle Museum upper floor (1934)	48
Figure 2.2 Plan of final layout of York Castle's street scene as depicted the museum's first guide book (1941)	49
Figure 2.3 Cartoon depicting 'The Acquisitive Sheppard' in the <i>Hull Daily Mail</i> (July 1913)	52
Figure 2.4 Leaflet produced by York Corporation to advertise the Kirk Collection's display at York Exhibition Rooms	68
Figure 2.5 Display representing Lofthouse & Saltmer's Manufacturing Chemist at the Museum of Commerce (1925)	73
Figure 2.6 Window display of chemist's shop on the Old Times Street (1935)	74
Figure 2.7 Detail of Jonathan Bean Design's plan for the Leeds 1842 Street (October 1996)	78
Figure 3.1 Clay Pipe Workshop, Abbey House	89
Figure 3.2 <i>The Last Beverley Pipemaker</i> , Frederick William Elwell (c. 1900)	91
Figure 3.3 Display and interpretation of common lodging house, Leeds 1842 Street	99
Figure 3.4 Display and interpretation of the privies and the night soil worker, Leeds 1842 Street	101
Figure 3.5 Abbey Fold after the 2001 renovation	105
Figure 3.6 Window of Kirkgate coppersmith (1938)	107
Figure 3.7 Window of Kirkgate sporting goods shop after the 2012 renovation	108
Figure 3.8 Interpretation of Horsley's sporting equipment shop in the 'Kirkgate Traders' Review'	110
Figure 3.9 Rowntree Snicket, a former corridor and store room at York Castle	112
Figure 3.10 Domestic interior on York Castle's Rowntree Snicket	113

Figure 4.1 'Looking down on Kirkgate,' <i>Museums Journal</i> (1938)	129
Figure 4.2 'Kirkgate from Alderman's Walk' <i>Museums Journal</i> (1938)	129
Figure 5.1 Entrance to the Leeds 1842 Street, accompanied by a mural of Leeds in 1840	136
Figure 5.2 Former gates of York Castle Prison, now part of Kirkgate	138
Figure 5.3 View through the bars of the York Castle Prison gates	138
Figure 5.4 Design for York Castle Museum street by J. Percival Chaplin (1934)	144
Figure 5.5 <i>Briggate, Leeds</i> , John Atkinson Grimshaw (1891)	146
Figure 5.6 Extract from York Castle Museum promotional leaflet (2018)	150
Figure 5.7 Plan of York Castle's street scenes after the 2012 renovations	156
Figure 5.8 Plan of Abbey House's street scenes after the 2001 renovations	156
Figure 5.9 Plan of Thackray Museum Leeds 1842 Street	156
Figure 5.10 Leeds 1842 Street, recommended visitor route	158
Figure 5.11 Leeds 1842 Street, sample visitor paths	158-9
Figure 5.12 Abbey House streets, sample visitor paths	160-1
Figure 5.13 York Castle streets, sample visitor paths	162-3
Figure 6.1 Description of arriving on Kirkgate in York Castle's accessibility guide	191
Figure 6.2 Description of the sounds and smells of Kirkgate in York Castle's accessibility guide	191
Figure 6.3 Display and interpretation of dressmaker, Leeds 1842 Street	194
Figure 7.1 Examples of 'choose a character' cards for the Leeds 1842 Street	203
Figure 7.2 Mannequin of John Oddy inside the Leeds 1842 Street's slaughterhouse display	203
Figure 8.1 Design for York Castle's tallow dip factory, J. Percival Chaplin (1934)	212
Figure 8.2 Still from Pathé film <i>Leeds Victorian Museum</i> (1966)	213

Figure 8.3 Character card for Thomas Sowden, Night Soil Collector, Leeds 1842 Street (front and back)	237
Figure 9.1 Privies on Abbey Fold	250

Introduction 'Doing the Victorians'

'Doing the Victorians' is echoed, at York Castle Museum, by the 'real-life experience' of walking down 'a genuine Victorian cobbled street' to 'call at the Victorian police station.'

John Gardiner, 'Theme Park Victoriana' (2004)¹

Travel back in time...

Take a journey of discovery to our world-famous recreated indoor Victorian street, Kirkgate.

Soak up the sights, sounds and smells of Victorian York as you explore its cobbled streets and alleyways.

York Castle Museum marketing leaflet (2018)²

Kirkgate at York's Castle Museum is the self-professed 'world-famous' example of a wider popular trend within museum displays of the Victorians: the reconstructed indoor street scene. Located within the walls of museums which typically cover broader themes and include other display and interpretation strategies, these street scenes consist of life-size or near life-size reconstructions of period buildings, shops and houses built from and displaying a mix of salvaged and restored original fittings and modern replicas. They can be found in museums across the country (and worldwide), particularly in city history museums (such as Salford Museum and Art Gallery or the Museum of London) or transport museums (such as the Merseyside Maritime Museum or Streetlife Museum of Transport in Hull). While not exclusively 'Victorian' in content – York Castle Museum's near neighbour the Jorvik Viking Centre presents a reconstruction of the city streets in the tenth century, for example – the nineteenth-century past seen on Kirkgate is the setting most commonly found on other museum street scenes. As can be seen from York Castle's marketing material cited above, street scenes sell

¹ John Gardiner, 'Theme Park Victoriana' in Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff eds. *The Victorians Since 1901: History, Representations and Revisions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 172

² York Castle Museum, 'York Castle Museum: The Best Day Out in History', leaflet, 2018

themselves to their visitors as a chance to take a step back in time and walk through the streets as they once were, absorbing the surrounding trappings of Victorian life with all their senses. From this immersive, sensory engagement with their reconstructed environment, the museum promises a form of making meaning of life in the Victorian past distinct from other approaches.

This thesis, the first study to focus specifically on the history and practice of reconstructed Victorian street scenes, explores how narrative and meaning is constructed on the street scenes of York Castle Museum and its fellow Yorkshire museums. It seeks to understand these exhibitions' space within the wider culture of museums and heritage, how they came to be and how they function in allowing visitors an environment in which to play, perform and construct meaning of the everyday nineteenth-century past. By gaining a greater grasp of one of the most popular theatres of interaction between the public and the Victorian past, it is possible to develop an insight into how the public, historians and curators can collaborate to make meaning from the past and point towards how this collaboration can work more effectively in the future.

The prevailing view of the museum Victorian street scene in the early twenty-first century can be summed up by the quotation that began this chapter, in which the history journalist and lecturer John Gardiner described the experience of walking down Kirkgate as an example of the trend toward 'doing the Victorians.' 'Doing the Victorians' suggests a form of engagement with the nineteenth-century past in which learning and meaning-making occurs through active, performative participation. This study develops from the notion that engagement with the nineteenth century past via the museum Victorian street scene is grounded in active 'doing' and a performative play of stepping back into the past. As a result, my thesis views the museum street scene through the lens of different varieties of performance and performativity.

The structure of the thesis is informed by the image of the museum as a theatrical space, dividing the argument into three principal sections – 'The

Stage', 'The Audience', and 'The Performance' – through which the different ways in which narrative and meaning are constructed by both the museum and its visitors are explored.

Part I, The Stage, explores the idea of the museum as a form of narrative told in three-dimensional space. This part looks at the museum street scene from the perspective of its curators and designers as museum scripters and scenographers. It outlines the history and development of the museum street, its roots within the nineteenth century itself as a form of democratised popular public history for 'the Man in the Street,' and addresses the common criticism of such populist spaces as inauthentic and 'dumbed down' versions of the past.

This leads into Part II, The Audience, which grows from the view that the visitor's role in making meaning from the museum is as important as the museum's and that, in studying the museum, we must place the visitor's body into the scene. This part suggests that the nature of the street scene as a full-scale replica of a real street inside the walls of a museum offers a particularly valuable example of a museum's potential to place the visitor's body within the exhibit. It argues that this immersion within the display can create a level of embodied, empathic connection, but also that the variety of sensory cues can equally prove overstimulating and create a bodily barrier to successful meaning-making.

The final part of this thesis, Part III – The Performance, explores the way in which visitors move between the roles of audience and performer, working in collaboration with the museum to create a narrative from the three-dimensional environment.

My argument is that the success of the street scene in providing popular engagement with the nineteenth-century past lies in how it creates a stage for meaning-making through a multi-voiced dialogue between visitors and the museum. The thesis concludes that developing this dialogue further into a unique, individual, personalisable museum experience for the age of the post- or counter-tourist would help fulfil the street scenes' vision of a

popular, democratic medium of accessing the everyday past of the ordinary urban Victorian for the ordinary individual of today.

Focus of Study

This study takes as its locus a small set of museums within Yorkshire, although mention will be made of museum practices elsewhere in Britain and the wider world. These street scenes are Kirkgate at York Castle Museum (Figure 1.1), first opened in 1938; Stephen Harding Gate, Abbey Fold and Harewood Square at Abbey House Museum in Kirkstall, Leeds (Figure 1.2), a museum which first opened in 1927 with the three street scenes added in 1954-8; and the Leeds 1842 Street at the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds (Figure 1.3), opened in 1997; alongside the Old Times Street in Hull (Figure 1.4), which was never officially opened and destroyed by German bombing of the city in 1941. Yorkshire has been chosen as the focus of the study as it provides a more specific framework of a small number of museums whose practices are directly linked in terms of locality and influence. While there are reconstructed street scenes present in museums across the country, they are both more prevalent in Yorkshire and have a longer pedigree there. Local historian and curator Peter Brears – who embodies the close links between the three current Yorkshire museums with street scenes, having worked as curator of York Castle during the 1960s and 1970s, director of Leeds Museums (including Abbey House) in the 1970s and 1980s, and served as a consultant during the development of the Thackray Museum in the 1990s – argued that ‘partly as a result of its great size, partly as a result of the strong, independent minds of its inhabitants, Yorkshire has always enjoyed a powerful sense of cultural identity quite equal to that of Scotland or Wales,’ which he believed prompted Yorkshire curators to play a central role in developing folk collections and museums.³ Citing the likes of York Castle Museum founder John Kirk, Hull Museums

³ Peter Brears and Stuart Davies, *Treasures for the People: The Story of Museums and Galleries in Yorkshire and Humberside* (Bradford: Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council, 1989), p. 70

director Thomas Sheppard and the work of various curators of Bankfield Museum and Shibden Hall in Halifax (including Robert Patterson, later the curator of York Castle), Brears noted that Yorkshire curators had an outstanding influence on developments in curating collections of folk life and bygones and displaying them in innovative ways, amongst which he numbered the reconstructed street scene.⁴ As Brears saw it:

The pioneering work of the Yorkshire folk museum curators has exerted an enormous influence on the development of Britain's museums. [...] The opening of the Castle Museum, York, had even greater national influence, mini "Kirkgates" appearing everywhere from Biggar in Lanarkshire to Helston in Cornwall.⁵

Yorkshire, thus, has a particularly significant pedigree in museums of this type, prompting a focus on this region specifically.



Figure 1.1: Kirkgate, York Castle Museum

⁴ Brears and Davies 1989, pp. 70-83

⁵ Brears and Davies 1989, p. 81



Figure 1.2: Stephen Harding Gate, Abbey House Museum



Figure 1.3: Leeds 1842 Street, Thackray Medical Museum



Figure 1.4: Old Times Street, Hull⁶

York's Kirkgate is worthy of study because it is the longest standing display of its kind in the country.⁷ The earliest surviving example of the street scene approach, it has also been repeatedly expanded and redeveloped, serving as an example of how the concept of a reconstructed street has grown and adapted over time. Hull's Old Times Street, in contrast, provides a permanently unchangeable example of the original approach to street

⁶ Thomas Sheppard, 'Hull's "Old Times" Street', *Museums Journal* October 1935, 35 (7), Plate XVI

⁷ Whether York's Kirkgate was the very first 'permanent' recreated street scene within a British museum is debateable as a possible earlier example existed in the 'Arcade of old-time shops,' a small covered street of shop fronts of different ages, added to the Abbey Folk Park in New Barnet in 1936. This folk park was founded and operated by the mystic Father John Sebastian Marlow Ward and his religious sect, the Confraternity of Christ the King. It closed in 1945 after a scandal involving enticing a 16-year-old girl into the sect left Ward bankrupt. Remnants of the park's collection can be seen at Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology in Queensland, Australia. J.S.M. Ward, 'The Abbey Folk Park, New Barnet', *Museums Journal* September 1936, 36 (6), pp. 239-243; Wesley Clapton, 'Abbey Father is Sued for Enticement', *Daily Herald* 9 April 1945, p. 3; W.A.E. Jones, 'Became a Nun When 16', *Daily Herald* 1 May 1946, p. 3; Geoffrey A.C. Ginn, 'An Ark for England: Esoteric heritage at J.S.M. Ward's Abbey Folk Park, 1934-1940', *Journal of the History of Collections* 2010, 22 (1), pp. 129-40

reconstruction in the 1930s, its destruction leaving it without the opportunity for the over-layering of later curatorial concepts as at York Castle. That the museum was never open to visitors allows it to be seen in the unique respect of solely through its curator's eyes, without the intervention of visitor-generated narratives (meaning that it features heavily in Part I of this thesis and not in the later parts). Meanwhile, the two Leeds museums with street scenes – Abbey House and the Thackray Museum – provide contrasting examples of different local museum streets inspired by the approach at York Castle in different eras and from different organisations. The former is a local authority museum, run by Leeds Museums and Galleries as part of Leeds City Council, whose street scenes originate in the 1950s in the first wave of post-war responses to York Castle's approach. The Thackray, meanwhile, is an independent museum run by a private charitable trust – the Thackray Medical Museum Company – and opened in the late 1990s as one of a number of cultural institutions supported by funding from the newly founded National Lottery. Together, these four museums make up a geographically and ideologically concise and interlinked set of case study sites through which the idea of performance and performativity on the museum street scene can be explored in detail.

Theme Park Heritage

John Gardiner's view of 'doing the Victorians,' cited above, serves as part of his wider argument that today's heritage representations of the nineteenth century often fall under the umbrella of what he termed 'Theme Park Victoriana,' a concept introduced in a paper of the same name at the 2001 Locating the Victorians conference at South Kensington Museums. Gardiner's idea of Theme Park Victoriana – which he described as 'a view of history in museums, visitor attractions and shops that foregrounds the interactive and the commercial, favours sensory input and atmosphere above the drily factual, and elevates private and local experiences beyond the traditional narratives of national history' – represents the typical response to Victorian street scenes in museums during the latter part of the twentieth

century and early twenty-first.⁸ Like others who have written on the subject of Victorian street scenes within museums, Gardiner chose to view York Castle's Kirkgate as part of a broader trend in which he grouped it together with not only similar Victorian streets in open-air living museums, such as Blists Hill Victorian Town at Ironbridge, but also heritage projects as varied as literary house museums such as the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth and reality history programming on TV, such as *The 1900 House* (1999). My thesis is the first example of a study that looks in depth at Victorian street scenes within urban museums specifically and argues for why, although there is clear overlap with sites like Blists Hill, they do also have their own distinct origins and continue to operate somewhat differently.

Gardiner's Theme Park Victoriana argument captured the prevailing view of such sites within the heritage debates of the late twentieth century. As Gardiner put it, Theme Park Victoriana emphasises personal connections with local, family and working-class histories rather than grand narratives of 'kings, queens, great battles and general progress,' resulting, in his view, in a narrative of the past in which 'factual background tends to be given a lower priority than personal engagement.'⁹ He criticised sites and exhibitions such as York Castle's Kirkgate for presenting the past 'as a site of nostalgia and atmosphere, where the *frisson* of "olden times" often seems to be more potent than excitement generated by conscious connection with a particular age.'¹⁰ This view echoed that expressed in earlier heritage debates. Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* (1985), David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985), Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry* (1987), and John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* (1990) all expressed concern at an increasingly commercialised use of a 'theme park' version of the past as popular entertainment.¹¹ These critics raised questions about distinctions between 'history', 'the past' and 'heritage' that continue to be discussed to

⁸ Gardiner 2004, p. 167

⁹ Gardiner 2004, p. 171

¹⁰ Gardiner 2004, p.168

¹¹ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990)

this day. Together they represent a critique of heritage and the heritage industry as a commercialised, safe, consumer version of the past, separated and repackaged from its historical origins. Hewison's criticisms of 'the heritage industry' were particularly strident. He described heritage as essentially conservative and static, a safe and unchanging view of the past where continuity is emphasised over change and history becomes a homogenous 'yesteryear,' with sites which include reconstructed street scenes, such as Beamish, accused of providing 'no understanding of history in depth, [...] more costume drama and re-enactment than critical discourse.'¹² Hewison made no mention of street scenes within city museums such as those discussed in this thesis specifically, but that these were understood as contained within Hewison's condemnation of the heritage industry is apparent from York Castle staff's equally strident defence. The museum's Keeper of Folk Life, Mark Suggitt, wrote for the Social History Curators Group in 1988 that Hewison's 'theme park' comparisons were facetious and that the difference between a historic-styled theme park and a 'bona fide museum' would be obvious to both visitors and professionals.¹³ In the *Museums Journal*, meanwhile, Suggitt suggested that, despite Hewison's often accurate criticisms, his conclusions had been 'weak and rather ill informed' through not consulting with the heritage sites and museums discussed, nor their visitors.¹⁴

Concurrent with the wider heritage debates of this period, there also emerged the 'New Museology' movement, which made similar observations about the idea of a more 'theme park' vision of the past in contemporary museums. In the words of the 1989 Peter Vergo-edited book of that title, the intent of *The New Museology* was to serve as a response to an 'old museology' that was 'too much about museum *methods*, and too little about

¹² Hewison 1987, p.135-7. See also Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 97-100, which saw Beamish as a nostalgia-driven theme park experience akin to Disneyland, and Bob West, 'The making of the English working past: a critical view of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum' in Robert Lumley ed, *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 36-62 for a similar view of Blists Hill at Ironbridge

¹³ Mark Suggitt, 'Fast Past?: The Heritage Business', *SHCG News* 1988, 17, p. 6

¹⁴ Mark Suggitt, 'Book Reviews: *The Heritage Industry – Britain in a Climate of Decline* by Robert Hewison', *Museums Journal* March 1988, 87 (4), p. 218

the purposes of museums.¹⁵ Contained within the book's discussion of museum roles in the late-twentieth century was the Museum of London's Colin Sorensen's thoughts on modern museums as 'Theme Parks and Time Machines.' Like Gardiner, Sorensen noted a change of focus to the stories of the everyman and a desire for immersion within a physical, multisensory environment which promised of immediacy in connecting with the past, letting 'a distant "then" become a present and convincing "now".'¹⁶ The historian Ludmilla Jordanova, who would later be approached by the Thackray Museum to act as part of their development team in the planning stages of their museum and street,¹⁷ further criticised such approaches in popular contemporary heritage sites. Singling out the example of the street reconstruction at Jorvik, she criticised it and other sites like it for 'the ability not to convey information but mimic experience.'¹⁸ Despite the 1930s origins of the streets recreated within museums in York and Hull, there was a tendency in 1980s heritage and museum discourse to focus attention more on more recent sites such as Jorvik, an approach which helped to suggest that this immersive immediacy and telling historical stories of the everyman was a contemporary phenomenon.

The view emerging from the heritage discourse and new museology of the 1980s – that street scene reconstructions come under the wider umbrella of a 'theme park' approach to heritage, that such theme park heritage is populist at the expense of being shallow, conservative and lacking interest in contextualising their exhibits or interrogating popular perceptions of the past – remained the prevailing one in the years that followed, as is evidenced by Gardiner advancing the notion of Theme Park Victoriana in the early twenty-first century. In 1995, Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* divided museums into statist (seeing their purpose as enhancing the public's cultural and intellectual level) or populist (the museum as part of the leisure

¹⁵ Peter Vergo, 'Introduction' in Peter Vergo ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), p. 3

¹⁶ Colin Sorensen, 'Theme Parks and Time Machines' in Peter Vergo ed, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), pp. 60-73

¹⁷ Leeds, Thackray Medical Museum, Shelf 4, File 2, Mike Cooper, 'Thackray Medical Museum: Chief Executive Report, October 1995'

¹⁸ Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums' in Peter Vergo ed, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), p. 25

industry).¹⁹ ‘Populist’ museums, amongst which Bennett saw sites which contain reconstructed environments, buildings and streets (like Hewison, Bennett cited Beamish as the specific example of the type, rather than the indoor street scenes), were not in Bennett’s view ‘democratic’ museums. Bennett justified this position by suggesting that the narrative of the everyman only exists in these museums ‘at the price of submitting them to an idealist and conservatively inclined disfiguration.’²⁰ Meanwhile, in America, the restaged and reconstructed museum past was examined in close detail by Richard Handler and Eric Gable’s study of the living museum at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, in *The New History in an Old Museum* (1997). Handler and Gable’s conclusion – that mimetic reconstruction of past buildings and streets ‘destroys history,’ that it ‘teaches people not to question historians’ stories, not to imagine other, alternative histories, but to accept an embodied tableau as the really real’ – is indicative of the continuing view that a reconstruction of a historic street presents a safe version of the past which admits no possibility of questioning the authority or authenticity of the museum’s narrative.²¹ While my thesis makes use of a similar methodology to Handler and Gable in focusing on specific museum sites and taking into consideration the viewpoints of their staff and visitors, it aims to provide a counterpoint to this view of reconstructed historic environments and show that such spaces are neither conservatively static nor do they preclude visitors questioning or resisting their proposed narratives.

It has, however, been the case that, from the 1990s onwards, academics have become less universally critical of what had been dubbed ‘theme park heritage’ and more open to the idea that heritage experiences such as museum street scenes have some positive value. This can be seen most obviously in Raphael Samuel’s *Theatres of Memory* (1994) and the works which it influenced. Samuel argued against the ‘heritage baiting’ which he saw in the works of Hewison, Wright, or Neal Ascherson, denying their

¹⁹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 105

²⁰ Bennett 1995, p. 110

²¹ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 224

notion of heritage as essentially conservative, capitalist and populist, by observing that ‘heritage’ has never been a systemic, unified project, but rather an ever-changing set of different priorities.²² Samuel saw York Castle, in its use of a street scene, as ‘a pioneer’ both in providing an active, hands-on engagement with the past and in encouraging the prominence of a more positive representation of the high street, shopping and the character of the shopkeeper which would emerge across the latter part of the twentieth century to counter earlier stereotypes.²³ In contrast to the predominant views of the ‘heritage baiting’ critics of the 1980s, Samuel saw active ‘doing the Victorians’-type museums such as these as positive examples of contributing to a more culturally pluralist view of the past.²⁴ Samuel’s influence can be felt on Jerome de Groot’s *Consuming History* (2009), which sought to develop Samuel’s idea of history as ‘a social form of knowledge’ and explore it across the abundance of media which engages with the past in the twenty-first century. De Groot highlighted museums in which reconstructed streets encourage an active engagement with the past (focusing specifically on Beamish and the Swedish open-air museum at Skansen in Stockholm) as breaking ‘the barrier between static museum and viewer, allowing an experience-based interaction with heritage.’²⁵

Even critics of reconstructed environments in museums as tantamount to ‘theme park heritage’ have adopted a less singularly disparaging view of this approach than they had during the 1980s. Lowenthal, for example, has argued that “‘experiencing’ the past is not learning about the past’ and that museums such as these lack scholarly history’s ‘reminder that we never really get into its denizens’ shoes or simulate their souls.’²⁶ However, even

²² Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 242-60

²³ Samuel 2012, pp. 159-63

²⁴ Samuel 2012, p. 280-1. Here is the shopkeeper, like E.P. Thompson’s famous weavers and artisans ‘rescued from the enormous condescension of posterity,’ a connection that Samuel himself made when discussing how shopping and the shopkeeper have, like labour, been ‘rehabilitated’ by their depiction in recent versions of the popular past. Samuel 2012, pp. 159-61

²⁵ Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in popular culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 242

²⁶ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 168

while arguing that such museums lack the possibility to engage critically with the past, Lowenthal did conclude in 1998's *The Heritage Crusade* that: 'To contend that heritage precludes good history is to see the public as singularly blinkered, as if infection by Disney destroyed historical curiosity,' arguing that a 'Disney Historyland' could prompt an engagement with more scholarly history much as popular historic TV series lead to higher sales of academic books.²⁷ Even Gardiner himself concluded something similar in his longer form book *The Victorians: An Age in Retrospect* (2002), published shortly after first advancing the theory of Theme Park Victoriana. His argument here continued the Theme Park Victoriana theme, but also suggested that the inclusive warmth of nostalgia-driven museums and heritage attractions can 'draw people into a more nuanced study of the past.'²⁸

In the twenty-first century, assessment of street scenes in museums and heritage attractions from both museum professionals and Victorianist academics has grown more comfortable with this potential for museum approaches which use their popular appeal to engage visitors in the wider themes of Victorian history. Andrea Witcomb, describing herself in her museum practice as 'a curator who identifies with the New Museology,' provided an alternative argument to Bennett's sole focus on the museum's political function in her *Re-Imagining the Museum* (2003).²⁹ Witcomb's argument that museums must be understood for their popular pleasure functions as well as political ones was cited by Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton in their assessment of reconstructed buildings and streets at Beamish in *The Playful Crowd* (2005). While acknowledging that Beamish sought to provide 'the idea of the museum' in 'the age of the theme park,' Cross and Walton concluded that this museum approach remained one that included both entertaining and educational imperatives, that it was 'a world away from Disney and the theme park.'³⁰ They noted, as Suggitt had, that

²⁷ Lowenthal 1998, p. 170

²⁸ John Gardiner, *The Victorians: An Age in Retrospect* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2002), p. 90

²⁹ Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 86

³⁰ Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton, *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 236

Hewison, Bennett and similar critics of the Beamish approach had not talked to those behind such museums or given sufficient consideration to the practical demands on museums and their curators and stakeholders. They concluded that museum scholarship in this area which came from museum professionals, such as Kevin Moore, had a better grasp of these practicalities.³¹

More recent responses to the reconstructed Victorian street scene concept have looked specifically at the Dickens World attraction at Chatham Dockyard in Kent, which was open between 2007 and 2016 and served as more of a popular heritage attraction than the street scenes within traditional museums discussed here. These assessments, such as in Juliet John's *Dickens and Mass Culture* (2010) and Kathryn Hughes' 'Dickens World and Dickens's World' (2010), referenced Gardiner's 'Theme Park Victoriana' to argue that the site appealed to audiences uninterested in grand national narratives but engaged by the everyday lives of their ancestors and people like them. They further added that Dickens World appealed through utilising active and theatrical engagement rather than written and analytical, although its ultimate commercial failure since the publication of John's and Hughes's arguments does place doubt over its popular appeal.³² While some, such as Judith Flanders – whose own books have helped bridge the gap between academic and popular histories of the Victorians – condemned Dickens World as 'dumbed down' and 'inauthentic' history, John posited that not being an 'elite' space made Dickens World an unintimidating environment which used the familiar trappings of mass culture to create a more accessible place in which to make meaning from the Victorian past.³³ Describing Dickens World as resembling a stage set more than anything, in which both

³¹ Cross and Walton 2005, pp. 216-7. See Kevin Moore, *Museums and Popular Culture* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997), pp. 135-55 for an assessment of the value of street scenes at York Castle, Jorvik and Beamish which emphasises the value of their popular appeal.

³² Kathryn Hughes, 'Victorians Beyond the Academy: Dickens World and Dickens's World' *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2010, 15 (3), pp. 388-93; Juliet John, *Dickens and Mass Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

³³ John 2010, p. 286. Judith Flanders, 'Great Forebodings about Dickens World', *Guardian* 17 April 2007 [online]
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/apr/17/greatforebodingsaboutdicken>> accessed 2 February 2019

staff and visitors were performers, John suggested that 'visitors are not asked to suspend their disbelief, but to employ a double consciousness that they are modern actors in a stylized, theatrical reproduction of Dickens's world.'³⁴ It is this latter argument which corresponds most closely to my thesis, which also takes the view that reconstructed street scenes function like a stage on which multiple performances may occur simultaneously and that visitors in the postmodern and post-tourist age are capable of understanding the artificiality of the scene whilst using it to make meaning from the Victorian past. As with the heritage critics of the 1980s, however, John's assessment of the Victorian street scene, understood through the lens of Dickens World, was a theoretical one which both viewed the street scene as one thread in a wider argument and focused more on her own observations than a close study of the site, talking to staff and visitors.

My thesis takes a different approach to earlier assessments of the reconstructed street scene as part of the wider discourse surrounding 'theme park heritage.' This is the first study to take a narrow, specific focus on museum street scenes and to look at individual examples of this form in depth. Although the similarities with other forms of popular interpretations of the nineteenth century must be acknowledged, particularly the type of reconstructed historic environment on show at open-air museums such as Beamish, this thesis emphasises the distinct identity and origins of the urban streets recreated within city museums and their appeal to the people of the real city streets outside. By focusing on a comparative case study of specific example museums with street scenes, my thesis can explore in greater detail than previous works how the street scene and its visitors work together to make meaning from the Victorian past. Following the criticism from Suggitt, and Cross and Walton toward the work of Hewison and others as drawing entirely on external observation rather than taking into account the perspectives of those working in heritage and museums, this study makes use of primary research from both staff and visitors to the museums analysed. In so doing, it draws conclusions which contradict the prevailing

³⁴ John 2010, p. 279

narrative of populist reconstructions of the physical environments of the past as essentially conservative and static and their audience as passive and unquestioning.

Methodology: Museums as Performative Spaces

The active, performative nature of making meaning via ‘doing the Victorians’ prompts a research methodology and thesis structure which analyses the museum street scene through the concept of the museum as theatre.

Over the past two decades there has been a growing performative turn in the literature of heritage, tourism and museum studies. This can be seen in the updates made to Urry’s original 1990 *The Tourist Gaze* when reissued as *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* from Urry and co-author Jonas Larsen in 2011. This edition acknowledged that an emphasis on sightseeing, tourism as a purely visual experience, neglects the other active, multimodal elements of ‘doing’ in the tourist experience. A new chapter, on ‘Performances,’ drew on the dramaturgical sociology of Erving Goffman to reconfigure the tourist ‘gaze’ as a multi-modal performance within a wider ‘sensescape,’ emphasising that ‘people are never disembodied travelling eyes.’³⁵

³⁵ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: Sage, 2011), p. 199. For further examples of analyses of museums and heritage sites as performative environments in which meaning-making is active and multimodal see: Tracy C. Davis, ‘Performing and the Real Thing in the Postmodern Museum’, *The Drama Review* 1995, 39 (3), pp. 15-40; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Afterlives’, *Performance Research* 1997, 2 (2), pp. 1-9; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Tim Edensor, ‘Staging Tourism: Tourists as Performers’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 2000, 27 (2), pp. 322-344; Tim Edensor, ‘Performing tourism, staging tourism: (Re)producing tourist space and practice’ *Tourist Spaces* 2001, 1 (1), pp. 59-81; Adrian Franklin and Mike Crang, ‘The trouble with tourism and travel theory?’ *Tourist Studies* 2001, 1 (1), pp. 5-22; Gaynor Bagnall, ‘Performance and performativity at heritage sites’, *Museum and Society* 2003, 1 (2), pp. 87-103; Valerie Casey, ‘Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum’, *The Drama Review* 2005, 49 (3), pp. 79-87; Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007); Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd eds. *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Dimitra Christidou and Sophia Diamantopoulou, ‘Seeing and Being Seen: The Multimodality of Museum Spectatorship’, *Museum and Society* March 2016, 14 (1), pp. 12-32

Meanwhile, Laurajane Smith's *Uses of Heritage* (2006) established a view in which 'there is, really, no such thing as heritage'; that 'heritage' is a discourse, a social and cultural practice involved in constructing meanings and values, rather than something with a set identity and definition inherent within heritage sites and objects.³⁶ Smith emphasised the value of 'doing' and that a place becomes a heritage site through being performed as such: performances create the necessary physical and emotional connections for heritage meaning-making.³⁷ Theories of museum studies and theatre studies have come closer together in viewing the museum as a space for staging and performance. In *Theatre & Museums* (2013), theatre academic Susan Bennett argued for the similarities of both theatre and museum audiences in being active in contributing to the construction of meaning through the performance. She noted that her own *Theatre Audiences* (1997) drew the same conclusions as John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking's *The Museum Experience* (1992) in suggesting that the meaning of the same performance would be different for different audience members dependent on their individual and collective experiences and memories.³⁸ In both cases, audiences are increasingly understood as participators and co-creators in the narrative produced by the performance on stage.³⁹

While other museologists in the 1990s proposed readjusting the focus of study from an understanding of the museum based on curatorial practices to one focused on visitor responses, incorporating pedagogic theories such as Lev Vygotsky's theory of socio-constructivist learning practices,⁴⁰ Falk and Dierking's Contextual Model of Learning in the museum posited that museum meaning-making be viewed through the lens of the interplay of different contexts. Under this model, different meanings are made through the

³⁶ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 11

³⁷ Smith 2006, pp. 304-5

³⁸ Susan Bennett, *Theatre & Museums* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 19

³⁹ For further examples of the museum understood as a space for participatory meaning-making see: Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museums 2.0, 2010); Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz: Museums 2.0, 2016)

⁴⁰ Stephen E. Weil, 'Rethinking the museum: An emerging new paradigm', *Museum News* 1990, 69 (2), pp. 56-61; George E. Hein, 'The Constructivist Museum', *Journal for Education in Museums* 1995, 16, pp. 21-3

museum via a visitor's personal context (their past experience and knowledge), socio-cultural context (interactions with other people both within and outside their visitor group), and physical context (the actual physical environment of the museum).⁴¹ In returning to the Contextual Model of Learning in *The Museum Experience Revisited* (2013), Falk and Dierking observed that museums and analyses of them have still tended to rely on only one of the contextual strands of the model, with museums often still disregarding real visitors in favour of an idealised 'average' visitor.⁴² My thesis, however, accepts Falk and Dierking's contention that it is only by viewing the *gestalt* of the museum experience through this interplay of contexts that meaning-making within the museum can properly be understood and so chooses to adopt their contextual model. The methodological approaches chosen for this study are therefore a mix of interdisciplinary methods incorporating aspects of history, sociology and audience reception studies to understand the process of meaning-making on the Victorian street scene from a variety of perspectives and in a depth not previously explored. As with Handler and Gable's research at Colonial Williamsburg, an in-depth understanding of the nature of a museum as an institution, its stakeholders, and its users requires frequent visits to the museums studied here, incorporating both archival research into the museum's past developments and on-site research into the museum's current practices and audience.

Part I – The Stage looks at how museums with street scenes have staged and scripted the Victorian past, exploring the process of meaning-making from the curatorial perspective, what Falk and Dierking dubbed the physical context. For this section, a research methodology grounded in the practices of history was adopted. Archival research was carried out in both the museum stores and local history archives to provide insight into the development of the museums and their ethos. Early plans, proposals, and policy documents were researched along with original publications produced

⁴¹ John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2011); John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013)

⁴² Falk and Dierking 2013, pp. 30-1

by the museums and marketing materials such as guide books and leaflets. This gave an insight into the scripts that each museum intended to provide for their visitors. Archival research also involved national and local newspapers, which helped to identify both the development of the museum streets and how they chose to present themselves to a wider audience. Meanwhile, professional journals were consulted to place the unfolding narrative of the museum streets within the context of the wider museums establishment. In particular, the archived back issues of the *Museums Journal*, the journal of the Museums Association published since 1901, proved an invaluable and previously underutilised resource in this area.

Given the criticism of past research for not allowing museum staff or visitors' voices a place in assessments of museum sites such as these, it was important for this study to feature contributions from those. Further insight into the processes by which the museum streets are developed and presented to the public was provided by conducting a series of extensive semi-structured interviews with museum staff at the three surviving museum sites (York Castle, Abbey House and the Thackray). These interviews included perspectives from staff at all levels, from curators to visitor-facing front of house staff and volunteers. Interviews with members of the original development team for the Thackray Museum's 1997 opening and curators of the most recent redevelopments of the older museums provided valuable insights into the ideas behind the museums' design and arrangement. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and, with the informed consent of interviewees, were anonymised to allow staff to comment freely on their opinions. Anonymous interviews will be cited by the initials of the museum and the role of the staff member, so YCM C1 represents the first interviewee from York Castle's curatorial team.

For Part II – The Audience and Part III – The Performance, which are partially analogous to Falk and Dierking's personal and socio-cultural contexts respectively, it was important to assess visitor responses to the museum streets in order to understand the *gestalt* of the museum experience. Exhibition reviews in newspapers and journals provided some of

this insight, as did the comments made by visitor-facing museum staff in interviews concerning their own experiences with visitor interactions. However, an audience reception study was also vital in getting a first-hand insight into general visitors to the museum streets. Modern audience reception research in media studies, which have looked to move beyond Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework that saw viewers as a mass audience decoding a broadcast message, have demonstrated the value of recording audience interactions during their consumption of media rather than surveying them afterwards. Drawing on Vygotsky's theory of socio-constructivism, Goffman's dramaturgical sociology and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogic narratives, this approach understands broadcast media as a 'text in action,' with its meanings constructed in collaboration with viewers. By recording viewers responding to, conversing with, and accepting or denying points raised by the media that they watch, researchers in film and television, such as Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Wood, were able to build a better picture of this conversationally mediated meaning-making.⁴³

More recently, a similar methodology has begun to be used in museum audience research, primarily in the United States. Falk and Dierking argued strongly against the utility of exit surveys as a measure of visitor experience and reactions to museum exhibitions, feeling that observations of visitor interactions in the moment provided a much more reliable sense of their actual unmediated responses and the socio-cultural quality of performative meaning-making.⁴⁴ Falk and Dierking's views have influenced the practice of the USA Museum Learning Collaborative, whose *Listening in on Museum Conversations* (2004) project was based on the notion that meaning-making is a form of conversational elaboration among participants at multiple simultaneous levels.⁴⁵ This was measured via analysis of audio recordings of conversations amongst visitor groups as they explored the

⁴³ Valerie Walkerdine, 'Video Replay: Families, Films and Fantasy' in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds.) *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 167-99; Helen Wood, 'The mediated conversational floor: an interactive approach to audience reception analysis', *Media, Culture & Society* 2006, 29 (1), pp. 75-103

⁴⁴ Falk and Dierking 2011, p. 47

⁴⁵ Gaea Leinhardt and Karen Knutson, *Listening in on Museum Conversations* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2004), p. xiii

various museum sites in their study, a methodology which demonstrated far greater insight into 'live' museum meaning-making than other forms of audience reception research.⁴⁶

This thesis follows their example in utilising recorded visitor conversations as a mode of audience reception study. Visitor groups at the three sites were approached at the start of the museums' street scenes and, on giving their consent to participate, were given a recording device and then allowed to visit the street as they would normally, while their conversations were recorded, and their movement tracked. In total forty groups (comprising 123 individual visitors) were recorded at Abbey House, twenty-three groups (comprising 72 individual visitors) at the Thackray Museum and twenty groups (comprising 54 individual visitors) at York Castle, a total of twenty-nine hours of recorded visitor conversations. Material from these recordings has been used in combination with the interviews and archival material to build up a complete picture of the theory and practice of museum street scenes in Yorkshire.

First, however, this study will look at the challenges of staging the past at these museums.

⁴⁶ For further examples of successful museum audience reception studies utilising listening in on conversations, see: Christina Goulding, 'The museum environment and the visitor experience', *European Journal of Marketing* 2000, 34 (3/4), pp. 261-78; Christidou and Diamantopoulou 2016

Part I

The Stage

Introduction

We got the windows in Guisborough,
 The grill's from Cardiff Zoo;
 The letter-box comes from the Falkland Isles,
 And the counter from Timbuctoo.
 The chimney piece is Canadian,
 The doorway we purchased in Cork;
 But the whole is genuine replica
 Of olde worlde York.
 The stamps are eighteen forty,
 And everything's rather a mix,
 In our pseudo-Victorian post-office
 Of eighteen seventy-six.
 So post a card to your sweetie.
 We'll sell you a stamp that's a fake,
 As long as your money's authentic,
 And it's only cash we take.

'The Authentic Touch' by G.W., published in *Museums Journal*, September 1959¹

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in her article 'Afterlives' (1997), cited a discussion which she had with the former director of the Cameri Theatre in Tel Aviv and of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, Jeshajahu Weinberg, in which Weinberg described how he saw a museum as 'a story told in three-dimensional space.' As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett commented: 'On its face, this statement does not distinguish museum from theatre. Or rather, this statement points to their convergence.'² Both the director of a play and of a museum build narrative through *mise-en-scène*, the design and arrangement of space. In the metaphor of museum-as-theatre, how then do the sceneographers and scripters of the museum street scenes create three-dimensional narratives of the Victorian past? And what are the possible limitations of this approach?

In September 1959 a new area was installed in York Castle's Victorian street scene. With the main body of the street, Kirkgate, occupying what had once been the exercise yard of the former female prison building, one of the

¹ 'Notes and Notices: Museum Post Office for York', *Museums Journal* September 1959, 59 (6), p. 133

² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Afterlives', *Performance Research* 1997, 2 (2), p. 7

former cells leading off it had now been converted into a small courtyard, named Providence Court. The centrepiece of this new courtyard was a recreation of a nineteenth-century post office. The guide book to the museum published shortly afterwards provided a description of the new shop:

The Archway leads into a small yard where William Henry White combines the business of a general mixed store with a post office. Here peggy sticks and rubbing stones jostle with tea cannisters and patent medicines, and behind the grill are reproductions of the famous “Penny Black” of 1840 – the first adhesive postage stamp in the world. The letter box by the door is functional and is for the use of visitors, being emptied daily by the G.P.O.³

As is typical of museum guide books, the text was given a sense of immediacy by being written in the present tense, serving to create a script for the visitor to follow in the moment. In the description from the guidebook, the bricolage of objects from peggy sticks to patent medicines is all part of a single historic scene portraying the original business of a combined general store and post office. The name above the door (William Henry White was a genuine tea merchant and post master within living memory for York residents at the time) would also have helped to give the sense that this was the image of a real person’s authentic surroundings, any unusual juxtapositions merely a reflection of their individual quirks.⁴ The guide book also emphasised the functionality of the shop, continuing its script to prompt visitors to engage with it as a genuine post office, buying their stamps and dropping their postcards in the letter box to be collected by the modern G.P.O. and delivered, a memento from the tourists in the past to their friends and family of the present.

When the opening of the post office was announced with a notice in the pages of the *Museums Journal*, however, it was accompanied by the satirical poem which appears as the epigraph to this chapter and provides an alternative interpretation of the new space’s staging of the Victorian past.

³ York Castle Museum *York Castle Museum Guide* (York: William Sessions Limited, 1961), pp. 11-2

⁴ For more on William Henry White’s original shop, see York Press, ‘A bridge to York’s past’, *York Press* 4 April 2005 [online] <<https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/7866928.a-bridge-to-yorks-past/>> accessed 1 February 2018

Titled 'The Authentic Touch' and published anonymously under the initials G.W., the poem highlighted the staged and artificial nature of the post office scene. Like the museum display it critiques, the poem is a mix of fact and fiction. The windows really were from a demolished property in the market town of Guisborough, on the North York Moors, but the counter's origins in the more exotic Timbuktu is simply playful fantasy.⁵ Exaggerated though it may be, the poem makes a number of points that would occur in later heritage debates. Like the guide book, 'The Authentic Touch' drew attention to the post office's offer to let you 'post a card to your sweetie.' Here, however, the popular appeal of the museum offering this transaction was perceived as a purely commercial imperative. The museum had no problem selling a stamp that's a fake 'as long as your money's authentic.' Rather than suggesting that the shop window bricolage is a coherent individual scene, the poem drew attention to how 'everything's rather a mix' of periods and locations, all put together to stage a whole that is a so-called 'genuine replica of olde worlde York,' a 'pseudo-Victorian post office.' The poem demonstrates an awareness amongst museum professionals of the complexities inherent in trying to present a 'genuine replica' decades prior to such concerns becoming central to heritage debates in the latter part of the twentieth century.

While it is impossible to know for sure who the anonymous G.W. was, the likely candidate is George Willmot, York's only curator and previous contributor to *Museums Journal* with those initials. Between 1950 and 1970 Willmot was curator of the city's other museum, the nineteenth-century Yorkshire Museum, whose traditional vitrine displays and taxonomic arrangement stood in marked contrast to the immersive theatricality of York Castle. It offered what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett called 'in context' displays as opposed to the 'in situ' displays of York Castle.⁶ 'The Authentic Touch' can be read specifically as a criticism from a traditional 'museum man' of the entire populist and commercial full-scale mimetic reconstruction form of 'in situ' museum display.

⁵ 'Notes and Notices: Museum Post Office for York', *Museums Journal* September 1959, 59 (6), p. 133

⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, pp. 3-4

These two opposing descriptions of the York Castle post office provide, in microcosm, an indication of the issues and questions raised by the staging of the past by such museums and their curators; in particular the novelty and crowd-pleasing quality of a mimetic street reconstruction and the concern with whether that level of mimetic replica of the true past is even possible. These themes form the basis of Part I in which we consider the museum-theatre as it is staged with the curator as scenographer. It explores the history and development of the museum street scene and argues that the popularity of this way of narrativising the Victorian past in three-dimensional space should not be seen as an example of history 'dumbed down' for a mass audience, but rather as a successful way of actively engaging ordinary people with their past and that of their city and community.

Chapter One – 'Turning the museum into Shop Windows for the Man in the Street' – examines the origins of the first museum street scenes that opened in the 1930s and 50s. It argues that the museum streets succeeded because they appealed to an audience beyond the traditional museum visitor. By inviting the ordinary 'Man in the Street' onto their street to experience staged historic versions of the familiar and everyday, such as the post office where they can send a real postcard, the museum created a link between the city streets outside and their metonym within the museum. As such, the chapter challenges the traditional view that the museum street scenes were inferior indoor derivatives of the rural open-air folk museums of Scandinavia and instead places them in a more urban tradition of rational recreation and civic pride.

Chapter Two – On Authentic Reproduction – looks to answer the questions raised by the image of the 'pseudo-Victorian post-office' in 'The Authentic Touch' and the seemingly oxymoronic notion of 'authentic reproduction' in general. It acknowledges the view of tourism scholars that such spaces can never be truly authentic, but will always be pseudo-real and hyperreal environments, a mix of original elements with simulations and simulacra. However, this chapter denies that the impossibility of perfect authenticity renders the museum street scenes a failed presentation of the past that is more escapism than history. Instead it posits that the museum

streets' designers and curators acknowledge that complete authenticity is an impossibility but have nevertheless made their street scenes objectively more real over time. Even without complete authenticity, the streets' reconstructions of the past offer their visitors a valuable sense of experiential realism. This chapter demonstrates that the museum audience are sophisticated enough to be aware of the various levels of reality on offer at the museum and to accept or reject them as building blocks to their own meaning-making, a subject that will lead on to Part II: The Audience.

Chapter One

'Turning the Museum into Shop Windows for the Man in the Street'

Previous responses to the use of reconstructed street scenes in museums have either suggested that this is a relatively new approach distinct from past practice (Gardiner, for example, described Theme Park Victoriana as the 'death of a "Victorian" attitude to museum display')¹ or that the street scenes were inferior attempts at partially reproducing the techniques of the open-air folk museums of Scandinavia. This chapter argues instead that there were more diverse influences on the first museum street scenes in the 1930s and 50s. It argues that the indoor city street scenes of Hull, York and Leeds were more rooted in the urban environment and urban display practices than is typically acknowledged. The curators and directors of the early museum street scenes were outsiders from the museums establishment, mavericks who brought exhibitionary ideas from outside the museological tradition into the museum. They may not have had a Victorian attitude to museum display, but they did draw on the period for more than just their subject matter. As much as they were influenced by the rural tradition of the folk museums movement, the museum streets existed within a tradition of representing the past that was urban both in its subject, and in the forms of exhibition and spectatorship that it adopted. The outsider curators of the first museum streets sought to open the museum up to a wider audience of urban tourists, incorporating commercial exhibition approaches from the so-called rational recreations of theatrical presentations, such as the panorama, to high street shops, shopping arcades, and trade exhibitions. As one 1941 *Yorkshire Post* article noted of Kirk, 'his English Nineteenth Century "Kirkgate" literally turns the museum into Shop Windows for the Man in the Street.'² By engaging the 'Man in the Street' with this city-in-miniature, the outsider-curators sought to use the

¹ John Gardiner, 'Theme Park Victoriana' in Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff eds. *The Victorians Since 1901: History, Representations and Revisions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 171

² 'Museums in War-Time', *Yorkshire Post* Saturday 1 November 1941, p. 4

museums and their street scenes as cornerstones of a wider project of civic improvement, serving as a link between the city's past and its future.

In seeking to reframe the understanding of the museum street scene as a primarily urban form, this chapter draws on the work of Billie Melman and her *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past 1800-1953* (2006). Melman acknowledged the existing scholarly view that there was a strong strand of pastoralist and ruralist sentiment in English presentations of the past in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. However, she proposed that this ruralist historiography should be balanced with an equally strong strand of imagining and consuming history through an urban lens. Similarly, this chapter acknowledges the influence of the rural vision of the past embodied by the open-air folk museums on the museum street scenes, but will argue that the street scenes equally emerged from a culture of the past which is distinctly urban. Melman suggested that during the period from 1800 to 1953 history was imagined and experienced as urban through the emergence of new urban visual forms and genres, technologies of looking and representing historical objects, from the panoramas and dioramas of the early nineteenth century to the development of film in the early twentieth and the influence of such forms on new literary genres which adopted panoramic and cinematic modes of constructing narrative.³ Melman's focus was on how this urban spectatorial historiography was embodied in the narratives constructed by novels and films. This chapter takes such observations and applies them instead to museums. It argues that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban spectacles were part of the formative architecture of a form of museum display which attempted to recreate urban space in a manageable format within the museum's walls. As Melman noted, there was also a clear 'overlapping of an urban vision of the past and the project of urban modernization,' something that can be seen in how the museum curators and directors discussed in this chapter utilised their representations of the urban past as parts of their wider civic programmes.⁴

³ Billie Melman *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past 1800-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 11

⁴ Melman 2006, pp. 93-4

1938-9: Looking Forward and Back

1938-9, the year that York Castle Museum and its street scene first opened to the public, was a significant moment for the museums establishment in Britain and this can be seen in the discussions that took place at the annual conferences of the Museums Association (MA), papers from which were published in the MA's professional journal, the *Museums Journal*. The fiftieth anniversary of two noteworthy events – the publication of Thomas Greenwood's study *Museums and Art Galleries* in 1888 (described half a century later as 'the first general treatise on the subject'),⁵ and the founding of the MA through an advert placed by the Yorkshire Philosophical Society in 1888, followed by its first conference in York in 1889 – sparked discussion around the present state of museums in the country, as well as looking back across the developments in the sector over the previous fifty years and suggesting developments to come. 1939's MA President Charles Bathurst, Viscount Bledisloe, dedicated his presidential address to the subject of 'Museums: Their Past, Present and Future.' Bledisloe saw a sequel to Greenwood's treatise in the recently produced study of provincial museums by MA secretary and National Labour MP Frank Markham.⁶ He argued that, by comparing the two publications, it was clear that many museums of the 1930s had left behind the gloomy, gothic and overcrowded for 'the advantages of simplicity and light', but that a 'cabinet of curiosities' approach remained in certain provincial institutions.⁷ However, although Greenwood and his Victorian contemporaries had argued that museums required neatly ordered and categorised displays typologically arranged, the fiftieth anniversary conferences included alternative concepts of display and arrangement from outside the museums profession. And, while Greenwood

⁵ Viscount Bledisloe, 'Museums: Their Past, Present and Future – Presidential Address to the Museums Association, Jubilee Conference, Cheltenham, 4th July 1939', *Museums Journal* August 1939, 39 (5), p. 218.

Greenwood himself described how 'the subject on which this book treats is almost without a literature' (Thomas Greenwood, *Museums and Art Galleries* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1888), p. i), although he did refer to some existent museological writing from John Ruskin and Whitworth Wallis.

⁶ S.F. Markham, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of the British Isles (Other Than the National Museums)* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1938)

⁷ Bledisloe 1939, p. 218

had used his book to argue that museums should focus on their educational remit for the didactic improvement of the common man, fifty years later alternative voices now suggested appealing on an emotional level to the urban tourist.⁸ Three papers, in particular, from the MA's 1938 anniversary conference in Belfast can be related to the new phenomenon of the museum street scene and offer three different lenses through which to view it. These form the structure of the chapter which follows.

At the 1938 conference the then-President of the MA, Mortimer Wheeler (the keeper of London Museum and director of the Institute of Archaeology), poured special praise on both the newly opened York Castle and the still under construction Old Times Street at Hull. Wheeler picked out York Castle 'for special mention, not merely for its own merit but also as representative of a general movement which cannot be too emphatically applauded.'⁹ He described how both York Castle and the similar street in Hull fit into 'a wider picture' of the growing appreciation through the 1920s and 30s of the value of collecting folk life and displaying it in innovative ways.¹⁰

⁸ For a further example of the emphasis on taxonomic display in Victorian and Edwardian museology, see David Murray, *Museums: Their History and Their Use: With a Bibliography and List of Museums in the United Kingdom* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1904)

⁹ R.E. Mortimer Wheeler, 'Presidential Address to the Museums Association, delivered at the Belfast Conference on 5th July, 1938' *Museums Journal* August 1938, 38 (5), p. 217

¹⁰ Wheeler 1938, pp. 217-218; For earlier discussion in the MA and the pages of *Museums Journal* in favour of an English open-air folk museum see: Henry Balfour, 'The Relationship of Museums to the Study of Anthropology', *Museums Journal* June 1904, 3 (12), pp. 396-408; Henry Balfour, 'Presidential Address to the Museums Association Maidstone Conference: The need for a national folk museum', *Museums Journal* July 1909, 9 (1), pp. 5-18; F.A. Bather 'Open-Air Folk Museums: Progress and Prospects', *Museums Journal* 1911, 10 (9), pp. 249-53; Henry Balfour et al. 'A National Folk-Museum', *Museums Journal* 1912, 11 (8), pp. 221-5; W.R. Butterfield 'Correspondence: Future of the Crystal Palace Grounds', *Museums Journal* 1913, 13 (1), p. 32; F.A. Bather 'The Triumph of Hazelius', *Museums Journal* 1916, 16 (6), pp. 132-6; G.R. Carline 'The Arrangement of Local and Folklore Specimens as a Nucleus of an Open-Air or Folk Museum', *Museums Journal* 1919, 19 (6), pp. 89-96; 'Open-Air Folk Museums', *Museums Journal* May 1930 29 (11), pp. 377-381; 'Folk Museum Committee', *Museums Journal* February 1931, Volume 30 (8), p. 300; Henry A. Miers, 'The Museums Association Norwich Conference, July 1933 – Address by the President', *Museums Journal* August 1933, 33 (5), pp. 149-163; R.E. Mortimer Wheeler, 'Folk Museums', *Museums Journal* August 1934, 34 (5), pp. 191-196; 'Discussion on Folk Museums', *Museums Journal* September 1934, 34 (6), pp. 227-232; C.E. Freeman, 'Museum Methods in Norway and Sweden', *Museums Journal* January 1938, 37 (10), pp. 469-492

This is also apparent in the 1912 proposal to utilise the Crystal Palace at Sydenham as the site for a National Folk Museum. L. Lind-Af-Hageby 'A National Folk-Museum', *The Times*, Wednesday 10th January 1912, p. 9; G.T. Plunkett 'The Crystal Palace And The National Folk Museum', *The Times*, Monday 29th January 1912, p. 6; Society of Architects 'The

From the perspective of the president of the country's principal collective organisation of museums, therefore, York Castle's Kirkgate and Hull's Old Times Street represented a long overdue attempt at replicating the approach of the Scandinavian open-air museums such as Stockholm's Skansen, which had been founded in 1891 by Artur Hazelius.

Two other 1938 papers, however, offer different contexts by which we may view the street scenes. In 'Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured: The Aesthetics of Museum Display,' Trevor Thomas (the Keeper of Ethnography at Liverpool Museums) suggested that it would benefit the museum curator to put themselves into the shoes of the child playing with their toy theatre, seeing displays in terms of stages and prosceniums and visitors as audiences.¹¹ He argued that the museum's role should be less one of the repository of facts and more the engaging presentation of those facts. He urged curators to think of themselves more akin to directors of theatre than lecturers: 'If we thought ourselves less as what the general public terms learned, and more as producers of *mise-en-scène*, we should retain, or acquire, a freshness of outlook. We are the showmen, not the performers.'¹² The museological *mise-en-scène* should, in Thomas's view, give the objects a space to perform, a space in which the curators choreograph them dynamically rather than with the repetitive regularity of a taxonomic arrangement. Along with the theatre director, Thomas also argued that the museum curator could learn from the window-dresser of a high street shop. In contrast to those who would dismiss the commercialism of shop display as antagonistic to the purity of the museum's educational imperative, Thomas advocated learning from shop window displays precisely because they are 'selling mediums' designed for popular consumption: 'Like the spider, they invite you, poor fly, into the parlour. By alluring your eye they induce you to

Crystal Palace Grounds as an Open-Air Museum', *Journal of the Society of Architects*, 1907-1922; p. 158; 'Notes and News: The Crystal Palace', *Museums Journal* 1912, 11 (10), p. 307; W.R. Butterfield 'Correspondence: Future of the Crystal Palace Grounds', *Museums Journal* 1913, 13 (1), p. 32; 'Notes and News: National Folk-Museum', *Museums Journal* 1913, 13 (5), p. 187; Evacustes A. Phipson 'Letters to the Editor: The Crystal Palace as a Folk-Museum', *Museums Journal* 1919, 19 (4), p. 72

¹¹ Trevor Thomas, 'Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured: The Aesthetics of Museum Display', *Museums Journal* April 1939, 39 (1), p. 1

¹² Thomas 1939, p. 2

part with your money. Museum display should induce the visitor to part with mental resistance.’¹³ Thomas’s view here was reflected by the praise in the *Yorkshire Post* three years later, quoted above, for the museum street scenes as spaces that turn the museum into ‘Shop Windows for the Man in the Street.’ That article praised the museum street scenes of both York and Hull for using their ability to ‘sell’ the visitor on their narrative and reach an audience not engaged by formal education, asking: ‘if a shop window can sell goods, cannot a showcase sell knowledge?’¹⁴ Thomas’s idea of adopting popular and commercial techniques of urban display in order to reach such a wide audience is another way of viewing the early museum street scenes, a counterpoint to Wheeler’s description of them as smaller indoor Skansens.

A third paper, ‘The Form and Purpose of a Local Museum,’ presented by Frank Pick (the Chairman of the Council for Art and Industry and Vice-Chairman of the London Passenger Transport Board) also argued for a more dynamic form of presentation than the taxonomic. Pick had toured local museums in order to discern what they did and did not do well. He concluded that museum displays had become stale groups of rows and rows of similar objects, noting that ‘nothing can become more tedious and tiresome, unless, of course, to Dr. Dryasdust.’¹⁵ As with Thomas’s notion of object choreography, Pick imagined that a dynamic approach to displaying static objects could serve as ‘a way of bringing the dead to life,’ with the curator’s role to reanimate the inanimate by bringing out connections between the object and a wider audience.¹⁶ He argued that, to create these connections with the average visitor, a relationship had to be established with the contemporary world outside the museum: ‘The museum must be linked up to current life. The last show-case in the museum must be read in conjunction with the shop windows in the town.’¹⁷ Pick saw the purpose of the museum as one of civic improvement, creating a stronger urban community through making art and heritage more accessible to the public, allowing them to see

¹³ Thomas 1939, p. 9

¹⁴ *Yorkshire Post* 1941, p. 4

¹⁵ Frank Pick, ‘The Form and Purpose of a Local Museum’, *Museums Journal* September 1938, 38 (6), p. 286

¹⁶ Pick 1938, p. 305

¹⁷ Pick 1938, p. 304

the city of the past presented by the museum as part of the city of today (and tomorrow). Reading the museum displays in conjunction with those of a high street shop could also mean incorporating shops into the museum itself. Pick argued for the value of preserving, as ‘economic documents [...] of much importance,’ a blacksmith’s workshop or ‘the old village store that carried everything the village needed.’¹⁸ This argument clearly resonated with Hull Museums director Thomas Sheppard who responded to Pick both at the conference itself and in print in the *Museums Journal* to direct Pick towards his Old Times Street as an example of Pick’s ideal of a local museum.¹⁹ We may also, then, view the museum street scenes within the context of Pick’s notion of reconstructing city spaces as part of wider civic improvement programmes.

Both Thomas and Pick are noteworthy as advocates for museological techniques and ideals adopted by the early museum street scenes as both can be seen as outsiders from the traditional museums establishment, here embodied by MA President Wheeler. Thomas was a curator, but he was also a noted polymath with numerous interests and connections beyond museums: a raconteur, enthusiastic actor, singer and theatrical set designer.²⁰ It is no surprise that he wished to bring a little theatricality to the museum stage as well. Pick, who grew up in York, did not have a museums background at all, but was instead concerned with bringing the museum to the people in his role as a transport administrator, turning the London Underground into ‘the people’s picture gallery’ with the introduction of contemporary art in stations.²¹ At the time of his MA Conference paper, Pick had also arranged for the display of a case of objects from the Victoria and Albert Museum on the concourse of Leicester Square Underground Station

¹⁸ Pick 1938, p. 293

¹⁹ ‘Belfast Conference Report’, *Museums Journal* August 1938, 38 (5), pp. 233-60; Thomas Sheppard, ‘Letters to the Editor: A Blacksmith’s Shop in a Museum’, *Museums Journal* October 1938, 38 (7), p. 364

²⁰ Robert Stuart, ‘Obituary: Trevor Thomas’, *The Independent* 8 July 1993 [online] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-trevor-thomas-1483804.html>> accessed 1 February 2019

²¹ Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. ix

to arrest the attention of commuters and encourage museum interest in the general, non-visiting, public.²²

The cultural historian Michael T. Saler has argued that Pick's work on the London Underground was an attempt to reconcile various antinomies – traditionalism and modernism, the transient and the eternal, romantic artisanal antiquarianism and contemporary commercial imperatives – to produce something which could stand as a metonym for the city as a whole.²³ Similarly, museums could utilise modern commercial design and marketing to connect communities with celebrations of their artisanal past. By making the museum display contiguous with the shop windows on the real, modern streets the museum would make itself a non-elite cultural space much like putting museum displays and art at Underground stations. As this chapter demonstrates, the founders of the museum street scenes were also museum outsiders who, like Pick, sought to reconcile antinomies of traditionalism and modernity by celebrating their city's past, while also finding ways for it to contribute to a modern future, a project in which their museums were just one part.

Outsider-Curators and Museum Mavericks

For his 2002 exhibition at The Lowry in Salford, *1962*, the artist Bill Longshaw created a full-size but monochrome reproduction of a northern city street and shop windows from 1962. Longshaw acknowledged that the project was inspired by his childhood love of the reconstructed museum streets such as York Castle's Kirkgate and, especially, the similar Lark Hill Place in Salford Museum and Gallery, which had opened in 1957.²⁴ He argued that his reinterpretations of the street scene, of which *1962* was just one example, worked because he could serve as a 'maverick curator,'

²² 'Underground Museum Display: Exhibit at Leicester Square Station', *Museums Journal* April 1938, 38 (1), pp. 24-5

²³ Saler 1999, p. 30

²⁴ William Longshaw, *People, Myth and Museums: Constructing 'the people's past', and white working class Salford, 1945-2007* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2008), pp. 14-5. See also William Longshaw, 'Some thoughts on Lark Hill Place', *LifeTimes Link* 2006, 20, p. 21

working ‘both inside and outside the museum to make people think about how the past is made and remade.’²⁵ While he may have had success in engaging museum audiences by bringing his artist outsider’s eye to refresh and enliven the relatively rigid practices of the museum, Longshaw was far from the first to do so. In fact, while Longshaw may have used his maverick status to subvert or play with some of the now-established techniques used by curator Ted Frape when constructing Lark Hill Place, the original curators of the first reconstructed street scenes were also outsiders from the strictly ordered museums establishment bringing wider influences to bear on their displays.

Robert Patterson, the longest serving curator of York Castle, holding the position from 1951-75, put the success of the museum and its street down to Kirk’s outsider background. Kirk, a surgeon and local general practitioner, was an amateur antiquary and archaeologist but had no formal or professional background in history or museums. Of Kirk’s background and the popularity of the museum which he founded, Patterson stated:

There is little doubt that it is the presentation which has captured the public imagination: the ingenuity and often sheer inspiration of Dr. Kirk’s lay-out. It is perhaps an indictment of the museum profession that the success is largely due to the fact that the museum was designed by a member of the public for the general public, and he brought a freshness and originality in display which is often lacking in one schooled in the more traditional methods.²⁶

Patterson’s argument here was twofold: firstly, that the museum appealed to a broader section of the public than its contemporaries through appealing via imaginative presentation and, secondly, that the very fact that Kirk was not trained in the favoured practices of the contemporary museums establishment was the reason for its success. Patterson himself may have had a background more grounded within museum practice – a biology graduate who went on to curatorial work in the natural history departments of Liverpool and Reading museums in the 1930s, he boasted of a first museum

²⁵ Longshaw 2008, p. 54

²⁶ Robert Patterson, ‘The Castle Museum’, *Museums Journal* August 53 (5) 1953, pp. 119-21

job at the age of 13 preparing wasps' nests for display at his local museum in Oldham – but he also spent many of the years prior to becoming curator of York Castle engaged in textile research, both for Woolwich Arsenal and at the University of Leeds.²⁷ His experience of research into the history of textile processes saw him not only moving from his past experience of natural history museums into those with more of a folk and social history bent, but also to focus on active engagement with objects displayed in appropriate surroundings rather than vitrine cases. '10,000 spinning wheels won't teach you how to spin wool. But 10 minutes spinning it will,' was how Patterson summed up the museum philosophy that working with textiles had taught him.²⁸

Kirk himself was far from the only person behind York Castle and its street scene to lack professional museum experience. While Kirk took the title of Director of York Castle Museum, many of his early curators were also new to the field. In 1936 a response to an application for funding from the Carnegie Trust noted that curator E.J.A. Kenny was 'well-equipped academically, but has had no previous museum experience.'²⁹ Violet Rodgers (later Wloch), officially the Deputy Curator but actually the senior member of curatorial staff in charge of the museum through its early years, 'came to the job untrained in museum work' according to Allen Grove, himself only briefly the curator during the period in which the museum opened to the public.³⁰ Meanwhile, on being hired in 1953 from a deputy curator position at York Castle to curate the street scenes at Abbey House, Cyril Maynard Mitchell was announced in the pages of the *Yorkshire Post* as an 'expert on folk museums.'³¹ In truth, however, although Mitchell gained vital expertise in the area having worked for six years at York Castle during which time Kirkgate had been extended, he had arrived at York with no experience in the museums sector at all. Mitchell's background was not

²⁷ '23 years of bringing the past to life', *York Evening Press* 6 September 1975, pp. 3-4

²⁸ *York Evening Press* 1975

²⁹ D.W. Herdman, 'Letter to the Chairman of the Joint Committee of the Carnegie U.K. Trust and the Museums Association, 30 April 1936', York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 11, p. 2

³⁰ L.R. Allen Grove, 'Letters to the Editor', *Museums Journal* March 1981, 80 (4), p. 220

³¹ 'New curator at Kirkstall is expert on folk museums', *The Yorkshire Post*, 10 September 1953, p. 1

antiquarian but in contemporary industry: in the 1930s he had worked as an industrial designer before taking up a role as an efficiency expert during the War, employed by the Ministry of Supply to work with the coal, iron and steel industries.³² He was hired at York Castle to bring his industrial experience to reconstructing traditional craft workshops and that would become his particular area of museum expertise, something well outside the tradition of taxonomic vitrine displays.

Perhaps the most significant of York Castle Museum's founders not 'schooled in the more traditional methods,' however, was not Kirk himself, despite the tendency (not least from the museum itself) to emphasise his role as an individual visionary founder. It is at least as important for our purposes to place the focus on Alderman John Bowes Morrell, the York councillor who was Chairman of York Corporation's Art Gallery Committee at the time that they acquired the Kirk Collection and later became Chairman of the Castle Museum Committee. Morrell would remain in the latter position throughout the museum's development and for many years after Kirk's death in 1941. While the Kirk Collection may have been instrumental in providing the inspiration for a 'folk life' museum and in giving the nucleus of both the eventual York Castle Museum and its street scene specifically, it was Morrell who saw this potential and ensured that what had been the Kirk Collection would ultimately form part of an urban street scene.

Kirk's collection of bygones had been mostly collected from the rural North Riding of Yorkshire, where Kirk's medical practice had been established in the village of Pickering. From the early 1920s the collection had been housed in the Pickering Memorial Hall and, even when the Hall became unfit for purpose, Kirk continued to hope for a permanent home within the North Riding. With that in mind, an offer was made to donate it to Scarborough in 1931.³³ The proposed Deed of Gift for the collection's move

³² *Yorkshire Post* 1953, p. 1

³³ 'News of the North: A Museum for Pickering', *Yorkshire Post* 3 October 1922, p. 9; Peter Brears, 'Kirk of the Castle', *Museums Journal* September 1980, 80 (2), pp. 90-2; 'The man in the Castle', *York Press* 24 January 2002, [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/6667216.The_man_in_the_Castle/> accessed 1 February 2019

to Scarborough made no mention of any plan to display the bygones in any way but a traditional taxonomic approach, stressing that: 'Where possible all exhibits belonging to a specific class or the product of a particular excavation shall be kept together so that the interest of such exhibits will be of practical use for the student.'³⁴ The concept of a street scene did not emerge until the collection went on offer to city museums away from the rural North Riding. It was at this point in 1934 that Morrell, in his position chairing the Art Gallery Committee, persuaded other members of the local government in York to attempt to acquire Kirk's collection, even in the face of those who dismissed the assorted bygones as 'a load of junk.'³⁵ Kirk later said of Morrell's contribution that 'had it not been for Alderman J.B. Morrell, who appreciated my point of view, there would never have *been* a museum containing my Bygones.'³⁶ It was also Morrell who suggested honouring Kirk by naming the street 'Kirkgate.'³⁷ In return, the shorter initial part of the L-shaped street scene was dubbed 'Alderman's Walk' in Morrell's honour.³⁸

Like Kirk, Morrell was an enthusiastic amateur antiquary, but had no formal background in the museums sector. Professionally, Morrell was a director at Rowntree's Cocoa Works from 1897 and was heavily involved in local government as a councillor, alderman, and twice city mayor, as well as founder of the York Conservation Trust. Even when he died in 1963, he was still working for the improvement of his city.³⁹ Once the city accepted Morrell's suggestion of acquiring the Kirk Collection, Morrell would add to the collection, making the eventual museum into something more urban than was exemplified in many of Kirk's rural bygones. He used his personal wealth and connections to acquire more large objects appropriate to a town street including shop fronts from the town of Stamford, Lincolnshire, (most

³⁴ 'Deed of Gift Between John Lamplugh Kirk and the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the County Borough of Scarborough, 1931', York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 10

³⁵ Anne Vernon, *Three Generations: The Fortunes of a Yorkshire Family* (London: Jarrolds, 1966), pp. 168-9; Minutes of York Art Gallery Committee, York, York Civic Archive, Y/COU/5/2/12 BC56, pp. 422-4

³⁶ Vernon 1966, p. 169

³⁷ J.B. Morrell, 'Letter to J.L. Kirk, 15 February 1936', York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 6

³⁸ Patterson 1953, p. 120

³⁹ Vernon 1966, pp. 125-6

notably the two-storey timber framed building which would become Kirkgate's most prominent shop)⁴⁰ and the former City of York Sheriff's Coach.⁴¹

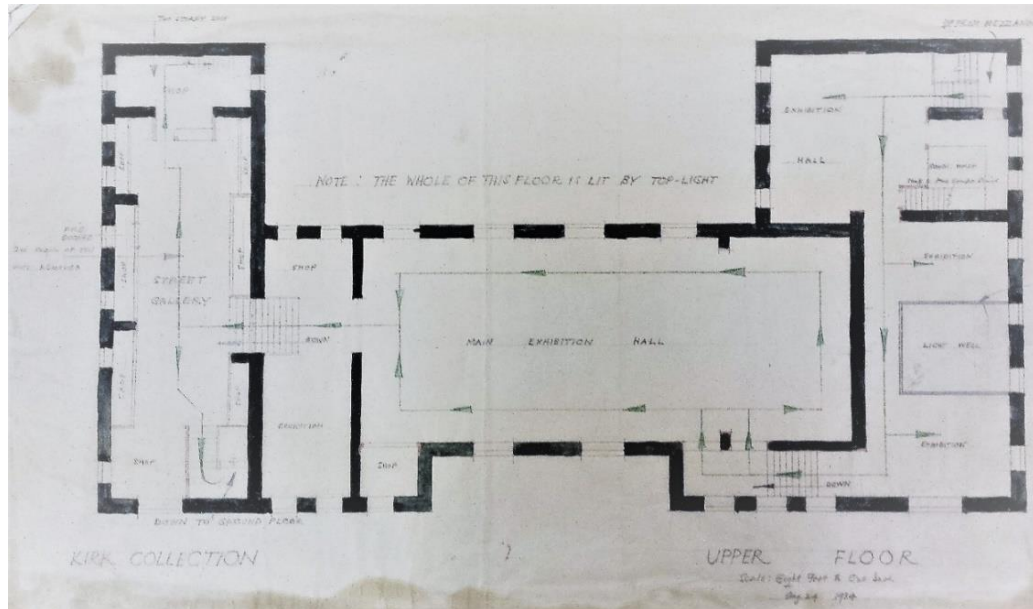


Figure 2.1: Original planned layout for York Castle Museum upper floor (1934).⁴²

These objects helped to change the focus of the collection and the museum, making the city street scene its central and defining feature. In early plans for converting the former Female Prison building of York Castle into a museum in 1934 (Figure 2.1), for example, the then-unnamed 'Street Gallery' (described as 'in effect an enlarged edition of the "Pump Yard" in the present Exhibition at the Exhibition Buildings,' where the Kirk Collection was currently displayed on loan) was to take up just part of the upper floor of the museum. With eight shop displays it would have been smaller than the Old Times Street in Hull.⁴³ Due in part to Morrell's influence and collecting, however, the final street as it appeared in the finished museum in 1938 (Figure 2.2) was much expanded, filling the ground floor's former exercise

⁴⁰ J.B. Morrell, 'Letter to W.L. Stephenson, 4 November 1935', W.L. Stephenson, 'Letter to J.B. Morrell, 5 November 1935', J.B. Morrell, 'Letter to W.L. Stephenson, 6 November 1935', York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 6; 'Ancient Shop for York: Stamford Contribution to "Bygones"', *Yorkshire Post* 17 January 1936, p. 17

⁴¹ 'This World of Ours: York Reconstructs the Past', *Yorkshire Post* 25 January 1938, p. 6

⁴² York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 1

⁴³ 'Report on the proposed conversion of the Female Prison, York into a modern museum', York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 11, p. 2

Wilberforce House for the purpose.⁴⁵ This story in *Museums Journal* is the first published mention of plans for any indoor museum street from any curator or collector. It was followed by letters from Sheppard to Kirk in which he sent Kirk a plan of his street and offered to take the Kirk Collection to form a 'Kirk Street' opposite his own, arguing that 'in the form of a series of shops in a street the exhibition would be of more general interest than if placed in one large room.'⁴⁶ When later outlining York Castle's origins, Peter Brears suggested that Kirk 'knew Tom Sheppard too well' to send his collection to Hull, feeling his by-gones 'would be merely absorbed into those of his super-eclectic rival.'⁴⁷

Unlike York Castle's founders, Sheppard was, by the time of developing his street scene in the 1930s, well established as a 'museum man.' A geologist active in Hull Geological Society and Hull Scientific and Field Naturalists' Club in the late nineteenth century, Sheppard had been appointed the curator of Hull Municipal Museum in 1901.⁴⁸ Over the next forty years of museum service he would be responsible for opening eight further museums, becoming a very active member of the MA, serving as president and hosting the association's annual conference, and helping to found the Yorkshire Museums Federation.⁴⁹ However, his often self-cultivated reputation as a maverick within the profession, as hinted at by Brears, means that Sheppard can still be considered alongside the other-curators and directors of this chapter; someone keen to bring outsider views into the traditionally conservative museum space. As a highly prolific writer (publishing over 200 *Hull Museums Publications*, editing *The Naturalist*, and

⁴⁵ 'Notes and Notices: Proposed Street of Old Hull', *Museums Journal* November 1931, 21 (8), pp. 372-373. This is the only mention of the idea that the Old Times Street would represent the Stuart era, rather than the more frequent assertion that it was a street of the previous century. That periodisation is contradicted even within the article, which refers to the use of Georgian shop fronts acquired by Sheppard for the future display.

⁴⁶ Thomas Sheppard, 'Letter to John L. Kirk, 31 October 1932', York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 2. That Sheppard added a post script suggesting that 'if this scheme does not meet with your approval' the whole thing could simply be displayed in one large room evidences that Kirk had not yet settled on a street scene as the best way of displaying his collection.

⁴⁷ Brears 1980, p. 91

⁴⁸ Tim Schadla-Hall, *Tom Sheppard: Hull's Great Collector* (Beverley: Highgate Publications, 1989), pp. 1-4

⁴⁹ Schadla-Hall 1989, p. 16

regularly contributing to *Museums Journal*) and opinionated speaker at conferences, Sheppard enjoyed the image of himself as a curator whose collecting and display practices explored areas beyond what was traditional. At the 1912 MA Conference, for example, he gave a provocative paper on 'Rubbish' in which he referred to how, in *Museums Journal*, 'I have more than once been pilloried for collecting rubbish' and that bygones, which he collected for Hull Museums, were objects 'which only a short while ago our very proper museums deemed too trivial for preservation.'⁵⁰

Sheppard was equally known for his somewhat predatory and occasionally unscrupulous approach to acquiring objects by any means. A cartoon published in the *Hull Daily Mail* (Figure 2.3) depicted him as 'the acquisitive Sheppard,' a 'snatcher' on the hunt to grab more specimens. An ardent self-promoter, Sheppard acknowledged how much he enjoyed seeing his name in print.⁵¹ He seems to have had no problem promoting the image of himself as an outsider even while remaining at the heart of the museums establishment. As President of the MA in 1913, his conference paper proudly announced that people greeted him with the words 'how's thieving?'⁵²

In that same paper, Sheppard also praised the collecting and display policies of Scandinavian museums. Not for the last time, he raised the hope of British museums 'following in the wake of our Continental friends [...] with their open-air folk-lore museums.'⁵³ Sheppard's status as a maverick curator, therefore, can be linked to a desire for museums that less closely resembled those in Britain and instead followed Skansen in creating dynamic displays of folk life.

⁵⁰ Thomas Sheppard, 'A Fisheries and Shipping Museum', *Museums Journal* May 1912 11 (11), pp. 19-20. 'Rubbish' was Sheppard's proposed original title, but it was rejected by the MA as 'too flippant for this serious and sober gathering,' hence the more formulaic official title. Sheppard, however, proceeded to give his paper on 'Rubbish' anyway, rather than focus too heavily on his new shipping museum. 'Possibly also I may speak rubbish; and if I do I shall have the satisfaction of being original, at any rate, as no one ever talks rubbish at a conference,' he quipped by way of explanation.

⁵¹ At a meeting of the Yorkshire Museums Federation, of which he was president, Sheppard advised against *Museums Journal* removing its 'notes and news' segment, 'as he, for one, liked to see references to what Mr. Sheppard was doing.' 'Yorkshire Museums Federation: Meeting at Port Sunlight', *Museums Journal* December 1936, 36 (9), p. 396

⁵² Thomas Sheppard, 'Methods of Collecting', *Museums Journal* October 1913 13 (4), p. 126

⁵³ Sheppard 1913, p. 132



Figure 2.3: Cartoon depicting 'The Acquisitive Sheppard' in the *Hull Daily Mail* (July 1913)⁵⁴

The Folk Museum Movement

When Wheeler described the new York Castle Museum in his 1938 MA Conference paper as 'representative of a general movement which cannot be too emphatically applauded' toward a British version of Skansen, he was articulating what would become the standard account in later discussions of the gestation of street scenes. Curators Peter Brears and Stuart Davies, for example, in their 1989 history of Yorkshire's museums, *Treasures for the People*, discussed York's Kirkgate, Hull's Old Times Street, and Abbey House's streets in a chapter on 'Folk Museums.'⁵⁵ Here, they associated the street scenes with the county's rural open-air museums as descendants of both John Lister's salvage of historic buildings to be re-

⁵⁴ 'Illustrated Hull', *Hull Daily Mail* 21 July 1913, p. 3

⁵⁵ Peter Brears and Stuart Davies, *Treasures for the People: The Story of Museums and Galleries in Yorkshire and Humberside* (Bradford: Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council, 1989), pp. 70-83

erected on the Shibden Hall estate and Hazelius's work at Skansen.⁵⁶ Brears had previously referred to a cruise taken by John Kirk and his wife Norah to Scandinavia in 1910 in which they visited museums including Skansen, writing that: 'This visit [...] undoubtedly bore fruit twenty years later when the Castle Museum plan was under discussion.'⁵⁷ York Castle's current guide book uses the same Scandinavian cruise as an origin story for the museum and its street, describing the trip's 'profound effect' on Kirk's attitude to the collection and presentation of bygones.⁵⁸

Cruises from Yorkshire across the North Sea to Scandinavia also played a role in the development of Sheppard's museum ideals. As MA President in 1923, Sheppard hosted the annual conference in Hull, including a boat trip to visit the open-air folk museum in Lyngby, Denmark, to serve as an example to British curators. In his conference paper, Sheppard once again suggested that British curators could learn from the Scandinavian example. He expressed the hope that, in one of the city's parks, 'there may be gathered together a collection of old buildings worthy of preservation,' suggesting the inclusion of a thatched cottage, windmill, half-timbered cottage and church in this potential folk park.⁵⁹ In 1928 Sheppard made a step toward realising this desire, leading the purchase of a sixteenth-century tithe barn in the East Riding village of Easington, with the promise of making it the centrepiece of an open-air folk museum.⁶⁰ The street scene in Hull that began development three years later could, therefore, be considered a development of the same concept as in the tithe barn. In both the 1913 and

⁵⁶ Brears and Davies 1989, p. 70

⁵⁷ Brears 1980, p. 90

Skansen's own roots can also be traced to urban display forms and international exhibitions as, at the 1878 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, Hazelius first attempted a display of daily life in Sweden via methods borrowed from panoramas and theatrical *tableaux vivantes*, including a three-dimensional tableau staging of Amalia Lindegren's sentimental painting, *The Last Bed of the Little One* (*Lillans sista bädd*). Skansen itself grew from the success of Hazelius's experiments in display at this international exhibition and later ones like it.

Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Walnut Creek CA: AltaMira, 1995), pp. 245-6

⁵⁸ Gwendolen Whitaker, *York Castle Museum: Souvenir Guidebook* (Norwich: Jigsaw Design & Publishing, 2014), p. 46

⁵⁹ Thomas Sheppard, 'The Museums Association Hull Conference, 1923. Address by the President', *Museums Journal* August 1923, 23 (2), pp. 32-4

⁶⁰ 'Notes and News: Hull Museums, Easington Tithe Barn', *Museums Journal* November 1928, 28 (5), p. 177

1923 conference papers asking for a British equivalent of Scandinavian open-air museums, Sheppard drew attention to his acquisition of the surviving timbers of the seventeenth-century King's Head Inn, a pub from Hull's Old Town which had been demolished at the turn of the twentieth century. The timbers, which he had suggested could be used to rebuild the inn in a folk park, would ultimately form a part of the plumber's shop on Sheppard's Old Times Street, pointing to a continuity between Sheppard's desire for a pastoral folk park and the eventual indoor street scene. Once the Old Times Street was being constructed in 1934, Sheppard appeared to confirm this notion during an MA discussion on folk museums. Presenting his thoughts on 'The Folk Museum Movement in Hull,' Sheppard referred to the Old Times Street as a something which 'will be an extraordinarily good reconstruction of the type which has been discussed by Dr. Wheeler.'⁶¹

After Sheppard had given this paper, Henry Miers, another former MA President, responded by noting that: 'Mr. Sheppard had shown what could be done by a city; it should be possible also to begin at the other end and excite the interest of a village in its local history and by-gones.'⁶² Sheppard's Old Times Street was not, therefore, exactly equivalent to the rural open-air museums. It was an urban version of an approach 'at the other end' of a spectrum from the display of country life in an open-air folk museum. As MA President, Miers had praised Sheppard's work in Easington as a step towards something like a Scandinavian open-air museum, but he clearly saw the Old Times Street as a separate urban entity.⁶³ Indeed, the urban space of his Old Times Street did not replace Sheppard's ambitions for Easington. Despite the presence of the King's Head once earmarked for Sheppard's open-air park, the chemist, tobacconist, cobbler and plumber of his city street do not match the thatched cottage and windmill that belonged to his vision of a folk park. That Sheppard continued separately to collect buildings and shop fronts for both an open-air museum at Easington tithe barn and an indoor

⁶¹ Sheppard 1934, p. 228

⁶² Henry Miers quoted in 'Discussion on Folk Museums', *Museums Journal* September 1934, 34 (6), p. 231

⁶³ Henry Miers, 'The Museums Association Norwich Conference, July 1933 – Address by the President', *Museums Journal* August 1933, 33 (5), p. 158

urban reconstruction at Hull Old Times Street suggests that he perceived them both as separate spaces fulfilling separate roles.⁶⁴ Rather than seeing the Easington tithe barn folk museum as the forerunner of Sheppard's Old Times Street, therefore, it is more useful to see the Street as developing from his urban imagination and an urban culture of history.

Morrell also saw a distinction between street scenes, such as the one which he had helped to create at York Castle, and open-air folk museums, the creation of which in York was one of his long cherished but ultimately unrealised projects. Advocating his ideal of an open-air folk park on the outskirts of the city in a 1962 Christmas card, Morrell wrote: 'The Castle Museum, with its famous street of shops and furnished rooms, is of town-life, but the life of the country-man should also be shown before it is too late. York has the best Folk Museum in Great Britain, why should it not have the best Folk Park?'⁶⁵ The street of town life, therefore, represented a different form of museum display for one of its founders than the 'life of the country man' displayed at Skansen or any of its descendants. Patterson, who shared Morrell's drive for a separate open-air folk park, saw Kirkgate and the York Castle streets as both 'transitional stages' toward 'the first true folk park erections' outside the museum⁶⁶ and a complementary indoor urban space to the potential outdoor rural park.⁶⁷

The compact city streets represented inside the York, Hull, and later Leeds, museums also differed in scale and layout from the various farm buildings spread across open spaces in Scandinavia. When discussing the

⁶⁴ 'News from the Museums: Hull Museums: Old House Acquired', *Museums Journal* April 1934, 34 (1), p. 35

⁶⁵ J.B. Morrell, 'With Christmas Greetings and Best Wishes for the New Year from J.B. Morrell (Burton Croft, York), 1962', York, Borthwick Institute, Papers of John Bowes Morrell – Folk Park at Heslington Hall, JBM93/1/2. This phrasing was repeated almost verbatim in Morrell's proposal for how the eventual folk park might look: 'The exhibits in the Castle Museum mainly illustrate town life, the Committee would like to establish a Folk Park to show life in the country whilst the old buildings exhibits are still available' – J.B. Morrell, 'A Yorkshire Folk Park, 7th December 1962', York, Borthwick Institute, Papers of John Bowes Morrell – Folk Park at Heslington Hall, JBM93/1/2

⁶⁶ Robert Patterson, 'Castle Museum, York, The Folk Museum of Yorkshire Life. Development Plan. Curator's Report, January 1956', Minutes of York Castle Museum Committee, York, York Civic Archive, Y/COU/5/2/12 BC59/1, p. 128

⁶⁷ Minutes of York Castle Museum Committee, York, York Civic Archive, Y/COU/5/2/12 BC59/2, p. 101

requirements for an open-air folk museum in England, a 1930 *Museums Journal* report described how ‘the open air is not the only requirement; there must also be space and cover, so that one building does not clash with its neighbour.’⁶⁸ Visitors to open-air folk museums were intended to view the buildings within the park as discrete, unconnected entities, a loose hamlet of different reflections of diverse epochs and environments. The street scene, however, made the visitor view the entire scene as a single piece in a recreation of an urban environment in which one structure cannot so easily be separated physically or symbolically from the next. In 1937 the *Yorkshire Post* described York’s Kirkgate, for example, as ‘a complete old-time street almost as a going concern in one single museum piece.’⁶⁹ The way that the potential visitor experience was scripted, therefore, was something different from encouraging a visitor to view each reconstructed building as a separate exhibit.

If the street scenes were, as Morrell suggested, ‘of town-life’ rather than the country, then it is reasonable to consider them alongside other examples of spaces in which town life was staged and the forms of display expected in urban spaces. This is not to say that the open-air folk museums and the movement to promote them in Britain did not provide an influence on the museum streets. However, just as Melman did not deny the complementary existence of the pastoralist, rural presentation of the past in English culture, so must we acknowledge the folk museum tradition, whilst also looking to how the museum streets existed within an urban culture of display and spectatorship.

Urban Tourists and Rational Recreation

Heritage critics during the debates of the late-twentieth century tended to perceive museums that utilised immersive, reconstructed displays and engaged audiences as much through leisure activities as they did as educational ones as a relatively recent phenomenon. Hewison’s argument

⁶⁸ *Museums Journal* 1930, p. 378

⁶⁹ ‘This World of Ours: An “Old Street” at York’, *Yorkshire Post* 10 June 1937, p. 8

positioned such museums as a post-industrial trend with populist heritage tourism as the new industry which had replaced manufacturing in Britain, exemplified by Beamish and its street reconstruction. Meanwhile, Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* used concepts such as 'Disneyization' and 'de-differentiation' to suggest that museums and leisure activities had grown closer together in the latter part of the twentieth century, increasingly providing 'edu-tainment,' a merging of educational and leisure imperatives.⁷⁰ This can be observed in similarities between the Viking street at Jorvik and areas of the Trafford Centre shopping mall in Manchester styled to represent New Orleans's French Quarter, classical Rome, and an English market town.⁷¹ Under the theory of de-differentiation, visits to museums become functionally equivalent to visiting shopping centres or theme parks. Leisure tourism is thus seen as 'not so straightforwardly contrasted with education and learning as in the past.'⁷²

Such observations are valid ways to understand the museum at the turn of the twenty-first century, but they ignore the fact that, away from traditional museums, 'edu-tainment' did play a significant role in the public's engagement with the past through what was then referred to as rational recreation. At the same time, the nineteenth century saw its own equivalent to the de-differentiation of shopping and museum display techniques discussed in *The Tourist Gaze*: what Tony Bennett called the Victorian exhibitionary complex. The emergence of new shopping developments – arcades and shopping centres – many of which contained or were adjacent to other forms of display and exhibition such as theatres, panoramas and dioramas, were part of an exhibitionary practice in which different forms of display adopted overlapping approaches to appeal to the public. All featured a shared exhibitionary architecture in which the exhibited and the spectator were organised, displayed and arranged in similar ways whether in a shopping arcade or an art gallery.⁷³ Adopting these exhibitionary techniques,

⁷⁰ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: Sage, 2011), pp. 119-54

⁷¹ Urry and Larsen 2011, pp. 125-35

⁷² Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 135

⁷³ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 51-61. See also Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University

as advocated by Thomas's case for the museum curator as scenographer and window-dresser, allowed the outsider-curators of the museum street scenes to invite urban tourists into reproductions of the urban landscape within a safe and comfortable indoor space reminiscent of the spectacles of high street shopping and theatrical staging.

In his 1984 essay 'Of Other Spaces' Michel Foucault cited various leisure spaces – including theatres and cinemas, museums and libraries, fairs and festivals – amongst examples of the 'heterotopia' (literally 'other space' and defined by Foucault as 'counter-sites' in which 'all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted').⁷⁴ Foucault separated these into different sub-categories of heterotopia, differentiated by how they organise time. He argued that the museum embodies 'the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages,' while in contrast the fair is linked 'to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival.' The museum was 'eternal,' the fair 'temporal.'⁷⁵ However, Bennett's demonstration of how exhibitionary practices grew closer together through the nineteenth century allows us to question this duality. Bennett noted that the fixed site amusement park, most famously in Blackpool, combined aspects of both the heterotopias of the fair and the museum's approaches to ordering time and space.⁷⁶ The historic street scene played a part in this collapsing of the museum-fair duality with an 'Olde Englishe Village' of shops counting among Blackpool's turn of the century attractions.⁷⁷ This may have been a leisure space to encourage pleasure-seeking crowds to enjoy shopping in a novel environment, much like the 'themed' spaces that Urry highlighted at the Trafford Centre, but it

Press, 2000), p. 27 for the similarity in shop windows, arcades, theatres, panoramas, and popular museums to address their public with similar styles of display and staging.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias.' *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984), p. 47

⁷⁵ Foucault 1984, pp. 47-48

⁷⁶ Bennett 1995, pp. 4-5

⁷⁷ Mark Girouard, *The English Town* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 290

also gave a different kind of tourist a different way of interacting with the past than that traditionally offered in the museum.

Covered by a glass roof to give tourists shelter from the Lancashire climate and browse in comfort and at their leisure, Blackpool's Old Englishe Village functioned as a historically-themed version of the shopping arcades popular in the era, an example of Bennett's notion of an increasingly universal exhibitionary architecture. For Walter Benjamin the arcade was the apotheosis of a new way of being in the city in the nineteenth century, representative of wider trends in the likes of panoramas and dioramas, world exhibitions, and literary representations of urban space. As heterotopias, they were the nineteenth-century city's dream of itself, creating miniature cities within the real city, which were a metonym for the whole, an image that served to make the real city more readable.⁷⁸ Benjamin's magnum opus, *The Arcades Project*, remained unfinished at the time of his death, but it is worth noting that the starting point of his discussion was a guide book for urban tourists: the 1852 *Illustrated Guide to Paris*. Benjamin quotes from this text's description of the arcade as 'a city, a world in miniature, in which customers will find everything they need. During sudden rainshowers, the arcades are a place of refuge for the unprepared, to whom they offer a secure, if restricted promenade.' Benjamin described this passage as 'the *locus classicus* for the presentation of the arcades,' introducing ideas of the arcade as a sheltered environment and of the arcade visitor as the *flâneur*, the stock character of the intelligent urban explorer who emerged from these new ways of exploring the city.⁷⁹ Charles Baudelaire, cited by Benjamin as the poet of *flânerie*, used the analogy of a museum to explain this new way of looking at the city in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863).

The world - even the world of artists - is full of people who can go to the Louvre, walk rapidly, without so much as a glance, past rows of very interesting, though secondary, pictures, to come to a rapturous halt in front of a Titian or a Raphael [...];

⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin from the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press, 2000)

⁷⁹ Benjamin 2000, p. 32

then they will go home happy, not a few saying to themselves, "I know my Museum."⁸⁰

If the visitor ignoring everything in the museum but for the great masters is equivalent to visiting the city only for a handful of famous monuments, and not the pleasures of the streets, shops and cafés, then perhaps, just as the arcade and the *flâneur* provided an alternative way of viewing the city, an alternative museum could do the same for its public. This alternative museum would provide a different way of seeing the exhibits than passing over anything 'secondary' in search of a single object of popular renown by replicating the form of the arcade within the museum.

As Benjamin noted, the arcade and the panorama often occurred side by side and fulfilled similar roles of bringing a manageable miniature metonym of the city into a comfortable and accessible environment. Both the panorama and the related spectacle of the diorama became part of a tourist industry of 'rational recreation,' pleasurable and often novel entertainments that also appealed through their promise of educational enrichment, giving access to knowledge in a distinct way from the museums of the time.⁸¹ As Richard Daniel Altick noted in *The Shows of London* (1978), the terminology of 'panoramas' and 'dioramas' became quite fluid, soon coming to mean any kind of visually arresting display designed to engage audiences with its novelty and verisimilitude.⁸² Already by the mid-nineteenth century a diorama or panorama could just as easily involve miniatures and models as it could solely painted scenes.⁸³ From this emerged the now more frequently used definition of 'diorama,' as a three-dimensional scale model often used in

⁸⁰ Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', 1863, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 1

⁸¹ For more on rational recreation as a populariser of nineteenth century knowledge, see Bernard Lightman 'Mid-Victorian science museums and exhibitions: "The industrial amusement and instruction of the people"' *Endeavour* 2013, 37 (2), pp. 82-92

⁸² Richard Daniel Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press, 1978), p. 173. The original 'Panorama,' first exhibited by Robert Barker in Edinburgh in 1788, was a painting around the walls of a rotunda gallery, surrounding the viewer, while the original 'Diorama,' first exhibited by Louis Daguerre and Charles Marie Bouton in Paris in 1822, offered mimetic views of cityscapes and landscapes, made ultra-realistic through tricks of lighting and perspective, seen by looking on from a seated theatre-style auditorium.

⁸³ Altick further pointed to miniature models of cities and streets popular in the 1840s as part of the same trend. Altick 1978, p. 394

museum interpretation. The museum street scenes discussed here can be described as full-scale dioramas.

Altick described the appeal of panoramic representations of international cities by noting that ‘they offered the pleasures of tourism without its cost or hardships; it permitted xenophobes to enjoy its adventures comfortably and safely at home.’⁸⁴ The same, though, could be said for panoramas that depicted the city in which they were housed. Like the arcades, these were metonyms for the city outside, but consumed within the safety and comfort of an enclosed, manageable space, rather than making the urban tourist explore the dirty, unsafe real streets to see the city. The more enduring panoramas also soon came to show not the city as it was, but the city of the recent past. Thomas Hornor’s view of London from the dome of St. Paul’s was based on the artist’s sketches of the city in 1821-2, but featured as a panoramic painting in the Regent’s Park Colosseum from 1832-55, continuing to show the London streets of 1822 for decades after they had been a reality.⁸⁵ Ultimately, visitors came not to see, as initially envisioned, the city streets as they were outside, but to get a glimpse into the recent but rapidly disappearing past, much as a century later the visitors to the first museum streets would.

Depictions of the historic urban environment in the rational recreations of the day also found their way onto the theatrical stage. As Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow describe in *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (2001), in the aftermath of the Great Exhibition the West End became a magnet for ‘theatric tourists’ looking to mix rational amusement with more visceral thrills.⁸⁶ This was most obvious in the Princess’s Theatre, the West End theatre located closest physically to the Crystal Palace, in which audiences could witness Charles Kean’s elaborately staged historically authentic productions of Shakespeare in the 1850s, described by Altick as ‘the zenith of drama-as-panorama’ and ‘a succession of magnificent pictures

⁸⁴ Altick 1978, p. 181

⁸⁵ Altick 1978, p. 155

⁸⁶ Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), p. 172

periodically interrupted by recitations from Shakespeare.⁸⁷ In the 1860s the Princess's became the venue of another metonymic representation of the streets of the city outside with the complete recreation of Charing Cross on a winter's night in Dion Boucicault's melodrama *The Streets of London*. The enduring popularity and multiple revivals of the latter meant that once again what had begun as a replica of the contemporary city outside soon drew tourists as a memorial of the rapidly changing urban landscape in the recent past.⁸⁸

If, as Davis and Emeljanow suggest, Kean's medieval sets for Shakespeare productions grew from the success of Pugin's Medieval Court at the Great Exhibition,⁸⁹ then equally these versions of the rational recreation trend on stage contributed in the opposite direction to the late-nineteenth century trend for full recreations of historic streets at international exhibitions. At least ten of these followed the success of the Old London street at the 1884 International Health Exhibition.⁹⁰ As with many rational amusements, Old London was designed as a more enticing element to draw visitors in to the exhibition and to engage them with some of the drier displays on sanitation.⁹¹ Old Manchester and Salford, a central feature of the

⁸⁷ Altick 1978, p. 182

⁸⁸ See 'Whitsuntide Amusements: Adelphi', *The Standard* 22 May 1877, p. 3, which praised the revival's sets, including the 'well-known but now obliterated Northumberland House [...] given with the most minute fidelity.'

⁸⁹ Davis and Emeljanow 2001, p. 172

⁹⁰ Kate Hill lists the International Health Exhibition street as also featuring as part of the Inventions Exhibition of 1885 and the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and adds further examples of the trend in Old Antwerp at the 1885 Antwerp Exhibition and again at the Antwerp Exhibition of 1894, Old Edinburgh at the 1886 Scottish International Exhibition, Old Manchester and Salford at the 1887 Royal Jubilee Exhibition in Manchester, Alt-Berlin at 1896 Berlin Industrial Exposition, Gamla Stockholm at the 1897 Stockholm Exhibition, Old Buda at the 1896 Budapest Millennium Exhibition, an Old Brussels exhibited in 1897, and, most popularly, Vieux Paris at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, which was visited by around 50 million people. Kate Hill, "'Olde worlde" urban? Reconstructing historic urban environments at exhibitions, 1884-1908', *Urban History* 2017, p. 3

Raphael Samuel referred in passing to the International Health Exhibition's Old London as 'a remarkable precursor' to York's Kirkgate, but did not pursue the thread further. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* 2nd edn (London and New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 178-82

⁹¹ Annmarie Adams, 'The Healthy Victorian City: The Old London Street at the International Health Exhibition of 1884' in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space* edited by Zeynep Çelik, Diane Favro, and Richard Ingersoll (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 203-212. Old London was described in contemporary reviews as the 'picturesque' point of the most popular interest at the exhibition. 'The International Health Exhibition', *The Morning Post* Tuesday 3 June 1884, p. 5

Royal Jubilee Exhibition hosted by Manchester in 1887, was designed by theatre architect Alfred Darbyshire.⁹² Darbyshire designed sets for Charles Calvert's 1870s Shakespeare revivals at Manchester's Prince's Theatre, which bore similarities with Kean's 'historically authentic' productions. As Darbyshire saw it, Calvert 'not only desired to please the eye and delight the ear, but [...] to make his revivals educational,' perfect examples of rational recreation and inspirations for Darbyshire's work on exhibition street scenes, for which he described himself as 'determined to adopt the same method.'⁹³ The staging of the city in the street scene of later museums has its roots, therefore, in the literal staging behind the theatre proscenium.

The comfortable and contained micro-cities in theatres and arcades that served as metonyms for the real city outside for urban tourists to the major metropolises London and Paris were features of the mid-Victorian period. In the cities of the North, however, it was in the latter part of the nineteenth century that such micro-cities became commonplace, as the success of Old Manchester in 1887 shows.⁹⁴ Boucicault's *The Streets of London* continued to play successfully in local revivals in Northern cities, boosted by the tendency to stage it with panoramic views of local streets of the recent past in place of Charing Cross. Thus the 1896 production of *The Streets of Leeds* proved popular with 'the audience evidently relishing the flavour of local reminiscences.'⁹⁵ In this era, rapid developments in urban renewal and public building projects formed part of an attempt by Northern industrial cities to establish distinct individual identities.⁹⁶ The arrival of arcades in the Yorkshire cities that would later house museum street scenes was part of this process, with the Queens Arcade opening in Leeds in 1889 followed by the Cross and County Arcades, designed by the period's leading

⁹² Alfred Darbyshire, *A Booke of Olde Manchester and Salford* (Manchester: John Heywood, 1887). The street's crowd pleasing status is demonstrated by the description in its own guide book, which suggested that 'probably no part of the Exhibition will be more popular,' George Milner, 'Introduction' in Darbyshire, 1887, p. 17

⁹³ Alfred Darbyshire, *An Architect's Experiences: Professional, Artistic, and Theatrical* (Manchester: J.E. Cornish, 1897), p. 235, p. 193

⁹⁴ Altick referred to how 'attractions which had exhausted their drawing power in London were increasingly likely to migrate to the provinces,' citing the prevalence of the likes of panoramas and display-piece paintings in cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield toward the end of the Victorian period. Altick 1978, p. 471

⁹⁵ 'Music and the Drama', *Leeds Times* 18 July 1896, p. 8

⁹⁶ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* 2nd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 153

theatre architect Frank Matcham, between 1898 and 1900.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, the Hepworth Arcade opened in Hull in 1896, just a few minutes' walk from the Old Town where Sheppard would open various museums (including the Old Times Street) in the years that followed. Much like the street scenes themselves, the Hepworth Arcade was a new structure whose glass roof covered aspects of the city's much older past. Some of the arcade's internal walls and brickwork were found by the local planning department to be 'almost medieval.'⁹⁸ The local press responded to these new Yorkshire arcades in much the same way as the original Parisian arcades were praised in the guide book cited by Benjamin. Like previous arcades, these glass-roofed indoor streets meant that shoppers and urban tourists could explore in comfort. As the *Leeds Mercury* reported 'light and air have been admitted where they had long been urgently required; and old, filthy, and unsightly structures have made way.'⁹⁹ These urban exhibitionary practices designed to appeal to city tourists surrounded the likes of Sheppard, Kirk and Morrell during their formative years in late-Victorian Yorkshire cities and would provide a model for their later museum practice.

The use of rational recreation specifically as a way to 'sell' the museum to 'the Man in the Street' was advocated later in the mid-twentieth century by Frank Atkinson, the founding director of Beamish. Atkinson, another Yorkshireman whose own practice was influenced by that at York Castle,¹⁰⁰ outlined his own philosophy of a version of rational recreation in which it was important for museums to compete with popular urban entertainments for their audience's interest. His paper was given at the MA

⁹⁷ Matcham, designer of huge scale theatres for popular entertainment such as the London Palladium, the London Coliseum, the Hackney Empire and the Grand Theatre and Tower Ballroom at Blackpool, was known almost entirely for his work on theatres, making the Leeds arcades an unusual departure, but perhaps suggesting once again the overlap between the two. Brian Mercer Walker, *Frank Matcham: Theatre Architect* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980)

⁹⁸ Graham Hardy, *Hepworth's Arcade: One Hundred Years of Trading* (Beverley: Hutton Press, 1996), pp. 27-8

⁹⁹ 'The Queen's Arcade, Leeds', *The Leeds Mercury* Wednesday 24 July 1889, p. 5. A similar attitude can also be found in the same newspaper's reports on the initial plans for what would become the city's Victoria Quarter, a network of arcades opened in 1900 - 'New Arcades For Leeds', *The Leeds Mercury* Tuesday 3 March 1896, p. 3

¹⁰⁰ Frank Atkinson, *The Man who made Beamish: An Autobiography* (Gateshead: Northern Books, 1999), p. 91, p. 101

conference 1975, but looked back to the 1930s, the era of the fiftieth anniversary conferences and Atkinson's own early career. He recalled that 'shop windows had then become so exciting and colourful that it was quite clear museums had to become likewise if they were to attract their public.'¹⁰¹ He went on to invoke the image that popular museums existed on a tightrope suspended between amusement parks and arcades that were entertaining but offered little educational value on one side and formalised education with little appeal 'to the average man in the street looking for a little enjoyment,' on the other. 'Enrichment through enjoyment' – 'not only leisure for learning and learning for leisure, but learning *through pleasure*' – was how Atkinson proposed to negotiate this tightrope, a phrase with obvious echoes of the previous century's rational recreation.¹⁰² Such ideas of rational recreation to appeal to the 'Man in the Street' were a consistent element of the early ideas of museum street scenes. In 1936, for example, the *Yorkshire Post* referred to the concept of 'museum bait' to 'attract the less enlightened members of the public' with something more engaging to them than displays of purely academic interest. Hull's Old Times Street was singled out as 'one of the finest examples of "bait."' ¹⁰³

Sheppard's interest in the popular appeal of rational recreation can also be linked to how, just like Trevor Thomas, his activities beyond the museum included a passion for theatre. As President of the Hull Shakespeare and Playgoers' Society he organised theatrical performances and lectures, and was instrumental in establishing the Hull Repertory Theatre, of which he became chairman.¹⁰⁴ As with the museums which he curated, Sheppard found the Repertory Theatre's practice to be faced with the same tightrope Atkinson described between the rational and recreational.¹⁰⁵ In 1931, the year that Sheppard began work on his Old Times Street, this subject was obviously on his mind as he took part in an ongoing debate in the pages of the *Hull Daily Mail*. A correspondent to the

¹⁰¹ Frank Atkinson, 'Presidential Address: Remember what happened to the dinosaurs...?', *Museums Journal* December 1975, 75 (3), p. 103

¹⁰² Atkinson 1975, p. 104

¹⁰³ 'This World of Ours: Museum Bait', *Yorkshire Post* Thursday 9 July 1936, p. 8

¹⁰⁴ 'Thirty Years Work for the Drama', *Hull Daily Mail* 12 September 1931, p. 6

¹⁰⁵ 'Hull Repertory Theatre Scheme', *Hull Daily Mail* 23 November 1932, p. 5

newspaper questioned whether the Repertory Theatre sought to be an intelligent theatre or 'is it to be a mere pick-me-up for the jaded business man? Run as a commercial proposition? As another opium for the people?'¹⁰⁶ Others responded to suggest that some degree of commercial success was integral to keeping the theatre running, adding that playwrights who write 'with one eye on their manuscripts and the other on the box-office' remained capable of producing work of artistic worth.¹⁰⁷ Sheppard sided with the latter view, noting however that the very existence of the debate itself proved it was impossible to please all audiences.¹⁰⁸ The same could be said of his museum ventures, both acknowledging the need for some commercial 'bait' in order to make the museum financially viable and the impossibility of pleasing every visitor. In his response Sheppard singled out one particular production, which he felt demonstrated the Repertory Theatre at its best: *Street Scene*, Elmer Rice's 1929 work set in and around the street of a New York tenement.

The production of *Street Scene* is worth noting for more than just the obvious parallel of its staging of an urban street scene at the theatre at the same time as Sheppard began staging another urban street scene in the museum. The play was Hull Repertory's most ambitious production yet. Just like the spectacular nineteenth-century productions such as *The Streets of London* (and other cities), the set was made up of a reconstruction of the exterior of an apartment building and part of the surrounding street and a large cast of both professional and amateur actors featured as over sixty different characters. The ambition of the staging was matched by the success of the production with one review in the local *Hull Daily Mail* describing *Street Scene* as a play that would 'go down as one of the greatest successes in the history of the repertory movement in Hull.'¹⁰⁹ The review described it as playing to 'crowded houses,' something that was not always

¹⁰⁶ Pertinax, 'From Our Readers: Hull Repertory Theatre', *Hull Daily Mail* 16 December 1931, p. 4

¹⁰⁷ A. Leslie Sackin, 'From Our Readers: Hull Repertory Theatre', *Hull Daily Mail* 18 December 1931, p. 7

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Sheppard, 'From Our Readers: Hull Repertory Theatre', *Hull Daily Mail* 22 December 1931, p. 3

¹⁰⁹ J.G., 'Theatre Notes: Repertory', *Hull Daily Mail* 27 October 1931, p. 9

the case for the theatre, and put the success of the production down to its ability at winning enthusiasm from the “popular” audience.’ In another review, the production of *Street Scene* drew praise for bringing to life the daily lives of the streets and their people.¹¹⁰ The play gave Sheppard support for his developing view that an ambitious staged street could have the potential to connect with the ‘popular audience’ and tell artistically valuable stories of the city streets.

Morrell was equally interested in using the ‘bait’ of the street scene display quite literally to sell the Kirk Collection to the people of York. As mentioned earlier, prior to convincing both Kirk to donate the collection to the city and York Corporation to accept it, Morrell prompted the Corporation to take part of the collection on loan and display it temporarily in the Exhibition Buildings from May 1934 onwards.¹¹¹ The centrepiece of this display was ‘The Old Pump Yard,’ a recreation of a cobbled courtyard with five shop fronts arranged around a nineteenth-century water pump. On Morrell’s suggestion, the Corporation produced a leaflet distributed to all local ratepayers alongside their electric lighting accounts.¹¹² Serving partly to advertise the exhibition of the Kirk Collection, the leaflet (Figure 2.4), whose front page was captioned ‘A Unique Collection offered as a Free Gift to the Citizens of York, by Dr. John L. Kirk,’ was also designed to convince York ratepayers of the value of accepting the gift of a collection that could be seen as ‘a load of junk’ (emphasising that the collection itself was ‘free’ to the city, while not dwelling on the potential cost of housing it). In order to sell the common York ratepayer on the Kirk Collection a photograph of the Old Pump Yard was used, indicating that Morrell saw the street scene as a way to engage a wider audience than traditional museum goers, a model street for the ‘Man in the Street.’ The success of this approach can be seen in a *Yorkshire Post* story published just prior to the opening of the Castle

¹¹⁰ F.R., ‘Theatre Notes: Repertory’, *Hull Daily Mail* 20 October 1931, p. 3

¹¹¹ Minutes of York Art Gallery Committee, York, York Civic Archive, Y/COU/5/2/12 BC56, p. 436; ‘Antiques Museum: Dr. J.L. Kirk’s Collection for York’, *Yorkshire Post* 28 November 1933, p. 3; ‘“Bygones” of Rural Life in Yorkshire: Pickering Doctor’s Collection’, *Yorkshire Evening Post* 14 May 1934, p. 6; ‘News from the Museums: York City Art Gallery: Kirk Collection of Bygones’, *Museums Journal* September 1934, Volume 34 (6), pp. 254-255

¹¹² Minutes of York Art Gallery Committee, York, York Civic Archive, /COU/5/2/12 BC56, p. 454

Museum, which noted that: 'Thirty years ago it would have been impossible to suggest to the York City Council that they should expend a very considerable sum of money in providing quarters for the Kirk Collection of Bygones. Yet this has happened, and the ratepayers have readily acquiesced in the adaptation of part of York Castle to the purpose.'¹¹³

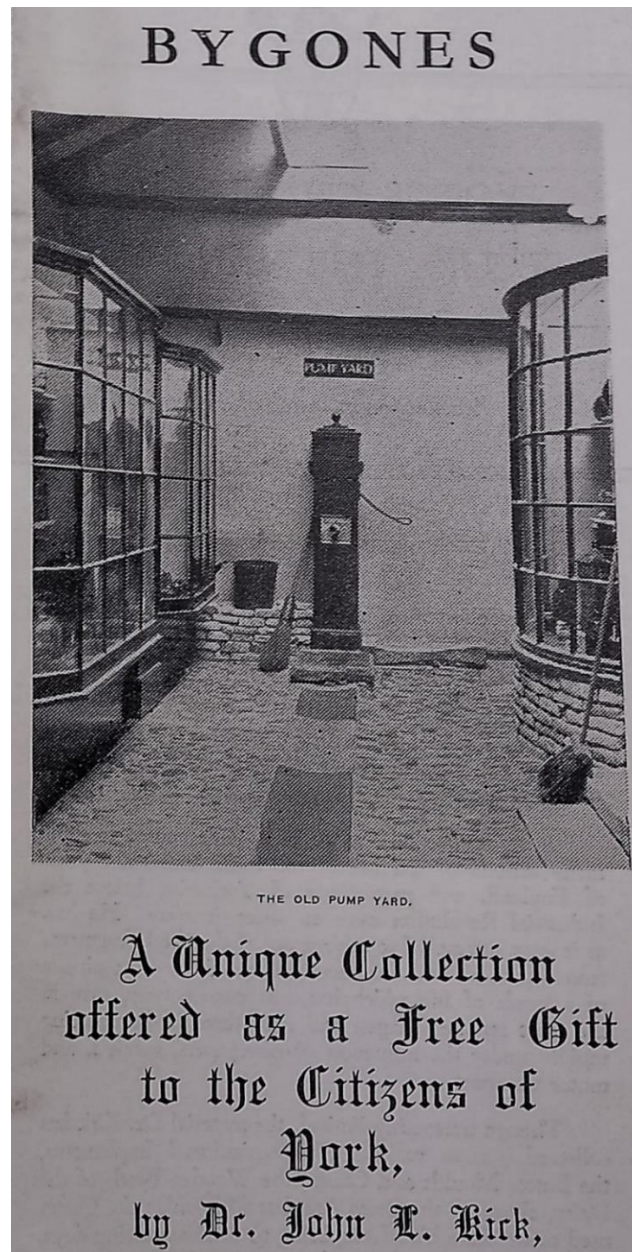


Figure 2.4: Leaflet produced by York Corporation to advertise the Kirk Collection's display at York Exhibition Rooms¹¹⁴

¹¹³ 'The Framework of Northern Culture – Modern Tendencies in a City of Great Traditions', *Yorkshire Post* 1 March 1938, p. 6

¹¹⁴ 'Bygones' leaflet, York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 11

Both the examples of Sheppard concurrently developing street scenes in repertory theatre and museum galleries and Morrell attempting to convince ratepayers of the value of the 'junk' in the Kirk Collection are not just demonstrations of the use of commercial forms of display and spectacle to engage the 'Man in the Street' in a form of rational recreation. The use of rational recreation is also indicative of how the museum streets, and the museums themselves, were just one part of a wider civic project, using the city's past to help build its identity in the future.

Civic Improvement

Like Frank Pick and his people's picture gallery creating a substitute for a traditional localised community, outsider-curators such as Morrell and Sheppard could use the metonymic city-within-a-city of the museum streets as part of a project to make their cities great, much as the cities-within-cities of the covered arcades had done for the Northern cities at the end of the nineteenth century. If the arcades were, as Benjamin suggested, the city's dream of itself, then so were the museum streets. For both Sheppard and Morrell, the museums were part of a wider marriage of traditionalism and modernity, an ideology that both celebrated the city's past and looked to build its future. For Morrell, according to his biographer, 'the city of York, as a living and corporate entity, was his abiding passion. Its history had been very real to him since his childhood, its civic welfare had been his concern throughout his manhood, and he hoped to play some part in the making of its future.'¹¹⁵ Morrell placed great value in the city's past, but all the more if it could be turned to assisting in its future, hence his passion for museums. This position formed the basis of Morrell's book *The City of Our Dreams* (1940).¹¹⁶ Its three sections laid out his view of York of the past, present, and future and described his vision of a community dedicated to 'a responsibility of preserving the beauty of the past whilst providing for the development of

¹¹⁵ Vernon 1966, pp. 173-4

¹¹⁶ Vernon 1966, pp. 163-4

the City.¹¹⁷ Sheppard took a similar view of Hull, penning his own version of the city's past and future in a series of short pieces for a special edition of the *Hull Daily Mail* published to coincide with the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1926. Having covered Hull in 906, 1226 and 1526, Sheppard looked ahead forty years to a fanciful Hull of 1966.¹¹⁸ Sheppard's idealised future city was replete with rational recreation, or in his own terms, 'the necessity for intellectual recreation which has arisen by a more educated populace.' Following his own example, Hull would be home to an abundance of museums and galleries, theatres, libraries and a top university.¹¹⁹

For both men the everyday streets of the real city and the changes being made to them were an important element of how they imagined their cities' identities. In a 1906 guide to the city Sheppard asked: 'What town or city can vie with Hull for its *perfect* streets?'¹²⁰ He delighted in the modern city with its new wide avenues and arcades lined with desirable shops, in which 'dismal dwellings have been demolished by hundreds, and fine spaces, surrounded by majestic buildings, have appeared in their stead.'¹²¹ However, he equally expressed concern at the loss of valuable historic buildings in the cause of widening the streets.¹²² Meanwhile, in *The City of Our Dreams*, Morrell acknowledged the value of street improvements for the health and cleanliness of York, as well as its greater traffic flow, while viewing the style of the modern streets as 'sad contrasts' to the Georgian ones. His greatest desire was to see historic buildings serving contemporary functions, hence his praise for how 'several of the old timbered houses [...] have been carefully restored and adapted for shops and offices.'¹²³ The museum, housing historic shop fronts in a no longer functional eighteenth-century prison building, would be the perfect outlet for this desire to see

¹¹⁷ J.B. Morrell, *The City of Our Dreams* 2nd edn (London: St Anthony's Press, 1955), p. 17

¹¹⁸ Thomas Sheppard, 'How Hull Made History: Romance of a Humber-side Village' in *Hull Museums Publications No. 145* (Hull, A. Brown & Sons, 1927), pp. 13-7

¹¹⁹ Sheppard 1927, p. 15

¹²⁰ Thomas Sheppard, *Hull: A Guide Containing Descriptive Letterpress Map and 12 Pictures* (Hull: A. Brown & Sons Ltd., 1906), p. 14

¹²¹ Sheppard 1906, pp. 12-4

¹²² Sheppard 1906, p. 17

¹²³ Morrell 1955, p. 100

historic York turned to the benefit of the rational recreations of the city's future.

For Morrell the streets of York were like a museum in themselves. In *The City of Our Dreams* he praised the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg, another open-air museum that could be seen as an inspiration for his own museum philosophy, but saw it as no match for the real streets of York. These streets had 'more of the past worth preserving than there is in any other provincial town in England, we have no need to reconstruct, but only to preserve, and should add what is worthy in modern architecture to stand by the examples of the past.'¹²⁴ This echoed a popular view of York as more urban tourists began to visit the city in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. York was a museum with its streets as exhibits. As an 1881 letter to the *York Herald* put it:

It is one thing to possess an open air museum containing the Minster, the King's Manor, St. Mary's Abbey, the Multiangular Tower, &c., all catalogued and described in any guide book; it is a totally different thing and an added charm, having such quaint houses, antique churches, and old streets as you may find in Stonegate, Fossgate, Goodramgate, The Pavement, and elsewhere.¹²⁵

There is a similarity here to Baudelaire's conception of the observer of modern life. The writer contrasted the old-fashioned tourist who only has eyes for the masterpieces outlined in any guide book – the Minster or Abbey standing in here for the Titian or Raphael in Baudelaire's museum analogy – and the modern spectator who finds delight in browsing the charms of the streets in between. It was the latter view of York that Morrell sought to extend by installing the Kirk Collection in a reconstructed street in the old Castle Prison. In *The City of Our Dreams*, he viewed the rational recreation of the city's 'cultural centre' as key to York's future.¹²⁶ The Castle Museum was held up as 'an example of how popular [a museum] can be made to both

¹²⁴ Morrell 1955, p. 17

¹²⁵ 'Correspondence: Picturesque York', *The York Herald* Monday 13th June 1881, p. 6

¹²⁶ Morrell 1955, pp. 139-44

young and old, high-brow and low-brow, rich and poor.¹²⁷ For Morrell, therefore, the museum and its street were the perfect example of bringing rational recreation to the people of the city and in return giving them a sense of civic pride. In 1941 York Castle played host to an exhibition on town planning, entitled 'Living in Cities.' Morrell contributed to the exhibit photographs of every street in York intended to illustrate the history of urban planning as a context for understanding the plans for civic developments in the post-war period.¹²⁸ Here was Morrell directly using the 'bait' of the presentation of the city's past in the museum street as a hook in order to get the public to invest emotionally in York's future development.

Sheppard, too, used his museum and exhibitionary skills for the purposes of civic pride. This is readily apparent in his work for the civic fortnight of the 1924 Empire Exhibition at Wembley. While reconstructed street scenes were no longer as common in international exhibitions as they had been two decades earlier, the exhibition nevertheless provided Sheppard with a step towards his museum street of shops. For Hull's involvement in the civic fortnight, Sheppard led the exhibition, providing objects from Hull Museums and displays representing the city's trades and industries alongside a large-scale model of the city. The exhibition led to Sheppard opening the country's first Museum of Commerce in the city in 1925, essentially a permanent version of a trade display at an international exhibition, involving the model of the city and displays sponsored by local businesses and trades.¹²⁹ Showing both the history and current practices of local trades, these utilised commercial display techniques and were advertised in a Sheppard publication entitled 'Hull's Shop Window.'¹³⁰ Many of the same trades that were represented in this 'shop window' would become real shop windows on the Old Times Street, such as the chemist (Figures 2.5 and 2.6). While the museum did draw some criticism for the lack of interpretive material, meaning that 'the trade exhibit remains merely a

¹²⁷ Morrell 1955, p. 109

¹²⁸ 'Town Planning Exhibition', *Yorkshire Post* 18 July 1941, p. 6

¹²⁹ 'A Museum of Commerce and Transport in the Making at Hull', *Museums Journal* January 1925, 24 (7), pp. 160-162

¹³⁰ Thomas Sheppard, *Hull Museums Publications No. 180: 'Hull's Shop Window' – Guide to the Museum of Commerce and Transport, High Street, Hull* (Hull, Hull Museums, 1933)

“shop window,” and not a museum,¹³¹ the Museum of Commerce was regarded as a success in terms of providing rational recreation. ‘New Building which is Educative as well as Recreational,’ was how the *Hull Daily Mail* described the museum on its opening. The article further noted that the museum, which was housed in the glass roofed former Corn Exchange, was popular with visitors due to being ‘comfortably warm, bright and airy.’¹³² Like the nearby Hepworth Arcade, visitors could explore a representation of the city in comfort and safety, a version of the city that was not only rendered readable by its manageable size within the walls of the museum, but also contributed to a sense of Hull’s significance and identity.



Figure 2.5: Display representing Lofthouse & Saltner’s Manufacturing Chemist at the Museum of Commerce (1925)¹³³

¹³¹ ‘Museum Publications: Hull’s Shop Window’, *Museums Journal* April 1933, 33 (1), pp. 15-16

¹³² ‘Museum of Commerce and Transport’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 April 1925, p. 8

¹³³ Sheppard 1933, p. 24



Figure 2.6: Window display of chemist's shop on the Old Times Street
(1935)¹³⁴

Although Leeds's street scenes at Abbey House did not begin development until the 1950s, around fifteen years after the opening of York Castle Museum, the lack of new museum development brought about by the intervening war years and the years of austerity that followed mean that it is possible to view Abbey House's street development within some similar context as that discussed earlier in this chapter. At a 1952 meeting of the Yorkshire Museums Federation in Hull, for example, the architect Clifford Harry Barnett noted that the past thirteen years had seen very little new museum building.¹³⁵ Barnett outlined a vision for new museum building which resonated with the debates of 1938-9. He argued that it was equally important to engage with 'the interested layman' and the casual visitor as it was the academic audience. Barnett stressed that the past century's uninviting galleries 'would have to be seriously amended if we were to keep the interest of the man in the street.'¹³⁶ Once again, the image of the 'Man in

¹³⁴ Thomas Sheppard, 'Hull's "Old Times" Street', *Museums Journal* October 1935, 35 (7), p. 247

¹³⁵ 'Meeting of Yorkshire Federation at Hull', *Museums Journal* December 1952, 52 (9), p. 229

¹³⁶ *Museums Journal* 1952, p. 229

the Street' was evoked to convey the kind of audience that the museum needed to reach out to, beyond the narrow academic audience. And, once again, the methods of the real high street were seen to be the way of engaging with 'him.' Barnett was not a museum architect. His Leeds-based firm Gillinson, Barnett and Allen were best known for modern shopping centres and, later, for ambitious modernist leisure centres.¹³⁷ In Leeds they were responsible for the design of the Merrion Centre, which opened in 1964 and contained a cinema, bowling alley, ballroom and shops under a glass roof. The Centre was the start of a new phase of civic developments in building a new Leeds for the twentieth century, providing, like the old arcades, miniature cities-within-cities for visitors to explore in comfort and safety.¹³⁸

Within a year of Barnett's presentation for the Yorkshire Museums Federation, Leeds City Museums director David Owen had hired Mitchell with the express intent of bringing York's street scene approach to Abbey House.¹³⁹ By the time of the opening of the third and largest of Abbey House's three interconnected streets, Stephen Harding Gate, in 1958, the similar feel of the museum street to the covered streets of the real city outside were obvious. *The Times's* museum correspondent, for example, described the approach at Abbey House as similar, but distinct from the open-air reconstructions seen at Skansen or St Fagan's with York Castle seen as the only other equivalent museum display. *The Times* report did, however, conclude by noting that Stephen Harding Gate 'is not left open to the sky but is roofed in with glass, a method which in this climate has obvious advantages, though it does create the effect rather more of an arcade than of a street.'¹⁴⁰ The museum street's enclosed space, glass roof and shelter from the elements placed it as something which gave the feel of

¹³⁷ Tom Allan, 'Time on Our Hands', *The Guardian* 9 March 1972, p. 18

¹³⁸ Susan Wrathmell, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Leeds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 165-6

¹³⁹ 'Personal Items: Appointments', *Museums Journal* October 1953, 53 (7), p. 183

¹⁴⁰ Our Museums Correspondent. 'The Cosy Streets of 50 Years Ago', *The Times* 8 October 1958, p. 12

the city's arcades, a script inviting the museum's audience to read the museum street like one of the city arcades.¹⁴¹

Popularization

The success of the street scene in using commercial display approaches borrowed from the streets outside to engage the interest of the 'Man in the Street' and the urban tourist is demonstrable through the museums' visitor numbers. In a 1966 seminar at the University of York, Patterson was clear about what made York Castle a successful museum: what he termed 'popularization.' Referring to visitor numbers above 650,000 in the previous year, making it one of the most visited museums in the country, Patterson suggested this was due to having an audience beyond those interested in formal education, one that included the local public and urban tourists.¹⁴² These numbers also increased dramatically over time as the museum's reputation grew and as the street expanded and influenced other displays within the museum worked on by Patterson and Mitchell. The 650,000 visitors in 1966 were a large increase on 1951's 303,809 when Patterson first became curator.¹⁴³ In 1976, Wloch, the original Deputy Curator when the museum opened in 1938, recalled how 'we all jumped for

¹⁴¹ The comparison between Abbey House and the city's arcades was not lost on the visitors recorded for this study, with one group looking at a sewing machine in the window of the haberdasher and being prompted to suggest 'have you seen that place in the Victoria Quarter with all the sewing machines in the window?', a reference to the antique sewing machines in the window of AllSaints menswear in the arcaded Queen Victoria Street (AHM Visitor Group 1)

¹⁴² 'Folk Parks. A Report of a Seminar Organized by the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York in October 1966', *Museums Journal* December 1966, 66 (3), p. 222

¹⁴³ , 'Newspaper Cuttings Relating to the Castle Museum, York, Vol. 1 1950-1977', York, York Civic Archive, Local History Reserve Y.069, p. 1. Visitor numbers rose above 400,000 by 1961, over 500,000 in 1962 and 600,000 in 1964. Competition, especially from the neighbouring Jorvik Viking Centre, would see those numbers decrease in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. In 2001 the *York Press* reported that numbers had fallen from over 800,000 in the 1970s to 320,000, even though the museum remained 'England's most popular museum of everyday life.' At their lowest ebb, prior to the 2006 renovation of Kirkgate, the museum's annual visitor numbers dropped to 126,355. 'Let us linger longer in the past', *York Press* 30 May 2001, [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/7942468.Let_us_linger_longer_in_past/> accessed 1 February 2019; 'Museums share ups and downs', *York Press* 8 November 2005, [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/7975386.Museums_share_ups_and_downs/> accessed 1 February 2019

joy when we got 1,000 visitors in one day on Bank Holidays,' whereas thousands of daily visitors were a regular occurrence by the 1970s.¹⁴⁴

As a museum that built its street scene after already existing as a museum of folklore and bygones for almost thirty years, Abbey House's visitor numbers provide another way of evidencing the popular appeal of the street scene: by giving direct comparison of visitor numbers before and after its construction. In 1954, the year that the museum's first street Abbey Fold was opened to the public, the museum was visited by 110,000 visitors. Not only was this a significant increase on the 73,160 people who visited Abbey House in the previous year, 1954 was also a record for annual visitors at any time in the museum's history up to that point.¹⁴⁵

By the time that the Thackray Museum was in its planning stage in the 1990s, the popularization effect of the street scene for the 'Man in the Street' was obvious, and served to inform the new medical museum's approach. Graham Black, whose philosophy of the museum as an educational leisure activity – a modern slice of rational recreation – is apparent in *The Engaging Museum* (2005), was an early consultant on the Thackray project. He observed that for the museum to function it would have to cover its running costs through visitor spending. In a 1993 'Outline Interpretive Approach,' he counselled following the example of the only three museums in the country that he described as 'revenue positive.' Two of these, York Castle and Jorvik, were Yorkshire museums reliant on a street scene as the centrepiece of their marketing offer.¹⁴⁶ Following the example of those commercially successful museums, Black suggested that the opening of the museum 'could be a reconstruction of mid-Victorian working-class housing, with issues dealt with through the people who lived there.'¹⁴⁷ When interviewed about the idea behind using a street scene in the museum, one of the original development team added that: 'What had been decided was that they needed something

¹⁴⁴ Violet Wloch, 'Great museum is one man's memorial', *York Evening Press* 14 July 1976, p. 5

¹⁴⁵ 'Leeds museum's street to rival that at York', *Yorkshire Post* 31 December 1954, p. 8

¹⁴⁶ Graham Black, 'Thackray Medical Museum: An Outline Interpretive Approach, May 1993', Leeds, Thackray Medical Museum, Shelf 4, p. 4

¹⁴⁷ Black 1993, p. 11

approaches from the theatre and the high street into the museum. As Trevor Thomas had then suggested, the choreography of objects and displays was designed to suggest a lively and dynamic environment. The plan for the area around the street's common lodging house (Figure 2.7) captures this sense of bringing the inanimate to life, replete with sound and smell bubbles and populated with characters on the plan captioned in language that eschews the clinically descriptive in favour of evocative and emotive terms: 'old crone,' 'crapping toddler comatose on a bundle of rags.' This is not a scheme for a museum display that focuses on dispassionate taxonomical classification, this is the staging of a lively drama. The space is designed so that visitors look into shop windows and domestic interiors to see a small dramatic vignette as part of a larger story, much like a series of tableaux vivantes, blurring the line between museum, theatre and shop window.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the urban street scene as a method of staging the Victorian past in museums should not be seen as part of a late-twentieth century trend towards a commercialised, Disneyfied heritage industry, nor as an incomplete attempt at recreating an early-twentieth century Scandinavian open-air rural folk museum. These streets were brought to life by curators, directors and designers who drew on their background away from traditional museum design and display to create a three-dimensional narrative to connect the average 'Man in the Street' with the city's past. The likes of Thomas Sheppard, John Kirk, John Bowes Morrell, Robert Patterson and Cyril Maynard Mitchell took inspiration from commercial display practices from the stage to the shopping arcade to create comfortable and comprehensible metonymic representations of their cities as part of a wider civic project of cultural improvement. That these museums received high visitor numbers and inspired later museums towards a similar approach proves that the street scenes achieved a popularization of museum narratives of the urban past, but raises further questions over how to respond to these museum scripts.

With the street reconstruction within the museum inspired by real streets and real shop windows and seeking to be read in a way that is complementary to the streets of the wider city outside, does that script

prompt an audience reading or visitor performance more akin to an arcade *flâneur* than a museum visitor to a typographically-arranged gallery? This is a question which will be addressed in Chapter Three. Further, the same accusations that could be levelled at any era of 'rational recreation' or 'education' must be addressed. If we are to accept the concept of the museum street scene as a method, equivalent to the arcade or panorama, for transforming the complexities of the real city into a comfortable metonym, then it must also be subject to some of the same criticisms. The metonymic micro-cities that existed to make the real city readable and safe for the urban tourist could equally be seen as a falsified and sanitised version of the less comfortable streets outside and the more challenging or difficult aspects of their past. Kean's Shakespeare productions and the historic reconstructions at international exhibitions, for example, were described by Davis and Emeljanow as exemplars of Dean MacCannell's later critique of 'staged authenticity' in tourist spaces of the twentieth century.¹⁵¹ The same theory could readily be used to describe the staged streets of the museums discussed here. Chapter Two will, therefore, answer the questions raised by the issue of staged authenticity and the museum street, and to do that we will need to return to the concerns raised by the 'Authentic Touch' poem.

¹⁵¹ Davis and Emeljanow 2001, p. 172

Chapter Two

On Authentic Reproduction

The script that visitors are encouraged to follow on museum street scenes is not just one of stepping into the past, but specifically of stepping into the past 'as it was.'¹ It is not enough simply to explore a reproduction of a past space, it must seem, in the parodic words of the poem 'The Authentic Touch,' a 'genuine replica.' The realism and authenticity of the streets' reproduction of real historic streets is embedded in the scripts that the museums present for their visitors to follow, but 'genuine replica' is a term fraught with internal contradictions. 'The Authentic Touch's critique of 'genuine replica' on York Castle's street scene is analogous to, and indeed prefigures by decades, the architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable's 1992 view of Colonial Williamsburg in which she argued that: 'It is hard to think of a more dangerous, anomalous, and shoddy perversion of language and meaning than the term authentic reproduction.'² Having established in Chapter One that the street scenes succeed in creating a popularly accessible staged version of the urban past, adopting aspects of display practices from commercial and leisure entertainments, this chapter addresses the criticism of their staged nature. It acknowledges the validity and applicability to museum street scenes of theories such as Dean MacCannell's concept of staged authenticity in tourist spaces or Umberto Eco's notion of hyperreality. It argues, though, that not only are narrativisations of the past always a mix of factual artefacts, dramatization and speculation, but that it can be demonstrated that the street scenes *do* provide a form of authentic experience even within a staged environment. Furthermore, it is important not to lose sight of the visitors' role in engaging

¹ The phrase 'as it was' was used by Sheppard to recount how buildings and shop fronts were reconstructed from their original form on his Old Times Street. The interior of the White Lion Hotel was 'transferred in its entirety and rebuilt exactly as it was' according to both Thomas Sheppard, 'Hull's "Old Times" Street', *Museums Journal* October 1935, 35 (7), p. 249 and 'Air-Raid Damage to Hull Museums', *Museums Journal* September 1941, 41 (6), p. 128

² Ada Louise Huxtable, 'Inventing American Reality' *The New York Review of Books* 3 December 1992, p. 24

with and performing the museum's script. This chapter argues that museum visitors are sophisticated in their reading of the museum script, are aware of the staged nature of the museum environment, and are able to incorporate questions about its authenticity within their performance.

Performed Realism

Dean MacCannell's theory of staged authenticity, outlined in *The Tourist: A new theory of the leisure class* (1976) incorporated Goffman's dramaturgical sociology and understanding of the performative nature of everyday life into the study of tourist behaviour. MacCannell in particular drew on Goffman's ideas in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) of 'region behaviour,' in which daily transactions and interactions were divided into performative, staged 'front' spaces and more genuine, unguarded 'back' spaces.³ MacCannell argued that tourist sites provide a series of 'front' regions that create barriers from a final, completely authentic 'back' region.⁴ Often this means that, even in situations in which tourist settings promise to pull back the façade and reveal something 'authentic,' visitors are simply seeing another stage set. The theory of staged authenticity also drew on the concept of the 'aura' as outlined by Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935), a presence and authority inherent to an original work tied to its contexts and traditions which is removed in inauthentic reproductions.⁵ MacCannell argued rather that society can only understand a work as a significant, authentic original *by* reproducing it. His view was that a sense of 'authenticity' in tourist sites and objects is achieved through a process of 'sacralization' in which the object is

³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* 4th edn (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 109-40

⁴ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A new theory of the leisure class* 3rd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 91-107

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* translated by J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008). Benjamin did not explicitly mention the concept of auras in *The Arcades Project*, discussed in the previous chapter, but his repeated use of 'phantasmagoria' in reference to the various contained metonymic reconstructions of urban space is indicative of a view of the increasingly staged streets of arcades and their successor department stores as perhaps lacking the aura of the real city.

'marked off', 'framed', and 'enshrined' as an object of significance. Its authenticity is confirmed by its appearance in mechanical and social reproductions: 'The reproductions *are* the aura.'⁶ The street scene is both itself a reproduction – marking off and framing its shops and its concept of a 'typical thoroughfare' as a display inside the museum, privileging them as 'authentic' – but also something to be reproduced and shared – gaining a sense of authenticity from being repeatedly reproduced in the images and descriptions of the guide books and on the postcards that visitors sent from Kirkgate's 'genuine replica' post office. The staged authenticity of tourist settings is worrying, MacCannell suggested, because they are 'not merely copies or replicas of real-life situations but copies that are presented as disclosing more about the real thing than the real thing itself discloses. [...] A false back is more insidious and dangerous than a false front, [...] not merely a lie but a superlie, the kind that drips with sincerity.'⁷

The idea of the superlie of a reconstruction that seems to be more real than reality places MacCannell's tourist theories alongside other concepts used by late-twentieth-century postmodern theorists to view contemporary tourist spaces and activities as 'pseudo-events' and 'hyperreal.' Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961) posited that the graphic revolution and emergence of mass media through the twentieth century had seen a new dominance of images and pseudo-events: planned or incited events with an ambiguous relationship with reality.⁸ In the age of mass tourism this meant that the tourist needed the world to become 'a stage for pseudo-events.'⁹ Tourists were seen to look for experiences and sites that were not genuinely authentic but rather that fulfilled their pre-imagined version of the environment that they were visiting. With the reality being unintelligible to the tourist, they instead sought a comforting caricature, looking 'less for what is Japanese than for what is Japanesey.'¹⁰ The criticisms of the author of 'The Authentic Touch' can be viewed in this light,

⁶ MacCannell 2013, pp. 43-8

⁷ MacCannell 2013, p. 102

⁸ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* ? edn (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), pp. 11-2

⁹ Boorstin 2012, pp. 79-80

¹⁰ Boorstin 2012, p. 106

the 'pseudo-Victorian post-office of eighteen seventy-six' as a stage for pseudo-events and its visitors looking less for something that is Victorian than what is 'Victorian-y.' They were happier purchasing the iconic penny black, Britain's original postage stamp from 1840 and a Victorian item with which they were familiar, than one which would fit with the proffered 1870s setting. The penny black felt more 'authentic' than something of the 1870s as it was a piece of Victoriana that the visitors already knew.

Jean Baudrillard, meanwhile, viewed the mass media age as one in which direct simulations of reality had been replaced by simulacra: 'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.'¹¹ In his 'Travels in Hyperreality' (1975), Umberto Eco applied the notion of the hyperreal specifically to museum reproductions. The full-scale reproduction of the 1906 drawing room of music impresario Harry Harkness Flagler at the Museum of the City of New York served as an example of how an original and reproduction 'mingle in a continuum that the visitor is not invited to decipher.'¹² That the room contained both objects from Flagler's actual drawing room and reproductions 'made to serve as connective tissue' resulted, in Eco's view, in a 'a two-level reading' of the display, with 'antiquarian information for those who choose to decipher the panels and the flattening of real against fake and the old on the modern for the more nonchalant.'¹³ The museum streets are similar hyperreal simulacra. As street scenes representing a typical example of the historic streets of their cities, rather than direct reproductions of any complete original street, they are reproductions without an original. As outlined in Chapter One, they attempt to represent the streets of the whole city in the manageable form of a smaller contained space. As such they can theoretically say more as a metonym for the streets of the whole city in the past than any individual street would, but they are therefore a reconstruction with one foot in fantasy and one in fact. As Ludmilla Jordanova noted, when discussing Jorvik, the street scene gives

¹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 1

¹² Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (1975) in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* translated by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 9

¹³ Eco 1975, p. 10

a promise ‘that a simulacrum of the past is available that renders the conventional notion of a museum obsolete.’¹⁴ In an argument largely critical of the museum strategy of a reproduction environment, Jordanova argued, however, that any claim to exactitude is ‘an open lie, because an exact facsimile is technically impossible.’ She viewed the street scene as a particular falsehood precisely because its particular selling point lay in its claim to an authenticity that it could never successfully capture.¹⁵

As with other instances of hyperreal simulacra, Jorvik is noteworthy because, reliably or otherwise, the script that it gives its visitors to follow is one that performs authenticity. Even Boorstin’s argument that people seek the pseudo-authentic rather than genuinely authentic is an acknowledgement that pseudo-events are driven by a performative ersatz authenticity. Meanwhile, the tourist’s quest for authenticity is as central to MacCannell’s theorising of the tourist as the ultimately staged nature of that authenticity: ‘The rhetoric of tourism is full of manifestations of the importance of the authenticity of the relationship between tourists and what they see; this is a *typical* native house; this is the *very* place the leader fell; this is the *actual* pen used to sign the law; this is the *original* manuscript.’¹⁶ While critiques of hyperreal museum environments as staged pseudo-spaces that provide unthinking visitors with an inaccurate narrative of the past could be taken too far (and this chapter will later argue that such critiques do not sufficiently credit the agency of museum visitors’ ability to acknowledge and respond to their staged surroundings), it is undoubtedly the case that the rhetoric of performative realism cited by MacCannell is central to the scripts of the museum streets.

Museums’ guidebooks provide a script for how each museum expects its visitors to respond to the museum environment and even offer to act as director for the visitor’s performance. As one 1960s guide to York Castle described itself, such a guide serves as a “companion” from which the visitor may learn something of the background to a number of the exhibits, a short

¹⁴ Jordanova 1989, p. 25

¹⁵ Jordanova 1989, p. 25

¹⁶ MacCannell 2013, p. 14

preliminary “walk” through the buildings.’¹⁷ Here we may see echoes of Billie Melman’s arguments in her discussion of the urban culture of history, in which the visual spectacles of the city in panoramas or arcades birthed a perambulatory literature of *flâneurs* accompanying their readers textually through the physical space of the city. The guide book presented itself as filling the role of an expert accompanying the visitor group in order to direct their walk through the building, ensuring that they appreciate the aspects of the exhibition that the museum’s curators intend. In the scripts laid out by the guide books the rhetoric of the typical, the genuine and the real recurs repeatedly regardless of the period in which the guide was published. York Castle’s first guide book, published in 1941, noted how the buildings on Kirkgate ‘must seem houses forming a real street,’ adding that: ‘It is not of course a real street as many people think, but this guide is to show how the parish of York Castle grew from real buildings which were being demolished.’¹⁸ The guide’s writer, Alice Lewis – the museum’s lecturer and assistant curator in charge of education – here set out a script in which she encouraged visitors to focus on the street’s realness. The informed visitor reading the guide was unlikely to imagine that the street was a real one, as Lewis suggested some visitors would, but by establishing that it was so real-feeling (and constructed from real parts) that one could think that it was a real street, Lewis directed them to perceive that it was, if not real, then at least very realistic.

Another 1960s guide to York Castle described the street as ‘planned and assembled by Dr. Kirk to represent a typical thoroughfare in any Yorkshire town of a century ago.’ The guide stressed the ‘fidelity in detail achieved in this reproduction.’ The street was, according to the guide, made up of ‘genuine remains carefully salvaged from old York buildings [...] reconstructed with inspired genius.’¹⁹ Even though the guide acknowledged the bricolage of disparate elements from different sources, referring to the

¹⁷ Roland Willis, *York Castle Museum: The Living Past* (York: Herald Printing Works, n.d.), p. 5

¹⁸ Lewis 1941, p. 6

¹⁹ York Castle Museum, *York Castle Museum Guide* (York: William Sessions Limited, 1961), pp. 8-9

street as ‘a composite structure,’ it countered this with the repetition of the rhetoric of authenticity. In the space of this short passage visitors were encouraged to perceive the street as ‘typical,’ ‘genuine,’ and reproduced with ‘fidelity in detail.’ Even while not a recreation of an actual street, Kirkgate was nevertheless written of as a faithful reconstruction of the past. By the 1980s the museum’s guide did not even draw attention to its staged composite nature, instead insisting that ‘Kirkgate is not, of course, a stage-setting. It is a collection of real buildings and shop fronts.’²⁰ Across all eras, the museum has relied on building its narrative around performative realism. The direction and scripting given to visitors by their expert companion, the guide book, has always pointed them towards reading the environment as a real one.

While York Castle provides the broadest panoramic view of the museum street scene through time, performative realism and its rhetoric is also readily apparent in the scripts that the other museums discussed here have provided for their visitors. Abbey House, for example, described its streets in its 1960s guide book as ‘typical of the many “Folds, Courts, Gates, and Yards” which were so common in old Leeds,’ stressing that ‘most of the buildings shown have been removed from in and around Leeds and re-built exactly as they were found.’²¹ As in the York Castle examples, the museum scripts here directed the visitor to perceive their surroundings as both reproductions made of authentic parts, ‘re-built exactly as they were found,’ and an accurate reproduction as a whole of ‘typical’ urban environments.

The guide also directed the visitors’ attention to the clay pipe maker, F. and S. Strong, as this workshop was based directly on a real business which had recently closed in Leeds.²² Reconstructed from the workshop donated by Yorkshire’s last clay pipe maker Sampson Strong on his retirement, the museum’s clay pipe workshop was described by the guide as ‘re-erected in its entirety including the walls, windows, kiln, work benches, tools and other equipment.’²³ That Strong’s workshop (Figure 3.1) – notably

²⁰ Graham Nicholson, *The Castle Museum, York* (Wisbech: Balding + Mansell, 1981), p. 11

²¹ Abbey House Museum, *Guide Book to the Abbey House Museum* (Leeds: W.S. Maney & Son, 1968), p. 14

²² Abbey House Museum 1968, p. 17

²³ Abbey House Museum 1968, p. 17

the only one of the shop displays on Abbey House's street scenes today to remain unchanged since their 1950s opening – was a complete reconstruction of a genuine Leeds original, from walls to tools, lent credence to Abbey House's claim that its streets represented an authentic version of the city's past in the minds of the museum's visitors. However, in being unique among the Abbey House shops to do this, the clay pipe workshop also draws attention to the distinction between Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacrum. In being a reproduction of a real historic space – Sampson Strong's original workshop – and using its real components, the clay pipe workshop is an example of a simulation. However, the other shops on the street are not reproductions of original spaces. They are simulacra, copies without originals, pseudo-spaces that represent an idea of the 'typical' and 'real' rather than reproduce existent reality. As with Eco's observations of the hyperreal in Flagler's drawing room, the simulation space and the simulacrum spaces mingle with the visitor not encouraged to discriminate between them. The 'two-level reading' discussed by Eco is present here, the flattening of simulation and simulacrum (as well as the original objects and the replicas required for connective tissue) for those who do not read the guide and read between the lines; but, as this chapter will later demonstrate, even if the visitor is not invited to question which parts are more authentic than others, this does not mean that they will not do just that anyway.

Abbey House's clay pipe workshop also points to another way in which performative realism can be seen in the hyperreal space of the museum street scene. The museums' public scripts have consistently drawn attention to external expert sources to confer authority on the museum streets' version of an authentic past. However, there is often a staged or hyperreal aspect to these external authorities. Abbey House's curator Cyril Maynard Mitchell had first met Strong when curating craft workshops for York Castle. He had sought craftsmen to 'check the details' of the museum's reconstructed workshop displays and Strong, as the only remaining local clay pipe maker, was asked to confirm the authenticity of the museum's pipe maker's workshop. The *Yorkshire Post* in September 1951 published a

photograph of Strong working on a pipe in the museum's workshop, accompanied by a story which described how Strong 'with expert fingers moulded a specimen pipe with the old tools and instruments that lay scattered about,' going on to describe the workshop as 'perfect in every detail.'²⁴ Mitchell's method of having Strong confer the authority of authenticity on his reconstructed workshop relied on a public and media-friendly performance. The experienced pipe maker, whose father and grandfather had also worked at clay pipe making in the nineteenth century, needed not only to give his seal of approval to the museum's reconstruction but also to do so in a performative way which demonstrated that, despite being housed within the walls of an old prison building, the new workshop was functionally equivalent to the original in practical terms.



Figure 3.1: Clay Pipe Workshop, Abbey House

When Patterson took over as York Castle's curator, he, too, made use of the press to promote the museum with attention grabbing demonstrations of performative authenticity. In 1954, suggesting that 'a touch of realism was lacking' in the museum's barn display, Patterson proposed releasing thousands of spiders to create real cobwebs, while in 1963 he advocated

²⁴ 'Search for clay pipe maker ended in Leeds', *Yorkshire Post* 7 September 1951, p. 6

achieving an authentic smell in the museum's Edwardian pub by sprinkling beer on the floor, 'just to get the right atmosphere.'²⁵ In both cases the story caught the attention of the *Yorkshire Post*, which may well have been Patterson's aim. Whether or not he ever released spiders into the museum or sprinkled beer over the floor, the image was planted of York Castle's curator as someone willing to go the extra mile to ensure a reconstructed environment that was as authentic as possible.

Like Mitchell, Sheppard also relied on the last local clay pipe maker to confer authenticity on his reproduction of a pipe maker's workshop. In Sheppard's case, however, the approval did not come from the pipe maker himself, but rather from the artist Frederick William Elwell. Also an East Riding native who came of age in the late-nineteenth century and, in the early years of the twentieth, felt an urge to preserve evidence of disappearing local crafts, Sheppard found in Elwell a kindred spirit. Like Sheppard's displays on the Old Times Street, Elwell's paintings became known for staging everyday domestic and workplace scenes, often of traditional local life, with great attention paid to replicating realistically the details of the physical environment.²⁶ In one of his *Hull Museums Publications*, a 1927 guide to *Hull's Art Treasures*, Sheppard singled Elwell out for the local interest of his work, which Sheppard described as 'carefully drawn, usually with delightful colour effects, and often represent[ing] household and other interiors.'²⁷ In 1935 Sheppard invited Elwell to visit, and approve, his partially-built Old Times Street. Elwell was particularly interested in the museum's clay pipe workshop, which contained tools from the last of such workshops in Hull and Beverley, as one of Elwell's early realist workplace scenes had been the painting *The Last Beverley Pipemaker*

²⁵ 'Jobs for 1,000 Spiders', *Yorkshire Post* 7 April 1954, p. 4. 'Beer is "On" at Last', *Yorkshire Post* 13 June 1963, p. 4. In this, Patterson prefigured by decades the conclusions of Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory', which argued that history could be understood through physical 'things' and the senses which perceived them: 'like a modernist poem, it begins in the street, with the smell "of frying oil, shag tobacco and unwashed beer glasses."' (The latter part of this sentence quotes from Simon Schama's *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (1987)). Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory' *Critical Inquiry* 2001, 28 (1), p. 2

²⁶ Wendy Loncaster and Malcolm Shields, *Fred Elwell RA – A Life in Art* (Hull: Premier Books, 2014), pp. 29-30

²⁷ Thomas Sheppard, *Hull Museums Publications No. 146: Hull's Art Treasures* (Hull, A. Brown & Sons, 1927), pp. 26-7

(Figure 3.2). Elwell was sufficiently impressed with Sheppard's work to present the painting to the museum. In a further piece of performative realism, Sheppard intended to hang the painting inside the pipe maker's workshop to encourage visitors to compare how accurately the museum's reconstruction matched that of the artist, while, as with Mitchell and Sampson Strong, Elwell's approval and the acquisition of the painting made for good promotion of the street's realism in the press.²⁸



Figure 3.2: *The Last Beverley Pipemaker*, Frederick William Elwell (c. 1900)²⁹

The Last Beverley Pipemaker was not the only example of Sheppard using Elwell's work to confer authenticity on his own, but it must be noted that despite his reputation for realism the painter was also happy to produce

²⁸ 'News from the Museums: Hull "Old Times Street": Gift of Picture', *Museums Journal* November 1935, 35 (8), p. 319. The painting depicted John Goforth Junior who operated a clay pipe workshop in George & Dragon Passage, Beverley, until 1910. The scene was described by Elwell's biographers, in terms similar to those used for Sheppard's museum practices, as 'a treasured piece of Beverley's heritage to be preserved on canvas,' offering 'exciting evidence of a now lost way of life.' Despite Sheppard's stated intent to hang the painting in the Old Times Street it was never displayed there and thus survived the fire of the incendiary bombs that destroyed the street. To this day it can be seen on display in the neighbouring Wilberforce House. Loncaster and Shields 2014, p. 63

²⁹ Frederick William Elwell, *The Last Beverley Pipemaker*, Oil on Canvas (Hull: Wilberforce House, c. 1900)

staged hyperreal scenes. For a reconstruction of an East Riding pub Sheppard had acquired 'the entire contents of the bar parlour' from the Buck Inn in Drifffield. The display was not, in Sheppard's description, reproduced from the Buck Inn itself, however, but rather was 'reproduced as painted by Mr. Fred Elwell, R.A., in his well-known picture.'³⁰ Elwell acknowledged the Buck Inn as the inspiration for his 1935 painting *The Landlord*, but the painting also represents a fanciful scene rather than a perfect facsimile of reality. The eponymous landlord was modelled not on the Buck's actual landlord but on John Booth, a local butler.³¹ As with Boorstin's observation on tourists seeking stages for pseudo-events searching 'less for what is Japanese than for what is Japanesey,' Elwell's *The Landlord* was less concerned with portraying an actual landlord and his pub than with something that looked and felt right. By extension, Sheppard, by reproducing Elwell's view of the pub, had created a museum display that simulated an already hyperreal work. He too produced a pseudo-event catering to a possible audience desire to see something that matched their expectation of a historic pub rather than the reality of it.

Sheppard's Old Times Street never opened to the public, so beyond the responses of Sheppard's invited guests such as Elwell there is no way of knowing how the public would have reacted to it had they had the chance. Even after its ruins were dismantled and the former warehouse turned into a garden, however, performative realism continued to play its part in the story of Sheppard and his Old Times Street. In the 1980s, Sheppard's successor as Keeper of Museums at Hull Tim Schadla-Hall wrote in his biography of the earlier curator that, had the Old Times Street survived, 'today it would in many ways have been a more authentic local street than the famous street at the York Castle Museum.'³² This form of competitive comparison with the authenticity of other street scenes has been a common form of performative realism in the discourse around museum street scenes. On the opening of

³⁰ Thomas Sheppard, 'Air-Raid Damage to Hull Museums – Appendix: Contents of Old-Time Street', *Museums Journal* September 1941, 41 (6), p. 126

³¹ Loncaster and Shields 2014, p. 81

³² Tim Schadla-Hall, *Tom Sheppard: Hull's Great Collector* (Beverley: Highgate Publications, 1989), p. 31

Abbey House's first street, Abbey Fold, in 1954 the *Yorkshire Post* praised how 'there is an amazing authenticity about the shops,' suggesting that 'the new street is more true to life than Kirkgate or Princess Mary Court in the Castle Museum at York.'³³ Just four years earlier York Castle's Princess Mary Court had itself received praise for its greater realism than its forebear earlier in the museum, with *Museums Journal* noting that the Princess Mary Court shops differed from the main body of Kirkgate in that 'they show the workroom as well as the shop window' and 'more space has been allowed for the shop interiors.'³⁴ This tendency to declare publicly that the latest street scene presents a more real and accurate version of the streets of the past points to another key element of the performative realism of street scenes: the process of progressive realism.

Progressive Realism

The concept of 'progressive realism' was coined by Richard Handler and Eric Gable in their anthropological study of the changing presentation of the past at Colonial Williamsburg. Handler and Gable took Huxtable's criticism of the dubious reliability in the concept of 'authentic reproduction' a step further to question how 'museums place far too much emphasis on their possession of the "really real"' in order to separate themselves out as more authoritative than other examples of Bennett's exhibitionary complex.³⁵ They criticised the notion that there was any possibility of actually recapturing the past 'as it was' through reconstruction, feeling such a claim was disingenuous and downplayed the curatorial and interpretive role in selecting and editing narratives around the objects and buildings in the museum. Much like Laurajane Smith's argument for heritage as discourse, Handler and Gable's conclusion from embedding themselves within the workings of Colonial Williamsburg was that 'you cannot point to the past; it is not

³³ 'A road into the past', *Yorkshire Post* Friday 2 July 1954, p. 7

³⁴ 'Princess Mary Court: An extension to the famous cobbled street in the Castle Museum, York', *Museums Journal* December 1950, 50 (9), p. 206

³⁵ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 222-3

embodied in objects. “The past” exists only as we narrate it today.’³⁶ A museum is not a product of the past itself, but of the dominant paradigms produced in the present’s discourse surrounding the past.

In seeking an explanation for how the history presented by Colonial Williamsburg had changed across the twentieth century, Handler and Gable contrasted this ‘constructionist’ view, in which ‘facts’ are ‘essentially inert, meaningless’ and require a plot or conceptual framework of interpretation from historians and curators – a framework which changes with the dominant historiographic discourse – with an ‘objectivist’ view.³⁷ The objectivist position is that history changes not through shifting historiographic paradigms, but because the discovery of new facts and new knowledge allow historians to craft more accurate and authentic histories, constantly getting ever closer to ‘the truth of the past as it really was,’ the process of progressive realism.³⁸ In conversations and interviews with staff at Colonial Williamsburg, Handler and Gable found that the staff members’ view of why the museum’s presentation of the past had changed was overwhelmingly objectivist rather than constructionist. Williamsburg staff viewed their mission as one based on progressive realism toward a perfect mimetic reconstruction of the real past. Handler and Gable, who argued that perfect mimetic reconstruction is ahistorical and impossible, therefore concluded that an adherence to an ideal of progressive mimetic realism meant that Colonial Williamsburg is ‘escapism not history.’ Emphasizing mimetic realism and the idea that a reconstruction can present the past ‘as it was,’ in Handler and Gable’s view, leaves no room for people to think critically about how historical narratives are constructed or imagine other, alternative histories.³⁹

As we shall see, the rhetoric of progressive realism does feature frequently in the way that the Yorkshire museums with street scenes have discussed their changing presentation of the past. However, this does not preclude an acknowledgement from museum staff of a constructionist view of changing historiographic paradigms and that what Handler and Gable refer

³⁶ Handler and Gable 1997, p. 224

³⁷ Handler and Gable 1997, p. 61

³⁸ Handler and Gable 1997, pp. 70-7

³⁹ Handler and Gable 1997, pp. 223-6

to in the title of their study as ‘the new history,’ social history from below, has equally influenced changes to the museum street scenes. As far as staff at the museums discussed here are concerned, constructionist and objectivist motivations need not be at odds with one another. Furthermore, while acknowledging that shifting historiographic paradigms have played their part in the changing presentation of the past on the museum streets, it is important not to deny that there is validity in the objectivist view. It would be disingenuous to suggest that, in the decades since York Castle Museum first opened its street in 1938, no new evidence or material culture has emerged to affect the way that the past is presented in these museums.

The rhetoric of progressive realism appears in discussions of curatorial decision making when comparing the current street display to both previous incarnations of the same scene and other examples in rival museums. This is apparent in the refurbishment of Abbey House’s streets between 1998 and 2001,⁴⁰ York Castle’s Kirkgate in both 2004-6 and 2011-12,⁴¹ and the original development of the Thackray Museum in the early 1990s.⁴² As described at the end of the previous chapter, the driving force behind the use of a street scene as the introductory gallery for the Thackray Museum came from taking inspiration from the successes of the York Castle and Abbey House streets and creating a version in which ‘we did it even better.’ In the interview in which the historian from the museum’s development team raised this concept, he went on to elaborate on the nature of ‘better’ as a more ‘realistic view of what that period was.’ The intention of the Leeds 1842 Street was to ‘get away from what at both those other sites,

⁴⁰ ‘Abbey House Museum, Kirkstall Road’, *Yorkshire Evening Post* 12 September 2002 [online] <<http://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/abbey-house-museum-kirkstall-road-1-2086197>> accessed 1 February 2019

⁴¹ ‘£284,000 facelift on way for Kirkgate’, *York Press* 30 July 2004 [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/7882580.__284_000_facelift_on_way_for_Kirkgate/> accessed 1 February 2019; Mike Laycock, ‘£300,000 revamp for York Castle Museum’, *York Press* 24 February 2012 [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/9553755.__300_000_revamp_for_York_Castle_Museum/> accessed 1 February 2019

⁴² For more on the development of museum street scenes with the aim of increased realism, see Jack Gann, ‘Escaping the Bell Jar: The Changing Face of the Museum Victorian Street’ in *Imagining the Victorians*, ed. by Stephen Basdeo and Lauren Padgett (Leeds: Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies, 2016), pp. 180–93, and Jack Gann and Lauren Padgett, ‘Understanding the Victorians Through Museum Displays’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2018, 23 (2), pp. 170-86

York and Abbey House, is, let's face it, a very sanitised view – it's the rosy-coloured spectacles – of what these street scenes were like.⁴³ Meanwhile, one of the museum's curators described the process of developing the Thackray street scene as 'an attempt to make it more realistic than those, not just a reconstruction of shops in a street.'⁴⁴ Seeking to move beyond the 'sanitised,' 'rosy-coloured spectacles' version of the Victorian past that the Thackray developers and designers saw on York Castle and Abbey House's street scenes, the Leeds 1842 Street presented a darker, dirtier view of a street in urban Yorkshire. Depicting an inner-city slum, this street emphasised a view of the past in which people lived in cramped and unsanitary conditions in contrast to the cleaner past presented on the earlier street scenes. For Handler and Gable this contrast of the dirty street and the clean – 'shit and tulips' – were opposing icons of the new history and the old, or the opposition of a critical view of the past and a celebratory one.⁴⁵ Their conclusion, however, denied that the 'new history' at Williamsburg was any less escapist than the old; the 'shit' version of the streets of the past as much a piece of modern set-dressing as the 'tulips' one. It is indeed possible for a reproduction of the dirty past to be as much a performative pseudo-event playing on visitor expectations as that of the clean past. This was noted by David Lowenthal in his description of heritage as a process of 'upgrading' the past, an upgrading which may play up the darker elements as well as the rosier ones. As Lowenthal suggested, 'warts-and-all displays often show only warts, defaming the past to conform with modern views of misery.'⁴⁶ Such an accusation could readily be levelled at the Thackray Museum, which is, as discussed in Chapter One, a leisure activity as much as an educational one and has a need to provide audience appeal. However, staff behind the museum and its street scene demonstrate an awareness of the problems inherent in attempting to reconstruct the past 'as it was' and the possibility of an 'only warts' display of past misery.

⁴³ Interview TM D1, 22.10.15

⁴⁴ Interview TM C2, 20.05.16

⁴⁵ Handler and Gable 1997, p. 7

⁴⁶ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 153-6

Curatorial staff responses to interview questions surrounding the realism and authenticity of the Thackray's Leeds 1842 Street tended toward an emphasis on 'not wanting to shy away from the reality.'⁴⁷ This emphasizes a view permeated with progressive realism, which implies that the predecessors of the Leeds 1842 Street had staged a version of the past that was further from reality than that at the Thackray, due to shirking the possibility of engaging with the darker or dirtier side of the past. The curator from whom the above quotation is taken advocated a largely objectivist view: 'We do have a duty to tell the past in as much truth as we know it.' This is not to say that the curators and developers of the Leeds 1842 Street are not alert to the limitations and challenges of presenting the 'truth.' Having asserted that the museum has a duty to tell the truth of the past, the curator went on to clarify that: 'You can never know for certain any truth about the past, that doesn't really exist, but as much as it does we should be conveying that.' She further acknowledged a concern with 'not sensationalising things for the sake of it,' which is to say not presenting a darkly picturesque 'only warts' display purely to cater to a popular desire for a dark tourism experience, but balanced against that a view that it would be 'wrong for us to sugar coat things' as much of the history interpreted by the museum is 'quite grim.'⁴⁸ Curatorial staff are obviously conscious of the potential issues with heritage's tendency to, in Lowenthal's terms, 'upgrade' the past both as celebratory nostalgia ('sugar coating') and as exaggerated squalor ('sensationalising') and approach the reconstruction of the Leeds 1842 Street with this in mind, intending at least to downplay both tendencies as far as possible.

Similarly, staff can be seen as concurring with Handler and Gable that complete mimetic reconstruction is an impossibility, but deny that this means that such an endeavour can therefore only ever provide escapism. Graham Black, reflecting on the process of developing the Thackray Museum, also observed that a museum is a product of the present's discourse around the

⁴⁷ Interview TM C1, 19.05.16

⁴⁸ Interview TM C1, 19.05.16

past, writing that ‘the museum is a reflection of its time.’⁴⁹ However, in the case of Black and the Thackray Museum, an acknowledgment that the museum reflects its own moment in time could become an asset. Black argued that reflecting the museological paradigms of the moment meant that the Thackray was well placed to find a balance between a ‘traditionalist’ view of museum practice which ‘felt that much modern display has reflected a debasement of heritage’ and a modernizing one that focused on commercial imperatives and audience demands.⁵⁰ Regardless of how successfully the Thackray Museum managed to balance different paradigms, it is important to note that an acknowledgement of the flaws of mimetic reproduction and attempting to construct displays which functioned within a variety of museological paradigms has always been built into the way that the Thackray presents its past. It is equally important to acknowledge that the fact that it is impossible to provide a truly ‘authentic reproduction’ does not invalidate an attempt to reproduce something of the past and enable the public better to understand and engage with it; nor does it mean that it is not possible for one reproduction to be objectively more real than the one which came before.

The Thackray’s Leeds 1842 Street’s progressive realism did not solely consist of an attempt to move away from the celebratory nostalgia of ‘sugar coating’ the streets of the Victorian past, though. It also, as is clear in the gallery’s very title, sought to provide more realism by reflecting a more specific time and place than previous street scenes. While the early street scenes relied on individual memory (as in the clay pipe maker examples discussed above) to confer authority and authenticity on their version of the past, the Thackray developers relied on survey data from primary source material of the period. One of the historians involved in the research and the development of the museum was keen to stress the reliable authorities on which the reconstruction was based, listing sources for the Leeds 1842 Street including ‘everything from trade directories, censuses, Dr Ballard’s

⁴⁹ Graham Black, ‘Developing the Concept for the Thackray Medical Museum, Leeds’ in *Heritage Visitor Attractions: An Operations Management Perspective* edited by Anna Leask and Ian Yeoman (London: Cengage Learning, 1999), p. 258

⁵⁰ Black 1999, pp. 258-9

report on slaughterhouses, newspaper clippings, diary entries [...] the national reports, council minutes, wonderful recollections of pastors that were working in the area.⁵¹ Two sources were particularly emphasised: sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, published in 1842, and the more local equivalent of the same year, Robert Baker's *Report on the Condition of the Residences of the Labouring Classes in the Town of Leeds*, which provided supplementary local detail to Chadwick's report.⁵² The time period of Chadwick and Baker's reports gave the Leeds 1842 Street its setting, fixing it, unlike earlier street scenes, at a particular moment in time.

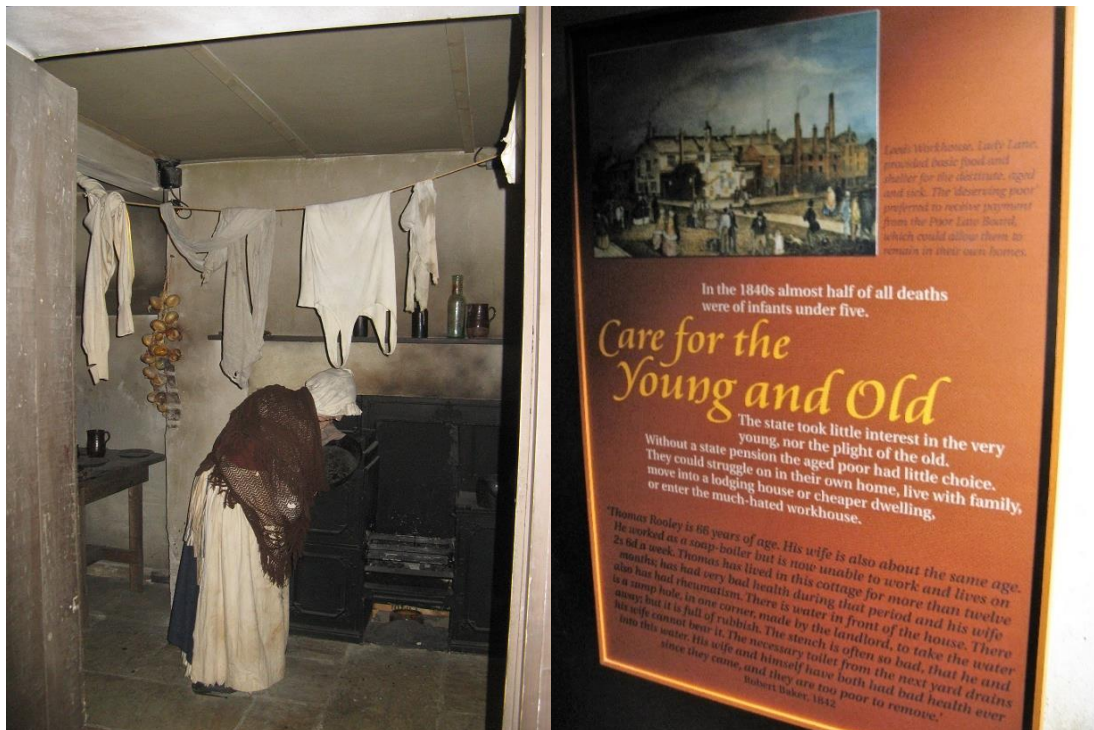


Figure 3.3: Display and interpretation of common lodging house, Leeds 1842 Street

From the start, the nature of the Thackray street scene was dictated by written primary source material. The finished street scene appeals to the authority of these sources repeatedly. Visitors arrive onto the gallery and are

⁵¹ Interview TM D1, 22.10.15

⁵² Edwin Chadwick, *Report on The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1842). Robert Baker, 'Report on the Condition of the Residences of the Labouring Classes in the Town of Leeds' in *Local Reports on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of England* (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1842)

introduced to the time period and themes of the museum with a short introductory film from an actor in the role of Baker, and his report, along with Chadwick's and other primary sources, is used frequently on the interpretation panels on the Leeds 1842 Street to support the interpretive text. As seen in the interpretation panel in Figure 3.3, the Leeds 1842 Street uses a three-tier interpretation strategy, consisting of a visual source (an illustration or photograph) which had provided some of the inspiration for the street scene, explanatory text in white and an extract from a written source in black to support the white text. As one of the museum's development team described it, 'you immediately see, within a very small panel, why that section of the museum is as it is' and establish the authority of the display through how it relates back to Baker's words.⁵³ Finally, on leaving the street an information panel informs visitors that: 'The 1842 report, on which our reconstruction is based, shocked the ruling classes into action.' This then leads into the succeeding galleries, setting up a narrative that explores how public health reform occurred in the years following Chadwick and Baker's reports.

The setting was even more specific in the proposals for the Thackray street reconstruction laid out by Peter Brears, who, as outlined in the Introduction, oversaw the other streets as the former curator of York Castle and director of Leeds Museums, and now served as a consultant on developing something similar for the Thackray. In May 1995, Brears provided an outline for the possible street in which he wrote that:

In order to provide a firm base for this study, it has been assumed that it relates to a specific area at a specific time – That is to say: Location – A yard off Kirkgate, such as the notorious Boot & Shoe Yard. Time – Late afternoon, November 1842.⁵⁴

⁵³ Interview TM D1, 22.10.15. The interviewee did note, however, that the system was not entirely successful from a design and accessibility position, suggesting that 'I think we made a mistake with this' when referring to the panel's use of black text on a dark background displayed within a low-lit gallery.

⁵⁴ Peter Brears, *Draft Study for the Reconstruction of a Leeds Slum c. 1840* (1995), Leeds, Thackray Medical Museum, Shelf 4, File 6, p. 2

As suggested by Brears's desire to 'provide a firm base' for the final street, a specific setting in place and time would provide a greater sense of reality in the finished product. Although the finished street scene is simply described in the museum's interpretation as 'the yards of Leeds in 1842' with its component parts given the fictional names 'Wade's Court' and 'Slaughterhouse Yard,' the real Boot & Shoe Yard is repeatedly referenced in the design of the final street and in the source material cited in the interpretation panels.

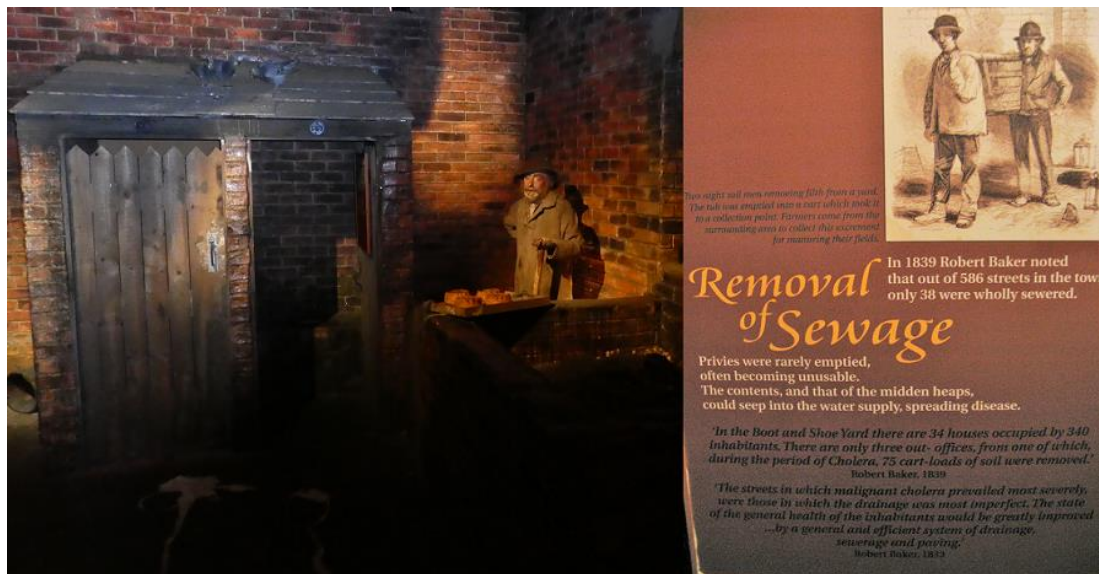


Figure 3.4: Display and interpretation of the privies and the night soil worker, Leeds 1842 Street

Brears described the real yard as an irregular terrace accessed via an arched tunnel entrance from the main street, noting that 'privies appear to be very few in number and very small in size' and how 'the plan of Boot & Shoe Yard in 1843 apparently shows just three.'⁵⁵ Inspired by Boot & Shoe Yard, the finished street features a display reconstructing two privies (Figure 3.4) alongside a midden heap being cleared by a night soil worker (one of the characters whose narrative of ill health visitors can follow through this gallery and the next). The interpretation panel covering 'Removal of Sewage' explains the issues with emptying privies and the potential for disease spreading from midden heaps. It supports this with citations from Baker's observations of the three privies for 340 inhabitants of Boot & Shoe Yard

⁵⁵ Brears 1995, pp. 6-10

during the spread of cholera through the city slums. The scene of the privies, complete with the appropriate perfumed aromas, may appeal to the aspects of the museum street scene designed to provide an immersive and engaging theatrical experience, but that does not mean that this scene is not embedded in primary source research which also appears prominently to give educational authority to the scene. As one curator described this aspect of the museum: 'There's always got to be a bit of showmanship about it, hence the smells really. Also, the idea is to show how horrible, in some ways, Leeds actually was at that time, therefore the smells make it that little bit more realistic.'⁵⁶ From the curatorial perspective, therefore, the Thackray street moves beyond previous examples of the street scene by bringing both 'a bit of showmanship' and something 'that little bit more realistic.' While these two imperatives can potentially pull the museum's plans in different directions, much like Frank Atkinson's tightrope metaphor discussed in Chapter One, they do not necessarily have to come into conflict with each other in the process of developing new displays.

The Leeds 1842 Street's identity as representing a yard 'off Kirkgate' refers of course not to the staged Kirkgate within York's museum but to the real thoroughfare of that name in the centre of Leeds. Nevertheless, it is tempting to see the Thackray slum as also being 'off Kirkgate' in the sense of providing a counterpart to the cleaner, more upmarket street scene within the York museum once curated by Brears. In isolation it would indeed be possible to view the Leeds 1842 Street as a 'warts only' view of life in Victorian Leeds, representing only the inner-city back alley slums and their inhabitants rather than a wider cross-section of urban life in the mid-nineteenth century. However, taking the *gestalt* view of the museum advanced by Falk and Dierking, it is important to note that the Thackray street scene does not exist in isolation, nor was it ever intended as such. The street is rather just a small part of both the museum as a whole and of its visitors' engagement with the Victorian past and Victorian urban space in their wider lives. The museum's slum street is thus intended to present a contrasting view to what visitors already know or expect about Victorian

⁵⁶ Interview TM C2, 20.05.16

streets, and may have experienced by visiting the other local museum streets. The Leeds 1842 street is intended as an encouragement to the visitor to look beyond and behind the Kirkgate of York Castle, just as the reports of people like Robert Baker encouraged the middle classes of 1842 to look beyond and behind Leeds's real Kirkgate to the dark, cramped yards such as Boot & Shoe Yard. In the years that followed the Thackray street's opening, York Castle itself would develop their street scene 'off Kirkgate' with side alleys of their own leading from the affluent wide main street, evidencing an idea that it is progressively more real to incorporate reproductions of the harsher, dirtier side of Victorian life.

In fact, the Thackray Museum's attitude towards progressive realism in the way that its street presented the dark side of the Victorian past was adopted by both Abbey House and York Castle at the turn of the twenty-first century. At this time both museums made their first complete redisplay of their street scenes since they first opened decades earlier and, in both cases, the same elements that the Thackray developers and curators had used to make their street 'more real' than the earlier examples were utilised in the redisplay: greater emphasis on the dirty side of the past, giving the street an explicit 'setting' representing a specific time and place, and an overt use of primary source data to give greater authority to the reconstruction.

In 1996 Leeds Museums received a £2.3 million grant from the newly formed Heritage Lottery Fund (who had also provided some of the funding for the Thackray Museum) for a complete refurbishment of Abbey House. The museum closed in 1998, shortly after the successful opening of the Thackray and its Leeds 1842 Street, and reopened in 2001.⁵⁷ As with the Thackray's 1842 setting, in redeveloping the museum Abbey House's curators 'tried to make sure that we made the street more representative of a particular time and place.' The curator who raised this point noted that: 'When it started it never actually claimed to be "a Victorian street." It was sort of just "The Street" and they were just "old."⁵⁸ Indeed, while the term

⁵⁷ 'Abbey House Museum, Kirkstall Road', *Yorkshire Evening Post* 12 September 2002, <http://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/abbey-house-museum-kirkstall-road-1-2086197>

⁵⁸ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

'Victorian street' has long been in colloquial usage to describe the museum streets, the visitor scripts provided by Abbey House did not initially refer to it as such. The museum's 1960s guide book simply talks of 'three Streets of Cottages, Houses, Workplaces, and Shops of the late 18th and 19th centuries.'⁵⁹ For the 2001 refit, however, the museum focused on a far more specific moment in time, described the curator as 'about the 1889-1890 period,' and the real businesses that existed in Leeds at that time, researched through trade directories and original photographs. More than this, though, the curators and developers of the new street changed the displays on the smaller Abbey Fold and Harewood Square so that they were closer to the real back alleys of Victorian Leeds: 'In a Leeds back alley, there might have been one business and other types of dwellings and possibly retail outlets and that sort of thing. So, we wanted to reflect that aspect and make it a little less of a collection of these sort of random workshops, which wouldn't necessarily have been next to each other.'⁶⁰ As a result of this decision, the former workshops on Abbey Fold were replaced with a mix of working and domestic spaces including a pawnbroker's shop and his domestic parlour, the cottage of an artisan and one of a widowed washer woman doing piece work from home.

While the curator expressed an objectivist explanation based in progressive realism of why the old workshops were changed to the pawnbroker's shop and cottages, outlining how research suggested that Leeds's real nineteenth-century back alleys bore a closer resemblance to this than the old display, she also offered a constructionist view based in changing historiographic paradigms. The new Abbey Fold (seen in Figure 3.5 with the cottages of the artisan and washer woman on the left and pawnbroker's parlour on the right) was designed to give Abbey House's streets a more explicitly social history-based narrative. As she saw it, the refit of Abbey Fold was 'trying to get ideas of social class and contrast in there. [...] There was supposed to be variations in different people's situations.'⁶¹ Thus, the presence of the pawnbroker is not simply there to show a typical

⁵⁹ Abbey House Museum 1968, p. 14

⁶⁰ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

⁶¹ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

shop that would have existed in a yard leading off a main street in Leeds, but also to create a narrative about the Victorian working class's relationship to debt and credit, while the widow washerwoman's cottage offers an insight into the work and living options available to women at the time. Those behind the changes made to Abbey House's streets, therefore, acknowledge that both objectivist and constructionist imperatives went hand in hand as they decided in what ways to develop the street.



Figure 3.5: Abbey Fold after the 2001 renovation

The new Abbey Fold reflected the narrative needs of the 'new history,' but this does not preclude the notion that the new version was in some ways objectively more real than its predecessor. The curator noted that in the 1950s 'quite a lot of the shop windows then, in a sense, were a bit more like traditional museum displays.' Although housed behind original period shop windows, many of the displays themselves were arranged as they would be in a vitrine in a traditional gallery space rather than dressed like a shop window. As the curator recalled, the tobacconist's shop on the original street took the approach of 'here is everything we've got to do with tobacco, from the early sixteenth-century to the 1950s' rather than showing a tobacconist's

window 'as a spot in time.'⁶² Simply by changing the display to be more reflective of the arrangement of a shop window display than a museum case undoubtedly made the new shops objectively more true to life.

This can equally be seen in the renovations of York Castle Museum, which happened in two phases: once in the 2000s with a £284,000 refit of Kirkgate (predominantly funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) opening in April 2006,⁶³ and then again in the 2010s when a further £300,000 (mostly provided by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) allowed for another set of renovations, which opened in June 2012.⁶⁴

Gwendolen Whitaker, the curator of the 2012 renovation, wrote a 2013 article for *Social History in Museums*, the journal of the Social History Curators Group, outlining the ideas behind the renovations. She stated that: 'Key to the project was to re-model displays to reflect the Victorian city of York, heighten the sense of "real" within display methods and by so doing bring Kirk's vision and the city's history more closely together.'⁶⁵ Whitaker went on to outline both progressive realism-based objectivist interpretations of the concept of heightening 'the sense of "real"' and also constructionist reasoning that highlighted shifting historiographic paradigms. The article followed from the attitude of the Thackray Museum developers in seeing the earlier Kirkgate as 'the rosy-coloured spectacles' view of the Victorian past, as with all heritage a product of its own particular era. In contrast to this nostalgic view of Victorian York as a city in the midst of a comforting 'golden age', the new display would show how 'the conditions in many York slums were worse than those in the depths of London; a chocolate box city it was not.'⁶⁶ As with the 2001 redisplay of Abbey House, the renovations involved renaming and redressing the existent historic shop fronts and window frames. Whitaker argued that this was necessary as Kirkgate had become

⁶² Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

⁶³ York Press 2004; Chris Titley, 10 May 2006, [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/features/history/756260.Dr_Kirk_s_vision/> accessed 1 February 2019

⁶⁴ Laycock 2012

⁶⁵ Gwendolen Whitaker, 'Kirkgate: The story of a street in a city and a city in a street', *Social History in Museums* 2013, 37 (1), p. 39

⁶⁶ Whitaker 2013, p. 40

'disjointed as an exhibition display' after years of changes in some areas and not in others. 'This was most obviously represented by the surviving names above the shops,' she wrote, 'these were a jumble of businesses from 18th and 19th century York or names of former civic officials and past members of staff.'⁶⁷

Figures 3.6 and 3.7 show the same shop window frame, a Georgian-era square window frame taken from St Saviourgate in the historic centre of York, in 1938 when the museum first opened and after the renovations in 2012.⁶⁸ The version in Figure 3.7, while still a staged simulacrum, is nevertheless objectively more real than the version in Figure 3.6. As a coppersmith in 1938 (Figure 3.6), the shop was named 'Wilson and Goodall.' As explained by Whitaker this was an example of naming the original Kirkgate businesses after those involved in the street's construction, with the names being a tribute to the Pickering craftsmen who worked on the original display: Alfred Wilson, the carpenter, and John Goodall, the sign painter.⁶⁹ In 2012 (Figure 3.7), the shop was redisplayed to represent the business of Thomas Horsley, a genuine nineteenth-century gunsmith and seller of sporting equipment from his shop on Coney Street, York's main nineteenth-century shopping thoroughfare.



⁶⁷ Whitaker 2013, p. 40

⁶⁸ The window's origins are described in John L. Kirk and L.R. Allen Grove, 'York Castle Museum', *Museums Journal* 38 (3) (1938), p. 108

⁶⁹ Kirk and Grove 1938, p. 106

Figure 3.6: Window of Kirkgate coppersmith (1938)⁷⁰

Figure 3.7: Window of Kirkgate sporting goods shop after the 2012 renovation

As in the Abbey House example, the redisplays of York Castle's street scenes fixed a particular setting in time, 1870-1901, and sought to bring their shops and the objects that they displayed more in line with this. Like the Abbey House curatorial team, this involved the York Castle curators researching archives, newspapers and trade directories to ensure that the shops on the renovated Kirkgate represented real businesses from Victorian York, removing the names of museum craftsmen such as Wilson and Goodall and replacing them with the names of York businesses of the period, such as Thomas Horsley. On top of this, Whitaker stressed the value of research that utilised 'the helping hand of ancestry.co.uk, the support of existing York businesses, city archives, living relatives and the York Family History Society,' tying the community represented on the street to the community of the city of today.⁷¹

Due to this emphasis on personal connection and genealogy, responses to the changes to Kirkgate could also become quite personal. This

⁷⁰ Kirk and Grove 1938, Plate IX

⁷¹ Whitaker 2013, p. 41

can be seen in the renaming of the street's grocer's shop, to take one example. When the museum's street was first constructed, the shop had been named for Alderman Charles Thornburn Hutchinson, the Lord Mayor of York at the time of the street opening in 1938 and a grocer by trade.⁷² As part of the process of renaming and redisplaying the shops to represent those active in the city in the late-nineteenth century, the name above the shop was changed to Thomas Ambler. While the change excited the descendants of the real Thomas Ambler, creating a greater connection between them, the museum, and the city (one descendant told the local *York Press* that she had taken her father to the museum as 'this trip to see the shop with me and his granddaughter would make his day'),⁷³ the Hutchinson family felt an equivalent loss. Charles Hutchinson's grandson wrote to the *Press* that he was 'disappointed that this link between my grandfather and the city has been lost' in the change of name.⁷⁴ This difference of opinion over the same small change to the museum display is indicative of the importance of what Falk and Dierking refer to as personal context: whatever the museum script, visitors' own prior experience and ideas will mean that they interpret that script in their own way.

As shown in Figures 3.6 and 3.7, these changes were more than just names on signs. They presented a progression from something akin to a traditional vitrine display contained within a historic shop window towards something with the feel of a real shop window. The redisplay removed rows and rows of identical shelving and, in Trevor Thomas's terms, choreographed the objects in a way that was significantly more eye-catching, removing the repetitive shelving, and making the space behind the window deeper to fit a greater variety of objects. The choreography of the objects was now arranged around the bicycle as the central focal point with the guns,

⁷² 'Two Centuries of Life in Yorkshire', *Yorkshire Post* 25 April 1938, p. 4

⁷³ 'Three generations share family's store history at Castle Museum', *York Press* 22 October 2013 [online]

<http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/10754068.Three_generations_share_family___s_store_history_at_Castle_Museum/> accessed 1 February 2019

⁷⁴ D.T. Hutchinson, 'Reader's Letter: What happened to the tea merchants?' 7 June 2012 [online]

<http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/features/readersletters/9748387.What_happened_to_the_tea_merchants_/> [accessed 1 February 2019]

cricket bats and tennis racquets artfully arranged around it. The objects in the new shop did not come from the original Horsley's sporting goods shop in York, but the arrangement of this window display was designed to recall the real Horsley's window, emphasising the aspects of the display that were more simulation than simulacrum.

MEETING ALL OF A GENTLEMAN'S NEEDS

Amongst the Victorian gentleman's needs would be guns and tobacco. The Thomas Horsley gun making business was in 10 Coney Street from about 1856. Interested gentlemen could see the progress of their orders in the workshop behind the shop. Horsley's were keen on new inventions and were one of the first to produce breech loading guns. In February 1862, the first British snap action patent was granted to them.

By the end of the 1880s the firm was also selling outdoor sporting equipment and running a shooting range.

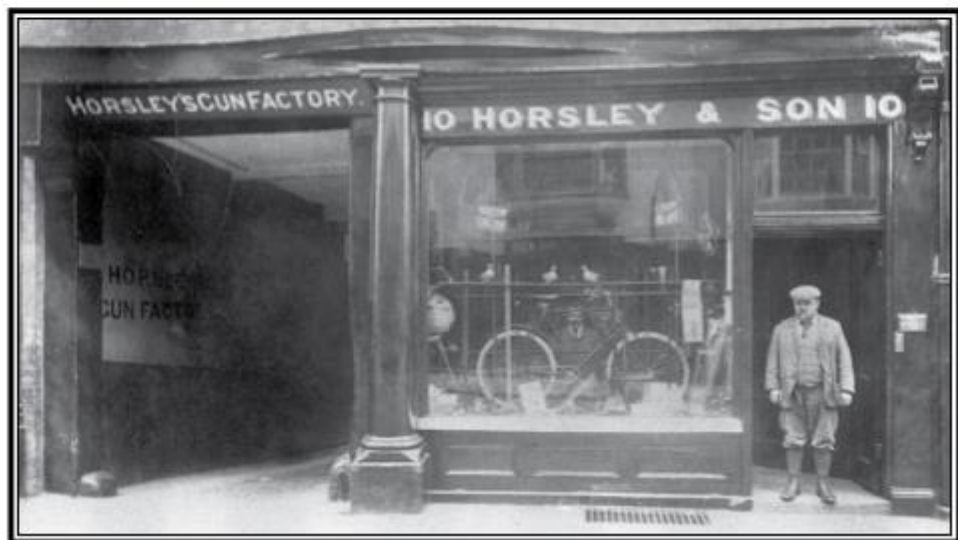


Figure 3.8: Interpretation of Horsley's sporting equipment shop in the 'Kirkgate Traders' Review'⁷⁵

⁷⁵ York Castle Museum, 'Kirkgate Traders' Review', leaflet, 2012

Kirkgate does not have interpretation panels as at the Thackray Museum, but the same approach of using their sources within interpretive material is apparent here, nonetheless. For the 2012 renovation, the museum produced a piece of interpretive text in the form of a fictional newspaper, 'The Kirkgate Traders Review,' styled after 'a similar advertising publication in the City archives.'⁷⁶ This newspaper contained the background stories, alongside original photographs and advertisements, related to the real businesses which had inspired the redisplayed Kirkgate windows. As seen in Figure 3.8, the interpretation of Horsley's shop included an original photograph of the real Coney Street business, which, by showing how the museum had replicated the design of the real shop's signage and built their window display around the central object of the bicycle, confers authority on the museum display. It also indicates that there is validity in the idea of progressive realism: even allowing for the fact that historiographic paradigm shifts provoke changes in museum displays (Horsley's tells a story of leisure pursuits, Wilson and Goodall focused more on craft, for example) and that whilst an 'authentic replica' is an impossibility, these images do indicate that the new window was undoubtedly a more realistic representation of a Victorian shop window than the original.

As at the Thackray Museum, York Castle's 2012 renovations also developed the street scene 'off Kirkgate.' Areas previously designated as back regions, primarily utilised for storage, leading away from the original main street, were opened up and displayed as 'snickets,' narrow back alleys (Figure 3.9). That these were narrow corridors leading to small rooms made them perfectly suited for the agenda of bringing out the darker, less 'chocolate box' side of the city. Whitaker wrote that:

The layout of the street was planned to be sympathetic to the shape of Victorian York. Busy main street shops were placed together and those with workshops such as the Undertakers and Tallow factory accessed through back alleys. Businesses which served customers from different levels of society were strategically placed in Kirkgate to do the same thing.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Whitaker 2013, p. 41

⁷⁷ Whitaker 2013, p. 41

The post-2012 Kirkgate provided a network of smaller streets in which, as in the real city, visitors could leave the wide, airy, affluent main shopping streets and access the dark, cramped back alleys behind. 'Suddenly it doesn't seem like just a street any more. It seems like a whole, recreated city,' wrote one complimentary review in the local *York Press*.⁷⁸ Maintaining the largely affluent, middle-class affect of Kirkgate, capturing something of the essence of the middle-class shopping streets of York, and adding narrow alleys of humbler dwellings and businesses leading from it created a more complete view of the differences in class and living standards at the time.



Figure 3.9: Rowntree Snicket, a former corridor and store room at York Castle

⁷⁸ Stephen Lewis, 'Kirkgate at York's Castle Museum is expanded', *York Press* 28 May 2012 [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/features/features/9730577.Past_is_given_a_makeover/> accessed 1 February 2019

Like the rest of the renovated Kirkgate, the new back alleys also placed emphasis on the use of an authoritative primary sources. Whitaker highlighted Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree's 1900 report *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* as 'one of the most important sources used to help shape the new district of Kirkgate,' much as Chadwick and Baker's reports had helped provide the basis for the Thackray street. Sure enough, the museum's most recent guide book, also written by Whitaker, assures visitors that the new domestic interior (Figure 3.10) is 'based on Rowntree's descriptions of a slum dwelling. These were often found in narrow cobbled alleys or courtyards with little sunlight and air. Conditions were overcrowded and insanitary.'⁷⁹ This appeal to a primary source serves to give authority to the renovated street and its curator's assertion that this darker, dirtier view of York's Victorian past is more 'real' than the 'rosy' nostalgia of the original display.



Figure 3.10: Domestic interior on York Castle's Rowntree Snicket

The addition of the more impoverished back alleys was discussed by Whitaker in largely objectivist terms, focusing on the progressive realism of

⁷⁹ Gwendolen Whitaker, *York Castle Museum: Souvenir Guidebook* (Norwich: Jigsaw Design & Publishing, 2014), p. 28

the new display as a 'more authentic' version of the city's real streets. However, in arguing that the purpose of the renovations was to move away from 'gentle time travel' into an age of 'social stability,' she was also acknowledging a constructionist position. The dominant historiographic paradigms have, as at Williamsburg, moved from the celebratory view of the Victorian past to a narrative more concerned with history from below. Unlike in Handler and Gable's observations at Williamsburg, however, curatorial staff were happy to acknowledge this alongside their assertion that the new street has become progressively more real than its predecessors. 'It changes according to the scholarship we have [...] and scholarship is always coming on,' was how one York Castle curator responded to the question of whether the museum's view of the Victorian past had changed over time, pointing to how notes from previous curators 'tend to focus on different things than we focus on now.' This York curator was far more willing to acknowledge constructionist influences than Handler and Gable recorded in the curators at Williamsburg, happily acknowledging that 'the ways that we think about the past always kind of reflect what we do in the present' and that the museum's view of the Victorian past will continue to change with 'our changing political landscape, and our changing social and economic contexts in the present.'⁸⁰ As with Whitaker's observations of the 2012 renovations, the current curator observed that former curatorial interests dwelt on 'nostalgia and a vanished way of life,' while current curators were asking questions such as: 'What's the social and economic context of these things? How were people living? [...] Where do they go to the toilet? What happens to the sewage?'⁸¹ This is a direct acknowledgment of a clear constructionist curatorial view at the museum, that changing displays reflect changing historiographic imperatives, different ways of narrativising the material that the museum has from the nineteenth century. The addition of privies on both York Castle's Rowntree Snicket and Abbey House's Abbey Fold, following the example of the Thackray, is a clear case of Handler and Gable's example shift from 'tulip' history to 'shit' history. It is quite literally history from the bottom.

⁸⁰ Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

⁸¹ Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

Rather than a binary choice between objectivist and constructionist ideals of the changing past on the Victorian street scenes, change is prompted by both. There is an undoubted shift in historiographic paradigms in which curators are more interested in shaping their streets specifically to script a social history narrative about class divides and the dirtier, less celebratory aspects of the Victorian past. At the same time, the factual material that makes up the building blocks of the street scene is not inert and simply in need of a structural framework. The progressive realism of the renovated street scenes is a genuine move towards something that, while it is never possible completely to recapture the past, does objectively more closely resemble the real shops and streets that they are attempting to replicate.

Experiential Realism

In her description of the aim of the 2012 renovation of Kirkgate discussed above, Whitaker referred specifically to a desire to 'heighten the sense of "real"' on York Castle Museum's street scene. The language here is significant as it points to how, even acknowledging that Kirkgate is a hyperreal simulacrum of a street in Victorian York, it is still capable of forming an important connection between the visitor and the past by presenting a real-feeling experience; not reality itself but a sense of real. This follows from Kevin Moore's defence of the value of York Castle and museums like it in *Museums and Popular Culture* (1997). Moore noted that curators 'often disparage the room sets that are ubiquitous even in the smallest local museums, and the street scenes found in larger museums, such as at York Castle,' in spite of their popularity with the museums' visitors.⁸² Moore argued rather that, as with York Castle curator Robert Patterson's notion of 'popularization' discussed in Chapter One, the very fact that they have high levels of popular appeal is precisely what makes such sites particularly

⁸² Kevin Moore *Museums and Popular Culture* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997), p. 140

effective.⁸³ In his view, this was because reconstructions such as the street scenes gave their visitors ‘the triple power of the real’ (real people with real things in real places). No museum can truly offer the reality of actual historical individuals using their original objects in the place in which they first existed, but sites such as York Castle can provide an affective reproduction. Moore suggested that objects lose some of their aura when decontextualized from their environment by being moved to the museum. Some reproduction elements are necessary, but by recontextualising the object with a recreation of a version of its original environment some of that aura may be restored.⁸⁴ He stressed that his view was purely theoretical and that further visitor research needed to be done to understand whether the ‘triple power of the real’ was a genuine part of visitor responses to museums. Therefore, it is important for this chapter to examine the power of an experiential ‘sense of the real’ by drawing on the recordings made of visitor conversations on street scenes, as well as responses to the streets in letters and reviews in the press.

Moore’s view that staged authenticity can provide a form of experiential realism even without being a complete and accurate mimetic reproduction of the past is supported by the work of Edward M. Bruner who posed a critique of postmodern views of the hyperreal in his 1994 article ‘Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction,’ focused on the living history museum at Lincoln’s birthplace in New Salem. Bruner criticised the ‘grand generalizations’ and ‘homogenizing monolithic language’ of Baudrillard and Eco, arguing that their theories were purely academic and lacked engagement with the actual complexities and nuance of different varieties of tourist and tourist desires and experience in practice.⁸⁵ Bruner’s response to the question of ‘authentic reproduction’ was to note that ‘authentic’ in this context can have a number of different meanings. Significantly, he drew a distinction between the use of ‘authentic’ by museum professionals to mean ‘a historic site believable to the public, [... achieving] mimetic credibility’ and

⁸³ Moore 1997, p. 148

⁸⁴ Moore 1997, pp. 135-55

⁸⁵ Edward M. Bruner ‘Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism’, *American Anthropologist* 1994, 96 (2), p. 409

its use to mean a reconstruction that 'not only resembles the original but is a complete and immaculate simulation, one that is historically accurate and true' to the period. Most museum professionals, most of the time, used 'authentic' in the first sense, Bruner found, while academic theorists tended to write as if all museum professionals took the second view, that authentic reproductions are exact and complete.⁸⁶ Thus, museum professionals, in Bruner's view seek to give the *experiential* sense of realism (as suggested by the quotation from Whitaker above), while their critics view them as attempting (and failing) to provide the genuinely real.

Bruner also questioned the central tenet of MacCannell's argument that tourists seek authenticity, which in this sense he took to have a third meaning: the genuine, original article. He suggested that, in fact, 'it may be these contemporary intellectuals who are the ones looking for authenticity, and who have projected onto the tourists their own view of themselves.'⁸⁷ Instead of seeking authenticity, or indeed defining their visit by their desires prior to the visit taking place, Bruner observed that tourists at New Salem make meaning 'in the performance of the site, as [they] move through the village and as they interact with the interpreters.'⁸⁸ The later chapters of this thesis will explore this concept as played out in the Yorkshire museum street scenes; however, it is useful to note here how it offers a contrast to Handler and Gable's view on Colonial Williamsburg. They suggested that Williamsburg and its 'authentic reproduction' rendered it impossible for its audience to think critically about the construction of historical narrative or the potential for alternative histories. Instead, Bruner found that many tourists used the reconstructed environment to 'play with time frames and experiment with alternative realities.'⁸⁹ Set against a body of literature which 'emphasizes the seriousness of the tourist quest and experience,' Bruner noted qualities of playfulness, entertainment, and improvisation in tourist performances.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Bruner 1994, p. 399

⁸⁷ Bruner 1994, p. 408

⁸⁸ Bruner 1994, p. 409

⁸⁹ Bruner 1994, p. 411

⁹⁰ Bruner 1994, p. 410

Bruner's refutation of the theories of Baudrillard, Eco and MacCannell perhaps goes too far in the direction of a dismissal of the concept that visitors seek authenticity in their engagement with the past at museums and heritage sites. He is correct, however, in noting that those earlier theorists tended toward generalisation, and that researchers need to pay attention to the experience from the audience perspective as well as the museum's. However, by doing just that, it is clear that ideas of the authentic, original and real *do* hold a strong appeal for visitors. This can be seen, for example, in interactions stimulated by the Artisan's Cottage on Abbey Fold at Abbey House. The cottage (seen on the far left of Figure 3.5) was reconstructed from the bricks taken from a demolished original cottage in Beeston in South Leeds. That this cottage has a level of authentic realism greater than that of the other buildings on Abbey Fold does indeed engage the interest of visitors to the street scene, as the recordings of visitor conversations show.

Mother – 'The house was originally built -' So this is a real house, which they moved brick by brick. It would have originally been built in 1830.

Daughter – Wow. (AHM, Visitor Group 2)

Woman 1 – This was built originally in 1830, one-up, one-down dwellings for industrial workers.

Woman 2 – Is this the real...?

Woman 1 – Yeah, they said they moved it brick by brick.

Woman 2 – Really?

Woman 1 – Yeah, it was brought brick by brick from Beeston.

Woman 2 – OK

Woman 1 – It's the original house. (AHM, Visitor Group 22)

Exchanges such as these, in which visitors are prompted by the museum script (in this case, a laminated file of interpretive text informing visitors of the provenance of the cottage) to appreciate the rhetoric of authenticity, are indicative of the fact that such performative realism is indeed something which visitors seek and respond to. Note the emphasis that both conversations placed on the term 'original' or 'originally.' Both focused their reading of the interpretive text on the specific phrase 'the house was originally built in 1830' and both returned to the term 'original' to round out this conversational fragment, emphasising that the original, hence authentic (in Bruner's third sense as well as his first), nature of the literal building

blocks of the cottage is the central aspect of their response to it. In both conversations, the respondent, replying with affirmative and encouraging responses – ‘wow’ and ‘really?’ – gives further credence to the notion that visitors find a sense of realism a strong draw in a museum, and supports Moore’s theory of the triple power of the real. Although the cottage is made of original parts, it is not in its original place nor is its ‘artisan’ inhabitant a real person, but the reconstructed environment makes it feel to the audience like something real and therefore engaging.

Even negative responses to the street scenes have tended to be predicated on audience members acknowledging their own search for something felt to be experientially ‘real.’ Their negative reaction emerges from their perception that the museum failed to achieve this, as can be seen in the following responses to the 2006 and 2012 renovations of York Castle’s Kirkgate (one from a museum professional and one from a member of the public). A 2006 review of the first round of renovations by former Beamish director Peter Lewis viewed the new Kirkgate as a failure to live up to the standards of Kirk himself, whose vision Lewis perceived as a Skansen-influenced attempt to ‘show everyday items in everyday settings, in a way that was edifying and entertaining.’⁹¹ On the tightrope between entertainment and education, Lewis saw the new Kirkgate as falling too far to the side of the former. It was, he said, ‘not improvement but a sad dumbing down of Kirk’s original hopes. Kirkgate has gained a gimmick and lost its soul.’ Lewis stressed the authenticity of Kirk’s original museum by referring to how ‘shop fittings and street furniture were dressed with real objects.’ In contrast, when looking at the present display, he commented that: ‘The shops they inhabit [...] all contain real objects but none are identified or priced. The result is the loss of integrity for the artefacts; they have become mere stage props.’ Meanwhile, the ‘looseness’ of the 1870-1901 setting meant that the new Kirkgate had the feel of ‘vaguely pantomimic Victoriana.’⁹² Regardless of the fact that the earlier version of the street had an even less fixed date, including objects from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, and that the

⁹¹ Peter Lewis, ‘Reviews: Street strife – Kirkgate, Castle Museum, York’, *Museums Journal* July 2006, 106 (7), p. 42

⁹² Lewis 2006, p. 43

shop windows had never featured identifying labels, Lewis viewed the original street as a space devoted to interpreting 'real objects' where the renovated street was one where those objects had become mere props in a staged, pantomimic scene. His quest for reality remained, but the museum seemed to him more false than before.

The accusation of a 'gimmick'-driven false version of reality was also levelled at the second renovation in 2012, this time in the pages of the local *York Press*, in a letter from Eddie Vee (a regular correspondent to the newspaper's letters page, perennial parliamentary candidate for the Monster Raving Loony Party and Elvis tribute performer, the latter of which should at least have given him an appreciation of performative simulations). In response to an earlier report in the *Press* that the new street scene would pay greater attention to the lives of the real individuals of Victorian York whose stories had emerged from research process, Vee questioned: 'Do we really have to suffer "faux Victorians" in a part of the museum which has its own ethereal atmosphere which suits the mood of the street perfectly?' Voicing the 'Disneyization' critique of reconstructed historic environments in museums, he described the renovated Kirkgate as an 'attempt to turn a world beating attraction into a tacky Disneyland-style theme park,' insisting that 'these streets speak for themselves and need no gimmickry.'⁹³ Even aside from the way that Vee appears to have interpreted the earlier story as suggesting that the museum would be introducing live costumed interpreters onto the street (something that had in fact occurred as part of the 2006 renovations and was also a point of contention for Lewis then), it is clear that he perceived the new version of the street as a move away from something real. The implication of Vee's dismissal of 'faux Victorians' would of course be that the earlier street was far more representative of 'real Victorians.'

Two things are clear in these responses: that museum visitors do indeed seek at least some form of authenticity in their museum experience and that they are not simply content unquestioningly to accept what the

⁹³ Eddie Vee, 'Readers' Letters: No to living it up', *York Press* 28 February 2012 [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/features/readersletters/9557631.No_to_living_it_up/> accessed 1 February 2019

museum presents as authentic. Both Lewis and Vee were given the museum script which emphasised the progressive realism of the new displays, but neither accepted the narrative prompted by that script. Both rejected the idea of progressive realism; but they did not do so in such a way that followed Bruner's suggestion that the authentic-inauthentic dichotomy is not valued in responses to reconstructed museum environments, nor did they follow Handler and Gable in rejecting the rhetoric of progressive realism as museums placing too much value on 'the really real.' Instead, they confirmed that they did seek authenticity (albeit in Bruner's first definition of 'credible and convincing' or perhaps the pseudo-authentic of Boorstin's search 'less for what is Japanese than for what is Japanesey') and their displeasure stemmed from feeling that the new street did not provide that same authenticity as its predecessor.

These examples are some of the more extreme rejections of the museums' script of progressive realism. Both the recordings made of visitor conversations and the interviews conducted with museum staff support the view argued in the previous chapter, and further put forward by Moore, that the engaging presentation and sense of reality in a street reconstruction is something that many visitors find attracts their attention. Consider, for example, this group of a mother and daughter on the Thackray Museum's Leeds 1842 Street. The mother had reassured her daughter that the street was 'not real' and 'just models' in response to the daughter's concern on entering the gallery that it would be 'too scary.' Despite entering the gallery with the knowledge that it was 'not real,' this mother and daughter nevertheless emphasised the authenticity of the reproduction in their conversations on the street. In Slaughterhouse Yard, the mother observed the interpretation boards referenced earlier and this conversation followed:

Mother – It says here that this is a real-life picture of the actual real place, the Leadenhall Slaughterhouse. That's in Leeds.
 Daughter – Can we go there?

Meanwhile, in the lodging house, the discussion continued with:

Mother – That’s their bed, look, where they all slept. Look at that, hard boards. This is really what it was like in the olden days.

Daughter – It looks really tough. (TM Visitor Group 5)

Although the discussion had already established that the street as a whole is ‘not real,’ there was nevertheless a repeated emphasis on the aspects that are or feel real. In the first conversation the repetitiveness of the phrase ‘a real-life picture of the actual real place’ rhetorically drives home the power of the multiple real elements, as posited by Moore. The Slaughterhouse Yard of the Leeds 1842 Street is not the real Leadenhall Slaughterhouse, but the museum’s use of original source material to give its reconstruction authority successfully gave the visitor a sense of the real place. By establishing that the museum shows ‘what it was really like in the olden days’ in the second conversation fragment, the mother prompted her daughter to respond with a sense of experiential realism, encouraging empathy with how tough it would have been to sleep on the bed. A physical, embodied, experiential opportunity to try out the hardness of the lodging house beds, as proved a successful audience appeal in the Geffrye Museum’s 2015 exhibition *Homes of the Homeless: Seeking Shelter in Victorian London*, would further enhance this sense of experiential empathy.⁹⁴

Even when visitors are happy to follow the museum’s script of the street scene as an authentic reproduction, they are still aware enough of its constructed nature to ask questions about which of Bruner’s definitions of the authentic they are getting. Conversations such as the following were common amongst the recordings of visitors to Abbey House’s streets.

Woman 1 – These are all reproductions, aren't they? But it will be of something authentic, won't it?

Woman 2 – Yeah. I'd have thought so. (AHM Visitor Group 1)

Man – I wonder how accurately they've dated these artefacts. I mean, we were told this is sort of the 1880s weren't we? But is this all from then? (AHM Visitor Group 21)

⁹⁴ Jane Hamlett and Hannah Fleming, ‘Curating Homes of the Homeless’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* April 2018, 23 (2), pp. 207-19

Woman – I wonder if this dress is actually historically accurate.
(AHM Visitor Group 35)

Visitors are happy to buy in to the sense of realism and still retain a healthy degree of scepticism about the different degrees of possible authenticity. Here we can see visitors both discerning a difference between objects original to the period and reproductions (and understanding that a value of authenticity may exist in both) and questioning whether original objects date from the appropriate period or whether the reproductions are accurate simulations of the real thing. The original and the reproduction, the simulation and the simulacrum may all exist within Eco's 'continuum that the visitor is not invited to decipher,' but that does not mean that the visitor will not make a play at deciphering it even without the invitation.

A number of visitors to York Castle drew attention in their conversations to the smell around the privies on the new back alley. Although the smells themselves are produced through scented oils and a heating element, not through actual toilet odours, they nevertheless contributed to the visitors' feeling of being surrounded by the 'sense of the real' that curator Whitaker sought to build into the visitor experience.

Woman 1 – It smells a little bit of urine. [...] Is this why? Are they making it authentic for us? (YCM Visitor Group 2)

Woman 1 – Is the smell supposed to be in keeping with here?

Woman 2 – It's authentic.

Woman 1 – Eurgh! (YCM Visitor Group 18)

Mother – It smells like it would have smelled. It would have smelled a lot worse.

Son – Mummy, they wouldn't have wanted to make it really smell, because then nobody would want to go to the museum.
(YCM Visitor Group 20)

In all three cases the visitors in these conversations appreciate that the museum has given them a sense of something 'authentic,' even while acknowledging that this authenticity is staged. In the last conversation, even a young child is aware enough of the practices and audience demands of the museum to note that the sense of authenticity engendered by the privy

smells is also closely managed to produce something which suggests that 'it smells like it would have smelled' without pushing over the edge into something that would drive museum visitors away. We can see clearly that the authenticity of the museum is obviously a staged authenticity, that visitors to the museum are conscious of this fact, and that they appreciate the experiential authenticity that the museum nevertheless provides.

Historiocopia

The idea that a museum's 'authentic reproduction' of the past can ever truly reproduce the past with complete accuracy is a clear falsehood. The claim made by Thomas Sheppard that his Old Times Street presented the streets of historic Hull 'as it was' merely offers a performance of authenticity, not the real thing. As with the audiences of many staged performances, however, the audiences for the museum street are typically willing to suspend disbelief and buy in to the idea of the street scene's authenticity, while retaining an enquiring mind about the process of how the illusion of authenticity is achieved. For their part, the curators, designers and developers behind the museum street scenes are fully willing to acknowledge the impossibility of a complete reproduction of the past 'as it was.' The museum street scene presents layers of a false front region, not because they are concealing a truly authentic back region, but because the real back region (the authentic Victorian past) exists forever in the past, as inaccessible to the museum curator as any other historian. The changes that occur in the museum may push toward a progressively more objectively real representation of the past, but complete 'as it was' authenticity is something that curators admit is impossible. That impossibility does not, however, mean that there is no value in the partial reproduction of the past provided by the museum.

The criticism of museum reproductions such as the street scenes as dramatised or 'upgraded' versions of the past could be just as readily applied to any attempt to narrativise the past from depictions in popular media to

those in scholarly, academic history. As Raphael Samuel observed: 'Historians are no less concerned than conservationists to make their subjects imaginatively appealing.'⁹⁵ Historians, in Samuel's description, use 'thick description to offer images far clearer than any reality could be' and "evocative" detail as a gauge of authenticity,' all of which does not seem particularly distinct from the staged authenticity of the museum. 'Do we not require of our readers, when facing them with one of our period reconstructions, as willing a suspension of disbelief as the "living history" spectacle of the open-air museum or theme park?' Samuel concluded.⁹⁶ This is not to say that scholarly, academic history is no more accurate than a theme park, but that criticism of a museum reconstruction as false because it takes original parts and adds the connective tissue of staged reproduction to create narrative elevates academic written history to a plinth of objectivity that it does not truly occupy. It feels like snobbery. It is essentially the reverse of Patterson's argument that 'popularization' proves the value of York Castle's street scene, suggesting instead that museums that use reproduction are bad history *because* they are popular history.

Handler and Gable's criticism of how history is made at Colonial Williamsburg is prompted by this same social condescension. They present a view that the staged authenticity of the museum reconstruction is problematic because it precludes the possibility of the audience questioning it or the official narrative that it represents. This position only makes sense if one presumes a homogenous, passive and unthinking audience who absorb the museum's chosen narrative without the alert, questioning mind that a reader of written history would bring. As this chapter has demonstrated, visitors to the museum streets do not operate in this way, or indeed in any individual monolithic fashion. They bring their own thoughts and experiences and may respond by questioning or outright rejecting the museum's script as well as buying into it. Even those happy to follow the script do so with an awareness

⁹⁵ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* 2nd edn (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 271

⁹⁶ Samuel 2012, p. 271

that they are looking at a hyperreal staged version of the past not the real thing.

It is worth going a step further than Samuel's defence of heritage to point to how visiting a museum reconstruction and reading a text of scholarly history do not have to, and indeed do not tend to, exist as completely separate spheres. We can appeal to Jerome de Groot's concept of 'historiocopia,' the 'overflowing plenty and abundance of meaning' in the way that history is popularly accessed in the twenty-first century.⁹⁷ It is important to remember, as de Groot did, that an ordinary person may 'in the course of one day interface with the past architecturally, through television, art, fiction, game, magazine and advertising.'⁹⁸ Each visitor to the museum will bring aspects of an understanding of the Victorian past and the streets of the Victorian city from this historiocopia and the role of the museum is in part to develop that interest and inspire the visitor to explore further. As Abbey House's curator commented:

We're not the only place in which you could learn about the Victorians, but I think, hopefully, also we're part of that mix of where people get their ideas about the Victorians from. A lot of it will be from film and television and by coming to a museum they can actually see things that are solid and real and not just part of a film set. And, if they get their other ideas through reading, then it's being able to interact with the actual, real objects.⁹⁹

The museum plays a part in the wider culture of historiocopia, it is 'part of that mix of where people get their ideas' about the past from. Its curators make no claim to provide their visitors with the last word on their subject, merely to provide what other elements of historiocopia cannot: the sense of interaction with real physical remnants of the past, even if those remnants are partial. Heritage is not a rival to academic history but a potential path to it.

⁹⁷ Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in popular culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 13

⁹⁸ De Groot 2009, p. 13

⁹⁹ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

De Groot noted of the way that the public consumes history that:

Buying, joining and browsing have become intertwined with the museum experience. [...] This breaks down the barrier between static museum and viewer, allowing an experience-based interaction with heritage [...] the customer is seemingly enfranchised, becoming part of the process of history rather than watching it happen.¹⁰⁰

While the use of 'seemingly' does point to how the museum visitor may not be in truth as enfranchised as they imagine, the museum still retaining the authority to create the environment in which the interaction occurs, this makes an important point about the value of the experientially real in museums such as the ones discussed here. To return to the subject with which Part I began, it can be said that the 'pseudo-Victorian post-office of eighteen seventy-six' offered, as the street scenes continue to offer today, something that may have only been a pseudo-event but was still experientially real for the visitors. In the act of buying their stamps and postcards and mailing them, the visitors became enfranchised in a real-feeling experience which gave them a greater connection to the past than they would as a passive audience. The construction of a narrative of the Victorian past on the museum street scenes cannot solely be understood from the perspective of curatorial approaches. It is equally important to understand how the visitors themselves build narrative and make meaning, how the audience becomes part of the performance. This is the subject of Part II in which we will see the museum visitor stepping through the proscenium of the vitrine case to take their place within the display.

¹⁰⁰ De Groot 2009, p. 242

Part II

The Audience

Introduction



Figure 4.1: 'Looking down on Kirkgate,' *Museums Journal* (1938)¹



Figure 4.2: 'Kirkgate from Alderman's Walk' *Museums Journal* (1938)²

One obvious way in which the museum is a different form of storytelling through three-dimensional space from the theatre lies in the physical position of the audience in relation to the stage. While a proscenium

¹ John L. Kirk and L.R. Allen Grove, 'York Castle Museum', *Museums Journal* 38 (3) (1938), p. 107

² Kirk and Grove 1938, p. 107

arch divides the theatrical stage and performers from their audience, in the museum the audience is placed amongst and moving through the staged narrative. A form of proscenium may yet exist as a divide between visitors and objects in the form of the vitrine, but the visitor still moves within the *mise-en-scène* in order to understand the narrative, while the theatre audience remains static to watch the stage and performers move and the narrative unfold. Nevertheless, museological discourse has often downplayed the physical, corporeal presence of the museum audience within the scene.

In *Museum Bodies* (2012), Helen Rees Leahy observed the lack of visitors' bodies in much of museums' scopic discourse. In particular, she argued that: 'The clearest instance of this disavowal of corporeality is the disembodied installation photograph, in which a work of art is displayed in pure, unpopulated gallery space.'³ The message here, Rees Leahy suggested, was that the museum was a space for eyes and contemplative minds, but not for physical bodies. The 'disembodied installation photograph' was undoubtedly the habit in the pages of *Museums Journal* in the era in which the museum street scenes first opened. Volume 38 of the collected editions of the journal, which covered the period from April 1938-March 1939 (including coverage of the conferences and papers in Chapter One) featured a total of 169 images, photographs and illustrations of which 85 showed museum galleries and displays. Only four of these 85 featured any human figure at all, two of them in the same article: Kirk and curator Allen Grove's first description of York Castle and its street.⁴ These exhibition photographs (Figures 4.1 and 4.2) used the human figure within the picture to show two different perspectives on Kirkgate. The inclusion of a human body in the image of the museum street scene, in contrast to the trend for disembodied installation photographs, points to an awareness on the part of Kirk and Grove that this was a different form of museum display, one that requires

³ Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 48

⁴ That this was typical for the period can be seen in how the previous volume of *Museums Journal* had 68 pictures of galleries and displays in museums, only three of which showed people, and the following volume had 37 pictures of galleries and displays, only four including people.

putting the visitor's body into the exhibit. In Part I, this thesis explored the construction of narrative of the Victorian past from the perspective of the curators and the museums staging and scripting their narrative. Now, in Part II, we must, as these photographs do, place the visitor back into the exhibit and understand how they play their part in constructing their side of the narrative, in building on what the museum's curators and designers have provided with their staging of the past.

As the images above indicate, the street scenes are distinct in approach from other museums and even the other galleries within their own museums. Unlike those, their exhibition scripts, of which promotional images in museums publications can be said to be part, have always acknowledged the corporeal presence of the visitor within the gallery. The positioning of the visitor inside the display itself rather than looking in on it from outside is a significant aspect of their 'museum bait,' that element designed to engage the 'Man in the Street' discussed in Part I. Part II, therefore, explores how, with the encouragement of the way that the museum street is staged and scripted, the audience makes meaning through an engagement with the museum which is embodied and ambulatory. The audience is both physically and intellectually active in their approach to meaning-making. However, an acknowledgment of the corporeal aspects of the audience being inside the scene must also accept that the body can be a barrier to meaning-making as well as a support. Thus, Part II will go on to argue that the museums with street scenes must become more aware of the barriers that their immersive approach presents, and consider how to make their streets physically and culturally accessible to every example of the 'Man in the Street.'

Chapter Three – The Narrative of Footsteps – takes the two images above as its starting point to argue that the way in which narrative is constructed in the street scene is one that progresses from a panoramic view looking in from above to a pedestrian narrative constructed from within the display, browsing in the shop window displays. The chapter draws on philosophies of the practice and rhythms of everyday life developed by Michel de Certeau, arguing that the museum street works in a similar way to the real streets outside in encouraging the gradual unfolding of a narrative

written by the feet of their visitors. This is followed by Chapter Four – Distress, Discomfort, and Disobedient Bodies – in which the possibility is raised of a negative bodily reaction to the immersive and multisensory modalities of narrative interpretation within the street scene. The chapter focuses on the specific case of sensory overload amongst neurodiverse visitors as an example of immersion within the display proving a barrier to successful meaning-making. It concludes that, in order to include visitors such as these, the museums need to move beyond disposing of disability as a 'problem' that they can write off with accessibility programmes (such as low sensory events), and additionally build cultural accessibility into the museum itself so that visitors have the tools to develop narratives about the lives of people like them in the nineteenth century. This idea, that the scripts set out by the museum and the narratives constructed by the visitor-audience must work together in dialogue, each ceding control to the other at various points, then becomes the central thread of Part III – The Performance.

Chapter Three

The Narrative of Footsteps

Chapter One described the panorama and diorama shows of urban landscapes and reconstructed streets popular in the nineteenth century as precursors to the street reconstructions introduced to museums from the 1930s. There was, however, one crucial way in which the experience of the museum street moved on from this inspiration. The early dioramas were theatre presentations: a seated audience would look down upon the scene and marvel at its verisimilitude from the position of a distant onlooker. In 1828, *The Times* reported of one of the most acclaimed of Louis Daguerre's original diorama scenes that: 'Leaning over from the seats [...] the spectator looks down upon the picture, *into* the high street of the village of Unterseen, and it is difficult for him to get rid of the impression that he could drive a chariot of full size all the way up it.'¹ A little over a century later, the museum street made good on the promise of that illusion. Early in their visit to York Castle Museum, the spectator would (as shown above in Figure 4.1) look down into the high street of a dioramic scene and receive the impression that they, as an audience member, could step into the scene and walk all the way up the street. Unlike the early diorama spectator, however, the visitor to York Castle could later in their visit descend the staircase and do just that, step inside what had previously been a scene viewed from outside to become themselves part of the scene, now watched by other spectators in their previous position. The script provided for the earliest museum street scene visitors in York Castle's original guide book emphasised the impressive character of this sequence of events:

The visitor only arrives there after completing the tour of the rest of the Museum, although his appetite has been whetted by a glimpse of the Street from the bow window beside the Georgian room near the entrance to the Museum. [...] The shop windows are lit up, the glass roof is hidden in darkness, a fire flickers cosily behind one of the upstairs windows, and the

¹ 'The Diorama, Regent's Park', *The Times* 24 March 1828, p. 6

visitor retains the strong illusion that he has stepped back into the serene tranquillity of a bygone age.²

The visitor here was encouraged to appreciate the tantalising glimpse from above of the street as one of the first things that they saw ‘near the entrance’ to the museum, before arriving later to feel like they have ‘stepped back’ into that previously glimpsed scene. Witnessing the street and then becoming part of it was, thus, always a part of how the museum’s curators and interpreters conceived the visitor’s experience of York Castle’s Kirkgate. It is this concept – that making meaning from the street scene begins as the more traditional act of observing a museum display through glass and then becomes a narrative inscribed through the pedestrian movement through the gallery space – which forms the basis of this chapter.

Part I argued for the connection between those earlier representations of the city street seen in the theatres, panoramas and dioramas, as well as arcades and department stores, and the museum street scenes of the 1930s to 1950s by calling on Billie Melman’s concept of an urban culture of historical narrative. Here we can again pick up the thread of Melman’s argument relating to the influence of new urban exhibitionary forms on the construction of literary narratives of the past. Melman contrasted the influence of visual exhibitionary forms on the approach to creating a narrative from past events in Thomas Carlyle’s *The French Revolution: A History* (1837) and Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).³ Melman argued, as discussed in Chapter One, that new exhibition forms such as the panorama created new ways of thinking about the past, with Carlyle’s contemporary readers and reviewers noting that his work was filled with ocular metaphor and the language of the reader-as-spectator, producing ‘a scenic history with the characteristics of a panorama.’⁴ While Carlyle created a narrative of the revolution whose scopic regime viewed the city and its story as a whole from above, making it as with the panorama ordered and

² Alice Lewis, *The Parish of York Castle (Alderman's Walk and Kirkgate)* (York: York Corporation, 1941), p. 14

³ Billie Melman *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past 1800-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 67-109

⁴ Melman 2006, p. 67

comprehensible, Dickens's version was, in Melman's view, closer to the vision of the Revolution presented at sites such as Madame Tussaud's. There was no ordered all-encompassing view, but instead the spectator was given a limited view amongst the chaos at street level.⁵ As in Chapter One, it is possible to apply Melman's understanding of the construction of an urban narrative of the past in literary and cinematic storytelling to the story in three dimensions constructed within the museum. While looking in on a display, as in the 'looking down on Kirkgate' image in Figure 4.1, presents the ordered, panoramic totality of view characterised by Carlyle, the experience of stepping into the display (as in Figure 4.2) then allows for the narrative to unfold in a personal, pedestrian form as in Dickens.

That a short-lived experiment with reversing the visitor flow through York Castle in the 1990s – beginning with the star attraction of Kirkgate before sending visitors upstairs to view the more traditional galleries – was soon reverted is indicative of the centrality of the narrative structure of beginning with the ordered external view before allowing for free exploration at street level.⁶ While the other street scenes discussed here do not quite so explicitly offer the transition from a panoramic view looking in from above to a street-level narrative, they do still provide something similar. At the Thackray Museum visitors see a mural cityscape of Leeds in 1840 (Figure 5.1), giving a panoramic introduction to their surroundings, before entering the narrow yards and alleys of the museum's slum through an archway. Meanwhile, visitors to Abbey House first see the street from outside the entrance to the museum galleries. The corridor leading to this point is decorated with contextual cues to set up the street scene, historic maps of the city followed

⁵ Melman 2006, pp. 71-2

⁶ The museum's 1990 guide book is unique in informing visitors to take this path through the museum, rather than the one discussed in this chapter. By the next edition of the guide, published in 2000, the visitor route returned to its original direction. Gillian Greaves, Josie Sheppard and Keith Matthews, *York Castle Museum Guidebook: England's Most Popular Museum of Everyday Life* (York: Maxiprint, 1990), p. 1; Josie Sheppard, Sherri Steel and Keith Matthews, *York Castle Museum Guidebook* (York: Maxiprint, 2000), p. 1

A visitor route beginning at what is now the exit to Kirkgate, however, remains the path for visitors with mobility impairments who are unable to climb the stairs to look down from the window in Figure 4.1. This results in a different experience from the usual pedestrian process of meaning-making from the street scene, something which may feel exclusionary. The subject of barriers to the ideal form of visitor meaning-making on the street scenes is explored in greater depth in Chapter Four.

by paintings of its streets in the nineteenth century. In all cases, the transition from looking in on the recreation of the city from the outside – as a visitor does when looking at a museum display within a vitrine – to walking within the reconstructed streets has more in common with how narrative is built in the real street than in the traditional museum.



Figure 5.1: Entrance to the Leeds 1842 Street, accompanied by a mural of Leeds in 1840

The Panoramic and the Pedestrian

Chapter One referred to the difference between the street scenes within museums such as York Castle, Abbey House, and the Thackray Museum and the open-air living and folk museums such as Beamish or Skansen to which they are often compared in museological discourse. It noted that one particular difference lay in how the tradition of open-air sites was to encourage visitors to view their buildings as separate, disparate elements, while the buildings of an indoor street scene are experienced as the individual parts of a complete whole. Cased neatly within the walls and

roofs of their museum buildings and within individual galleries inside those buildings, the museum streets can be looked into and down upon as if they were a miniature diorama in a vitrine, thereby being viewed from outside as if it were a single object display. The arrangement of the street scene encourages a two-fold view, firstly as a spectator looking in as with any other object in the museum, secondly as an active participant in the scene within the case. It is important, therefore, to consider the way that narrative is constructed and meaning made both from without and within.

The critic Susan Stewart's study of literary narratives of the body in relation to the gigantic and the miniature, *On Longing* (1992), is of use here in understanding the two types of narrative construction expected of the visitor to the museum street. For Stewart, the gigantic and the miniature are both understood as forms of containment, the gigantic as something to be contained in, the miniature as something which is contained, a concept which can apply to the street scene as depicted above in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2. As Stewart explained it, the position of the body looking into the container or contained within it provokes a different understanding of the nature of the object:

Once the miniature world is self-enclosed, as in the case of the dollhouse, we can only stand outside, looking in [...] Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it "surrounds" us. [...] We are enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially.⁷

Looking through the window in Figure 4.1, or on any cased object in a museum display, is an example of Stewart's self-enclosed miniature world. The street scene can be seen like the dollhouse, understood as a whole but only from a disconnected distance. Stepping into the display allows the visitor to understand it in a more connected fashion but only in parts.

⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 70-1

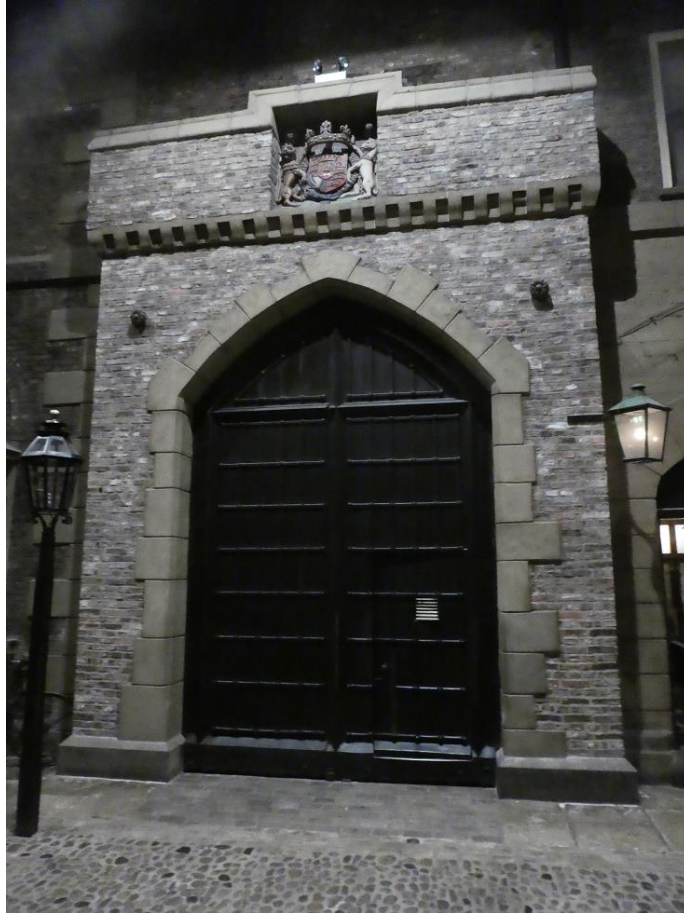


Figure 5.2: Former gates of York Castle Prison, now part of Kirkgate



Figure 5.3: View through the bars of the York Castle Prison gates

Stewart described the dollhouse as ‘the most consummate of miniatures’ as it, as a house within a house, presents a tension of inner and outer spaces as well as various layers of interiority. The dollhouse provides ‘center within center, within within within.’⁸ The museum streets (prime examples of Trevor Thomas’s vision of the museum as toy theatre discussed in Chapter One) are similar examples of ‘within within within,’ the tension between exteriority, interiority and different layers of interiority is present in the way that the street is a micro-city of buildings within a public building inside the real city. Even within the street, contained inside its gigantic surroundings, the visitor then looks into the windows of the shops to see another layer of interior. There will always be a layer of interior that is a miniature level within the visitor’s vision, always a layer that can only be seen and understood looking in from outside at a distance. On York Castle’s Kirkgate, for example, the former gates of York Castle Prison (the building’s original usage) feature as part of the street (Figure 5.2). Looking through the bars in the gate reveals a panoramic painting around the curved wall within, designed to represent the grounds of the prison as they would have appeared in the nineteenth century (Figure 5.3). The visitor may be able to see the street as if it were a diorama from above and then step into that scene, but the painting of the prison grounds shows that there will always be another within within that, a diorama within a diorama.

Stewart applied her notions of the gigantic and the miniature to how the environment of the city features in narratives, much as Melman referred to the different visions of the city in narratives of the past: the panoramic and the pedestrian. Each, Stewart suggested, provide a partial understanding of the urban space. Seeing the city from without, as from a window, would be akin to viewing the cased miniature, giving a totality of perspective but also a detachment from the object on view.⁹ Alternatively, a narrative built from seeing the city from within is always experienced through ‘the disjuncture of partial vision/partial consciousness.’¹⁰ This narrative of the city cannot be

⁸ Stewart 1993, p. 61

⁹ Stewart 1993, p. 78

¹⁰ Stewart 1993, p. 2

experienced simultaneously, but must unfold in a series of partial encounters.

In this distinction, a late-twentieth century view of how literary narratives of space are constructed, Stewart echoed a dichotomy that emerged from the Victorian era itself about how to see and understand urban space. As Lynda Nead noted in her study of representations of the metropolis in the nineteenth-century, *Victorian Babylon* (2000), there were two guiding principles to the regulation and planning of nineteenth-century urban space: mapping and movement.¹¹ Nead argued that ‘maps made the modern city legible and comprehensible [...] in contrast to the incoherent sensory experience of the street.’¹² The mapped city streets, the complete whole seen from without and above, were the ideal of a controlled and comprehensible space, the official narrative of politicians and civic planners; but the experience of each individual pedestrian within the city was far more untidy, as likely to resist or contradict the best laid plans of the official narrative as to develop from it.¹³ The opposition of the aerial and the street-level view evidence the presence ‘competing histories’ and experiences of the city.¹⁴ And so it proves for the model city created by the museum street scene: both the ‘official’ and the personal narratives are necessary for a complete view of the streets’ story, which is why the museum creates a scenario in which their model of Victorian urban space can be seen as a comprehensible whole from without and then invites the visitor to explore and create their own narrative of that space from within.

That the city seen from a window, as Kirkgate is seen in Figure 4.1, allows a person to make sense of the scene in a different way from how they might when walking through it at street level was also central to Henri Lefebvre’s theory of ‘rhythmanalysis’ (attuning oneself to the rhythms and underlying order of daily life). Lefebvre argued that the rhythm of the city streets would best be understood if the rhythmanalyst positioned themselves

¹¹ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 13-4

¹² Nead 2000, p. 13

¹³ Nead 2000, p. 75

¹⁴ Nead 2000, p. 22

both within and without the street, the street 'seen from a window' being the closest way to satisfy this need. Lefebvre wrote that:

He who walks down the street, over there, is immersed in the multiplicity of noises, murmurs, rhythms (including those of the body, but does he pay attention, except at the moment of crossing the street, when he has to calculate roughly the number of his steps?). By contrast, from the window, the noises distinguish themselves, the flows separate out, rhythms respond to one another.¹⁵

From the window in Figure 4.1, the visitor to York Castle Museum can, like Lefebvre's rhythm analyst, exist apart from the noises and murmurs experienced within the street (either real noises or soundtrack effects) and therefore understand the rhythm and flow of the whole before immersing themselves inside it. Museum staff do not view the visitor experience in explicitly rhythm analyst terms, but do emphasise the importance of understanding the flow of the street when seen from the window. One of the costumed interpreters who works regularly on Kirkgate emphasised how seeing the street from without and above 'was Dr Kirk's idea. [...] He wanted it to whet your appetite, that you wanted to be there now, but you had to walk round and eventually, when you least expect, you suddenly find yourself on it. I think that's definitely what he wanted and I think that works.'¹⁶ For this staff member the importance of seeing the street from without before getting to step into the scene after seeing the more traditional museum displays is something that has always been embedded into the fabric of how the museum's street scene approach has operated. From this point, the visitor becomes immersed in the multiplicity of rhythms of the reconstructed street just as they would on a real one.

Nead's argument for the dual sense of the Victorian urban environment seen by mappers and by pedestrians cited the work of Michel de Certeau and his philosophy of the practice of everyday life. Nead looked to de Certeau's assertion that 'history begins at ground level' in his 1985

¹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, 'Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms' (1992) in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 38

¹⁶ Interview YCM F1, 22.09.16

'Practices of Space,' to argue that the history of urban space can be understood as much through the journeys of ordinary individuals through the city streets as in the official discourse of 'great men.'¹⁷ De Certeau's version of the different narratives of the city seen from within and from without lay in the form of the contrast between maps and tours and between 'places' and 'spaces.'¹⁸ For de Certeau, 'space is a practiced place,' thus the street place defined by planners on a map becomes transformed into a space by the pedestrian walking through it on a tour.¹⁹ The city streets are inscribed and invented, in de Certeau's terms, by the 'chorus of idle footsteps' of the people that walk there, the narratives of the city improvised by people's movements in a succession of 'pedestrian speech acts.'²⁰ The museum streets similarly offer a plan through which the potential narrative is mapped out by designers and curators, and first understood and contextualised when seen from without, but it is through the narrative of footsteps within the reconstructed street that meaning is constructed and developed from the visitor's surroundings, turning it into a space.

De Certeau's arguments for a pedestrian construction of spatial narrative could be, and indeed have been, applied to the way that meaning is made in any museum. Caterina Albano, for example, argued in her paper 'Narrating place: The sense of visiting' (2014) that a museum visitor creates narrative from the gallery environment through 'actualizing some of its spatio-narrative possibilities by making them exist as well as emerge,' citing de Certeau's concept of the pedestrian speech act.²¹ Albano's application of de Certeau's philosophy of inscribing museum places via the lens of the pedestrian's movement through them is valuable, but it does not capture how the conventional gallery of vitrine displays remains a sequence of separately

¹⁷ Michel de Certeau, 'Practices of Space' translated by Richard Miller and Edward Schneider in *On Signs* edited by Marshall Blonsky (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 129; Nead 2000, p. 75

¹⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* translated by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 118-22

¹⁹ De Certeau 1984, p. 117

²⁰ De Certeau 1984, pp. 97-8

²¹ Caterina Albano, 'Narrating place: The sense of visiting', *Museum and Society* March 2014, 12 (1), p. 3

viewing distinct objects from without rather than within: the detached view of the panoramic spectator.

A more useful model for how de Certeau's ideas could be applied to the museum street scenes can be found in the work of Kate Hill. Hill's understanding of the series of theatrical reconstructed street scenes built for the nineteenth-century urban international exhibitions was that, 'even in what may be seen as a staged and commodified representation' of an urban place, de Certeau's notion of the poetry of the chorus of idle footsteps, the pedestrian construction of narrative, remained applicable.²² Hill argued that, just as with the pedestrian in the streets of the real city, the international exhibition streets allowed for people to create their own narratives of the urban past in the experiential and embodied practice of moving through the street, a form of making meaning of the urban past that came not from hegemonic, 'top-down' historical narratives, but rather a co-production between the designers and interpreters of the street and the visitors exploring it.²³ This idea of co-production is crucial to understanding the nature of the way that the Victorian urban past continues to be understood on those international exhibition streets' permanent indoor successors. The narrative unfolding in the form of pedestrian speech acts on these streets – far more than in other exhibition spaces – is not accidental, but a facet of their design approach.

Hill also noted that reports on the streets dwelled on visitors' corporeal engagement with the reconstructed environment through exploring, entering and inhabiting spaces, diving into rooms and ascending staircases.²⁴ Although Hill has elsewhere written on the different emphasis placed on corporeality in Hazelius's work at Skansen and Kirk's at York Castle compared with more traditional museum approaches, she did not bring the permanent street scenes in twentieth-century museums into her discussion of pedestrian meaning-making in nineteenth-century street reconstructions

²² Kate Hill, "'Olde worlde" urban? Reconstructing historic urban environments at exhibitions, 1884-1908', *Urban History* 2017, p. 24

²³ Hill 2017, pp. 1-25

²⁴ Hill 2017, p. 22

(as I do here), but many of her observations are equally valid.²⁵ As with the international exhibition streets, pedestrian construction of meaning is built into the museum streets from their design and scripting. They were always intended to give visitors a sense of stepping into the exhibit and building meaning from within that differentiated them from displays in other parts of their museums.

Inside the Scenes at the Museum

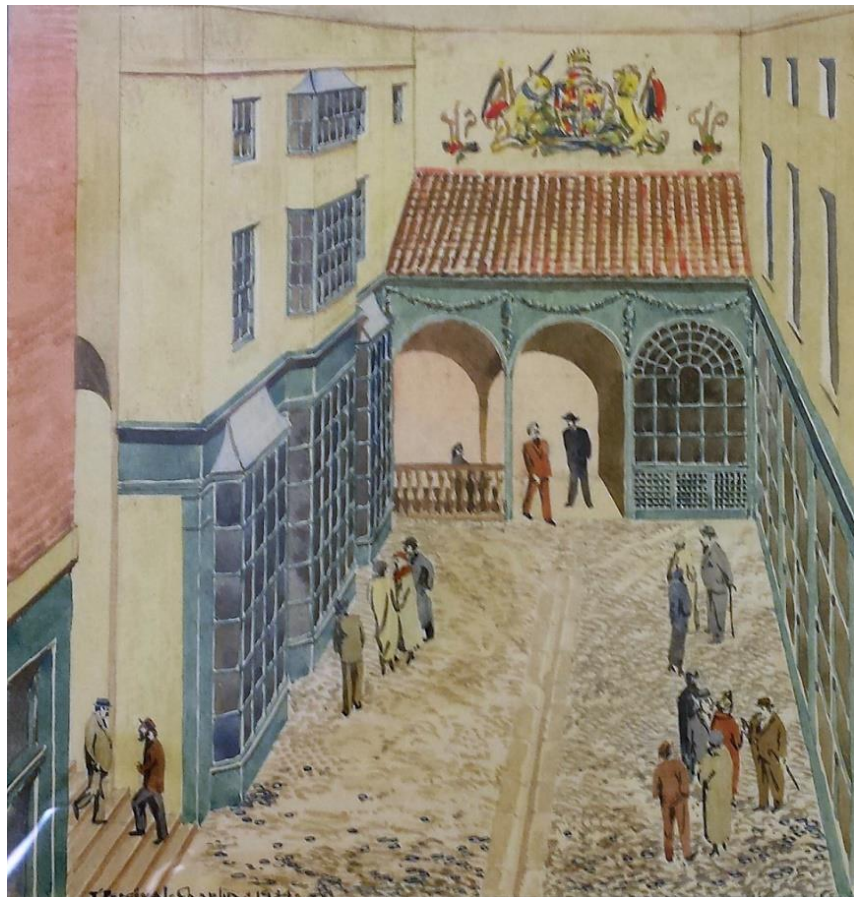


Figure 5.4: Design for York Castle Museum street by J. Percival Chaplin (1934)

Part II began by citing Helen Rees Leahy's observation of the disavowal of museum visitors' corporeality in museological discourse, in particular the absence of visitors' bodies from exhibition photographs and illustrations, and pointing to the early photographs of York Castle's Kirkgate

²⁵ Kate Hill, 'Collecting Authenticity', *Museum History Journal* 2011, 4 (2), pp. 203-222

as notable in not following this trend. Indeed, the corporeal presence of the public within depictions of Kirkgate were present from its earliest designs. Figure 5.4 below shows the first design of York Castle's street (in its originally planned upstairs location, shown earlier in Figure 2.1) drawn by the architect J. Percival Chaplin in 1934. Unlike the designs for other parts of the museum, but like the photographs seen in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, Chaplin's drawing relies on the presence of human figures within the display for scale and context, but also to suggest the expected scripted styles of visitor behaviour.²⁶ Visitors in Chaplin's design behave as if enjoying a promenade beside the high street shops of the real city or as depicted in the landscapes of the real urban shopping streets of Victorian Yorkshire painted by Leeds artist John Atkinson Grimshaw (Figure 5.5). As in such images of urban pedestrians, visitors in Chaplin's imagined museum street scene can be seen wandering, parading, admiring the scale of their surroundings, chatting with their companions and browsing the contents of the windows around them.²⁷ This is in contrast with Rees Leahy's observations of scenarios in which illustrations of exhibitions *had* shown visitors, predominantly in the previous century, and used to evidence perceived good visiting practice. Rees Leahy noted that, in the illustrated press, visitors to the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition 'could see their ideal selves interpellated in scenes of quiet conversation and diligent attention,' while 'lounging, parading and wandering' were strongly discouraged.²⁸ Chaplin's vision of visitors to a possible York museum street over seventy years later, however, was happy to feature precisely those actions among the expected

²⁶ Aside from these designs, Chaplin's most prominent work was in the design of crematoria, so the liveliness of this populated scene stands in contrast to the rest of the architect's career. Douglas J. Davies and Lewis H. Mates eds., *Encyclopedia of Cremation* (Abingdon, Routledge), p. 21

²⁷ The golden glow of the shop windows of an urban shopping street, akin to those depicted in Grimshaw's paintings, was a recurring motif in the way that the museum presented its street, with Kirk himself drawing attention to how: 'At night, concealed lighting illuminates each shop, and street lamps add to the effect' (Kirk and Grove 1938, p. 108). The museum's original 1940 guide book referred to how: 'Both Alderman's Walk and Kirkgate appear most beautiful in the dark afternoons of winter, when the shop windows are lit up' (Lewis 1940, p. 14), while the 1950s equivalent suggested that: 'As candles are lit a pink glow flushes the tiny window panes, and the goods displayed within seem more attractive than ever.' (G. Bernard Wood, *Journeys Through Time at York Castle Museum: A General Description of the Museum* (York: William Sessions Ltd., 1950), p., p. 21)

²⁸ Rees Leahy 2012, p. 55

visitor behaviours. Just as in Grimshaw's depiction of the urban crowds of Leeds' shopping thoroughfare Briggate in Figure 5.5, the potential visitors to York's reconstruction of an urban space appear as likely to be lounging and wandering as existing in rapt, diligent attention.²⁹



Figure 5.5: *Briggate, Leeds*, oil on canvas, John Atkinson Grimshaw (1891)

Rees Leahy criticised the aforementioned Art Treasures Exhibition for its failure to resolve the tension between what she perceived as the predominant forms of moving and looking in the museum, both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and today: glancing and gazing.³⁰ Rees Leahy argued that, as sight is a 'sense of simultaneity' in which a wide area is constantly surveyed, the challenge of a museum is to fix that sight onto single objects while choreographing the visitor's movement through the gallery. There is thus, in Rees Leahy's view, a tension between the static and attentive gaze held on an individual object and the mobile and distracted glance, viewing the whole field of the gallery and beckoned to move on by another object in the edge of their eyeline.³¹ This may well be the case with

²⁹ Wilfred Jenkins's *Briggate by Night* (1884), an artist and painting very much in the Atkinson Grimshaw mode, is on display at the entrance to Abbey House's Stephen Harding Gate, further suggesting this association in the visitors' mind.

³⁰ Rees Leahy 2012, p. 59

³¹ Rees Leahy 2012, p. 50

the more traditional museum gallery, wherein objects are seen as miniatures viewed from without, but inside the reconstructed street, where the visitor exists within, the act of viewing and moving functions differently.

It might be argued that the kind of wandering bodies and eyes seen in Chaplin's depiction of the potential York street scene embody a permanent state of glancing; and that the nature of the whole gallery space as a scene, the entirety a museum object as a whole made up of hundreds of other overlapping objects, precludes the possibility of any static, attentive gazing. Indeed, something like this was the view taken by the earliest behaviourist studies of museum visitor activity cited by Rees Leahy, those conducted by Yale psychologists Andrew Melton and Edward S. Robinson, which were published in the 1920s and 30s at the same time as the first street scenes were being developed.³² Melton argued that isolating individual objects prevented the distraction effect that would produce more of a glancing form of spectatorship: 'the spatial configuration, the *gestalt*,' of a complete reconstructed environment was 'not in itself sufficiently potent to overcome the normal distraction effects due to the competition between objects housed in the same gallery.'³³ A view of the street scenes as nothing but distraction effects, however, would do little to account for their positive reception as discussed in Part I.

It is more convincing to suggest that this form of display, distinct as it is from the other parts of the museums discussed here, encourages an entirely separate viewing practice, which we may describe as 'browsing.' Browsing – a form of moving and looking taking in the whole scene while surveying the individual aspects in an exploratory fashion, selecting for further attention those items with personal appeal – takes its cue from the looking and moving behaviour of the window-shopper of the high street, or the characters in a Grimshaw painting, rather than the glancing/gazing museum visitor. It is the behaviour of the character of the *flâneur*, discussed

³² Andrew Melton, 'Visitor Behaviour in Museums: Some Early Research in Environmental Design', *Human Factors* October 1972, 14 (5), pp. 393-403; Edward S. Robinson, *The Behaviour of the Museum Visitor* (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 1928)

³³ Melton 1972, p. 397

in Chapter One. This is precisely what the designers and curators of the street scenes encouraged and continue to encourage. Their scripts place the visitor in an environment that feels like the streets outside and thereby prompt a form of meaning-making akin to the pedestrian speech acts of de Certeau's narratives of footsteps.

The narrative construction of the urban pedestrian was clearly encouraged by the guide books written for York Castle in the 1950s by the local historian and travel writer G. Bernard Wood. Wood used the examples of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and the so-called 'Versailles Time-Slip,' in which two English women in 1901 claimed to have witnessed the court of Marie Antoinette at Trianon, as Victorian parallels to what he saw as the unique offer of York Castle's street scene: to step back into the past.³⁴ As Wood described the narrative of footsteps on York Castle's streets:

It is when you pass from Alderman's Walk into Kirkgate that the full panoramic effect of the Street is revealed. Here is the hub of things; the focal point of some bygone community that comes to life with every step you take.³⁵

As with de Certeau or Stewart's understanding of narratives of urban space as unfolding partially, one moment at a time, as the pedestrian moves in their personal tour, so too did Wood here emphasise how the success of York Castle's streets lay in the ability of the narrative to unfold gradually in turning from one part of the street (the relatively narrow, low ceilinged Alderman's Walk) into another (the wider expanse of Kirkgate). As Hill observed of the nineteenth-century international exhibition streets, the design of the streets as networks of smaller streets with turns and cul-de-sacs encouraged a less purposeful, more browsing-focused, form of moving and looking. It is no coincidence that the later examples at Abbey House and the Thackray Museum have both been made up of linked courts and yards rather than a single straight street, while York Castle has continuously added its own side streets and alleyways. One of the Thackray Museum development team

³⁴ Wood 1950, p. 3; G. Bernard Wood, *Princess Mary Court* (York: William Sessions Ltd., 1951), p. 5

³⁵ Wood 1950, p. 21

emphasised the structural difference between the street scene and other museum galleries by arguing that: ‘Very often in a formal museum gallery you can see all around the room, you can see all the things that lie ahead, which diverts your attention. The way that the street is set up at Thackray, it’s in about three or four different mini-sections, which [...] focuses your attention to the bit you’re in.’³⁶ Thus, he acknowledged the potential for the glancing/gazing dichotomy elsewhere in the museum, but the structure of the street encouraged a different form of looking.

As far as Wood was concerned, the purposeful, diligent movement and attention required for Rees Leahy’s glancing/gazing dynamic was not the role of the street scene or its visitors at York Castle. Instead, his script for the street’s visitor prompted: ‘Let us saunter through the Court and exchange the time o’ day with the cordwainer and the clockmaker, the bookseller, the saddler, and one or two others who, as it were, loiter in the shadows...’³⁷ This ‘sauntering’ attitude feels similar to the lounging and wandering which Rees Leahy claimed was discouraged as poor museum visitor behaviour, but here was actually encouraged as the way to perform the role of the time-travelling pedestrian. More recent guide books have been less poetic, but have continued to be clear in their prompt that visitors should view their staged shops as they would real streets of shops rather than the vitrine displays in the rest of the museum, writing that: ‘On either side of the street visitors may do their window shopping in authentic Victorian shops.’³⁸ It is this sauntering, window-shopping form of moving and looking that is here referred to as ‘browsing’ and forms the basis of how each of the museums discussed here expects their visitors to behave.

Just as with guide books, museums’ promotional leaflets also provide examples of the scripts which curators and designers encourage their visitors to follow and of certain visitors held up as exemplars of ideal visiting behaviour. The example in Figure 5.6 shows how the current leaflet

³⁶ Interview TM D2, 10.11.15

³⁷ Wood 1951, p. 5

³⁸ Josie Sheppard, Sherri Steel and Keith Matthews, *York Castle Museum Guidebook* (York: Maxiprint, 2000), p. 14

promoting York Castle Museum seeks to script their audience's visit. As with the earlier guide books, the leaflet prompts visitors to step physically as well as imaginatively into the display when they tell the visitor to 'step back in time.' The language of the leaflet encourages visitors both to immerse themselves in the various sensory modalities that make up corporeal engagement with their surroundings – 'soak up the sights, sounds, and smells of Victorian York' – and to write their own narrative of the exhibition space through exploration – 'take a journey of discovery.' Perhaps most significant in terms of pointing to what the museum considers to be a model of how to visit the street, however, is its choice of endorsement tagline: a quotation from the author Kate Atkinson describing the museum and its street as 'a place of miracles and wonders.'



"A PLACE OF MIRACLES AND WONDERS" Kate Atkinson, best-selling author

WELCOME TO YORK CASTLE MUSEUM!

In 1938, York Castle Museum opened its doors to the public, transforming the abandoned female prison on the site of York Castle into a ground-breaking visitor attraction.

Step back in time with original, pioneering displays and see how the museum has continued to build on the traditions of its founder, Dr Kirk, as we celebrate our 80th Anniversary!

From a recreated Victorian street to infamous criminals and cutting-edge costume collections; history comes to life at the award-winning York Castle Museum.

Discover more at yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk

TRAVEL BACK IN TIME...

Take a journey of discovery to our world-famous recreated indoor Victorian street, Kirkgate.

Soak up the sights, sounds, and smells of Victorian York as you explore its cobbled streets and alleyways.

Visit shops packed with fascinating objects – from luxurious costumes to tasty traditional sweets and the pharmacist's unlikely 'cures'.

From the luxury of the rich to a darker world of poverty and disease, see how York's 19th century residents lived, learned and entertained themselves.

Figure 5.6: Extract from York Castle Museum promotional leaflet (2018)

Atkinson, who was born and raised in York, first rose to prominence with her 1995 debut novel *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, a semi-autobiographical saga of a York family across five decades of the twentieth century, the title of which refers to York Castle although the museum itself plays no part in the novel's narrative. It is not the fictional narrative of

Atkinson's novel that is of interest here, but rather her real-world endorsement of the museum. The 'place of miracles and wonders' quotation, which has been used frequently in the museum's leaflets and other marketing material in the 2010s, appeared not in the novel itself but rather a 2008 interview with *The Guardian* in which Atkinson explained her fascination with the museum and why she paid tribute to it in the novel's title. In the interview, Atkinson explained that the title had originated in a dream in which she was walking through the museum at night and 'the objects sprang to life.' Atkinson recalled that:

I visited [the museum] regularly from an early age, walking with my father from our shop, which, like the Lennoxes' shop [...] sold medical and surgical supplies and was similarly located in Stonegate. [...] That walk took us through ancient streets so freighted with history that they can barely carry the burden. My father knew every shortcut there was, and those secret snickets and alleyways are an old and familiar groove in my brain.

The museum was a place of miracles and wonders for me, where the rooms and streets of the past were brought to life in a way that was (and still is) thrilling. My imagination was undoubtedly nurtured by those visits.³⁹

Just as Atkinson's memory narrative elided her own family's York shop with that of the semi-autobiographical Lennox family from the novel, so too did the sense of walking with her father in the real streets of York, 'so freighted with history', merge into walking in 'the streets of the past [...] brought to life' within the museum. An indication of how the museum experience spreads beyond the doors of the building, walking in the real historic streets of the city became, for Atkinson, part of the same memory narrative inscribed by her footsteps as exploring the reconstructed streets of the museum. She remembered the experience as two aspects of the same thing. The pedestrian speech acts that construct these narratives were functionally equivalent, one leading into the other.

³⁹ Kate Atkinson, 'Guardian book club: Night in the museum', *The Guardian* 1 November 2008 [online] <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/nov/01/atkinson>> accessed 30 January 2019

In the prominence of her name and words in the museum's marketing, Atkinson is thus interpellated as the ideal example of a visitor to the museum street, her vision of visiting the street the recommended way of visiting. Atkinson's way of viewing and visiting the museum street can be seen as the realisation of the ideals of Frank Pick and J.B. Morrell outlined in Chapter One. The way in which she imagined her family's shop on historic Stonegate and the shops on the museum's Kirkgate together as one in her dream was fitting to Pick's demand that the displays in the museum 'must be read in conjunction with the shop windows in the town.' It fit with Morrell's own dream in *The City of Our Dreams* that the museum should form one part of the civic identity and pride of the city's people, that the historic city street within the museum should help to construct the identity of the city streets and their people outside. Other museum visitors are prompted by this script to follow Atkinson's lead and walk the city street of the museum like the city streets outside.

This distinction between visiting and viewing practices on the street scene as compared to the other areas of the museums was a recurring point made by museum staff in interview. Staff members frequently drew a distinction between how design and scripting encouraged visitor behaviour on their museums' street scenes, and on the other galleries within the same museums. They outlined a difference in the various galleries' design and structure, a difference in meaning-making when viewing a succession of separate individual museum objects from without compared with exploring a single complex scene from within. Abbey House's curator, for example, explained that: 'We have exhibition galleries and more cased displays upstairs and in those we can do slightly more lateral interpretation and also explore and explain objects individually far more. The shops: it's an experiential way of doing it.'⁴⁰ A learning officer responded in similar terms, emphasising the value of maintaining a difference between the two approaches: 'We do try and keep it distinct, so we've deliberately not put labels and interpretation into shops and houses. I think that makes it more immersive. I think that makes it easier to relate to people rather than a

⁴⁰ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

display.⁴¹ Notably, the learning officer suggested that the 'immersive' street scene is something distinct from 'a display.'

A similar line was taken by a curator at York Castle, who described how 'the rest of the museum is display cases and rooms and set ups that you can see but not necessarily walk into,' noting that outside the reconstructed period rooms upstairs 'the visitors have a bit of distance between themselves and the museum objects.' This was contrasted with how 'you walk into Kirkgate and Kirkgate is a Victorian street that you can experience and go into. It's meant to be an immersive experience.'⁴² Once again, here is a contrast between the idea of 'display', of something that requires the visitor to be a detached onlooker from without, and 'immersion,' a scene that the visitor can enter within. Kirkgate is a space that is understood through how one must 'walk into' it. It can be understood only partly when seen from without, its final meanings must be made by pedestrian speech acts from within.

Curatorial staff at the Thackray Museum also used the language of 'immersion' to suggest the distinction between their street and the rest of the museum, between making meaning from without and within. 'I suppose the rest of our museum is quite a standard display. So, we've got display cabinets with objects and an interpretation panel next to it, whereas the street is much more immersive,' one member of the curatorial team argued, further expanding on this point to explain that a 'more immersive' approach means that 'by recreating a scene, we're putting people into that environment and asking them to imagine themselves there.'⁴³ That the Thackray street was always intended to prompt different visitor behaviours from the rest of the museum is clear from the similar rhetoric adopted by one of the development team: 'It's more of an immersive experience. There's a potential for feeling part of, rather than standing apart from.'⁴⁴ The intent was to make

⁴¹ Interview AHM L1, 14.05.15

⁴² Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

⁴³ Interview TM C1, 19.05.16

⁴⁴ Interview TM D2, 10.11.15

the visitor feel themselves part of the scene. As the scene is a street, the visitor is intended to feel themselves a pedestrian.

Visitors are intentionally prompted by the museums' scripts to pursue their visit to the other galleries in all three museums in accordance with established good museum visiting practice, while on the street scenes switching to assume the role of the browsing pedestrian, a sort of museum *flâneur*. In order to assess whether this scripting is successfully followed by the visitor audience once they step through the proscenium and into the scene, it is important to take a closer look at visitor behaviour. Are these streets also successful sites of a co-production of meaning between curators and staggers, and their visitor audience, as Hill suggested the nineteenth-century exhibition streets had been?

The Browsing Visitor

York Castle, Abbey House, and the Thackray Museum all adopt a linear recommended route through their various galleries (in part as a way of managing the flow of visitors through the occasionally narrow spaces of the historic buildings that house all three museums). The way that York Castle is laid out specifically to encourage visitors to see Kirkgate from without first and later from within is an example of this linear layout. In their non-street galleries visitor movement and the meaning which it makes is enforced by progress in a set direction, which is further fixed by developments in the narrative script of the interpretive text following this linear, often chronological, route. Visitors have some flexibility in which objects or displays they view within this linear path, but they are consistently pushed in one direction. The design and layout of the street scenes, however, is different. While they begin and end by connecting to the linear recommended visitor path of the rest of their museum, the streets themselves are more open, offer more opportunities for visitors to take different physical paths through them and, therefore, different intellectual or emotional paths.

Figure 5.7 shows a plan of the layout of York Castle's Kirkgate and its attendant courts and snickets. Visitors whose path through the museum has

previously been linear arrive down the stairs from the previous gallery, the 'Life' gallery. At this point, however, they are faced with a variety of different paths. They may turn onto Alderman's Walk and follow it round onto the wide central part of Kirkgate, they may go straight ahead down the narrow snicket to the reconstructed cocoa room, or cross Alderman's Walk and proceed down the other snicket and walk by the working-class domestic interior. A more exploratory form of audience interaction is prompted from the moment of stepping into the street scene. Several museum staff noted this distinction and suggested that it had indeed resulted in a different kind of visitor behaviour on York Castle's street compared with other galleries elsewhere in the museum. A learning officer explained that the appeal of the street's layout is 'the idea of it being a little bit of a rabbit warren, [...] creating your own path, a bit of self-discovery, a bit of "it's up to me where I go in the street." I think that's probably quite unique in the museum.' While acknowledging that for some visitors this may be an uncomfortable structural shift, suggesting that some may ask 'where do I go next? I haven't got a route set out for me,' she observed that for most visitors it was 'refreshing' to leave behind the strictly structured 'corridor approach,' calling it 'a different pace [...] of visiting.'⁴⁵ Meanwhile, one of the costumed interpreters who works directly with the street's visitors on a daily basis observed: 'It's sort of free for visitors to just explore on their own. [...] To me it has a different atmosphere in it to the rest of the museum.'⁴⁶ Visitors free to 'just explore on their own' were seen as liberated from the structured experience offered elsewhere, instead embracing the option to write their own narrative of the space by 'creating their own path.' Visitor-facing museum workers thus observe a greater tendency in visitors to the street to inscribe their own narrative of the Victorian past through personal exploration.

⁴⁵ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16. Chapter Four goes into greater detail concerning those visitors who did find the experience unexpected or uncomfortable

⁴⁶ Interview YCM F2, 22.09.16

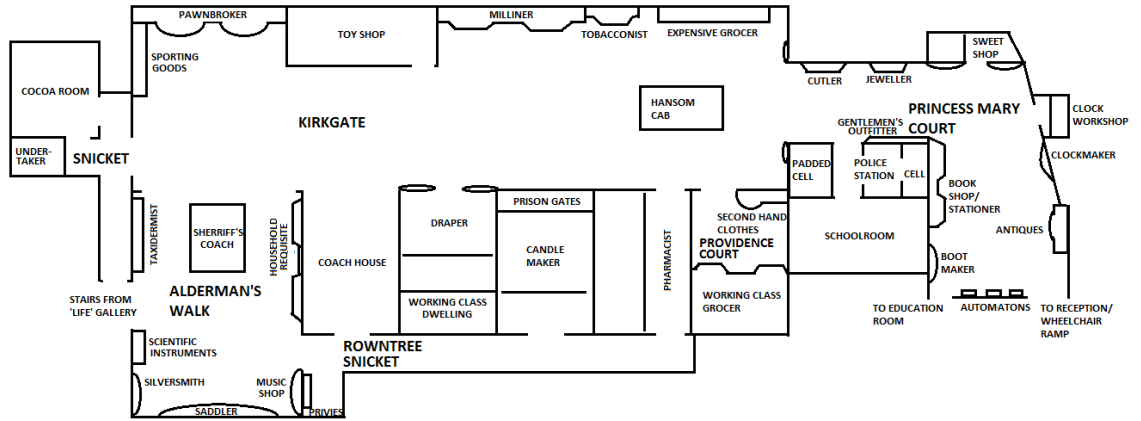


Figure 5.7: Plan of York Castle's street scenes after the 2012 renovations⁴⁷

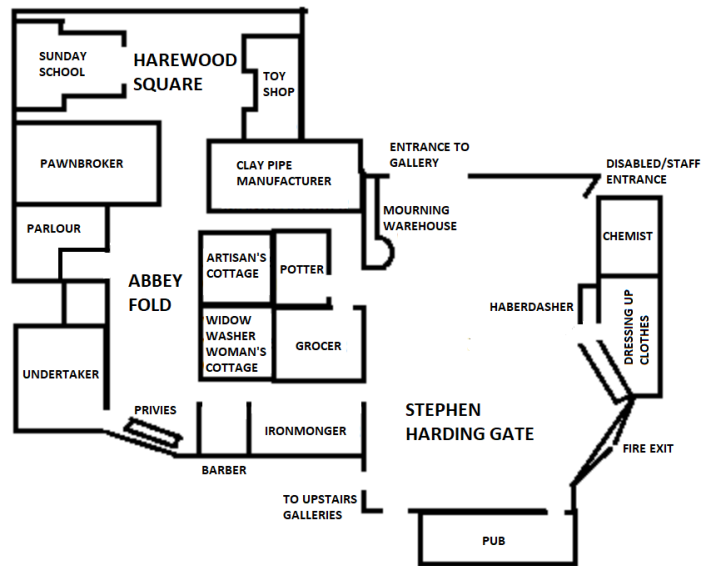


Figure 5.8: Plan of Abbey House's street scenes after the 2001 renovations

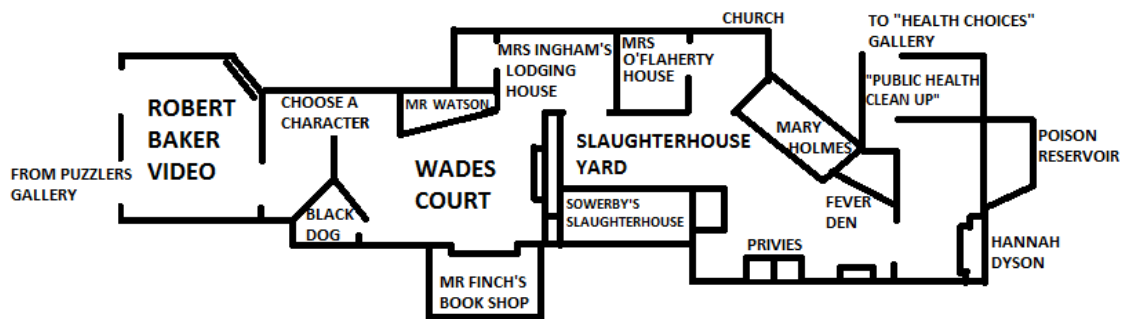


Figure 5.9: Plan of Thackray Museum Leeds 1842 Street

⁴⁷ In 2017, after the on-site audience research was carried out for this thesis, the museum swapped the locations of the toy and sweet shops.

A similar layout to that seen in Figure 5.7 can also be found at Abbey House, albeit on a smaller scale. As shown in Figure 5.8, visitors enter Abbey House's streets on the largest street, Stephen Harding Gate, but have various options for which way to proceed, either along the main street, into the ironmonger's shop, through which they may access Abbey Fold, or through the narrow alleyway leading toward Harewood Square. The Thackray Museum's Leeds 1842 Street, as shown in the plan in Figure 5.9, does present its visitors with a linear path through its three connected yards. Indeed, a recommended route through the gallery, staged as a line of whitewash dripped from a bucket, has been incorporated into the design to lead visitors into the next part of the gallery. This does not, however, necessarily mean that the visitors to the Leeds 1842 Street will follow this path, as recorded visitor behaviour demonstrates.

Figure 5.10 shows the path of dripped whitewash through the Leeds 1842 Street, while Figure 5.11 shows example paths taken by actual visitors recorded as part of this study. As can be seen from these examples, the real paths that visitors take through the Leeds 1842 Street rarely follow the recommended route laid out in whitewash. Instead, visitors travelled towards what caught their attention before doubling back or looping around on themselves, sometimes travelling the same part of the street multiple times, on other occasions ignoring or skipping whole areas of the street, even, in the case of Visitor Group 19, leaving the street by the same point at which they entered. As Figure 5.12 and Figure 5.13 show, in the absence of a recommended linear path, and confronted with the variety of options for directions through which to move through the street scene, visitors at Abbey House and York Castle were even more likely to explore through their own highly distinct, unique paths. As with de Certeau's theory of maps and tours, the black lines of the plan of the street scenes' layouts remain constant throughout each visit shown in Figures 5.11, 5.12 and 5.13, but the green lines of each group's tour show individual paths through which the footsteps of each group plot their own gradually unfolding pedestrian narratives.

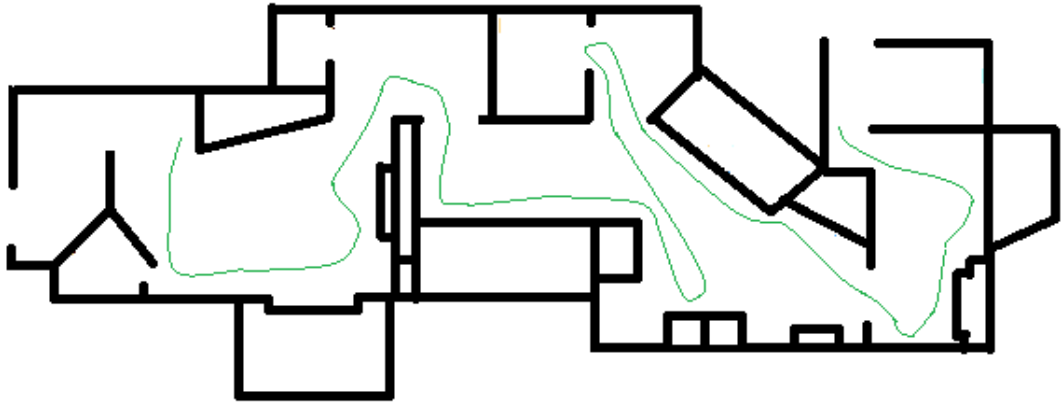
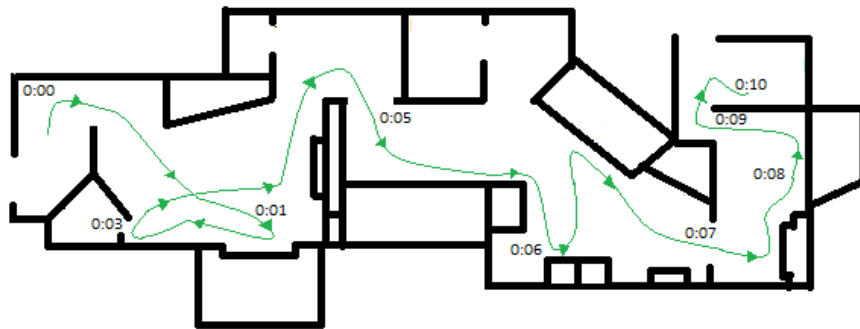
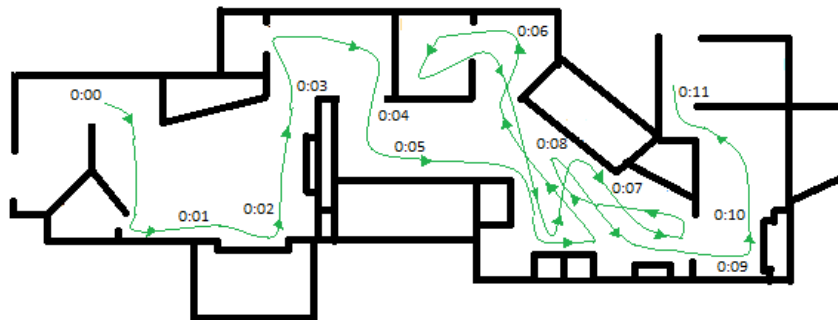


Figure 5.10: Leeds 1842 Street, recommended visitor route

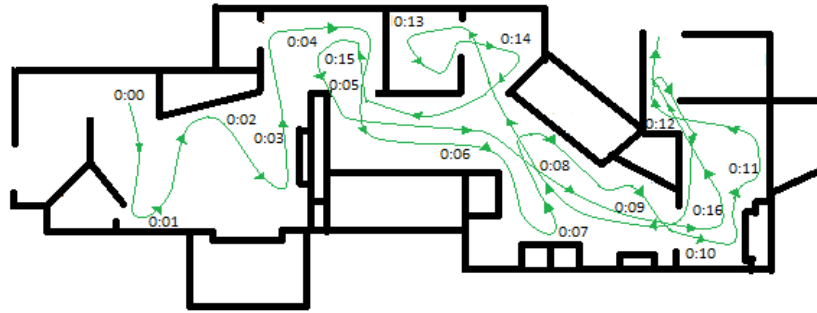
VISITOR ROUTE
VISITOR GROUP 1



VISITOR ROUTE
VISITOR GROUP 4



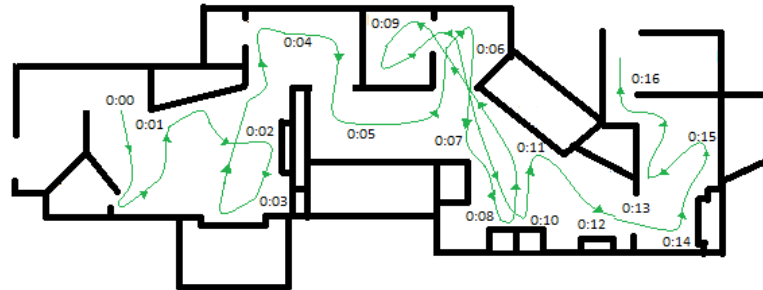
VISITOR ROUTE
VISITOR GROUP 6



VISITOR ROUTE
VISITOR GROUP 9



VISITOR ROUTE
VISITOR GROUP 11



VISITOR ROUTE
VISITOR GROUP 19

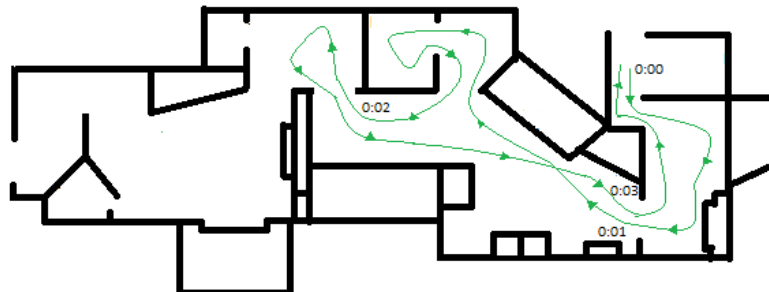
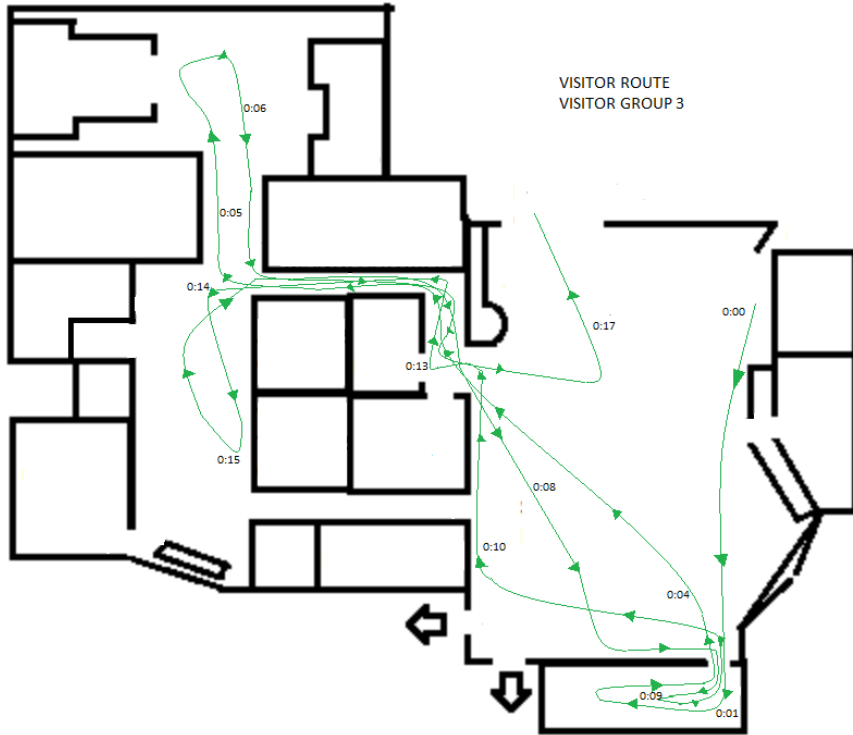


Figure 5.11: Leeds 1842 Street, sample visitor paths



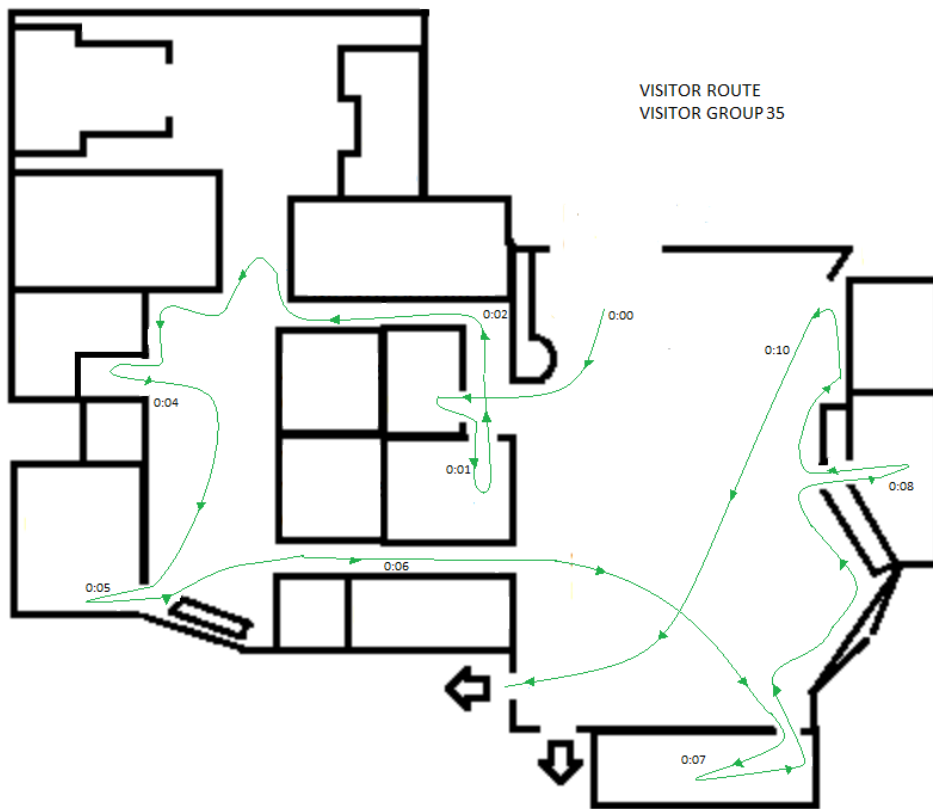
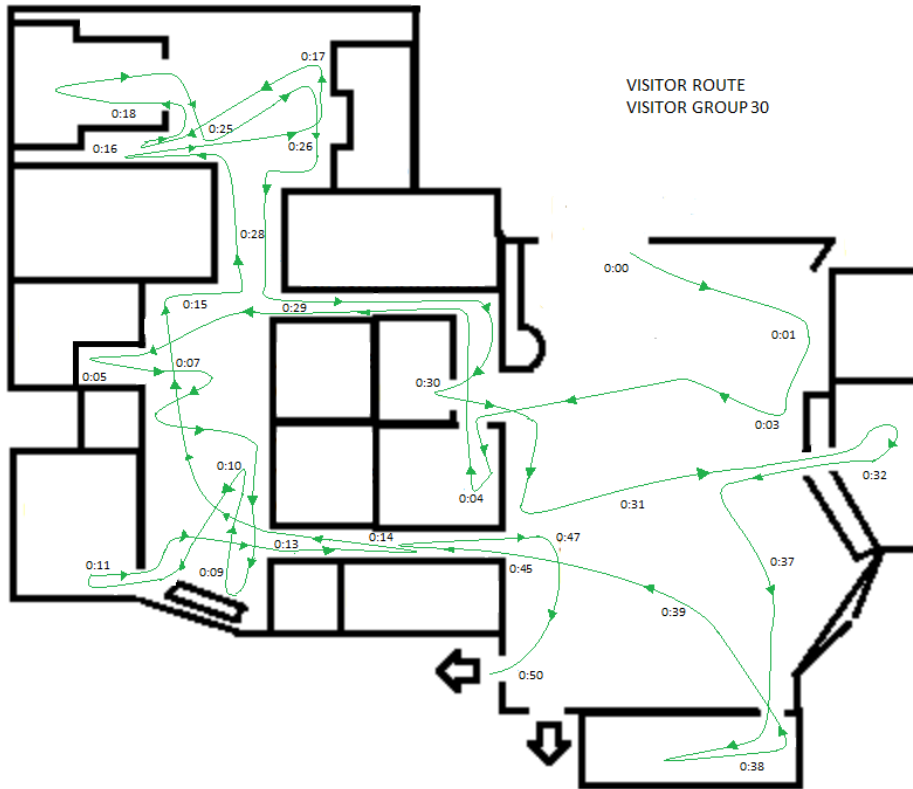
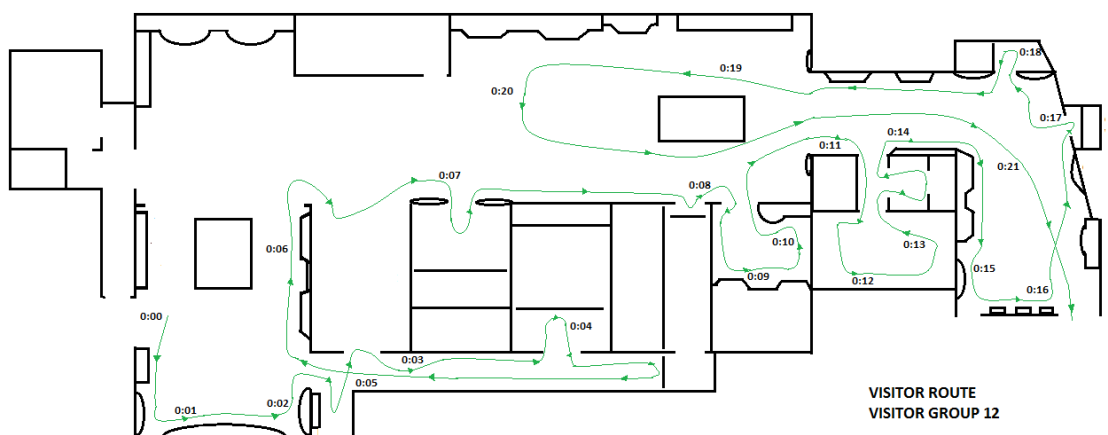
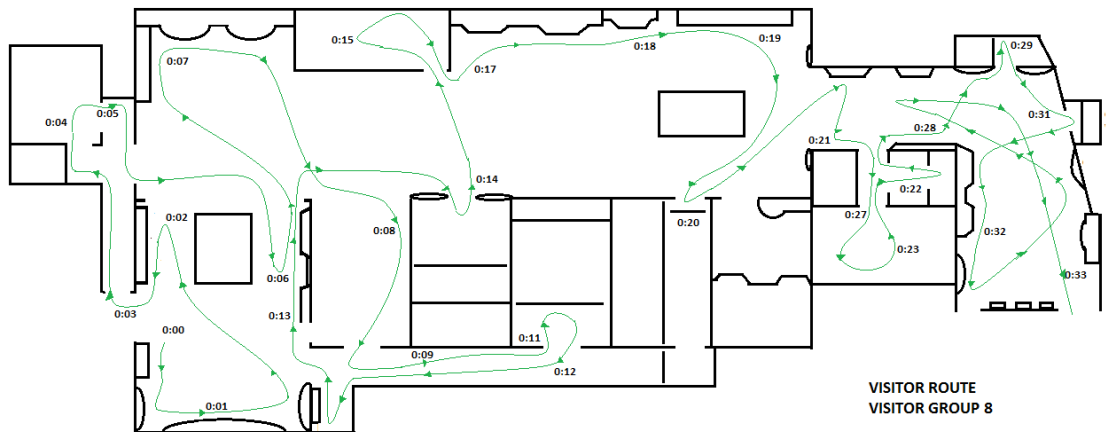
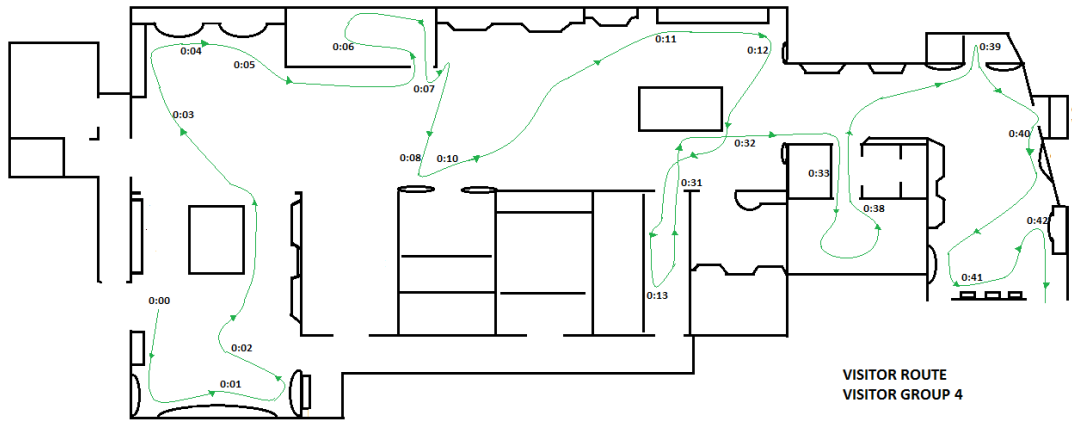


Figure 5.12: Abbey House streets, sample visitor paths



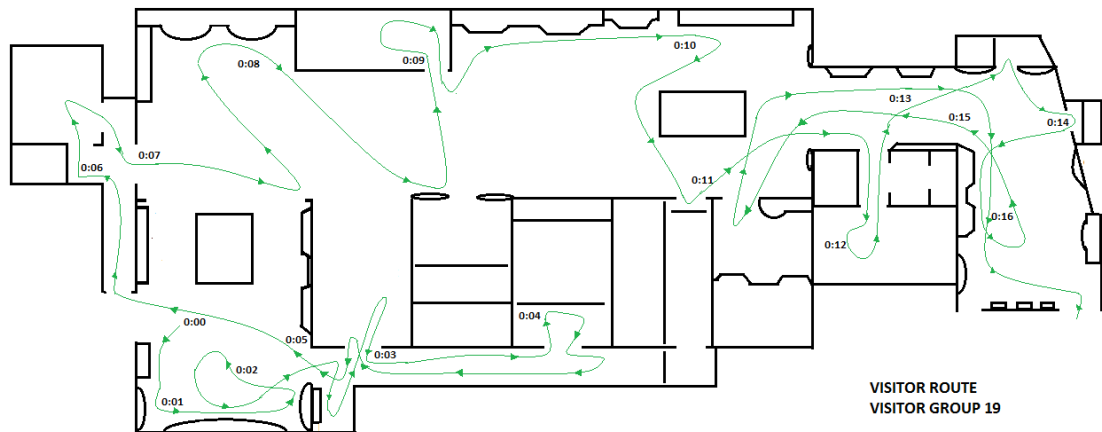


Figure 5.13: York Castle streets, sample visitor paths

Staff that work on the street scenes at all three museums identified this distinct form of visitor behaviour and suggested that the museum street giving the feeling of a real street outside encouraged a different set of social rules and cues for visitors, successfully prompting them to adopt the browsing behaviour of pedestrians on a real street. One Thackray Museum learning officer suggested that, immersed in what felt like the familiar surroundings of a street, visitor behaviour tends to become more street-like than following the traditional rules and script of a museum environment. She suggested that: ‘Because people are used to being in a street – a normal street – people might behave more like they’re in a street when they’re in the fake street than they might act like they’re in a museum.’ She explained that this could be observed:

in the way they move around in there. When people are walking around in a museum, they tend to walk along in a straight line and look at the things they’re going past. In the [museum] street, people walk around like you might walk around a street. So, they’ll go up to the butcher’s and have a look around it and then they might double back on themselves and have a look at something on the other side of the room.⁴⁸

This staff member suggested a certain type of visitor movement that is typical of ‘walking around in a museum,’ movement which is linear and sequential, following a script laid out by the gallery. However, within the

⁴⁸ Interview TM L1, 19.05.16

Leeds 1842 Street, she saw visitors' movement as far from linear, involving crossing back on themselves or ignoring whole areas if their browsing attention has been drawn elsewhere, a set of pedestrian speech acts that she tied directly to people's style of moving and looking performed on the real city streets.

Costumed interpreters on York's Kirkgate also observed that the different unwritten rules of the traditional gallery of vitrines and the street scene had indeed resulted in visitors behaving on the museum street like pedestrians outside. One interpreter observed that even though 'the glass cases are still there [...] disguised as window frames,' visitors do not perceive or respond to them as such. Instead, 'they feel like they're walking down a real street with real people around them.' Because of this, he concluded: 'They do behave differently, especially young families. They tend to run around a little bit more. [...] There are times in the summer holidays when it starts to feel a little bit like a playground.'⁴⁹ There is a bodily shift in the way that visitors move through the street compared to the rest of the museum. They follow different paths, carry themselves differently, move at different paces. As a learning officer at Abbey House Museum suggested, visitors, particularly children, 'start to hold themselves differently, they talk differently' as they assume the role of a Victorian pedestrian. 'They start to clippy-clop round the street, even though they haven't changed their shoes or anything, they've just put a shawl and a mob cap on.'⁵⁰ According to both these staff members at different museums the unique environment of the street prompts a form of visitor behaviour that is unlike that apparent in a traditional museum context. Even the simple act of walking is distinct on the street scene compared with other galleries. It is observably more similar to that of a pedestrian on a real street.

These observations are borne out by the conversations recorded between visitors. Visitor conversations at all three sites were peppered with questions and suggestions about which direction to go next or which parts of the street to enter, such as: 'Have we been down here yet? Let's go down

⁴⁹ Interview YCM F3, 22.09.16

⁵⁰ Interview AHM L1, 14.05.15

this way' (AHM Visitor Group 7), 'Can we go through there, here? [...]' [Reading] "To Abbey Fold." Woah, look at that' (AHM Visitor Group 13), 'We'll go round here and then up that way' (YCM Visitor Group 8), 'Just go through the post house and you get to the wee back alley' (YCM Visitor Group 9), or 'Can we go back into it? I think we've missed a bit' (TM Visitor Group 6). In all these cases, visitors were plotting their own course through the myriad choices offered by the street layout, deciding which way their pedestrian narratives would develop next, whether they would build their story through Abbey Fold or 'the wee back alley.' These conversations are also indicative of how the construction of meaning and narrative requires negotiation, not just in terms of co-production between museum and visitor, but also between visitors within their visiting groups. The paths of pedestrian narrative construction are discussed and agreed between visitors, as can be seen below in the discussions of some of the visitors to Abbey House.

Man – Shall we go back out on the street there? We haven't seen half of the shops on the other side, have we?

Woman – Oh, yeah. I don't know which way round we go, I just want to have a look here.

I'm not sure which way round we're meant to go.

Man – I don't know. What I meant is: do the first bit and then move to the second bit.

Woman – OK. (AHM Visitor Group 23)

The script provided by the museum's *mise-en-scène* provides the visitors with a series of possible narrative structures through which, by choosing their path at any individual junction, a different pedestrian narrative can unfold. As suggested by the York Castle learning officer quoted earlier, these visitors were at some points uncomfortable with the shift in the unwritten visiting rules, questioning 'which way round we're meant to go.' Their decision to enter into a shop rather than go down one of various paths around or between streets represents another step in their unfolding pedestrian narrative. Exploring inside what they were previously looking in at from outside is also indicative of the earlier discussed appeal of looking in from without, and then being able to explore that same space from within.

Visitors were conscious of the difference in this offer from the more traditional role of the audience as detached spectator. When they did explicitly spell out how they thought that the street scenes' approach differed from other audience or spectator activities, it was this difference between seeing from without and from within that was mentioned. One Abbey House visitor, for example, enthused to her companions that: 'I like that you can actually go in a bit, because normally you're just looking through a window' (AHM Visitor Group 22). Here there is a clearly expressed preference for the active engagement of the pedestrian entering the scene rather than observing from without, as the visitor would do in other parts of the museum. For other visitors, the variety of possible pathways through the gallery was also worthy of praise. Visitors to Kirkgate responded positively to the different paths that they could explore. One mother encouraged her family by excitably noting: 'Gosh, there's lots of places to explore, aren't there?' (YCM Visitor Group 10). In another exchange, two women visiting Kirkgate began their visit with the following conversation:

Woman 1 – It feels like a maze round here. Is this what it was like?

Woman 2 – Shall we get lost? (YCM Visitor Group 2)

In both cases the visitors were excited to be stepping into a different kind of museum environment and looking forward to progressing through the street in a way that was different from what they had been doing when first looking down on it at the start of their visit. Exploring or 'getting lost' gave them an appealing chance to throw themselves into the museum's display and find their preferred narrative within it. Not perceiving their own acts of moving and looking through the lens of the glancing/gazing dichotomy described by Rees Leahy, street scene visitors tended to articulate their own movement more in the terminology of exploratory browsing. 'We're just browsing' (AHM Visitor Group 9), one visitor told a costumed interpreter when he approached them on Abbey House's Stephen Harding Gate, while in another group visiting the same street a father asked his children 'shall we go in and have a peruse?' (AHM Visitor Group 36). The language here is clearly that of the window-

shopper, the strolling *flâneur*, browsing and perusing, not a museum visitor who is giving focused attention to specific individual objects or displays.

Walking not Watching

In Chapter One, the curator, amateur dramatist and museum theorist Trevor Thomas suggested that the museum curator should serve as scenographer with their displays functioning like miniature theatres to tell choreographed stories in three dimensions. That chapter highlighted the Victorian street scenes within Yorkshire museums as examples of Thomas's theory of museological *mise-en-scène* in practice. However, while the museum street scene does remind one of a theatrical space in its staging, it has a crucially distinct relationship with its audience and prompts a distinct and relatively unique form of spectatorship. In seeking to reassure her granddaughter, who was worried about the darker and more sinister aspects of the Thackray Museum's Leeds 1842 Street, one visitor suggested that: 'It's like a theatre scene. That's all it is. It's nothing different from that, apart from we're walking around it instead of sitting and watching it on stage' (TM Visitor Group 23). This explanation, given by one more experienced visitor to a newer one, is perhaps the best summation of how the Victorian street scenes and their audiences relate to other forms of three-dimensional narrative construction. When seeking to provide a reassuringly familiar context to help her granddaughter relax, it was not the display approach of other parts of this museum or others to which she related the street scene. Instead, she described the *mise-en-scène* of the museum street as familiar to her nervous granddaughter in terms of being like the scenography of a theatre set with them, the visitors, as the audience. She then clarified the essential difference between their familiar role as a theatre audience and the different kind of audience role which they were to take on here: they were not to remain statically spectating from without as the audience had for Daguerre's diorama of Unterseen or Boucicault's staged *Streets of London*, they would instead view from within, 'walking around it' in a series of

pedestrian speech acts that would grow to construct their own specific narrative of the scene.

A stage in which the audience member becomes part of the scene, a progression from the narrative of the complete panoramic view of the miniature to the pedestrian view from within the gigantic scene: this is how the various visitor scripts from the museum's layout to its promotional material and guide books prompt the construction of narrative from street scenes. While the other galleries in the museums discussed here are designed to provide a more traditional and even didactic form of interpretation, the streets are designed and scripted with this different form of narrative in mind. Here the browsing and perusing behaviour of the pedestrian-spectator is what the museum encourages. Just as with the ideal visitor experience exemplified by Kate Atkinson's imaginary journey through the real city of York and the reconstructed city within the museum – a journey in which the streets of the past inside the museum were brought vividly to life through her perambulations – visitors are immersed in their environment and prompted to build narrative through exploration. This results in a co-produced meaning, negotiated between the museum scenographer and the active visitor audience.

However, it must be noted that, although many examples can be found of visitors constructing narrative through pedestrian speech acts on the museum Victorian street scene, this does not mean that the museums' desired scripts are followed by every visitor in every situation. In fact, there are numerous reasons why a visitor may reject or defy the museums' scripts, resulting in variations in meaning-making and this will be explored in the chapters which follow. The theme of introducing the body into the discourse of the museum gallery is further explored in Chapter Four, which provides a counterpoint to the demonstration in this chapter of successful pedestrian co-production of meaning by highlighting the ways in which placing the visitor's body inside the exhibit can be as much a barrier as an assistance to successful meaning-making. The experience of immersing oneself inside a gallery full of stimulation across multiple senses can prove overwhelming, especially for visitors who are not neurotypical, as Chapter Four will explore.

Chapter Four

Distress, Discomfort, and Disobedient Bodies

In addition to her discussion on museums' scopic regimes in *Museum Bodies*, Helen Rees Leahy noted that 'the history of corporeality in the museum is also a tale of recalcitrant bodies that have rebuked, resisted or ignored the museum's regulations and exhibition script.'¹ Once we have, as in the previous chapter, acknowledged the importance of placing the visitor's body into the exhibition and understood how meaning and narrative are constructed through the visitor's corporeal presence in and movement through the exhibition space, then we must also accept that that body can be a barrier to a satisfying or meaningful museum experience. Rees Leahy argued that, just as they can provide inspiration, edification and pleasure, it is also the case that 'museums have made people tired, angry and sick.'² She referred to these as examples of 'disobedient bodies' in the museum. Such disobedient bodies in the museum street scene are the basis of this chapter, which argues that negative responses to the museum environment can militate against the possibility of the audience-constructed narrative. The nature of the street scene as immersive sensescape may be the very thing which engages a diverse audience with the past displayed by the museum, but that same sensescape can equally prompt visitors to feel overwhelmed, stressed, or scared. It is possible to go further, though, than Rees Leahy's observation that museums can make people tired, angry, and sick. We can note that visitors' personal contexts may well include coming to the museum when already experiencing such discomfort and that this can play a significant role in damaging their museum experience. This is especially true of visitors who come to the museum with pre-existing conditions or disabilities. Rees Leahy chose not to discuss disabled visitors specifically in the pages of *Museum Bodies*, arguing that the disregard for the specific needs of disabled visitors has, rather, been symptomatic of a wider disregard

¹ Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 7

² Rees Leahy 2012, p. 7

for the bodily needs of any museum visitor.³ This chapter takes an opposite but complementary view, that a greater focus on the needs of their disabled visitors would also improve accessibility in the museum for all visitors. In particular, this chapter places the focus on museum visitors who are neurodiverse. This focus has been chosen as those visitors are among those for whom immersion in a complex multisensory environment can be overwhelming rather than beneficial and they are a largely under-researched group within museological literature.

That disobedient bodies amongst any visitor group can disrupt visitors from either following museum scripts or developing their own is apparent in frequent examples of recorded conversations on the museum street scenes. In the following two examples family groups of visitors attempted to make meaning from the toy shop window display on Abbey House's Harewood Square. In both cases, however, the distress of the child visitor proved a barrier to creating or following a successful meaning-making script.

Mother - You know on that little round table there?
 Daughter - Yeah.
 Mother - It's got a blue thing on, a dome shape.
 Daughter - Mmhmm.
 Mother - They used to have things called tea cosies and they'd put that on to keep the kettle warm. Not the kettle, the teapot, sorry.
 Daughter - Can we try and finish the street quickly, I need the toilet. [...]
 Mother - Which dolly would you pick?
 Daughter - I need the toilet.
 Father - We'll go through now.
 Mother - We're gonna go through now and you can go. (AHM Visitor Group 27)

Daughter - Mummy! The dolls are scary! Mummy, the dolls are scary! The dolls are scaring me!
 Mother - Oh yeah, they've got scary eyes.
 Daughter - Scary. Come on, let's go now. [...]
 Mother - Have you seen that little stage up there?
 Daughter - I want to go now.
 Mother - Yeah, let's go. [...]
 Daughter - I don't like the scary dolls.

³ Rees Leahy 2012, p. 11

Mother - Oh, you're frightened of the dolls? (AHM Visitor Group 30)

In both conversations the mothers tried to build a discussion around the objects in the shop window through which their daughters could construct meaning. They drew attention to specific objects, accompanied by a short question or fact designed to elicit a response from the daughters that could build on their initial statements. The daughters, however, blocked the possibility of a developing conversation with responses that were non-committal ('mmhmm') or actively resistant to engaging with the display ('I want to go now'). The visceral reaction of distress at needing to use the toilet or feeling scared precluded a more intellectual reaction to the display. While the daughters had to repeat their complaints to prevent their mothers from continuing to talk at cross purposes to them, ultimately both conversations resolved themselves with the decision to leave, moving on without constructing any meaning from the display.

These conversations are cited here as just two examples of many similar conversations recorded between visitors on the museum street scenes in which distress or discomfort provided a barrier to following or creating scripts that would make meaning of the display. Across all three sites there were many similar examples of visitors failing to engage with displays as they were sick, tired, scared, in need of the toilet, hungry or in a hurry. They serve merely to point to how bodily and psychological barriers to meaning-making can potentially exist for all visitors at any time. This type of disobedient body when faced with performing the expected script would be equally present in a more traditional gallery space as in the reconstructed street scene or, indeed, for any person seeking to engage with any leisure pursuit. There are, however, areas in which the immersive multisensory environment of the street scene specifically may trigger visitor responses more than would be felt in other galleries and there are some visitors who may be more affected than others.

The museum sensescape: ‘A double-edged sword’?

As described in Chapter Three, the street scenes of York Castle, Abbey House and the Thackray Museum engage their visitors by immersing them within the museum display, through which they can then make meaning through corporeal exploration, something which is enhanced by the multiple sensory modalities contained within the streets. The street scenes do not just attract the visitor’s attentive gaze to a succession of objects, but rather surround them with visual stimuli and encourage a browsing approach to looking and walking, all while adding the possibility of touching and handling objects and providing audio and olfactory stimulation with soundtracks and perfume effects. Interacting with the museum environment via a variety of sensory modalities can be enormously beneficial in helping the construction of meaning in visitors who lack the ability to interact in specific ways (such as the use of touch and sound to enhance the understanding of visually impaired visitors). Such an abundance of sensory cues can also, however, prove overwhelming, especially for visitors who are hyper-sensitive to sensory stimulation, and thus prone to sensory overload. As one member of the Thackray Museum’s front of house team described it: ‘Someone’s going to always feel maybe a bit overwhelmed by it all [...] It does attract people as well. [...] It is a double-edged sword.’⁴

Twenty-first century museology has seen a sensory turn in which academics have come to suggest that museums should move beyond their traditional ‘ocularcentric’ focus on visual interaction and textual interpretation to embrace their potential as a sensescape incorporating all other senses to allow an understanding of the past through a form of embodied cognition. In *Museum Materialities* (2010), for example, Sandra H. Dudley argued that ‘undoing Cartesian mental/material distinctions, and re-emphasizing the mutual embeddedness of sensory modalities [and] sensible material qualities [...] has the potential to inform museum practice in creative ways.’⁵ Advocacy

⁴ Interview TM F2, 20.05.16

⁵ Sandra H. Dudley, ‘Museum materialities: Objects, sense and feeling’ in Sandra H. Dudley ed., *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 12. See also the idea of material historiography in Bill Brown, ‘Thing Theory’

of the use of additional sensory cues beyond the visual and textual has also been closely tied to the desire to provide greater access to non-traditional museum visitors. In particular, studies of museum access for blind and visually impaired visitors has stressed the value of haptic (active) touch in providing a different form of engagement with the museum collection rather than serving as a substitute for visual meaning-making. A grasp of elements such as texture, weight and temperature of objects provided by object handling opportunities may have been introduced to assist visually impaired visitors but are of benefit to all.⁶

Blind and visually impaired visitors have been central to arguments in favour of the museum sensescape, dating back at least as far as the 1913 MA Conference hosted by Sheppard in Hull (mentioned in Chapter One). At that event, the Director of Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery, J.A. Charlton Deas, presented a paper on providing museum access for blind visitors.⁷ Deas discussed practices which he had introduced at Sunderland including audio description of artwork and museum objects, tactile object handling and even raised the potential use of the sense of smell.⁸ In the century since Deas presented these ideas, progress towards a more multisensory approach to museum interpretation has been sporadic, but advocates for greater access for disabled visitors have continued to connect superior access with a greater variety of sensory modalities in the museum gallery, especially those concerned with access for blind and visually impaired visitors, who have had far more research devoted to them than any other disabled group.⁹ This theory is supported by the work of Art Beyond Sight, an

Critical Inquiry 28 (2001), pp. 1-22. The idea of the 'sensescape' as a counterpoint to the 'ocularcentricism' of the association of sight with reason can be seen in Constance Classen and David Howes, 'The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artifacts' in Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth Phillips eds, *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 192-222. See also Fiona Candlin, 'The Dubious Inheritance of Touch: Art history and museum access', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5 (2) (2006), pp. 139-45

⁶ Candlin (2006), p. 145; Fiona Candlin, 'Don't Touch! Hands Off!: Art, blindness and the conservation of expertise' in *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts* ed. by Elizabeth Pye (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), p. 91

⁷ J.A. Charlton Deas, 'The Showing of Museums and Art Galleries to the Blind', *Museums Journal* 13 (3), 1913, pp. 85-109

⁸ Deas (1913), p. 106

⁹ Serap Buyurgan, 'The Expectations of the Visually Impaired University Students from Museums', *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 9 (3), 2009, pp. 1191-204; Nina Levent,

American research institute who used focus groups with a number of blind and visually impaired visitors at museums. They found a strongly positive response to handling objects, but also an understanding that this represents a different experience from looking at them, a more emotional than intellectual connection, not equivalent to a sighted person's engagement with the object but not necessarily 'better' or 'worse.'¹⁰ The work of Art Beyond Sight led to the book *The Multisensory Museum* (2014), an interdisciplinary set of essays edited by Art Beyond Sight's director – art historian and museologist Nina Levent – along with Harvard Medical School Neurology Professor Alvaro Pascual-Leone. Their argument was that 'museum experience is a multi-layered journey that is proprioceptive, sensory, intellectual, aesthetic, and social' and will always be influenced by the visitor's sensory surroundings; thus it is useful for the museum to understand and harness the potential of multiple sensory modalities of interpretation.¹¹

Essays in *The Multisensory Museum* emphasised the neuroscientific basis of cognition as a multisensory process, in which objects are understood through processing multiple sensory cues in the same parts of the brain. A museum sensescape would result in 'more elaborative processing, thus enabling better understanding and improved recall of the museum experience and its intellectual content' and would therefore 'encourage a deeper public engagement with history.'¹² They stressed the need for meaning-making via the conjugation of senses, noting that: 'It is the combination (not the isolation) of the modalities that is key.'¹³ Emphasis was

Georgina Kleege, Joan Muyskens Pursley, 'Museum Experience and Blindness', *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33 (3), 2013; Simon Hayhoe, 'The Philosophical, Political and Religious Roots of Touch Exhibitions in 20th Century British Museums', *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33 (3), 2013

¹⁰ Christine Reich, Anna Lindgren-Streicher, Marta Beyer, Nina Levent, Joan Pursley, and Leigh Ann Mesiti, *Speaking Out on Art and Museums: A Study on the Needs and Preferences of Adults who are Blind or Have Low Vision* (Boston: Art Beyond Sight and Museum of Science, Boston, 2011), p. 38

¹¹ Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone, 'Introduction' in Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone eds, *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p. xiii

¹² Simon Lacey and K. Sathian, 'Please DO Touch the Exhibits!: Interactions between Visual Imagery and Haptic Perception' in Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone eds, *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p. 12

¹³ David Howes, 'The Secret of Aesthetics Lies in the Conjugation of the Senses: Reimagining the Museum as a Sensory Gymnasium' in Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-

also placed on the way that senses such as sound and smell are processed in emotional areas of the brain, such as the limbic system, meaning that museums which include this aspect alongside the visual, such as the street scenes, are able to engage on an emotional as well as logical level and create a greater connection with the museum displays.¹⁴ Although this was seen as beneficial to all visitors, there remained a particular stress on the access and inclusivity that a multisensory museum experience could provide for non-traditional visitors, particularly those with sensory disabilities.¹⁵

Far less has been written about access for visitors with cognitive, intellectual or developmental disabilities, but that which has been produced has also tended to argue that the use of multiple sensory modalities serves to create greater access. Charles K. Steiner's work at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1970s, documented in his 1979 report *Museum Education for Retarded Adults*, was the earliest example of advocacy for access for developmentally disabled visitors (despite the now-outdated terminology), trialling and encouraging the use of 'touchable material,' 'minimal exhibition barriers' and active games involving replicas.¹⁶ Later work on the subject followed this lead. The 1998 report *Access in Mind* from the now-defunct Scottish charity INTACT (The Intellectual Access Trust) remains the most cited resource in the UK on access to museums for visitors for whom a traditional visit presents cognitive barriers. It argued that 'touch sessions and multi-sensory displays' had proved successful in giving access to visually impaired people and could do the same for those with developmental disabilities.¹⁷ Mencap (formerly The Royal Society for

Leone eds, *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), pp. 285-6

¹⁴ Stephen R. Arnott and Claude Alain, 'A Brain Guide to Sound Galleries' in Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone eds, *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), pp. 90-1; Richard J. Stevenson, 'The Forgotten Sense: Using Olfaction in a Museum Context: A Neuroscience Perspective' in Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone eds, *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), pp. 154-5

¹⁵ Stevenson 2013, pp. 159-60

¹⁶ Charles K. Steiner, *Museum Education for Retarded Adults: Reaching Out to a Neglected Audience* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), p. 21, pp. 39-42

¹⁷ Ann Rayner, *Access in Mind: Towards the Inclusive Museum* (Edinburgh: INTACT, The Intellectual Access Trust, 1998), p. 23

Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults) introduced audio tours for 'People with a Mental Handicap' at the D-Day Museum in 1989, once again adopting multisensory interpretation strategies previously used for visually impaired people to a wider audience of visitors whose disabilities had been barriers to access.¹⁸ In the twenty-first century, touch tours and haptic touching of both objects and tactile models continue to be advocated as a way of creating greater understanding and meaning for visitors with cognitive or developmental disabilities.¹⁹ The argument goes that 'a young reader, an adult with literacy difficulties [...], someone with dyslexia, a person with a learning difficulty, and a foreign visitor or one for whom English is a second language can all be faced with the same barriers to acquiring information in museums' and an environment with multiple interpretive modalities can remove barriers to access for all of them.²⁰

The prevailing wisdom, therefore, remains that interpretation via multiple sensory modalities is the best way of creating access for the widest range of visitors and for visitors with cognitive or developmental disabilities specifically. The sensescape of the museum street could be seen as the ideal environment for this kind of wider access. There is certainly evidence of that view in the statements made by museum staff when interviewed. A member of Abbey House's learning team discussed the advantages of the multisensory immersion of the museum's street by citing a recent interaction with a group of students with special educational needs. The group had visited the museum four weeks earlier and the staff member was impressed at their recall of details such as the fact that unaccompanied adult women would not be allowed in Victorian pubs. She noted that:

These are children with identified special needs, some of them with memory problems, who had totally remembered something from four weeks ago here that they would definitely not have remembered from a lesson that they'd had four weeks ago at

¹⁸ Jonathan Rix, 'Checking the List: Can a model of Down Syndrome help us explore the intellectual accessibility of heritage sites', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 11 (4) (2005), p. 347

¹⁹ Sue Picton, 'Opening Minds to Access', *Museum Practice*, 17 (2001), p. 40

²⁰ Picton (2001), p. 36, a view echoed by Rayner (1998), p. 11 & 17; and Rix (2010), p. 94

school. So, for me that shows the impact of being in a totally immersive, object rich environment.²¹

In this case being inside the scene, immersed within it as described in Chapter Three, enabled the children to embed the meaning which they had made far better than they would with verbal learning in the classroom. This view was echoed by learning staff at the Thackray Museum, one of whom argued that:

For that kid who struggles to read or struggles to engage in the traditional way, being able to smell what history would have been like or being able to hear it can just trigger something in their head that would never have happened in a classroom, not in a million years. All the sensory stuff just adds up to include everybody.²²

In both cases the museum learning staff highlighted the benefits of not just immersion, but also the use of touch, sound and smell to stimulate an emotional engagement with the past that is more inclusive for all visitors. However, after considering the point a little further, the Thackray learning officer did add a significant caveat by saying that ‘it can exclude people as well, because it can be too much for some.’ This is an important point for museums to bear in mind when considering the use of multiple sensory cues: the museum sensescape can exclude as much as include.

The Neurodiverse Museum Visitor

Immersing the visitor in a world of multiple sensory modalities can result in a distressing sensory overload that is for some a barrier to access, even while for others it can provide a deeper connection. This is particularly true if we turn our attention to members of the general visiting public who are not neurotypical. ‘Neurotypical,’ and its counterpoint ‘neurodiverse,’ terms with origins in the autistic community, are here used in the broader sense that they have since acquired to refer to a range of (sometimes overlapping)

²¹ Interview AHM L1, 14.05.15

²² Interview TM L2, 19.05.16

developmental disorders including autism spectrum conditions (ASC), development coordination disorder (dyspraxia), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).²³ People with ASC alone number over 1% of the UK population, meaning that museums with hundreds or thousands of daily visitors are likely to have multiple neurodiverse visitors amongst the general public on any given day, yet there is little research exploring their responses to the museum environment.²⁴ Over the past decade there *has* been some growing recognition of the importance of acknowledging neurodiverse visitors to museums and their different access requirements, leading to a small body of literature on the subject, almost entirely confined to the United States. Such studies of neurodiverse museum visitors originate specifically from museum education work in that country and, as such, have drawn on the work of occupational therapists in specific small programmes for children with ASC at individual art and science museums in the US.²⁵ They are useful, but limited, for the purposes of the current study of Yorkshire street scenes. Other neurodiverse conditions that may create

²³ For more on the various definitions of 'neurodiverse' see John Elder Robison, 'What is Neurodiversity', *Psychology Today* 7 October 2013 [online] <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/my-life-aspergers/201310/what-is-neurodiversity>> accessed 3 February 2019

²⁴ T. Brugha, S.A. Cooper, S. McManus, S. Purdon, J. Smith, E.J. Scott, N. Spiers N, and F. Tyrer, *Estimating the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions in adults: extending the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey* (Leeds: NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care, 2012)

²⁵ Elise A. Freed-Brown, *A Different Mind: Developing Museum Programs for Children With Autism* Unpublished MA Thesis (South Orange: Seton Hall University, 2010); Susan Davis Baldino, 'Museums and Autism: Creating an inclusive community for learning', *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* ed by Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 169-80; Shelley Mulligan, Paula Rais, Jacqueline Steele-Driscoll and Samantha Townsend, 'Examination of a Museum Program for Children with Autism', *Journal of Museum Education* 38 (3), 2013, pp. 308-319; Lesley A. Langa, Pino Monaco, Mega Subramaniam, Paul T. Jaeger, Katie Shanahan, and Beth Ziebarth, 'Improving the Museum Experiences of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their Families: An Exploratory Examination of their Motivations and Needs and Using Web Based Resources to Meet Them', *Curator: The Museum Journal* 56 (3), 2013, pp. 323-35; Taylor Kelsey Kulik and Tina Sue Fletcher, 'Considering the Museum Experience of Children with Autism', *Curator: The Museum Journal* 59 (1), 2016, pp. 27-38; Alexander Lussenhop, Leigh Ann Mesiti, Ellen S. Cohn, Gael I. Orsmond, Juli Goss, Christine Reich, Allison Osipow, Kayla Pirri and Anna Lindgren-Streicher 'Social participation of families with children with autism spectrum disorder in a science museum', *Museums & Social Issues* 11 (2), 2016, pp. 122-137; Liya Deng, 'Equity of Access to Cultural Heritage: Museum Experience as a Facilitator of Learning and Socialization in Children with Autism', *Curator: The Museum Journal* 60 (4), 2017, pp. 411-26; Tina S. Fletcher, Amanda B. Blake and Kathleen E. Shelffo 'Can Sensory Gallery Guides for Children with Sensory Processing Challenges Improve Their Museum Experience?', *Journal of Museum Education* 43 (1), 2018, pp. 66-77

barriers to access for museum visitors, such as ADHD, have not even received this level of study.

These examples are useful in pointing to areas in which museums have been shown successfully engaging with neurodiverse visitors, especially in comparison to ten years ago when there were no such studies in existence. However, their focus remains narrow. Their emphasis on resources for children with ASC does not necessarily assist with an understanding of wider issues of sensory distress or sensory overload in all types of adult neurodiverse visitors, especially when not in planned or organised groups. The resources proposed in some of these papers for visitors with ASC do not always align with the feelings of the autistic community themselves. For example, Taylor Kelsey Kulik and Tina Sue Fletcher's paper 'Considering the Museum Experience of Children with Autism' (2016) acknowledges the lack of museum-specific resources for understanding the needs of children with ASC and instead suggests that they rely on 'toolkits' for 'autism-friendly' organisations produced by the advocacy group Autism Speaks.²⁶ Autism Speaks, however, is a highly controversial organisation, heavily criticised by those with ASC for their lack of people with ASC in leadership positions (and thus choosing to speak *for* people with ASC rather than allowing them to voice their own position), along with their past support for the notion that ASC is a 'disease' in need of a 'cure.'²⁷ The overwhelming focus on children with ASC with little written about neurodiverse adults also conforms to what has been written by the National Autistic Society in Britain, which noted that, in museums, 'support for families with autistic children is also slowly becoming a feature, although there is a

²⁶ Kulik and Fletcher 2016, p. 32

²⁷ Emily Willingham, 'Why Autism Speaks Doesn't Speak For Me', Forbes 13 November 2013 [online] <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilywillingham/2013/11/13/why-autism-speaks-doesnt-speak-for-me/#79b0c3b03152>> accessed 2 February 2019; David Perry, 'Speaking Out Against Autism Speaks, Even if it Means No Ice Cream', New York Times 4 June 2015 [online] <<https://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/06/04/speaking-out-against-autism-speaks-even-if-it-means-no-ice-cream/>> accessed 2 February 2019; Violet Fenn, 'I will never "light it up blue" for autism awareness because we do not need a cure – autism is not a disease', Metro 26 March 2018 [online] <<https://metro.co.uk/2018/03/26/this-is-why-i-will-never-light-it-up-blue-for-autism-awareness-we-do-not-need-a-cure-because-autism-is-not-a-disease-7408706/>> accessed 2 February 2019

lack of thought for autistic adults.²⁸ The use of art and science museums with relatively traditional approaches to display and interpretation in each of these studies also makes them quite different from the street scenes discussed here. There has been no analysis of how immersion in a highly multisensory reconstruction of a past environment might affect neurodiverse visitors' meaning-making ability.

People who are neurodiverse have brains which process information and stimulation differently from those who are neurotypical. This can manifest itself in a variety of different ways and provoke a diverse array of responses to museum stimuli. With regard to the multisensory immersion of the museum sensescape, it is worth noting that problems with sensory processing are common to many neurodiverse conditions. Both people with ASC and ADHD have been documented to struggle with sensory processing, something that can present as hypersensitivity (in which sights, sounds and smells can become magnified, distorted or hard to block out, leading to difficulty in focusing and the possibility of overwhelming sensory overload) or hyposensitivity (in which the person struggles to process any sensory cues, therefore often seeming clumsy or disengaged).²⁹ The advice for museums from the National Autistic Society highlights 'coping with sensory overload' as one of the major barriers to museum access for visitors with ASC, adding the potential difficulties of transitioning between very different gallery spaces and between high and low light levels, along with 'navigating large and confusing spaces.'³⁰ All of these could apply particularly to the street scenes, which, as Chapter Three demonstrated, provide a strong transition from the more traditional gallery spaces elsewhere in their museums.

When it comes to visitors with ADHD, these large spaces with a variety of sensory cues can also result in a lack of focus. There is no public

²⁸ Claire Madge, 'Autism in Museums', *National Autistic Society* 2016 [online] <<https://network.autism.org.uk/good-practice/case-studies/autism-museums>> accessed 2 February 2019

²⁹ Gail Gillingham, *Autism, Handle With Care!: Understanding and Managing Behavior of Children and Adults With Autism* (Arlington: Future Horizons, 1995); Lauren M. Little, Evan Dean, Scott Tomchek and Winnie Dunn, 'Sensory Processing Patterns in Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Typical Development', *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics* 38 (3), 2018, pp. 243-54

³⁰ Madge 2016

advice for museum visitors in the UK with ADHD. However, Edward Hallowell, an American psychiatrist specialising in ADHD, described the experience of museum visiting as something akin to shopping in a department store:

The way I go through a museum is the way some people go through Filene's Basement [a chain of department stores in Massachusetts]. Some of this, some of that, oh, this one looks nice, but what about that rack over there? Gotta hurry, gotta run. It's not that I don't like art. I love art. But my way of loving it makes most people think I'm a real Philistine.³¹

As discussed in Chapter Three, the museum street scene is staged and scripted so as to encourage a browsing-style visitor behaviour. Hallowell here highlighted the potential downside to that, a form of shopping-style interaction in which it is hard to separate elements of the display as your focus is constantly being drawn away to a new element. Hallowell went on to add that on other occasions he could approach a single painting in a museum with hyperfocus, 'get into the world of the painting and buzz around in there until I forget about everything else.' It is important to remember that not all neurodiverse visitors will respond in the same way all the time. As the 1998 INTACT report stated: 'People with learning or communication disabilities are a heterogeneous group and the degree to which they may be affected can vary tremendously.'³² They are, the report noted, 'people, not statistics. [...] They are all individuals with widely different interests, likes and dislikes, skills and personality traits, just like everybody else.'³³ To put it another way, they have the same range of personal contexts, in Falk and Dierking's terms, as any other visitor, their neurodiverse conditions being just one of them. For some neurodiverse visitors the museum sensescape may be a distressing and overwhelming experience, with a strong potential for sensory overload; for others the inclusion of additional sensory cues may

³¹ Edward Hallowell, 'What's it like to have ADHD?', *HealthyPlace* 2016 [online] <<https://www.healthyplace.com/adhd/articles/whats-it-like-to-have-adhd/>> accessed 2 February 2019

³² Rayner (1998), p. 15

³³ Rayner (1998), p. 16

help them to engage. The museum sensescape can indeed be ‘a double-edged sword.’

The audience reception study of my research sought to understand conversational meaning-making in a broad cross-section of members of the general museum visiting public. As such, there was no attempt to recruit participants who fit certain demographics or to ask them to identify any invisible disabilities. As a result, there is no way of knowing how many of the recorded visitors were neurotypical or not. Some, however, did volunteer that information about themselves and, thus, it is possible to use their conversations as illustrative examples of neurodiverse visitors to museum street scenes. They are too small a sample size to draw any strong conclusions about the wider picture of neurodiverse museum visitors, but even these individual cases can illuminate how different the response of one neurodiverse visitor to the multisensory immersion in the street scene may be from another. In the following two examples we can see individual conversations from a visitor to Abbey House who identified herself as having ASC (as well as asthma) compared with one to York Castle with ADHD. Both had the potential to respond negatively to being immersed within the display and exposed to multiple sensory stimuli, but their response was quite different.

Woman – It's always a little bit eerie coming through here, as if someone's gonna pop up. [...] I'm gonna go outside.

Man – Outside, why?

Woman – Fresh air.

Man – Oh, right. You alright?

Woman – Yeah. It's a bit stuffy in here.

Man – How do you get back in?

Woman – What?

Man – I don't know how you get back in.

Woman – It's OK, I've seen everything.

Man – Okey-doke.

Woman – That's what I'm saying, I'll see you outside.

Man – Oh, OK. I might be another half an hour before I'm done.

Woman – I'll go and get a drink.

Sorry, it's just a bit stuffy in here for my asthma. (AHM Visitor Group 3)

Woman – Did it get darker in here? [Thunder crashes] Oh, oh, that's cool.

'Fragile, please do not touch'. This is a fabulous, fabulous place and I want to touch everything and I know I'm not supposed to. Oh my gosh, this is so beautiful. Oh, Honey, that's a toy store. You can go in. Oh my gosh, I wish the boys were here. Honey, they've got little tiny toy soldiers in here. Oh, are those handbags? Oh, the beaded bags are stunning. I love the vases. Look, there's a little croquet set. Isn't that cool, Honey? Wow, oh, and you know what, remember when we had a Viewmaster?

Man – Mm hm.

Woman – [...] Listen to the sound effects. I wonder, with some of the tall buildings, maybe it was dark during the day down some of these streets. (YCM Visitor Group 4)

Both examples could be seen as showing that the visitor has been overwhelmed by being immersed within a multisensory environment rather than looking at a museum display from the outside. However, for the first (the visitor with ASC) it was an entirely negative experience that ultimately resulted in her leaving the street gallery without her companion and without successfully making meaning from her surroundings; while for the second (the visitor with ADHD) the experience was largely an exciting one, leading to a lengthy and enjoyable exploration of the street. The first visitor found the atmosphere of being fully immersed in her surroundings oppressive; it prompted a fear of people 'popping up,' jumping out to scare her as might occur at a 'dark heritage' attraction. This in turn led to a feeling that her surroundings were particularly stuffy and a trigger for her asthma. Ultimately, the museum street environment prompted a yearning for fresh air that was strong enough to make her unable to attempt to engage with the museum's displays or make any meaning from them. The immersive environment actively worked against engagement for this visitor.

With the second visitor, her ADHD meant that her conversation became a series of fragmentary statements as a new element of visual or audio stimulation broke her previous focus. Like Edward Hallowell, she assumed an attitude of 'gotta hurry, gotta run,' excited by one object and then grasped by the question of 'but what about that over there?' The various sensory cues undoubtedly exacerbated this. While this sensory overstimulation may mean that the visitor struggled to focus on developing

any meaning-making from any individual aspect of the street scene, she clearly found the overall experience nevertheless engaging, and she continued to find fascination in her surroundings and the various sensory cues for the rest of her visit. Neurodiverse visitors will respond in a variety of ways when immersed in the sensescape of the museum street scene, but it remains important for museums and their staff to be aware of the potential pitfalls of the multisensory approach and plan for how to deal with the possibility of distressing sensory overload.

Accountability and Disposal

Staff in the museums with street scenes are aware of the potential for their sensescape to provide distressing experiences or sensory overload, particularly for neurodiverse visitors. A York Castle curator responded to a question in interview about whether visitors might find the immersive sensescape overwhelming or distressing by saying:

That's a possibility, especially for people with autism, because there's noises, there's changing lights, there's people, there's bustle, there's so much stuff to look at. And for many people that can get really overwhelming [...] I think it is definitely possible to have a negative experience in an immersive space like that.³⁴

However, it can prove difficult to translate that awareness into active methods of dealing with this issue. This is a wider problem with museums and questions of access that the sociologist Kevin Hetherington has dubbed the process of 'accountability and disposal.' Since the 1990s the introduction of disability legislation, in the UK in the form of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and its successor the Equality Act (2010), have prompted museums to take a more active stance on access programmes in order to be compliant with the new laws. However, Hetherington noted that museums' need to be seen to be fulfilling their obligations under equality legislation can drive access initiatives which are more focused on the visible signs of access

³⁴ Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

than the practical effects. Hetherington's argument of accountability and disposal suggests that museums tend to 'write' themselves as disability accessible spaces with the visible signs of access, and so dispose of the 'problem' of disability without engaging with questions of intellectual access.³⁵

The 'reasonable adjustments' required by the Equality Act for disabled access to public buildings are outlined in terms of the removal or circumvention of physical impediments to access and the provision of auxiliary aids or accessible information formats. The Act legislates for measurable physical changes such as wheelchair ramps, accessible toilets, or hearing loops.³⁶ As they are far harder to quantify or measure, there is less explicit legal guidance on matters of intellectual access. This emphasis is then reflected in how museums approach the question of access. As Hetherington put it: 'Most commonly the disabled are interpellated by the wheelchair ramp - this has become a sign of disabled access. The fact that many people with disabilities do not need wheelchairs often goes unnoticed.'³⁷ Once the 'problem' of disability is accounted for with ramps, toilets, audio guides or touch tours, it is seen as resolved.³⁸ Additionally, Fiona Candlin has argued that highly visible access programmes, such as object handling sessions, may matter more to museums seeking to demonstrate their commitment to accessibility than the actual intellectual impact on the visitors. Images of blind or visually impaired visitors handling objects serve to signify the museum as an inclusive, accessible space.³⁹ Hetherington's (and Candlin's) theories apply to the relationship between museums and visually impaired visitors, but it is equally possible to apply them to the case of neurodiverse visitors. Indeed, the theory of accountability

³⁵ Kevin Hetherington, 'Accountability and Disposal: Visual impairment within the museum', *Museum and Society*, 1 (3) (2003), p. 110

³⁶ *Equality Act 2010, Chapter 15* (London: The Stationery Office), pp. 10-11

³⁷ Hetherington (2003), p. 110

³⁸ Hetherington (2003), pp. 107-8. The 1998 INTACT report expressed similar sentiments when considering how museums cater more to removing visible physical barriers than intellectual ones, arguing that: 'Too often institutions feel that they have addressed the issue by installing a ramp and a toilet with a wide door and a grab-rail.' Rayner (1998), p. 13

³⁹ Candlin (2006), p. 138

and disposal offers a useful lens which has not previously been applied to attempts to enhance museum access for neurodiverse visitors.

The most common way of combatting the problems of sensory barriers to access for neurodiverse visitors has been in the form of what are typically called 'low sensory events.' These are occasional times, either at the beginning or end of regular opening hours or through a special early or late opening, in which the museum is quieter than usual, invasive sound or smell effects are turned off and lights and other strong sensory cues are set to neutral levels, creating a more relaxed and comfortable visiting experience. Much of the existent literature on neurodiverse museum visitors focused on case studies of low sensory events and has shown them to be effective in engaging visitors, primarily children with ASC, who would not otherwise be comfortable in the museum environment.⁴⁰ They even found that, when placed in a less over-stimulating sensory environment and given the opportunity to control their sensory cues, children with ASC particularly enjoyed 'engaging in activities heavily loaded with visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli.'⁴¹ These are promising findings; however it must be said that these studies appearing in academic publications such as *Curator: The Museum Journal* and the *Journal of Museum Education* and co-authored by or produced in close collaboration with museum staff may in themselves be examples of the process of accountability and disposal. These publications serve to demonstrate publicly and visibly the museums' commitment to access for neurodiverse visitors, but the actual numbers of real visitors helped by these events remains only a minimal number of the neurodiverse visitors who come to the museum every day as part of the general visiting public.

York Castle, Abbey House and the Thackray Museum have all made use of low sensory events to assist with access for neurodiverse visitors and others who may struggle with sensory overload. When asked how the museum deals with the potential for visitors feeling overwhelmed and the possibility for sensory overload, forms of low sensory event were something

⁴⁰ Kulik and Fletcher 2016, pp. 28-9; Mulligan et al 2013, pp. 313-4

⁴¹ Mulligan et al 2013, p. 316

pointed to by multiple staff members as a way of accounting for the problem of access for those with sensory difficulties. Abbey House's curator, for example, described how the museum has had 'some events for children with learning disabilities, particularly autism, [...] having quiet times when they can come in and there aren't other people crowding around.'⁴² Meanwhile, a member of the Thackray learning team pointed to how: 'We've started doing a monthly evening where we turn all the sounds off and try and moderate the lighting and we have things that you can put over your nose so you can moderate the smells.'⁴³ In both cases, however, there has been little follow-up. The low sensory events are put into place as a way of accounting for the 'problem' of neurodiverse visitors hypersensitive to sensory cues and these roughly two hours a month are then deemed sufficient to dispose of the issue with little further thought.

York Castle is the only one of the three sites to announce an ongoing schedule of low sensory events on the 'access' section of their website. Initially announced in September 2016 as a 'relaxed opening' for two hours at the end of the day on a Friday, these low sensory events were advertised as 'an afternoon designed for those with autism' in which 'noises and sound effects will be turned off and all the main lights will be put on so there will be no dark areas or sudden sounds.'⁴⁴ Since rebranded as 'Low Sensory Experiences,' a semi-regular event on occasional Sundays, the events have moved beyond a narrow marketing to visitors with ASC to instead offer free entry to 'visitors with autism, dementia, visual impairments or similar issues' during a time in which the museum is 'less overwhelming' with the lights set on a higher, constant level on Kirkgate and the sound effects turned off.⁴⁵ The museum's curatorial and learning staff were keen to draw attention to these low sensory events to evidence how they were handling questions of access for visitors with the potential for sensory overload. A York Castle

⁴² Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

⁴³ Interview TM L1, 19.05.16

⁴⁴ York Castle Museum, 'Relaxed Opening at York Castle Museum', *York Castle Museum* September 2016 [online] <<https://www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk/news-media/latest-news/relaxed-opening-at-york-castle-museum/>> accessed 30 January 2019

⁴⁵ York Castle Museum, 'Access', *York Castle Museum* 2019 [online] <<https://www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk/access/>> accessed 30 January 2019

curator outlined the workings of the low sensory event to explain that ‘we do understand.’⁴⁶ Meanwhile, a member of the museum’s learning team suggested that: ‘It can be a bit much, a bit overwhelming, for people with extra sensory needs and I think we have tried to address that a bit recently with our relaxed opening dates.’⁴⁷

For all that the low sensory events serve to indicate that the museum understands and cares about neurodiverse visitors and their barriers to access, the museum has little way of measuring their success or developing access programmes from there. While they may give some visitors a more accessible museum experience, they continue to feel like examples of accountability and disposal in action. There also appeared to be a difference in opinion between back of house staff, who perceived the low sensory events as positive steps for greater access, and the front of house staff who actually interface with visitors during these times. York Castle’s announcement of low sensory events promised that visitor-facing staff had been given ‘basic training on what it means to have autism and how it affects visitors with the condition.’⁴⁸ However, this did not mean that those staff have committed to the concept. While a member of the learning team answered the question of visitors’ responses to low sensory events by saying that people had responded ‘really positively. Surprisingly positively, actually. I think people are really welcoming it;’ one of the costumed interpreters on Kirkgate took a different view. He referred to the previous low sensory event by observing that ‘three people I think benefited, they came in purposefully for it and they enjoyed it, but I think actually six people refused to come in, they walked away. So, we lost six proper, would-be paying customers.’⁴⁹ This comment makes clear that the staff member saw the visitors visiting for the low sensory event as distinct from ‘proper’ visitors and the event as therefore damaging to the museum as a whole.

York Castle’s low sensory events, and those that have occurred sporadically on the other museum streets, only happen for two hours on

⁴⁶ Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

⁴⁷ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

⁴⁸ York Castle Museum 2016

⁴⁹ Interview YCM F1, 22.09.16

occasional Sundays, meaning that they only have a positive effect on access to the museum for the small set of visitors who are made aware of them before they occur, and are able to visit the museum during these times. They do little to help with access to the museum for visitors with the potential for sensory overload at other times. The low sensory event is an example of the museum displaying its commitment to access, but actually only providing superior access for a small proportion of the targeted group.

Sam Theriault and Beth Redmond Jones' work with young people with ASC at San Diego Natural History Museum prompted this conclusion: 'Access initiatives (such as low-sensory mornings) are important. [...] But access is just the beginning. Like neurotypical museum visitors, some autistic young adults want more.'⁵⁰ As with other cases of accountability and disposal, it is important to remember that neurodiverse visitors will want more from the museum than simply the removal of physical barriers to access, just as the presence of wheelchair ramps does not automatically make the museum a welcoming space for visitors with mobility impairments. Theriault and Jones instead emphasised the importance of 'pre-visit accessibility tools' which can help neurodiverse visitors understand and prepare for what they are about to see. These often take the form of 'social stories.' Social stories are short written texts, accompanied by pictures, which are designed to convey information about a situation or activity and the social expectations surrounding it.⁵¹ Pre-visit accessibility tools and social stories have been found to be effective in museums in preparing neurodiverse visitors for what they will encounter in the museum, providing structure for a visit, and allowing visitors to make a 'game-plan' about how to approach their visit.⁵²

When it comes to pre-visit accessibility tools, there is once again a variety of success in the approaches of the museums with street scenes. Abbey House does not offer accessibility information on its website beyond

⁵⁰ Sam Theriault and Beth Redmond Jones, 'Constructing Knowledge Together: Collaborating with and Understanding Young Adults with Autism', *Journal of Museum Education* 43 (4), 2018, p. 371

⁵¹ Anastasia Kokina and Lee Kern, 'Social Story™ Interventions for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Meta-Analysis', *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 40 (7), 2010, pp. 812-26

⁵² Freed-Brown 2010; Lussenhop et al 2016, pp. 130-1; Fletcher et al 2018, pp. 66-77

the classic signifiers of physical accessibility, such as accessible toilets and induction loops for the deaf and hard of hearing.⁵³ The Thackray Museum does offer an accessibility guide tailored specifically to ‘what to expect’ for visitors with ASC. However, the guide is only available on request from the museum’s reception, meaning that a visitor would already have to be visiting the museum in order to see it and make their game-plan.⁵⁴ Having no ability to plan for what the museum might contain before entering the building does little to assuage the discomfort neurodiverse visitors may feel before arriving at the museum and may well result in them deciding not to come at all. Since 2018, however, York Castle has had a comprehensive pre-visit accessibility guide, a form of social story, with guidance for ‘visitors with sensory issues’ available through the ‘access’ section of the museum’s website (although the physically published leaflet does not point to where to find it).⁵⁵

The guide (extracts from which can be seen in Figures 6.1 and 6.2) effectively communicates how the experience of visiting the street is scripted in a distinct way from the rest of the museum, as argued above in Chapter Three. The prompt to note that this gallery is ‘a little bit different’ allows the visitor to prepare for a different set of social expectations in this space to the other galleries to which they have already been. Figure 6.2 gives examples of the warnings that visitors are given for the low lighting, smells and loud noises on the street, drawing particular attention to the street piano, which can be played by one of the street’s costumed interpreters and is a particularly noisy feature which may be played unexpectedly at any time. While guidance such as this cannot completely resolve the issues that neurodiverse visitors may face when visiting the street, it at least gives them the ability to plan for how to approach their visit and spells out the museum’s script of what might be expected of good visiting practice. It is an approach that the other museum street scenes would do well to follow and make

⁵³ Abbey House Museum, ‘Access’, *Abbey House Museum* 2019 [online] <<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries/abbeyhouse/access>> accessed 30 January 2019

⁵⁴ Thackray Medical Museum, ‘Facilities and Accessibility’, *Thackray Medical Museum* 2019 [online] <<https://www.thackraymedicalmuseum.co.uk/visit/facilities-and-accessibility/>> accessed 30 January 2019

⁵⁵ York Castle Museum 2019

widely and publicly available. Theriault and Jones' observation that 'access is just the beginning' and that neurodiverse visitors, like neurotypical ones, 'want more' from their museum experience, can be taken a step further, however, with museums offering a higher form of access.



Figure 6.1: Description of arriving on Kirkgate in York Castle's accessibility guide⁵⁶



Figure 6.2: Description of the sounds and smells of Kirkgate in York Castle's accessibility guide⁵⁷

⁵⁶ York Castle Museum, 'York Castle Museum: Planning Your Visit', *York Castle Museum* 2018 [online] <<https://www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/09/Detail-visual-story-York-Castle-Museum.pdf>> accessed 30 January 2019, p. 12

⁵⁷ York Castle Museum 2018, p. 13

Representation and Belonging

Following a similar conclusion to Hetherington's view of accountability and disposal, museums and disability scholars Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd identified the use of wheelchair ramps and accessible toilets as a form of disposal of the question of disabled access, adding that this disposal has tended to mean that disabled visitors are denied the higher form of intellectual access that most able-bodied visitors seek in their museum experience: having narratives of people like them reflected in the narratives of the museum.⁵⁸ As visually impaired museologist Joseph Wapner observed, people don't visit a museum just because it is physically accessible: 'People don't go to the Getty to use the bathrooms.'⁵⁹ Wapner argued that there is a need to differentiate between the 'basic access' provided by many interpretations of disability legislation and a deeper 'cultural accessibility.'⁶⁰ A culturally accessible museum is a space in which the visitor feels welcome and feels a sense of belonging and ownership. Even with perfect physical accessibility, a lack of this cultural access will mean that visitors struggle to make meaning of the past that they encounter in the museum. Little has been written on the subject of cultural access for visitors who are neurodiverse, with the focus very much on barriers to physical access, but the American museologist Susan Davis Baldino has noted that successful access programmes gave children with ASC a sense of belonging.⁶¹ She argued that: 'People with autistic spectrum disorders are part of our collective history and integral to our society. As such they should be part of our collective meaning-making and should not be intentionally or incidentally excluded.'⁶² To be included should not simply mean to be given

⁵⁸ Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd, 'Activist Practice' in *Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum* ed. by Richard Sandell, Jocelyn Dodd, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 10-1

⁵⁹ Joseph Wapner, 'Mission and Low Vision: A visually impaired museologist's perspective on inclusivity', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 33 (3), 2013 [online] <<http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3756/3290>> accessed 2 February 2019. See also Amanda Cachia, 'Talking Blind: Disability, access and the discursive turn', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 33 (3), 2013 [online] <<http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3758/3281>> accessed 3 February 2019

⁶⁰ Wapner 2013

⁶¹ Baldino 2012, pp. 177-8

⁶² Baldino 2012, p. 178

access to the physical environment, but also to see stories of people like you reflected in the museum.

With its theme of health, hygiene and disease throughout history, the lack of any narrative of living with disability in the nineteenth century on the Thackray Museum's Leeds 1842 Street is particularly egregious. The museum is well aware that visitors to the museum relate to the stories of people like them and have made sure to build that into the way that the Victorian past is interpreted on the street. This much is apparent from the approach of using individual characters represented by mannequins and character cards, which visitors pick up on entering the Leeds 1842 Street, to tell specific stories of Victorian diseases and medicine. Curatorial staff discussed the use of the character stories as a way of using empathy to make the museum's narratives 'more relatable.'⁶³ One of the museum's visitor assistants made a more direct comparison, pointing to how visitors gravitate toward learning the story of the character closest to them in age and gender, with children tending to pick the card for the girl child character Alice Finch if they are girls or the boy child James Wilson if they are boys. 'People are drawn to what it would have been like for them,' he explained.⁶⁴ The vast majority of family groups recorded for this study did indeed pick their characters according to age and gender. There is even evidence in the interviews with Thackray staff of the power of relatable stories of disability. One of the museum's original development team recalled how:

I took my mother round and on the first floor she stopped and said: "My father had a wooden leg like that one." He'd lost his leg in August 1918 and she said it was just like that. That must be seventeen-eighteen years ago, but I remember that. And that single item engaged her emotion more than anything else in the whole place.⁶⁵

If a powerful, and memorable, emotional connection such as this can be made through the link with a disability narrative elsewhere in the museum, why can it not feature on the street as well?

⁶³ Interview TM C1, 19.05.16

⁶⁴ Interview TM F1, 19.05.16

⁶⁵ Interview TM D2, 10.11.15



Figure 6.3: Display and interpretation of dressmaker, Leeds 1842 Street

The conversations recorded amongst one visitor group on the Thackray Museum's Leeds 1842 Street indicate the cultural accessibility problems with the lack of disability narratives in the museum's story of Victorian health and medicine. This group, who were visiting as part of the general visiting public not as a pre-booked or organised session, had members with different disabilities and health problems including multiple sclerosis (a condition of the nervous system which can cause physical, neurological and sensory difficulties), ASC, and asthma. Like any other museum visitor, they also drew on the large variety of other personal contexts that made up their individual identities. In this case, one of the group (the visitor with multiple sclerosis) also worked in costume design and this informed many of her responses to the museum street. The following conversation took place outside the recreation of the home and workroom of Mary Holmes, the dressmaker character who is dying of tuberculosis (Figure 6.3).

Woman 2 – Oh dear, you didn't do so well, love.

Dressmaker was quite a high position of low positions, wasn't it? I mean, it wasn't...

Woman 1 – If you owned like a haberdashery or something, then you were still quite high up. But there did used to be a lot of rooms where poorer women used to sit and they used to sew for hours.

Woman 2 – Just basic sewing.

Woman 1 – For, like, the lace and stuff.

It's like looking into the future.

Woman 2 – Yeah, you live like that. That's you. (TM Visitor Group 22)

The visitor was particularly engaged by this part of the display as she (and her companion) saw the Victorian dressmaker as a character analogous to herself and this part of the display, therefore, served to help her make meaning of what she imagined the place of someone like her would be in the 1840s. The display's focus on the hardships of homeworkers such as dressmakers meant that the visitors were able to build up a picture of what life would be like for someone like them at the time, answering the question of whether being a dressmaker was 'quite a high position of low positions' by pointing to how the nature of homeworking would actually often mean a cramped room 'to sit and [...] sew for hours.' The museum here provided enough scaffolding from which the visitors could construct meaning, a fully successful example of the co-production of meaning desired by the museum when putting the street scene together. This was not the case, however, with the following conversation which occurred shortly afterwards.

Woman 1 – See, I couldn't live back then. I'd have been dead already, wouldn't I? Although, I suppose I might not have asthma if I'd grown up like this. I might not even have MS, I suppose.

Woman 2 – [...] They have a mental asylum somewhere, love, that'd be you, that would. And me, because they'd say I was a hypochondriac. [Man] would be in there as well, because they used to chuck autistics in. (TM Visitor Group 22)

Once again, the second woman applied the empathy and relatability rhetoric of 'that's you' or 'that'd be you,' but, unlike with the dressmaker, there is nothing in the museum's script to prompt any answer as to what the Victorian experience would actually have been like for someone of this aspect of her companion's identity. Instead, their approach to meaning-making here was entirely speculative. It was made up of questions and suggestions – 'I'd have been dead already, wouldn't I?' or 'I suppose I might not have asthma' – to which the museum provides no path to explore the answers. This can be

contrasted with the following exchange which took place in the schoolroom at York Castle.

Woman 1 – Good to see blind and deaf children. Special schools began to be created in 1893. That's quite early, isn't it?
 Woman 2 – It is quite early. Earlier than I'd thought. (YCM Visitor Group 12)

With this group, the visitors were provided with information that filled in gaps in their knowledge of the period. They were pleased to see representation of blind and deaf children and to discover that their lives in the nineteenth century were different from how they might have expected, that special educational establishments existed for such children at a much earlier point than the visitors imagined. The Thackray group, however, was left to guess that they would 'chuck autistics in' the asylum because the museum has nothing to say about the experience of people with ASC in the Victorian era.⁶⁶ This is indicative of the flaw with any totally constructivist attitude to museum interpretation. The idea that objects and displays can and will speak for themselves and allow the visitor complete freedom to construct their own meaning will tend to leave visitors unsatisfied with the lack of answers to their speculative questions. As Chapter Three argued and the following chapters will explore further, meaning must rather be a co-production, formed in dialogue with the museum, the museum providing some level of framework or scaffolding from which the visitor can work and which may answer the visitor's questions.

Of course, it would be impractical for the Thackray Museum to include stories of every possible disease, injury or disability of the nineteenth century in the Leeds 1842 Street. The inclusion of some narratives of living with disability and Victorian attitudes to disability, however, would make the space instantly more culturally accessible to disabled visitors today and would make them feel like the museum was a place where they belong with the stories of people like them being told. The visitor group above, for example,

⁶⁶ 'Autism' was not formally named until 1943, but studies of case notes from Great Ormond Street Hospital have indicated how people with symptoms that would today be associated with ASC were treated in the nineteenth century. Mitzi Waltz and Paul Shattock, 'Autistic Disorder in Nineteenth Century London: Three Case Reports', *Autism* 8 (1), 2004, pp. 7-20

mentioned the possibility that the museum 'have a mental asylum somewhere.' The inclusion of a space such as this could provide an area to discuss Victorian attitudes to people with a variety of psychological and neurological conditions and how they were treated at the time.

Even the concept of physical disability is conspicuous by its absence in a street scene devoted to health risks in the period. Hannah Dyson, a mill girl with a serious injury to her leg (an adaptation of the story of Hannah Poynton, a real-life mill girl from Armley whose leg was amputated in 1824 with Hannah dying shortly afterwards), appears as a mannequin on the street and then has her story picked up upstairs in the museum's surgery galleries, but the character does not survive the surgery. When considering the museum's lack of narratives of disability on the Leeds 1842 Street, one of the museum's learning officers suggested that: 'Hannah, I guess, is disabled but then dies a week later,' concluding that this did not constitute a story of living with disability. 'For a lot of people accidents were common. There's a lot of people who survived that sort of thing and had stories. That would be nice to include,' she added.⁶⁷ This staff member suggested that the street could tell a more complete narrative of Victorian health and healthcare if the museum included an amputee or blind character amongst the characters on the street, which would also appeal on an empathetic level to visitors who are or have friends and family with similar disabilities. The same could equally be said of visitors with cognitive or developmental conditions. She concluded her thought by stating that 'elsewhere in the museum, as we've had money and developed things like the Conflict Gallery, that has more diverse voices in it. So, it would be nice to include that into the street.'⁶⁸ It is to be hoped, therefore, that future developments and financing in all of the museums discussed here will be open to a greater range of different stories of diverse types of Victorian people. However, in the meantime the structure of the Leeds 1842 Street would make it easier to introduce some of these narratives quickly and cheaply via the character cards. There is nothing in the mannequins dotted around the street to suggest that the narratives and

⁶⁷ Interview TM L1, 19.05.16

⁶⁸ Interview TM L1, 19.05.16

medical conditions of each character is set in stone. The museum could produce a variety of flexible narratives for each that could vary from day to day and would cost nothing more than printing further character cards.

Earlier chapters have highlighted the success of the museum street scene as an approach that uses its immersive reconstructed sensescape to engage the so-called 'Man in the Street' with the Victorian past in a way that other forms of interpretation, whether texts or traditional vitrine-based museum displays, may not. As this chapter has discussed, however, the ability to make meaning from the museum environment through multisensory embodied interaction also means that there is potential for a disobedient bodily response, for tendencies such as sensory overload to provoke a bodily rejection of the museum's script which may make it more, rather than less, difficult to make meaning from a complex sensory environment. For these museums truly to be a space to connect the 'Man in the Street' with their Victorian past, they must acknowledge the diversity of people in the real street and reflect that in both their interpretive approaches and the narratives that the museum tells.

Ultimately, the museum street scene, like any other museum display, will not become a welcoming and accessible place for all unless everyone has cultural access and feel that they belong. This may mean that the museum needs to embrace the aspects of the street scene in which it can be a more flexible and customisable space where both visitors and the museum and its staff can assume many identities and many voices, working together in a dialogue that constructs meaning in a unique way for each visitor. It is this dialogic, polyglossic approach to the construction of narrative on the museum street which will be explored in Part III.

Part III

The Performance

Introduction

Visitors will be the equivalent of Chadwick's observers, recording the conditions under which poor people lived and attempting to comprehend the causes of so much misery, illness and death.

Extract from the planned exhibition outline for the Leeds 1842 Street, 1994¹

Here's Robert Baker giving you a couple of minutes, at the most, on Leeds in the 1840s and then you're straight in there, a bit like a Doctor Who style visitor. [...] We don't want to kill it by making it have lots of tedious questions. So it has to be a kind of research activity: You are 'x', find out about your place, what you are, what you've got.

Extract from an interview with a member of the Thackray Museum development team²

Take a walk through the 'Living Hell' of the slums of Victorian Leeds. [...] Become one of the eight Victorian characters that you meet on your journey. Explore their lives and the risks to their health. Search for a treatment to your illness. Your character's survival depends upon the choices you make.

Extract from a 2001 leaflet advertising the Thackray Museum's 'living experience'³

In her discussion on 'heritage as performance' in *Uses of Heritage* (2006), Laurajane Smith argued that a visitor is 'both heritage performer and audience.'⁴ Smith posited that the museum visitor is both an audience to the 'interpretive performances of the heritage site/museum management and interpretive staff' and is herself involved in performative construction of meaning, supporting her view of heritage as discourse.⁵ In this way, according to Smith, visitor performance can provide a challenge to what she called Authorised Heritage Discourse, the narrative authored and officially sanctioned by heritage professionals and institutions. Smith wrote that:

¹ Thackray Museum, 'Proposed Exhibition Outline – 07.01.1994', Leeds, Thackray Medical Museum, Shelf 4, File 2

² Interview TM D2 10.11.15

³ Thackray Museum, 'We're Full of Life: A Living Experience', leaflet, 2001, p. 2

⁴ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 70

⁵ Smith 2006, pp. 66-74

The idea of the performativity of heritage helps to challenge the idea of the passivity of heritage audiences, and allows a theorization of those audiences as active agents in the mediation of the meanings of heritage.⁶

Visitor performance makes the visitor complicit in how meaning is made in the museum, and the multiplicity of possible visitor performances and identities also creates an opening for a multiplicity of different meanings that can be constructed from the museum space. Some of these performances develop directly from the scripts proffered by the museum, while others, deliberately or unconsciously, contradict or run counter to them. As Smith wrote, visitors may accept the authorised view and build their performance upon it, but may also 'engage in their own performances of equivocation or rejection in which the authorized meanings are adjusted, negated and/or new meanings and identities created.'⁷ We have already seen in Part II how the introduction of the visitor's body into the environment of the museum street scene can prompt either the museum's desired pedestrian performance or an overwhelmed discomfort. Part III explores this further, looking at the fluidity of the visitor's roles as audience and performer, and the negotiation of narrative authority and control in these performances.

While Chapter Three highlighted the example of the museum street scene's scripts prompting the visitor behaviour of the browsing pedestrian, there are more complexities to even that role which may serve as an example of the fluidity of the audience-performer dynamic. The three examples that serve as the epigraph to Part III – a detail from the planned exhibition outline during the Thackray Museum's development in the early 1990s, an explanation of the museum's intentions from an original member of the development team, and a line from the museum's marketing leaflet – show the variety of different roles that the Thackray Museum's scripts expect their visitors to move between. Across these three examples, the visitor is cast in the following parts: a middle-class Victorian surveying the slum, a time travelling tourist from the twenty-first century looking at the nineteenth,

⁶ Smith 2006, p. 74

⁷ Smith 2006, p. 70

an observer of one of eight ill slum dweller characters who feature on the street, and one of those slum dwellers themselves.

On entering the area of the Leeds 1842 Street, visitors first watch a video of an actor as Robert Baker (this is in the room with the introductory painting of a Leeds cityscape in 1840, shown earlier in Figure 5.1). Baker's introduction conditions the visitor to assume that they will take on the role of a Victorian middle-class surveyor of the impoverished side of the city, as laid out in the original exhibition outline, by addressing the audience as such. The actor-as-Baker explains that the subject of his research is 'not the Leeds that you and I would recognise, the prosperous manufacturing town of which our young Queen Victoria would be proud. It's not the town of fine shops and elegant buildings with which the middle class are familiar.' This prompts the watching 'you' to see themselves as akin to Baker and their role in visiting the slum street as that of an outsider, and a Victorian outsider specifically. When the actor-as-Baker remarks that 'it's the crowded yards and courts behind the flimsy façade which bear witness to the terrible price being paid for our prosperity;' the visitor is encouraged to see 'our prosperity' as meaning theirs (or at least the character that they may be assuming). However, before entering the street itself, visitors are then encouraged to pick up a card related to one of the characters depicted in mannequins on the street (seen in Figures 7.1 and 7.2), whose story they can follow through this gallery and the next. Visitors, first prompted to associate themselves with Baker and his surveyors, are now given somebody else to relate to. As Graham Black, one of the museum's original designers, explained the street's intentions: 'Visitors walk through the slum to explore the lives and illnesses of its inhabitants. They select an individual character to identify with.'⁸ However, the lines are blurred around whether this identification with the character means that the museum scripts expect the visitor to assume the role of their chosen character, and perform it or observe them from the outside.

⁸ Graham Black, 'Developing the Concept for the Thackray Medical Museum, Leeds' in *Heritage Visitor Attractions: An Operations Management Perspective* edited by Anna Leask and Ian Yeoman (London: Cengage Learning, 1999), p. 257

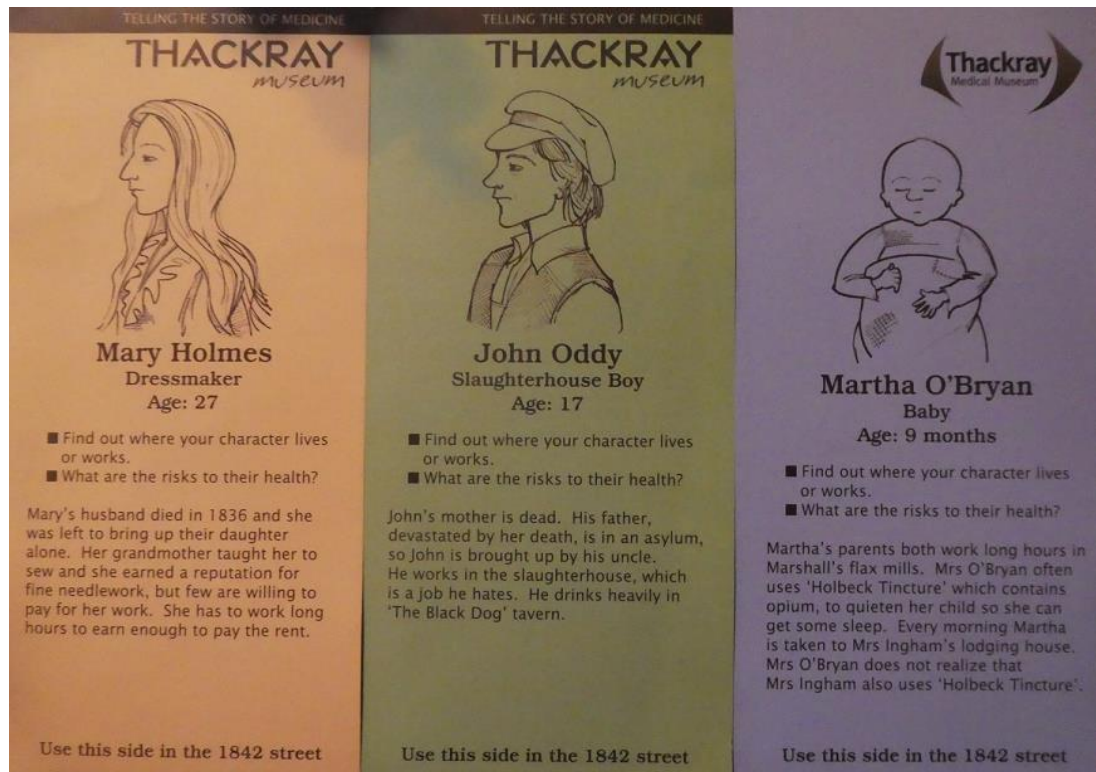


Figure 7.1: Examples of 'choose a character' cards for the Leeds 1842 Street



Figure 7.2: Mannequin of John Oddy inside the Leeds 1842 Street's slaughterhouse display

The text panel on the wall prompting visitors to ‘Choose a Character’ and offering the choice of cards refer to them as ‘your character,’ rather than ‘you,’ as do the cards themselves. However, these pronouns are not consistent throughout the various gallery scripts, nor within different descriptions of the museum’s own intentions for its visitors. The original 1990s marketing leaflet for the museum prompted visitors to ‘Experience life in the 1840s. Walk back in time and experience the sights, sounds and smells of Victorian slum life.’⁹ Here the visitor’s role performing the part of a time traveller is emphasised, while there is no suggestion that they should identify with or assume the role of one of the Victorian characters. In the 2001 leaflet visitors were sold the possibility of being able to ‘take a walk through the “Living Hell” of the slums of Victorian Leeds’ and ‘experience the filth, stench and squalor of overcrowded slum dwellings.’ This would appear once again to encourage the visitor to play the tourist in the slum, whether imagining oneself a time traveller or in the role of one of Chadwick and Baker’s surveyors, experiencing the hellish conditions as an outsider. However, that leaflet went on to suggest that visitors can ‘become one of the eight Victorian characters that you meet on your journey’, encouraging them to: ‘Explore their lives and the risks to their health. Search for a treatment to your illness.’¹⁰

The part that the visitor plays in this script is a fluid one. They are encouraged to enter the street as an outsider tourist, then immerse themselves in the scene so that they assume the role of the character, trying to find a treatment for ‘your illness.’ A similar fluidity can be seen in the 2007 leaflet in which visitors are encouraged to ‘Choose a character and follow their life and ailments. Pick the treatments that determine your survival amongst the rats, fleas and bed bugs.’¹¹ Here the suggestion to ‘choose a character’ initially implies that the visitor is following the narrative of a character separate from them, before the personal pronoun flips from ‘their’

⁹ Thackray Museum, ‘Have you got the guts to take a look inside the museum that means so much to everybody’, leaflet, 1998, p. 4

¹⁰ Thackray Museum, ‘We’re Full of Life: A Living Experience’, leaflet, 2001, p. 2

¹¹ Thackray Museum, ‘Thackray Museum, Leeds: Telling the Story of Medicine’, leaflet, 2007, p. 2

to 'your', suggesting that once the visitor immerses themselves in the scene and their character they will start to play the role of their chosen character and invest emotionally in their own survival.

With this variety of different script prompts, it is no surprise to see different visitors choosing to play different parts during their visit to the street, even in some of the earliest the reviews of the museum. A museum professional wrote in the *Museums Journal* in praise of the museum's 'set pieces':

At the beginning of the gallery I had picked up a card for a character called John Oddy. I now found him cheerily disembowelling an animal in the slaughterhouse yard, blood from the carcass flecking a tray of freshly-bakes pies balanced on the hard wall.

In Health Choices in Victorian Britain, I discovered that Oddy had suffered an untimely death but from smallpox, not from eating dodgy pies.¹²

This reviewer approached the street from the position of an audience member following John Oddy's story as an onlooker rather than taking on the role of Oddy. He noted 'finding' Oddy (in the form of his mannequin seen in Figure 7.2) in the midst of his daily work and later learning about the character's death. While the reviewer selected Oddy out of all the characters, there is no suggestion that he did so because he identified with or played the role of the character, just that he found his story interesting. A degree of analytical detachment is perhaps to be expected in a professional assessment of the display's strengths and weaknesses published in a professional journal. Reviews in the mainstream press stressed a slightly different visitor role, with the *Yorkshire Evening Post* praising how 'visitors walk back in time through the grim streets of Victorian Leeds and experience how people really lived.'¹³ When not reviewed with the detachment of a fellow museum professional the visitor to the street is seen as assuming the role of the time traveller. There is no mention in this review of visitors relating

¹² Richard Butterfield, 'Reviews: When the cutting edge was blunt', *Museums Journal* May 1997, 97 (5), p. 23

¹³ 'Prescription for having some fun', *Yorkshire Evening Post* Saturday 26 July 1997, p. 3

to or imagining themselves in the role of the street's characters, but there is plenty of evidence of this in the way that visitors behave on the street.

One of the museum's development team described how 'you picked a character and you went through, saw where they lived and asked: "Did they survive?" And at the end of it, you know: "Oh dear, Grandad, you chose x, you're now dead!" Big laugh.'¹⁴ As with the scripts suggested by the museum's marketing, the personal pronoun by which the character is referred flips from 'they' to 'you'. Visitors are seen identifying firstly with an observer following the character's story, viewing their homes and living conditions and, as they come to discover more about their lives, becoming more closely associated with their character so that the character's final fate becomes 'you're now dead.' The visitor thus enjoys the playful and imaginative association of the members of their group and their characters. Sometimes this may involve simply adjusting the language by which the characters are referred to a more empathetic 'you' or 'me', but it may equally involve some degree of literally assuming a part and performing a character. The latter can be a part of the museum's formal education sessions. As a Thackray learning officer described it:

We get them, the kids, to be one of the mannequins, they dress up as one of the mannequins, and then they themselves become a character that lives on the street. So it kind of becomes more natural for them to ask questions as if you are a Victorian because they're acting as a Victorian too.¹⁵

By being given a costume and a character the visitor changes from observer to someone who acts 'as a Victorian' and behaves as someone 'that lives on the street.'

What is significant to note about both the scripts presented by the museum's staff and marketing materials, and the responses to the street observed in visitors, is that the visitors' performance takes many different roles that the visitor is happy to slip between or playfully try out. As with viewing the Leeds 1842 Street's characters concurrently as both 'them' and

¹⁴ Interview TM D1, 22.10.15

¹⁵ Interview TM L2, 19.05.16

'me,' visitors can also perceive themselves in multiple roles at once and can move between different states of being audience and performer. This serves as an example in microcosm of visitor behaviour and meaning-making within the Victorian street scene in general and forms the basis of Part III's exploration of the negotiation, between visitors and the authoritative voice of the museum, of roles of audience, performer, and scripter.

Chapter Five – Re-enactment and Role Play: Visitor Roles in Costumed Interpretation – explores the most traditional and theatre-like form of museum performance: live costumed interpretation. It argues that neither the interpreter nor the audience's roles are as rigidly defined as they originally appear with interpreters shifting between first- and third-person performances and back, and audiences shifting between passive observation and assuming parts in the scene. It shows that live costumed interpretation often develops from demonstration to dialogue, allowing the visitor to direct the narrative how they want as they become more participatory. Finally, Chapter Six – Narrative Authority and The Polyglossic Museum – looks to the museum street scene as a place in which different power structures can play out, allowing different voices into the official, authorised narrative. It looks to the literary theories of Mikhail Bakhtin to suggest that the museum street scene offers a space where meaning is made in a dialogue that allows for playful role reversals of traditional structures of authority and the incorporation of both official and unofficial voices to work together to make meaning.

Chapter Five

Re-enactment and Role-Play: Visitor Roles in Costumed Interpretation

Parts I and II have already discussed the similarities and significant differences between the museum street scene and a theatrical stage scene, but how do these differences manifest when actor-performers are introduced into the scene?

In his 2007 study of American living history sites at Plimoth Plantation, Colonial Williamsburg and Old Sturbridge Village, Scott Magelssen argued that the spatial configuration of 'living museum environments' allows them to erase the normal modes of theatre audience perception. The removal of the proscenium arch, the performer-spectator divide, invites a perception which is 'no longer a mirror of reality on the other side of the picture frame, but a total surface, in which a multiplicity of realities may exist.'¹ He suggested that live costumed interpretation in museums creates the potential for multiple performative realities to coexist at once and for multiple participants to collaborate in making their own meaning from the performance. Ultimately, Magelssen concluded, this potential was often a missed opportunity in which 'while living history museums physically incorporate staging models that break the performer-spectator relationship of the proscenium theatre': the visitor remains intellectually constrained as a passive audience even if no longer physically bound by theatre seating.² Magelssen attributed this to a temporal barrier between first-person performers acting as if in the past and present day visitors, a barrier which psychologically served a similar purpose to the proscenium in keeping the performer apart from the audience.³ This chapter considers the live costumed interpretation at York Castle, Abbey House and the Thackray Museum in the light of Magelssen's argument that live costumed interpretation can open things up to a dialogue of multiple

¹ Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), p. 104

² Magelssen 2007, p. 125

³ Magelssen 2007, p. 124

performative realities. It looks at the variety of different forms of live costumed interpretation featured in the three streets: first-person theatrical performance, first- and third-person demonstration and interaction, costumed interpretation in formal education sessions, and costumed visitor performance. It concludes that, while it is reasonable to find, as Magelssen did, that the authority for directing museum narratives and performances lies more with the museum performer than the audience-performer, the fluid dynamic of performance roles, between first- and third-person performance, for example, or observing audience member and participatory audience member, does allow the visitor to construct a dialogue from these performances.

Audience and Performance

Museum audiences can be placed within wider debates about the role and agency of all media audiences. In particular, Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst's *Audiences* (1998) provides a useful outline to understanding the fluid nature of the museum visitor as both audience and performer. Abercrombie and Longhurst's theory of audience conceptualised three basic types of audience: the simple audience, which provides focused attention to an organised performance conducted in their presence in accordance with specific rules and rituals (traditional theatre, football matches, and religious ceremonies are examples); the mass audience, in which performances are mediated rather than immediate and not subject to direct communication or spatial localization, but consumed in private with less formality and less attention (modern mass media, television and radio broadcasts, are examples); and the diffused audience, in which the proliferation of mass media has made performances, and therefore audiences, a part of the background of everyday life.⁴ Informed in part by the philosophies of performance in everyday life discussed here in earlier chapters, in particular that of Erving Goffman, Abercrombie and Longhurst

⁴ Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), pp. 39-76

concluded that in the postmodern era of the diffused audience, 'life is a constant performance; we are audience and performer at the same time; everybody is an audience all the time.'⁵ While Abercrombie and Longhurst argued that the mass audience developed during the modern era and the diffused audience in the postmodern, all three types of audience continue to exist throughout. In the museum, as this chapter will demonstrate, they can all still be found. A living history re-enactment may be performed in a manner akin to traditional theatre to a simple audience with a proscenium-type performance-audience divide. However, if the performance involves implicating the audience as part of the show, giving them a specific role such as a jury in the re-enactment of a historic trial, then they slip into the role of the diffused audience, simultaneously performer and observer.

The diffused audience, the spread of the experience of being both audience and performer across all aspects of daily life, is seen by Abercrombie and Longhurst as resulting from an increased spectacularization of the everyday.⁶ This they termed the Spectacle/Performance Paradigm, citing John Urry's earlier cited work on the tourist gaze to suggest that 'contemporary life in general is a question of spectacle and the aim of modern life is to see and be seen, an aim that has come to dominate leisure activities of all kinds and not just tourism.'⁷ The Spectacle/Performance Paradigm makes the ordinary social world into one in which everyone is performing for an audience, real or imagined.⁸ A postmodern museum visitor already exists in a world in which they are used to being both a performer and audience member on a near constant basis, the lines between performer and audience constantly blurring and those roles consistently switching. It is in light of these different ways of being both audience and performer and moving between the two that meaning-making in performance on the Victorian street scenes in can be understood.

In *Theatre & Museums* (2013), Susan Bennett's link between audience roles in non-traditional theatre and museums prompted her to

⁵ Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, p. 73

⁶ Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, p. 88

⁷ Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, p. 81

⁸ Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, pp. 77-98

argue that the visitor-as-performer or, at the very least, active audience member challenges the concept of the visitor as a passive consumer of the museum's authoritative message. She argued that visitors could now be 'collaborators' in the making of meaning in the museum, rather than existing in 'hushed contemplation.'⁹ We have already seen a demonstrable example of the collaboration between museum-scripter and audience-performer in Chapter Three's construction of street-level narrative through a sequence of pedestrian speech acts. However, the shifting roles of audience member and performer and the way in which this can contribute to more varied and personal forms of meaning-making are even more apparent when considering the performative interactions of live costumed interpretation.

Live Costumed Interpretation in Museum Street Scenes

Live costumed interpretation has been a part of the concept of reconstructed street scenes in museums since the earliest days of the street-in-a-museum concept. The previously discussed forerunners of the museum street reconstructions in Scandinavian open-air folk museums and the 'old towns' displayed in the nineteenth-century international exhibitions made use of staff in period costume as demonstrators and shopkeepers and this principle was part of Sheppard and Kirk's street plans, even if costumed interpreters did not actually appear in practice at these first museum streets. Had Hull's Old Times Street been completed and opened to the public, it was part of Sheppard's plan to have the shops staffed by costumed interpreters. As his obituary reported, 'If the shops had come to fruition, Mr Sheppard intended that the shops should be staffed by people in old-time dress, men-folk in top hats. An old blacksmith had offered to work at the forge.'¹⁰ While York Castle's Kirkgate did not adopt the practice of regularly staffing its recreated shops with costumed interpreters until after the 2006 renovation, the possibility of featuring costumed staff within the displays was there in the

⁹ Susan Bennett, *Theatre & Museums* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 19

¹⁰ 'Death of Mr Thomas Sheppard, Director of Hull Museums for 40 Years', *Hull Daily Mail*, 19 February 1945, p. 4

original plans. In J. Percival Chaplin's original 1934 designs for the street the display of a reconstructed tallow dip chandler (which was eventually constructed within one of the cells leading from the prison exercise yard) featured a costumed figure arranging a rack of candles for dipping (Figure 8.1). As with Chaplin's design for the street as a whole, the character may serve in part to give a sense of the scale of the display, but equally suggests how the reconstruction could be brought to life by the presence of a living human component, one who could demonstrate the traditional craft interpreted by the display.



Figure 8.1: Design for York Castle's tallow dip factory, J. Percival Chaplin (1934)¹¹

The streets at Abbey House had a more ambivalent relationship with the use of costumed interpreters. Having worked on the Princess Mary Court extension to York Castle's street and then curated the original street scenes at Abbey House before becoming director of Leeds Museums, Cyril Maynard Mitchell wrote the Museums Association's handbook on reconstructed craft workshops in 1961. In its pages Mitchell argued against the use of

¹¹ York, York Castle Museum, Kirk Archive, Box 1

mannequins, suggesting that they are ‘apt to look artificial and that artificiality is easily imposed on the general scene,’ but even with costumed interpreters he felt that care needed to be taken to ensure that they felt appropriate to their environment. Mitchell concluded that ‘it is far better to have an empty workshop which looks as though the craftsman will be back in five minutes, than one containing figures which look as though they have been immobile for many years, or live people who, by their actions and mannerisms show that they are in unfamiliar surroundings.’¹² As a result of Mitchell’s views, Abbey House’s streets featured neither display mannequins nor costumed interpreters, at least not on a daily basis. Costumed interpretation did, however, feature prominently in the image of the museum’s street promoted to the wider public, as can be seen by a pair of Pathé newsreel films produced in the decade after the streets were opened.



Figure 8.2: Still from Pathé film *Leeds Victorian Museum* (1966)

The narration of the film *Leeds of Yesterday*, released in 1958 after the opening of Abbey Fold and Harewood Square, enthusiastically commended the museum’s ability to bring the past to life, describing how:

¹² Cyril Maynard Mitchell, *Applied Science and Technology before the Industrial Revolution: Handbook for Museum Curators* (London: Museums Association, 1961), p. 63

The streets, and their shops, in which original crafts are still carried on were erected because the museum authorities felt the need for preserving the atmosphere and character of yesterday, now that in modern Leeds scenes like these have disappeared - the blacksmith's for example.¹³

The film then showed a blacksmith, costumed in a leather apron, working bellows and hammering against an anvil. The clear implication being that the success of the museum at giving its exhibits life lay in the costumed actor performing an act of carrying on traditional crafts, that this performance was what preserved the 'atmosphere and character of yesteryear,' despite the fact that this was not a part of the regular museum practice nor particularly approved of by the curator, Mitchell.

A second film, *Leeds Victorian Museum* (1966), made even more explicit a potential script for an imagined visitor to the museum encountering live costumed interpretation. 'Let's see what was on sale in the ironmonger's shop,' the voiceover narration said, as the film showed a woman walking into the shop to see a man costumed and performing the role of shopkeeper. Even though the woman was also costumed in a nineteenth-century style, the camera followed the woman into the shop, viewing the rest of the scene from over her shoulder looking across the counter, as if we, the audience, were invited to assume her point of view (Figure 8.2). Her role was roughly analogous to a hypothetical visitor to the museum street. The woman was then seen pointing to various objects in the shop as the costumed performer demonstrated their function, the voiceover narration now assuming his voice as it explained: 'Here's one of the first vacuum cleaners, not quite made to glide around the furniture. But even in 1880 labour saving devices were well on their way. Here's the new portable model, which keeps you fit as you manipulate the suction bellows by hand.'¹⁴ The film provided a script for a possible interaction in which the visitor assumes the role of a Victorian shopper while the costumed interpreter demonstrates his wares, switching between a playful performance of a nineteenth-century salesman – 'here's the new portable model' – and a third-person interpreter performing in the

¹³ *Leeds Of Yesterday* (London: British Pathé, 1958)

¹⁴ *Leeds Victorian Museum* (London: British Pathé, 1966)

present – ‘even in 1880 labour saving devices were well on their way.’ This was a model for how a viewer could perform in the museum once they became a visitor.

Despite the presentation of sites such as Abbey House as environments in which costumed living interpreters brought the past to life and interacted with the public in promotional materials, costumed interpretation did not become a regular part of British museums until late in the twentieth century. Just as, in the previous chapters, the forms of staging the streets of the past in theatres were linked to the development of a street stage in museums, costumed interpretation can also be tied to developments in the staging of theatre in the twentieth century. In *Theatres of Memory*, Raphael Samuel drew parallels between the immediacy sought by placing the contemporary museum visitor ‘as an eavesdropper on the past’ and ‘TV docudramas and 1960s *cinema-verité*.’ He argued that living history interpretation in museums and heritage sites was ‘very much of a piece with the more generalized revolt against formality and such characteristic 1960s cultural (or counter-cultural) enthusiasms as “theatre in the round”, with its rejection of the proscenium stage in favour of free-floating space.’ Samuel saw such performances in heritage spaces as part of the same movement as the emergence of prominent National Theatre promenade productions such as Bill Bryden’s *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1978) in which ‘the audience, instead of being passive spectators, were invited to fraternize with the actors.’¹⁵ Despite this, costumed interpretation was rare enough in British museums by 1980 for the American museum director and writer George Ellis Burcaw to note in *Museums Journal* that, though popular in America, ‘living history was seen as a stunt, as “gimmickry” in Britain.’¹⁶ Burcaw concluded that ‘I was pleased to be told by the director of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum that two or three interpreters in selected locations at Blists Hill would be in authentic period dress soon. It may be that history can be too lively, but you in the United Kingdom have a long way to go before you need worry about

¹⁵ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* 2nd edn (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 192

¹⁶ G. Ellis Burcaw, ‘Can history be too lively?’, *Museums Journal* June 1980, Volume 80 (1), pp. 5

it.¹⁷ By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, costumed interpreters had become a normal sight staffing the recreated shops of Blists Hill and its brethren, and even in the indoor museum streets discussed here.

Abbey House continues to follow Mitchell's opposition to using mannequins in its street display. A current curator, who also worked on the street's 2001 renovation, recalled that:

There were arguments [during the 2001 renovation] about whether we should have Gems figures standing as shopkeepers within the displays and I'm very glad that we decided not to do that. [...] When the cobwebs grow between their ears, it's rather unpleasant.¹⁸

Since 2001, however, there has been a move to utilise the street more in the manner suggested by the earlier Pathé films. As the curator explained, 'It's not a permanent feature of the visit, but we do have costumed interpreters inside the shops,' pointing to volunteers 'who come in and sort of adopt a character.'¹⁹ Live costumed interpretation is not part of every visitor's experience at Abbey House, but is used in formal education sessions, alongside the volunteers assuming the role of shopkeeper-demonstrators, and theatrical performance events.

When the Thackray Museum was in development in the 1990s, costumed interpreters were considered but largely ruled out as too expensive. One of the development team further explained that they were influenced by how costumed interpretation had become such a mainstay of the nearby Royal Armouries that it had been to the detriment of visitor interaction with the museum's objects and displays: '[Visitors] went from one costumed interpreter to another and the stuff in the cases was just wallpaper for many people,' like Baudelaire's hypothetical Louvre visitor only interested in a Titian, rather than the street scene *flâneur*.²⁰ As discussed in the introduction to Part III, the street's characters and their mannequins fill some of the role of costumed interpreters, with the museum's marketing echoing

¹⁷ Burcaw 1980, p. 7

¹⁸ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

¹⁹ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

²⁰ Interview TM D2, 10.11.15

the language of 'living history' by selling the museum and its street as 'a living experience.'²¹ The characters people the street with a human element to create an empathy-driven narrative and allow visitors to interact and role play as fellow Victorians. As one current curator suggested when comparing the Leeds 1842 Street to another without human characters, the Museum of London Docklands' Sailortown, 'they don't have the people that we have. So, I suppose, theirs is more of a traditional display, in the sense that they've changed the surroundings but they're not asking you to engage in a different way really.'²² Beyond the use of the characters as mannequins, live costumed interpretation does get used by the Thackray Museum in formal education sessions in which learning staff and sometimes students will dress in appropriate costume to visit the street.

Costumed interpretation was introduced as part of the regular visitor experience at York Castle in 2006. The marketing for the newly renovated Kirkgate leant heavily on the presence of costumed interpreters with a leaflet and poster campaign depicting costumed staff serving in the shops and walking in the street, captioned by the slogan 'You've seen the street, now meet the people.'²³ The museum's toy shop, grocer's shop and sweet shop were opened to the public, each with a costumed shopkeeper who could both sell small souvenirs, such as sugar mice in the sweet shop or packets of loose leaf tea in the grocer, or provide live interpretation for the visitor. Although publicised as a novel approach for the museum, the staffing of the shops with costumed interpreters is in reality an extension of the policies that existed under the curator Robert Patterson in the 1950s and 1960s. The grocer selling tea packets is a remodelled use of the same space as the post office established under Patterson's curatorship and referenced in the introduction to Part I as selling Victorian stamps and postcards. Patterson even advocated a form of costume for his post office workers. As reported in *Museums Journal*, 'he thought in many cases the costumes were too specialized and the people appeared over-dressed. Much better were the nondescript, dateless costumes; in this country, for example, for about three

²¹ Thackray Museum, 'We're Full of Life: A Living Experience', leaflet, 2001

²² Interview TM C1, 19.05.16

²³ York Castle Museum, 'You've seen the street, now meet the people', leaflet, 2006

hundred years the standard female costume of the poor was a blouse and a skirt.²⁴ These 'nondescript' blouse, skirt and apron costumes have become the standard for many of the costumed interpreters discussed here, including York's. In fact, the main difference between 2006's 'meet the people' renovation and Patterson's post office was in the 2006 renovation making a permanent fixture of what had been a temporary experiment in previous generations. Following Kirkgate's 2012 renovation, two more shops were opened up in such a way that they could be staffed by costumed interpreters, a chemist and a draper, leaving five possible spaces for costumed staff. However, budget and staffing cuts meant that the role of costumed interpreter within the Kirkgate shops was switched to one largely filled by museum volunteers rather than paid members of staff. Only the main gallery attendant on Kirkgate remained a permanent paid costumed interpreter role. This reliance on volunteers has meant that, while formerly costumed interpreters were a daily part of the experience of the Victorian street at York Castle, today they are only present on the haphazard basis of volunteer availability.

First- versus Third-Person Interpretation

In each of the three museum streets there are a variety of approaches to live costumed interpretation, something that creates the space for multiple possible audience experiences. In so doing they offer the possibility of challenging Magelssen's argument that live interpretation maintains a performance-spectator division through a temporal proscenium barrier. The majority of the live interpretation at the American sites studied by Magelssen was conducted in the first person, which is more typical of sites such as Plimoth Plantation than with the staff of British museums. This may in part be due to Britain's slighter living history tradition than America, as observed by Burcaw. As David Lowenthal noted, performative re-enactment forms of live interpretation traditionally 'seemed superfluous where *real* history was

²⁴ 'Folk Parks. A Report of a Seminar Organized by the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York in October 1966', *Museums Journal* December 1966, 66 (3), pp. 220-224

plentiful. [...] Compared with spirited American shows, Britain's past remained largely passive.²⁵ This may account for how the live costumed interpreters on the Victorian street scenes have not tended to embrace first-person in-character interpretation on the same level as those at Plimoth Plantation. Magelssen cited the folklorist Jay Anderson's *The Living Time Machine: The World of Living History* (1984) as indicative of the view that first-person, present-tense, in-character live interpretation serves as 'the model that best allows the exploration of the past – inaccessible through other modes of exhibition,' meaning that Anderson perceived Plimoth as 'the ultimate form of living museum interpretation.'²⁶ This view was not, however, echoed at the Yorkshire museums with street scenes. While the relative merits of first- and third-person interpretation is something that was demonstrated in interviews as part of the thought process of staff at all levels, these staff were decidedly more ambivalent about the advantages of first person, in-character performance than is common at the American museums discussed by Magelssen.

At Abbey House, one curator stressed both the engaging strength of live interpretation, but also the possible reticence of visitors when directly approached: 'I think they respond very well to actual real people, but people don't always respond to someone who's coming up to them.' Significantly, she added that 'it's more difficult if you have somebody who stays in-character and won't interact with you as a twenty-first-century person. I personally [...] don't want someone to sort of bound up to me pretending to be Victorian.'²⁷ Here first-person interpretation was seen as actively intrusive. As with the potential for discomfort in immersive museum environments discussed in Chapter Four, something designed to enhance the visitor experience could potentially have an adverse effect, preventing the possibility of collaborative meaning-making. The curator's personal discomfort with first-person in-character interpretation was also something reflected in staff at other sites: one of the Thackray Museum learning staff

²⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 482

²⁶ Magelssen 2007, p. 5

²⁷ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

stated that ‘it’s an awkward one because the thing that I really don’t like is [...] people acting at me when I go to a museum.’²⁸ Lowenthal noted that this sense of discomfort was true of a lot of live interpretation interactions, stating that: ‘Prying annoys or intimidates reticent visitors. “Do I have to talk to these strange people?”’²⁹ Meanwhile, in *Consuming History* (2009), Jerome de Groot, while pointing to the benefits of live interpretation in encouraging ‘a different style of learning and engagement with the past,’ also observed that it can ‘confuse or embarrass a visitor.’³⁰

At Abbey House the approach to costumed interpretation performed by volunteers varies depending on the volunteer’s own skills and interests. While the curator suggested that costumed interpretation develops from volunteers who ‘are happy to take it on and create some sort of character,’ implying a first-person, in-character performance, only some of these volunteers actually do turn their own research into a specific character performance.³¹ As a learning officer explained:

It's not quite a play. [...] Each one does it slightly differently, so the pub landlord talks to you as if he's the pub landlord, whereas the Victorian washer woman will often talk you through as somebody looking back at a Victorian washer woman, rather than saying: ‘I am a Victorian washer woman.’ It depends on how comfortable the member of staff is.³²

A slightly subtler, but similar, differentiation can be seen between the first-person performances of learning staff at the Thackray Museum. One staff member contrasted her own approach with another first-person interpreter who ‘when she puts on her costume she is the Victorian school mistress’ and ‘if anyone mentions the electric lights they pretend that they don’t talk about it.’ She, however, frames her own performance by introducing herself in the present and explaining the concept of the street before saying ‘and now we’re going to imagine that we’re travelling back in time and I will become a

²⁸ Interview TM L1, 19.05.16

²⁹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 492

³⁰ Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in popular culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 116

³¹ Interview AHM C1, 21.04.15

³² Interview AHM L1, 14.05.15

Victorian,' arguing that to perform as a Victorian without such a framing explanation would 'feel dishonest.'³³

While there may be a feeling that there is some dishonesty in refusing to engage with the events of the years between the time period of the character and that of the audience, it may equally be that other museum interpreters perceive that an in-character, present-tense performance is easier for a visitor, particularly a child, to understand. This is the attitude taken by York Castle learning staff towards live costumed interpretation on Kirkgate. Asked to consider the benefits of first- or third-person approaches to live costumed interpretation, one learning officer justified the use of a first-person approach by saying:

Children respond better to a first-person character. [...] If somebody's in clothing [...] it jars a bit more if you're in third-person and you're: 'And this is how it would have been done'. [...] It feels more authentic and in keeping with the surroundings that you're in if the washtub lady who's doing some washing in Providence Court, say, is actually speaking as if she's a wash lady. [...] It doesn't make as much as sense, I don't think, to them if they're in third-person.³⁴

This attitude brings us back to Kevin Moore's threefold sense of the real, discussed in Chapter Two. Moore, like Anderson, praised Plimoth Plantation in particular for its use of first-person interpretation as 'creation of the real person transcends the limitations that might be expected in reconstruction.'³⁵ For the York Castle learning officer, as for Moore, the importance of the sense of authenticity in Kirkgate derives from the use of real objects in real settings with real, albeit performatively so, people. However, although she expressed a strong personal preference for first-person interpretation, this staff member did point to how its use is far from rigidly enforced or even the preferred approach in other departments of the museum. In a separate interview a York Castle curator gave a directly contradictory answer when talking about front of house staff and volunteers' live costumed interpretation,

³³ Interview TM L1, 19.05.16

³⁴ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

³⁵ Kevin Moore, *Museums and Popular Culture* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997), p. 145

saying that ‘more people seem to enjoy third-person interpretation than first-person interpretation.’³⁶ York Castle learning staff are hired on the basis of their ability to give acting performances, with many described as having ‘theatrical backgrounds’ and doing ‘a bit of re-enactment.’³⁷ In the case of front of house staff and volunteers, however, ‘we don’t expect them to have dramatic skills and performance skills and theatre skills,’ nor to give first-person, in-character interpretation.³⁸ Live costumed interpretation is not perceived to require the specialist skill set of an actor unless it is in the form of a first-person, in-character performance and, therefore, less trained staff are encouraged towards third-person performances.

Front of house staff and volunteers at York Castle give guided tours in costume, answer visitor enquiries and work behind the counter in the various shops referenced earlier. When asked if any of this involved first-person in-character interpretation, a curator answered unequivocally ‘no, not at all.’³⁹ The staff agreed, with one echoing Magelssen’s concern that first-person interpretation is problematic through failing to respond to present day questions, saying that the curators ‘would advise us probably not to be in-character, because it’s very hard to keep in it all the time and somebody’s bound to ask you a question where you’ll suddenly come out and answer it as you would do today.’⁴⁰ There is, however, some confusion amongst staff aware that their role is not to be in-character, while others in the museum might be. One member of the front of house team stated that:

There’s a very strict rule which our curators have put in, which is that if you’re a volunteer on the street [...] then you are a character. If you are one of the guides, then you are not. You are there to look the part, but you’re always being yourself and that’s a very clear distinction that’s been put to us.⁴¹

Volunteers, however, disagreed with this view of their role with one, working in the chemist’s shop, saying that ‘the role is not to pretend to be a chemist,

³⁶ Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

³⁷ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

³⁸ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

³⁹ Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

⁴⁰ Interview YCM F1, 22.09.16

⁴¹ Interview YCM F3, 22.09.16

but to talk about chemistry and what was available in the Victorian pharmacy.⁴² Another, working in the draper's shop, added: 'We tend to look the part, but we're not actors or actresses.'⁴³

Given the confusion amongst staff and volunteers about the mix of first- and third-person live costumed interpretation on Kirkgate, it should come as no surprise that there is also potential for visitor confusion in this area. A York Castle learning officer admitted that 'it sounds like, and it could potentially be, confusing for the visitor', but insisted that 'people accept it and it works.'⁴⁴ One costumed interpreter, who described her role as third-person interpretation, did admit however that 'because we're dressed in costume, [...] visitors often think that you're going to be providing some sort of performance for them or having some sort of character which you've got to represent.'⁴⁵ Further potential visitor confusion with regard to the role that costumed staff are playing can come from the fact that staff are styled as period shopkeepers and give museum interpretation, but the shops also still function as shops in the small souvenirs that they sell. In particular, the sweet shop functions as much as an actual sweet seller as it does a space for live interpretation. One staff member who regularly works in the sweet shop admitted:

You come in and the visitors will just start asking you for the sweets that are on the shelves behind you, which are display only, and you do have to explain that to them and make them aware of the things that they can buy. [...] Sometimes they'll be surprised that we are selling things in there. They're like: 'Ooh, you can actually buy things in here'. So, yeah, I think there is some confusion for visitors.⁴⁶

The confusion is twofold: on the one hand there are the visitors who seek to use the museum sweet shop solely as a sweet shop and are therefore disappointed that they are unable to take home as souvenirs objects that are part of the museum's permanent collection, while on the other there are

⁴² Interview YCM V1, 13.09.16

⁴³ Interview YCM V3, 04.10.16

⁴⁴ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

⁴⁵ Interview YCM F2, 22.09.16

⁴⁶ Interview YCM F2, 22.09.16

visitors who expect everything in the museum to be historic collections and are surprised that the costumed 'shopkeeper' is actually trading. In both scenarios there is some perceived failure on the part of the interpreter-visitor dialogue in having to correct the visitor's mistaken impressions.

Visitors' failure to respond to the museum's live interpretation in the expected way points to a significant aspect of live interpretation performance: the visitors' own role in constructing meaning from a live interpretation encounter. The learning officer who insisted that the mix of first- and third-person interpreters worked in spite of potential confusion suggested that this was so 'because we have so many different audiences in the street at one time and people do accept it and they make that leap.'⁴⁷ It is down to the visitors, therefore, to assume different audience roles in choosing to respond or not to certain types of live costumed interpretation and this is what makes the interpretation work, or not.

Audience Roles

The variety of visitor roles can be seen even in a relatively traditional piece of museum theatre, such as on Kirkgate at Christmas where, since 2009, a one-man promenade performance of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* takes place on the street throughout normal visiting hours.⁴⁸ As described by the staff member responsible for organising the performance:

Visitors would just come across it on their normal route around the museum. They'd just come into the street and see that something's happening. [...] Other visitors are wandering past. You don't have to stop and listen, you can just look at the shops. There's no sort of formal sitting down, unless you want to sit on the cobbles. [...] You can either listen or just carry on.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

⁴⁸ 'The cry of "bah humbug!" echoed around York's Castle Museum as Ebenezer Scrooge made an appearance in his Victorian parlour', *York Press* 1 December 2009 [online] <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/4769342.The_cry_of_bah_humbug_echoed_around_York_s_Castle_Museum_as_Ebenezer_Scrooge_made_an_appearance_in_his_Victorian_parlour/> accessed 1 February 2019

⁴⁹ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

This recalls observations of visitor-audience-performance roles made by the Performance, Learning and Heritage Project in Manchester, published in *Performing Heritage* (2011). Anthony Jackson, the project leader and a professor of educational theatre, noted that in responding to museum theatre performances visitors transitioned between different roles as they became, or resisted becoming, part of an audience. Visitors would switch back and forth between roles as “visitor”, “audience”, “participant” and “learner”, often simultaneously occupying multiple roles or blurring the distinctions between them.⁵⁰ Visitors were observed to split into three ‘tiers’ of audience as the performances took place: those seated directly around the performer (broadly equivalent to a traditional theatrical ‘simple audience’), those standing watching – ‘choosing to stay but wanting to keep their options open’ – and those who paid some attention as they moved through the rest of the gallery, treating the performance ‘as if it were another display in the museum to be viewed in passing.’⁵¹ Similar audience practices were observed in the Kirkgate *Christmas Carol* performance in which visitors are described as sitting attentively on the cobbles, standing on the street or wandering by. Jackson further noted that visitors made a ‘kind of cost-benefit analysis’ of whether to engage with the performance and potentially look foolish or not.⁵² This cost-benefit analysis was described by the York Castle learning officer:

You always get the people who are curious but very nervous and hesitant and don’t want to be picked on. [...] They want to go and have a look, but actually they’re reticent and a bit nervous about going too close because they don’t want to be singled out. They don’t want to have to talk, they just want to listen.⁵³

Meanwhile, as the museum theatre practitioner and scholar Catherine Hughes wrote in her contribution to *Performing Heritage*, audiences must

⁵⁰ Anthony Jackson, ‘Engaging the audience: negotiating performance in the museum’ in *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* edited by Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 12. For further observations of shifting visitor-audience-performer roles and the active construction of meaning at living history sites, see Gaynor Bagnall, ‘Performance and performativity at heritage sites’, *Museum and Society* 2003, 1 (2), pp. 87-103

⁵¹ Jackson 2011, p. 13

⁵² Jackson 2011, p. 14

⁵³ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

‘see double,’ both buying into the fiction of the performance and always aware of its theatrical frame.⁵⁴ Hughes compared the role of museum theatre performer and visitor-audience member to Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of the literary work, in which the reader is active in constructing meaning from a literary text.⁵⁵ Her assertion that ‘the spectators bring themselves to any performance – their prior experience and understanding from life and performance – which they use to find significance and create meaning’ echoes Falk’s and Dierking’s ideas about the interplay of contexts in the museum experience and can be seen in the way that visitor-audience behaviour contributes to the performance of museum theatre practitioners. As the visitors negotiate their role as audience members, this forces the performers to renegotiate how they relate to the audience, changing the performance.

The actor who performs *A Christmas Carol* on Kirkgate each Christmas is, therefore, praised for his skill in organising his role around the different visitors that the museum may receive: ‘He’s familiar with [...] the type of visitors who come. So he’s really good at tailoring each performance to the group that are in front of him and he’s very good at [...] being quite spontaneous and flexible with anything that he’s thrown.’⁵⁶ In this case the actor also literally negotiates the roles of the audience as, although the performance can exist solely as a one-man show with a traditional simple audience, the actor also has ‘various different hats that he can give out and he can get the group involved and give them parts to sort of become a part of the story.’⁵⁷ In one performance, for example, a willing child may take a flat cap and assume the role of Cratchit while the actor, as Scrooge, performs with or towards him; whereas in the next performance the audience may have no desire to become participants and the actor is both Scrooge and Cratchit. In one case the visitor becomes an audience member who then

⁵⁴ Catherine Hughes, ‘Mirror neurons and simulation: the role of the spectator in museum theatre’ in *Performing Heritage: Research, practice and innovation in museum theatre and live interpretation* edited by Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 192

⁵⁵ Hughes 2011, pp. 195-9

⁵⁶ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

⁵⁷ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

becomes a performer; in the other the audience member does not become a performer but helps to shape the course of the performance itself and is integral in developing its meanings.

The *Christmas Carol* actor's flexibility, the way in which 'if somebody throws in an awkward comment, he can sort of weave it into the story,'⁵⁸ is also played out in the less formally theatrical encounters between visitors and live costumed interpreters, showing that the concepts of first- or third-person interpretation are looser than their practitioners suggest. Having insisted that learning staff perform in first-person roles, a York Castle learning officer conceded that 'they can break character and it is flexible.' She suggested that a staff member performing in-character as a washer woman would, if faced with a specific enquiry from a twenty-first century visitor (such as 'why is she using that particular bit of blue on her washing?'), break character and refer to 'the context from her point of view as a twenty-first century person.'⁵⁹ This staff member concluded that in fact whether the interpreter remains first-person, in-character and present-tense or not comes from their need to 'respond to the group that you've got in front of you and you want to give them what they want.' A visitor who responds to seeing a costumed interpreter by saying 'Oh, wow, Mummy, look there's a Victorian! [...] I wonder what she's doing, let's go talk to her' prompts a different form of performance to one who responds with 'What is that brush that you've got there? How did they use that? What were they using in the pharmacist?'⁶⁰

Similarly, Kirkgate's costumed interpreters from the front of house and voluntary staff may insist that their role is to provide third-person interpretation but, when prompted by a visitor performance that is assuming in-character, first-person roles, they will respond in kind. One costumed interpreter – despite insisting that 'there's a very clear distinction' between first-person performances and his own third-person interpreter role – declared himself 'happy to play along with it to a certain extent.' He even added that he had created small performances and personae to use when

⁵⁸ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

⁵⁹ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

⁶⁰ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

acting in the first person. ‘During the school holidays, because we’ve got the Victorian school room, I have worked out a little five-minute thing that I do, which is sort of coming out as a teacher. Sort of: “Settle down children! Settle down. By your desks, by your desks!”, which they find quite entertaining.’⁶¹ ‘Sometimes they’ll come up to you and they might make a joke or they might say: “Oh, so who are you? And where do you work?” And they [...] expect you to have some sort of little character that you can perform’, another staff member admitted, before adding ‘I sort of play along with it to a certain degree and then I’ll go on to explain that I’m a guide in the museum and [...] give them some background information about the street.’⁶² This comment demonstrates the most typical way in which transitions between first- and third-person interactions are described by front of house staff and volunteers. With the visitors keen to role play as Victorians briefly, but constantly transitioning between that and their twenty-first century selves, moments of first-person interpretation are usually short and playful before returning to the third-person. One staff member suggested that ‘they have a bit of a laugh and they try and get in character briefly. But it’s not something where they want to get into role, or put a costume on, [...] just a quick conversation, a bit of a joke.’⁶³

In their playful transitions between eras and personae, and the way in which they either challenge the era and persona of the interpreter or take them along with them, visitors knowingly have fun with the strictures of first- and third-person costumed interpretation and the concept of re-enactment and are often the director of the interactions. These visitors are happy to cohabit in both the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries and in doing so they break down the possibility of a visitor-spectator temporal proscenium described by Magelssen. In fact Magelssen himself noted that the ‘post-tourist’, a tourist of the postmodern age of the diffused audience, may not buy into a first-person, present-tense, in-character performance in a museum

⁶¹ Interview YCM F3, 22.09.16

⁶² Interview YCM F2, 22.09.16

⁶³ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

in the way that a simple audience would.⁶⁴ As Magelssen argued, post-tourists are capable of engaging in several simultaneous performances:

Far from the image of the wide-eyed rube fresh out of the SUV [...], tourists are performers, too, [...] framing their interaction with the professional interpreters in terms of how they want to be perceived as much as they do to gather information or be entertained.⁶⁵

The twenty-first century appearance of the tourist-body, however, was still perceived as necessary at Plimoth in maintaining the separation of performer and audience. Lowenthal noted how thin the temporal and situational divide was at Plimoth when he recalled: 'To avoid confusion with period actors, visitors are asked to dress normally – a precaution confounded by a busload of Mennonites who looked uncannily like Massachusetts Pilgrims.'⁶⁶

Costumed Visitors

This last point suggests an alternative form of costumed performance that is worthy of attention: the costumed visitor. At the Thackray Museum the only costume for visitors occurs during formal education sessions. That this functions to put visitors more in the mindset of being in character has already been referenced. Museum staff are, however, keen for this possibility to be introduced to the general visitor, with one visitor assistant answering the question of what could improve the museum in the future by suggesting that the visitors be given 'a chance to dress up [...] as an old Victorian person. That would be cool, to walk around as an actual Victorian person.'⁶⁷ At York Castle and, particularly, Abbey House visitors have the opportunity to dress in replica Victorian costume, or elements of it, and this can result in a shift in visitor performance from that given while wearing their everyday clothes. In neither case does a complete costume change occur. On Kirkgate, it is simply a case of trying on garments such as capes and hats in the draper's shop, although visitors will have also come through the earlier fashion

⁶⁴ Magelssen 2007, p. 16

⁶⁵ Magelssen 2007, p. 138

⁶⁶ Lowenthal 2015, p. 479

⁶⁷ Interview TM F3, 20.09.16

gallery, 'Shaping the Body', which features more opportunities for trying on more replica costumes. At Abbey House, the haberdasher's shop contains a selection of 'dressing up' costume – dresses, skirts, jackets, waistcoats, and hats – to be worn over the visitor's normal clothes and deposited in a basket before the visitor leaves the street and continues their visit upstairs.

A York Castle curator who works regularly with both the costume collection and replicas for staff and visitors stressed the value of dressing in some element of period costume as providing insight into the people of the past. Describing the visitors' behaviour when dressed in costume, the curator noted that 'they tend to be a bit more self-conscious about how they're moving, how they're acting.' Referring to a replica gown that visitors can dress in elsewhere in the museum, she said that 'when people try this on, they move differently. It helps them to get contact with what it was like to have worn this kind of fashion in the past.'⁶⁸ Wearing even a partial replica of original costume affects the visitor's movement and behaviour, helping to create an embodied experience of a past person. This recalls Katherine M. Johnson's arguments in favour of the value of re-enactment as a practice of history through embodied perception. Johnson drew on a phenomenological view, following Merleau-Ponty, in advocating the primacy of embodied perception in people's relationship to the world. She argued that, while wearing the costume of the past cannot provide a complete understanding of past people's experiences, it can serve to create a 'form of kinaesthetic empathy.'⁶⁹ Wearing a reproduction of a Regency-era corset, Johnson argued, gave her a tangible embodied experience, a partial sense of the bodily experience of being a past person: 'how their movement may have been shaped by their clothing and how said clothing reflected the ways in which their society expected them to move.'⁷⁰ Similarly, wearing the reproduction costume in the museum does not give a visitor a complete understanding of life for someone who would have worn something similar,

⁶⁸ Interview YCM C1, 21.09.16

⁶⁹ Katherine M. Johnson, 'Rethinking (re)doing: historical re-enactment and/as historiography', *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 2015, 19 (2), pp. 193-206

⁷⁰ Johnson 2015, pp. 200-1

but it will give them a partial embodied sense of moving and acting in the nineteenth century, much as walking in the museum street has a partial feel of walking in the real street.

Even a very partial element of period costume can stimulate this different way of carrying oneself, of moving and interacting with the surrounding space. Chapter Three has already cited the observation of the Abbey House learning officer that children, when dressed up, ‘start to hold themselves differently, [...] talk differently [...], to clippy-clop round the street,’ even though they have not changed into new shoes or a complete ‘Victorian’ costume.⁷¹ This is not Johnson’s kinaesthetic empathy, as the visitors are not responding to physical stimuli but emotional ones. There is nothing bodily here to make the visitors walk in a different fashion, no change of footwear, skirts or trousers, simply a sense that they are in costume and therefore a semi-conscious desire to perform theatrically. Visitors choose to behave in a way that they perceive to be appropriate to how they are dressed and, thus, carry themselves and communicate in a manner that they imagine to be ‘Victorian.’ As one of the Kirkgate costumed interpreters observed of visitors’ ‘play acting’:

I’ve overheard visitors saying: “Oh, we can’t smile in this picture because we’re Victorians and we’re on the Victorian street.” So they all have very stern faces when they have their picture taken. [...] When there is some sort of play acting with visitors it’s always [...] the ways they’ve seen them interacting in films or TV programmes or historical novels and things like that.⁷²

The museum becomes the stage and the playground for these visitor groups to be actor, audience, and director all at once. One member of the group tells the other to perform the role of unsmiling Victorians, they perform the role and then serve as their own audience when looking back at their photograph.

These opportunities for wearing costume and role-playing as Victorians, assuming different roles from those that they came to the museum with, allow visitors different opportunities for how they approach

⁷¹ Interview AHM L1, 14.05.15

⁷² Interview YCM F2, 22.09.16

making meaning from the street. Magelssen was critical of how the marketing for 'living' museums 'strongly suggests that the visitors will be the ones doing the "living" at this living history site,' while in fact they remain largely observers of first- or third-person interpreters performing the living past.⁷³ He observed that this was particularly true of Plimoth Plantation, where the wearing of costume by visitors is explicitly banned, prompting visitors always to perform 'as themselves' even if partaking in historical tasks.⁷⁴ Museums with street scenes could encourage other time-hopping performances by further embracing the opportunity of costumed visitors and the kinaesthetic empathy that visitor costumes prompt. This could be achieved by providing a greater array of visitor costume options and encouraging (as happened accidentally with the Mennonites in Lowenthal's story) visitors to come to the museum already in costume.⁷⁵

Post- and Counter-Tourism

Magelssen argued that costumed visitor interpretation could prompt an alternative to the usual dynamic of first- or third-person interpretation. 'Second-person interpretation,' in which it is the visitor rather than a museum employee who assumes a historical character, could offer visitors greater opportunities to play a role in interpreting and understanding the past. This would create a 'historiographic and performative pedagogy' wherein the in-character visitor, asked to make choices based on their own understanding and unique sensibilities, could make meaning from the resultant historical or counter-historical outcomes.⁷⁶ For second-person performative interpretation to work, according to Magelssen, the museum should not view a visitor as 'an uninformed naïf stepping into what he or she regards as a convincing portrayal of the past,' but rather as a 'post-tourist.' Post-tourists are creative

⁷³ Magelssen 2007, pp. 138-41

⁷⁴ Magelssen 2007, p. 141

⁷⁵ Organised groups of members of the Victoriana-inspired costumed Steampunk sub-culture are already regular visitors to York's National Railway Museum, for example. 'Steampunk "Invasion" at National Railway Museum', *York Press* 23 February 2015 [online] <<https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/11811009.steampunk-invasion-at-national-railway-museum/>> accessed

⁷⁶ Magelssen 2007, p. 138

and aware visitors, capable of engaging in several different narratives and roles simultaneously.⁷⁷ The analysis of the sense of the authenticity of the museum street scene in Chapter Two referred to Edward Bruner's observation that visitors to Abraham Lincoln's birthplace at New Salem were happy to question the museum's authority and authenticity.⁷⁸ As part of this process, Bruner noted that visitors in interaction with the museum environment and interpretive staff 'play with time frames and experiment with alternative realities.'⁷⁹ These playful performances and interrogations of the staged nature of the museum are examples of post-tourism and, as that earlier chapter argued, can be seen in the way that visitors respond to the street scenes discussed here.

The post-tourist is the museum-visiting variant on Abercrombie and Longhurst's diffused audience member, the individual of a postmodern society who is a conscious performer and audience member at all times. Participatory second-person interpretation offers a way to utilise that form of visitor-performer behaviour to provide a more affective, and unique, museum meaning-making experience. Academics in America have observed successful instances of second-person immersive interpretation for the post-tourist visitor, particularly with regard to issues of great social change. The American museologist Valerie Casey, for example, observed that the visitor is dislodged from a passive spectatorial role at Colonial Williamsburg, in performances in which the visitor was given the part of the defendant in a historic trial. This allows the visitor to become aware of the staged and choreographed nature of their environment as they participate in and even subvert it.⁸⁰ Given the aware, postmodern, post-tourist quality that can be observed in contemporary visitors to the museum street scene, something similar could be achieved there.

⁷⁷ Magelssen 2007, p. 138

⁷⁸ Bruner 1994, p. 409

⁷⁹ Bruner 1994, p. 410

⁸⁰ Valerie Casey, 'Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum', *The Drama Review* 2005, 49 (3), pp. 78-95. See also the performance of visitors asked to re-enact Rosa Parks's act of civil disobedience on the original bus in which she first conducted her protest against segregation in Tracy C. Davis, 'Performing and the Real Thing in the Postmodern Museum', *The Drama Review* 1995, 39 (3), pp. 25-9

Examples of such second-person interpretation at museums remain rare, but there are opportunities to make use of such visitor-performer scenarios. At York Castle a learning officer observed that the forms of costumed interpretation which proved most impactful and engaging were those which involved the visitor within the performance. In particular, she highlighted an event in which visitors assumed the role of suffragette protestors marching through Kirkgate. Visitors had the chance to make 'Votes for Women' banners and sashes in the purple, white and green suffragette colours before marching down the street along with a costumed interpreter as the lead protestor, at which point she would have a confrontation with another costumed interpreter in the role of a policeman who would then arrest her. As the learning officer recalled:

People were really cross and upset, [...] they really felt the injustice and they felt that they wanted to get behind that campaign, and they bought into it. It helped them understand what that movement was all about and why people felt so strongly, the unfairness of somebody having a right to democracy and somebody else not having that right, just based on their gender. [It] helped them understand a historical event, a movement, in a way that perhaps they wouldn't have just by reading about it [...] They were part of that march up and down the street and part of that fight for 'No, let her go! Why have you chained her up?' And that was powerful.⁸¹

The suffragette protest served to better illuminate for the visitors the injustice of the lack of democratic rights for women in the late-nineteenth century by making them play a part in it. The confrontational aspect of the performance made it a far more active and affective meaning-making experience than forms of costumed interpretation which are more task-oriented. Being part of the protest, dressing in their sashes and waving their banners, made the visitors feel aligned to the cause and thus feel more strongly aggrieved by the lack of women's suffrage in the Victorian era. Performative pedagogy like this could be taken a step further by the museum street scenes fully embracing the post-tourist potential of second-person interpretation. The visitor protestors were still sidelined during the arrest of the interpreter

⁸¹ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16

playing the lead protestor. If they were placed in the scenario of having to be arrested for their beliefs, being put on trial or facing the many other difficult choices suffragettes faced at the end of the nineteenth century, what would they have done? The museum street scenes could use opportunities like this to see how visitors with their own unique personal contexts might have tried to resist or counter the course of history.

The theatre of the museum street scene is more than the experience of watching a performance narrative unfold through a proscenium arch which divides spectator-audience from the authoritative performers who control the narrative. As this chapter has demonstrated, in the museum street the postmodern diffused audience member can embrace their status as both audience and performer in a narrative that unfolds partly as planned by the museum and partly as guided by the visitor-performer. There is a fluidity to the roles which the visitor assumes, moving between the various audience forms outlined by Abercrombie and Longhurst, so on occasion they are simple audience members watching an in-character first-person interpretation play out like a piece of traditional theatre, but then in a moment they can cut in and break the proscenium divide with a post-tourist intervention. They can take directorial control, pull the interpreter out of their character, maybe out of their time period, to query something from a contemporary perspective. Both visitors and staff have to exist simultaneously in past and present, in-character and as themselves and the performance is built around this postmodern awareness. Visitors playfully enact roles of Victorian shoppers as they explore the street scene, but never without an awareness of their performance and a retention of their other roles at the same time. This is most obvious in the literal theatrical performance of live costumed interpretation, which has been outlined in this chapter, but can be found in any performative response to the street scene, its characters, and stories.

On the Thackray Museum's Leeds 1842 Street, as discussed in the introduction to Part III, visitors choose a character whose narrative they will follow through the street, but, like the reviewers mentioned in the introduction, their attitude to assuming this role is fluid. In one moment, they

will view the character as someone other than them, someone whose story they are to observe, in others they will relate directly to the characters, describing them as 'you' or 'me.' The following conversation between visitors on the Leeds 1842 Street shows the complexities of how post-tourist visitors relate to the street's characters:

Girl – I've got measles.

Woman – You've got measles? Right, OK. Not a bad thing if you had that now, is it, in 2016, measles?

Girl – No.

Woman – But then, what year is it?

Who have you got, then, [Man]?

Man – Thomas Sowden. And this is the smallest pub I've ever seen. And he comes here, apparently.

Woman – Oh, does he? Let's have a look. [...]

Man – But I know that I stay alive.

Girl – Do you?

Man – Yeah, 'cause I've done him before. There's only three of them that live.

Woman – It does give you a good idea of what it would be like.

Man – You should be able to play dominoes and get drunk in there.

Right, who are you?

Woman – The dressmaker. I've got TB.

Man – Yeah, and who are you?

Girl – That's me there.

Man – Yeah, but who are you? Oh, Finch. Finches, yeah.

Finch, that's her house. (TM Visitor Group 23)

The three visitors within this exchange played a lot with pronouns and timeframes, effortlessly sliding between them. The girl, for example, declared that 'I've got measles' in-character, but the conversation immediately slipped out of character to discuss the status of measles in 2016 and then slipped back in time with the question of what year it even is in the 'present' of the street. At another point the girl recognised her character, Alice Finch, as both 'me' and yet also someone and somewhere else in the form of the Alice mannequin. She was literally looking at 'herself' from the outside when she said 'that's me there.' Beyond this, however, the visitors also commented on how successfully or otherwise the museum pulls them into the scene. They were perpetually aware of their position in the constructed reality of the museum and happy to drop character to discuss this, with the man actively

seeking a greater level of participatory in-character second-person interpretation. His character card told him that Thomas Sowden the night soil worker, his chosen character, likes to drink and play dominoes in the Black Dog pub and therefore the visitor was disappointed at not being able to play out this scene for himself, with the pub being a space in which he was purely a simple, spectatorial audience member.

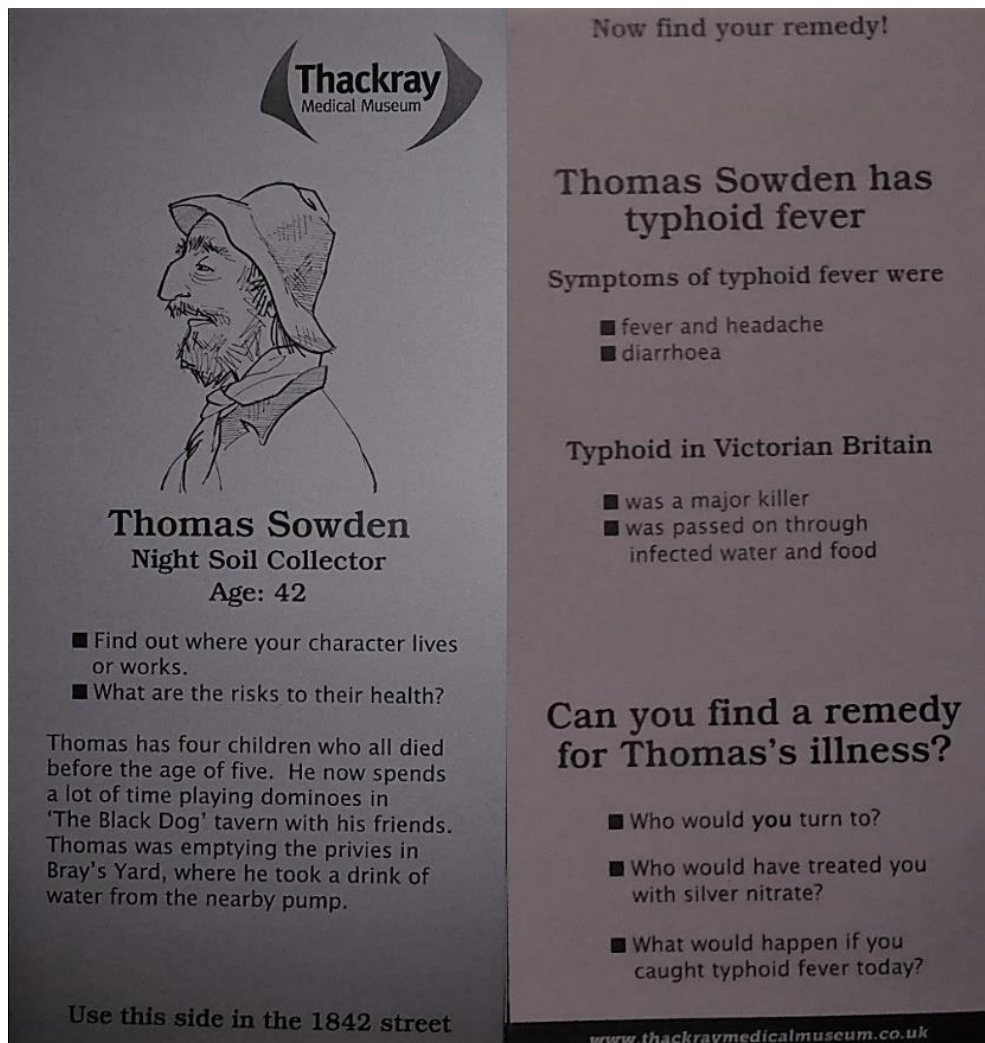


Figure 8.3: Character card for Thomas Sowden, Night Soil Collector, Leeds 1842 Street (front and back)

Perhaps most significantly, the group also actively defied the museum's script for exploring the characters' narratives. This they did in two ways. Firstly, the character cards are double sided (shown by Figure 8.3). The first side asks visitors to 'use this side on the 1842 street' and 'find out where your character lives and works' and uncover 'what are the risks to their health?' It is only after visiting the street that visitors are supposed to

turn the card over to the other side and see their character's diagnosis. This leads to the following gallery, 'Health Choices,' in which they explore possible treatments and discover their character's ultimate fate. By revealing that they have measles and tuberculosis from the outset, the girl and the woman in this group deliberately ignored the museum's script and decided how to approach their character's narrative in their own way, something that was a common response to the character cards in the recorded visitors. More than that, though, the man of this group deliberately chose Sowden from having visited the museum before and therefore having a prior knowledge of the characters' fate, something that he shared with the group. He knew which characters survive and which die in the museum's narrative and used that to assume a greater degree of control over his own fate as well as demonstrate that advanced knowledge to the group. This represents yet another variety of the fluid mixing of timeframes, incorporating elements from later in the museum into this visit to an earlier section, creating their own version of the narrative of the Leeds 1842 Street and its characters distinct from that prompted by the museum's scripts. By deliberately ignoring elements of the museum's scripts this group are not just post-tourists, they can also be seen as counter-tourists.

Chapter Four highlighted instances in which visitors disobeyed or behaved counter to the museum's scripts involuntarily, due to bodily conflict with the museum environment, but instances such as this also indicate a potential to resist or defy the museum's script deliberately. The postmodern audience's awareness of the staged and scripted nature of the museum allows them to follow or deny the museum's scripts as they go, to engage in counter-tourism. The idea of 'counter-tourism' was coined by the theatre and performance academic Phil Smith in his guise as performance artist Crab Man and published in his *Counter-Tourism: The Handbook* (2012). Smith's proposition is that post-tourists aware of the staged elements of heritage and tourism embrace their tourist status rather than deny it as artificial, taking the view that 'tourists are people who pick and choose what and how they experience, who mix and match things and their feelings about them, making

up their own leisure and heritage as they go along.⁸² Smith argued that there is a 'sameness' about heritage sites, that 'whatever the place or past, there's a common "heritage street" [with] different subplots of a common drama that we're all supposed to play our parts in.' Counter-tourism exists in the ability to deny this script and create your own, something which, Smith acknowledges, occurs even if the visitor is not being a conscious counter-tourist. All tourists mix up elements of heritage scripts, 'get lost along set routes, touch things they're told not to, and photograph and film objects from non-prescribed viewpoints.' Counter-tourists are simply those who enjoy deliberately subverting the script with radical anachronisms and rearrangements of the expected performance.⁸³ The group above may not consciously be coming to the museum to pursue a counter-tourist agenda, but they were obviously enjoying mashing up time periods, both present and past and reordering the path that the museum wanted them to take.

As with the involuntary bodily resistance to the museum scripts highlighted in Chapter Four, museums need to be aware of this *voluntary* resistance to their proposed script and build the likelihood of visitors wanting to pursue alternative paths into their design and curatorial approach. Introducing a greater degree of flexibility into how the narrative can unfold in the museum and with the on-street characters will assist a wider variety of visitors in achieving a satisfying meaning-making experience. A Thackray learning officer pointed to a situation in which just this flexibility had been added by live costumed interpretation at a Museums at Night event.

We did have characters in the street where there was a prostitute and there was a drunk midwife and a pickpocket. So, they were all quite unsavoury characters and, obviously they weren't swearing at the kids, but when it was adults that were coming through the street they were able to be bit more raunchy with the things that they were saying and saying a few things that maybe weren't entirely appropriate to a child audience.⁸⁴

⁸² Phil Smith, *Counter-Tourism: The Handbook* (Axminster: Triarchy Press, 2012), pp. 15-6

⁸³ Smith 2012, pp. 66-8

⁸⁴ Interview TM L2, 19.05.16

As with the previous chapter's suggestion that the museum incorporate more narratives of disabled Victorians into the Leeds 1842 Street through more flexibility with the character narratives, these live costumed interpreters assuming roles such as sex workers allowed for the inclusion of a thread in the story of nineteenth-century public health (venereal disease), which is otherwise conspicuous by its absence from the museum's narrative. This they did while remaining fluid enough in their performance roles to tailor their character and performance differently when needing to be more 'appropriate' for a child audience.

By embracing the visitor as a post- or counter-tourist, as somebody who is as involved in constructing the narrative of the museum street as the interpreter themselves, the museum street scenes can offer forms of live costumed interpretation which are flexible, allowing the construction of a succession of unique stories for each visiting group on any occasion. As Chapter Six will argue, the museum street is at its most effective when used as a theatre for a performance of multiple voices, both official and unofficial.

Chapter Six

Narrative Authority and the Polyglossic Museum

Previous chapters have argued that the museum Victorian street scenes were designed to tell the story of the ordinary 'Man in the Street' of the nineteenth-century to the ordinary 'Man in the Street' of the twentieth (and, latterly, the twenty-first) through the medium of exploring a simulated street environment. Chapter Three's view of the construction of narrative from above and from below – looking down on the whole street from without and then exploring it piece-by-piece from within – drew a parallel between these physical aspects and a more symbolic distinction between panoramic narratives of history told from above and the more everyday narratives at street-level. The visitors building their own pedestrian narratives to capture a version of the experience of Victorian pedestrian produce an alternative to an 'official' narrative of the Victorian era focused on great men and significant dates and events. Chapters Four and Five then showed different ways in which visitors can deliberately or unconsciously reject, defy or subvert the museum's scripts, negotiating and re-negotiating the roles which they perform within the street-stage, creating different versions of unofficial narrative, adding different voices into the mix. The previous chapter argued that the unofficial narrative voices supplied by post-tourist visitors, members of an aware, postmodern diffused audience, can provide an alternative to Laurajane Smith's Authorised Heritage Discourse. That chapter looked specifically at the more obviously performative example of audience-performer dynamics within formal live costumed interpretation scenarios, but the negotiation of performance and audience roles, and where the authority to direct the narrative lies, occurs throughout a museum visit. This chapter will argue that the less formal environment of the museum street scene, a staged version of history at street level, allows for a carnivalesque approach to the construction of narrative in which power structures are reversed and a singular monoglossic voice of authority deconstructed. It concludes that, although like the carnivals of the real world the reversal of power may be

illusory, the multi-vocal carnival of the museum street scene nevertheless contributes to a dialogic process of meaning-making.

Bakhtin, Polyglossia and the Carnavalesque

Earlier chapters have drawn a link between the construction of narratives of nineteenth-century life within the three-dimensional space of the museum street scene and in the literary narratives of the period. In those chapters Billie Melman's argument for an urban culture of the past and a street-level vision of life illuminated how the past is staged with the Victorian street scene. A further piece of literary theory can provide a framework for understanding the diverse array of voices that go into visitors' process of meaning-making: that of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin argued for the supremacy of the novel, as it emerged from modern industrialised society, over other more traditional literary forms. This was because the novel is not written with the single authoritative voice of more traditional narrative forms such as the epic. Instead, the novel can absorb elements and voices from a variety of places, creating a narrative that is polyglossic rather than monoglossic.¹ As an example, Bakhtin cited Vissarion Belinsky's description of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* as 'an encyclopedia of Russian life,' adding that:

this is no inert encyclopedia that merely catalogues the things of everyday life. Here Russian life speaks in all its voices, in all the languages and styles of the era. Literary language is not represented in the novel as a unitary, completely finished-off and indisputable language – it is represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing voices, developing and renewing itself.²

One could equally apply such a description to a museum, and more specifically to a folklife, social history, or living museum. We may refer back

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and the Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel' (1975a) in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3-40

² Mikhail Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' (1975b) in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 41-83, p. 49

to the early arguments in favour of such museums in the 1930s discussed in Chapter One, at the time in which Kirk and Sheppard's street scenes were being developed in York and Hull, to see the same image of the living encyclopedia of the nation or region. As argued in the *Museums Journal* of May 1930, a successful folk museum display would represent:

the whole in its harmonious diversity to bring out its relation to the varied environment and to the several races of inhabitants. Yet it is not enough thus to escape the monotony of the ordered museum. We want no home of the Sleeping Beauty; our buildings must be filled with life. The blacksmith at his forge, the weaver at his loom.³

Just as in the comparison between the novels of the nineteenth century and the literature of antiquity, the museum street's representation of the nineteenth-century street does not have the 'ordered monotony' of a monoglossic authorial voice, but instead can bring its objects and environment to life and create the possibility of multiple voices within the space's narrative.

Bakhtin located the polyglossia of the novel in a tradition of playful subversion of official authority embodied by the carnival tradition of a world turned upside down on feast days and fools' holidays, and passed into parodic literature.⁴ For Bakhtin, 'carnival' should not be understood within 'that narrow theatrical-pageantry concept of carnival, so very characteristic of modern times' and instead represented 'past millennia's way of sensing the world as one great communal performance.'⁵ Bakhtin noted that carnival images have a tendency to resemble spectacles, 'because of their obvious sensuous character and their strong element of play.'⁶ However, carnival should not be seen as simply spectacle, because it is not something that

³ 'Open-Air Folk Museums', *Museums Journal* May 1930, 29 (11), p. 378

⁴ Bakhtin 1975b, pp. 68-83; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, with an introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 122-132

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, with an introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 159-60

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin *Rabelais and His World* (1965) translated by H. Iswolsky in Pam Morris, ed. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Volshinov* (London: Arnold, 2003), p. 197

occurs with a separation of performer and audience. The carnivalesque is 'life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play.'⁷ This concept links the carnival with the way that narrative is constructed on the Victorian street scene, as outlined in earlier chapters. In particular, Chapter Five's description of performances within the museum street scene occurring without a proscenium divide between audience and performers finds its echo in Bakhtin's descriptions of carnival as 'a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act.'⁸

Much as the temporary heterotopia of the fair eventually dissipated to be replaced by a more permanent heterotopia in the form of amusement parks and similar entertainments, described in Chapter One, the carnivals of the past are no longer part of the life of modern society, but their worldview can be found in other media: what Bakhtin dubbed 'carnivalized literature.'⁹ Similarly, the contemporary heterotopia of the museum street can be viewed as a carnivalized museum space. The polyglossia of the carnival found its way into the dialogic nature of the novel in the latter's incorporation of the physical environments – and languages – of the marketplace and other public spaces. Bakhtin argued that the public square as 'the symbol of communal performance' became the main arena for carnival acts as it reflected the way in which carnival is universal and 'belongs to the whole people.'⁹ Carnivalized literature, such as the novels of Dostoevsky which form the focus of many of Bakhtin's arguments, takes place in these spaces of 'free familiar contact and communal performances.'⁹ As Bakhtin suggested, spaces such as 'streets, taverns, roads [...] and so on' can 'if they become meeting- and contact-points for heterogeneous people' serve as places of action within the novel with carnival-square significance. Within the museum displays referenced here, too, squares, streets and taverns are the places of action for the narrative and open up the possibility for the museum to be performed and read as a form of carnivalized literature.

⁷ Bakhtin 1965, p. 198

⁸ Bakhtin 1984, p. 122

⁹ Bakhtin 1984, p. 128

Bakhtin referred to the languages of the marketplace to indicate the polyglossic nature of carnival spaces. The familiar speech, curses and profanities of the marketplace provide another, unofficial, language that exists in dialogue with the official. For Bakhtin, 'the colloquialisms of the marketplace: the *cris de Paris* and the announcements made during fairs by quacks and vendors of drugs' are near impossible to separate from the literature of parody, farce and *soties*, especially since 'the barkers and vendors of drugs were also actors in performances at the fair.'¹⁰ The language of the marketplace can, of course, be found within the museum street scenes, complementing or entering into a dialogue with the more authoritative official language of the museum found in written interpretation. On the Thackray Museum's Leeds 1842 Street an official and authoritative language of museum interpretation is found on the text panels which explain the areas of the street, while a more unofficial language is layered over the top in the form of the atmospheric soundtrack, which does indeed include the barking of quacks and drug vendors. Thus, reading a panel that says: 'Slaughterhouses, just off the main streets of Leeds, were littered with carcasses, offal and blood tubs. Disreputable owners regularly killed diseased cattle and did little to improve conditions in the filthy yards' offers a monoglossic, official language, while a dialogue is created when the visitor reads the panel accompanied by the cries of cattle, crowing of cockerels, barks of street vendors, and songs of playing children. Even before the language of the visitor is included, there is already a plurality of voices from the didactic and official to the atmospheric and informal. The addition of visitors' voices, with all their various registers, can only further add to the polyglossic status of the developing narrative of the street.

Bakhtinian theories of the polyglossic construction of narrative meaning have been applied by some museologists to narrative within the museum, but this has once again tended to focus on formalised learning scenarios rather than the relationship between the museum and the general visitor. Bakhtin's arguments in favour of dialogic forms of narrative incorporating multiple voices and languages have been cited to support

¹⁰ Bakhtin 1965, pp. 212-13

forms of organised museum activity in which visitors play a more participatory role, breaking down performer-spectator hierarchies.¹¹ More useful to the present argument is David Francis's observations of Grayson Perry's 2011 British Museum exhibition 'Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman' in a 2015 paper for *Curator: The Museums Journal*. Perry's exhibition, which combined objects that he had selected from the museum's collection with his own artwork, featured written interpretation taken from his own humorous and personal first-person perspective alongside and in contrast to a traditional museum's authoritative third-person text. Francis argued that the exhibition's 'playful blurring of the distinction between the real and the imagined epitomizes Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque discourses.'¹² He posited that an unofficial, carnivalized and parodic voice on top of the museum's official one can make for a more successfully dialogic museum narrative, less dominated by monoglossic official hegemony, and that the positive responses to the additional parodic text was indicative of this. Francis saw a Bakhtinian theory of museums as a framework that relates to Nina Simon's Participatory Museum movement, stating that Simon's 'call for the addition of the voices and opinions of visitors and communities to museum exhibitions can be seen as analogous to Bakhtin's championing of multi-voicedness or heteroglossia in the novel.'¹³

However, despite suggesting the value that active participatory visitors' voices could add to the multi-voiced dialogue of the museum gallery, Francis's argument rests solely on the value of parodic and unofficial voices within the museum's interpretive material, rather than the additional value of the multiple voices of its visitors. As referenced above, the soundtracks and characters which populate the street scenes with the language of the marketplace add an 'unofficial'-feeling layer to the more official voice of the

¹¹ Sissel Lillebostad, 'Some observations on commitment and dialogue', *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 2014, 13: 1, pp. 87–92; Soojin Jun and Hyun-Kyung Lee, 'Dialogue and carnival: understanding visitors' engagement in design museums', *Digital Creativity* 2014, 25:3, pp. 247-254

¹² David Francis, "'An Arena Where Meaning and Identity Are Debated and Contested on a Global Scale": Narrative Discourses in British Museum Exhibitions, 1972–2013' in *Curator: The Museum Journal* January 2015, 58 (1), p. 55

¹³ Francis 2015, pp. 50-1. See also Jun and Lee 2014, p. 249 for another argument proposing the connection between Bakhtinian polyglossia and Simon's participatory museum.

written interpretation. However, a genuine understanding of a museum display as a form of carnivalized narrative requires a lack of distinction between museum and audience, instead seeing both as voices in a dialogic narrative. The recreated street scene is the perfect arena for such a theory, with its playful, theatrical design replicating the carnival space of the public square, differentiated from the more official and authoritative forms of museum display and interpretation elsewhere in their museums. Thus, this chapter explores a variety of situations in which visitors' voices dictate the course of the museum street narrative and performances in which the traditional authoritative roles are reversed.

The social aspect of the museum performance has been acknowledged in John Urry and and Jonas Larsen's *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2011). Urry and Larsen suggested that it is important to view tourists as operating not as a 'solitary *flâneur*,' but rather 'in "teams" of colleagues, friends, family members and partners.' The 'tourist gaze', therefore, is not simply an act of solo spectatorship, but rather should be seen as 'a *relational* practice involving subtle bodily and verbal negotiations and interactions' within groups, each individual gaze mediated by the presence of other gazes.¹⁴ In addition to the negotiation of audience and performer roles discussed in the last chapter, visitors must also negotiate their own roles within their visitor group. As with the more formal space of the performance of live costumed interpretation, the visitors within their groups must fluidly move through audience and performer roles as well as simultaneously occupying multiple roles at once. One of the most noteworthy examples of visitors shifting and renegotiating roles within the museum comes in instances wherein the museum environment allows for a reversal of the roles typically or previously performed by members of the visitor group, their pre-visit personal and socio-cultural contexts.

Using the interviews conducted with both curatorial and visitor-facing staff and recordings of interactions within visitor groups, this chapter explores three examples of this carnivalesque role reversal scenario. The first two

¹⁴ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: Sage, 2011), p. 201

involve children subverting the traditional family role in which the parent or senior family member is the authority figure, either through the child acting as 'expert' guide and group leader around the museum, or through the child's use of the museum's reconstructed Victorian space to play act as authority figures such as shopkeepers and teachers. In the third example, we return to interactions between visitors and museum staff to see how performative role reversal exists outside family groups. The nominal role of the museum interpreter as an expert guide and the visitor as their attentive audience can frequently be reversed in interactions in which the staff member becomes audience to the visitor's display of their own knowledge or recollections. The museum street scene becomes a form of carnival space within the bounds of which traditional hierarchies can be playfully performatively inverted. Thus, in this chapter, Bakhtin's ideas of polyglossia and the carnivalesque within narrative forms are applied for the first time to examples of visitor performance and role reversal within the museum street. I argue that, through this multi-voiced carnival, meaning-making on the museum street is constructed through the dialogue that occurs between the museum and its visitors.

Carnivalistic Debasings

Bakhtin stressed the carnivalesque language and performance that could be found in descriptions of bodily functions and their potential accompanied grotesquery and vulgarity.¹⁵ Here, then, we must make another visit to the privy. Earlier chapters have pointed to how the addition of reconstructed Victorian privies (and their attendant smells) on all three Yorkshire museum streets during the 1990s and 2000s are emblematic of a historiographic paradigm shift toward a dirtier view of the people's past, what Handler and Gable call the 'shit' version of the streets of the past rather than the 'tulip' version. This is a thread running throughout this thesis, from the

¹⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics* in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 167-206

'crapping toddler' depicted in the original plans for the Leeds 1842 Street in Chapter One's Figure 2.7 to the conversations taking place between visitors, which we will now explore. Interactions around the privies played a prominent role in many of the recorded visitor conversations. The reconstructed privies (almost entirely staged via replica surroundings rather than original objects) offer not just a sense of the Victorians as material, functional people fulfilling their basic bodily functions, urinating and defecating just as their modern descendants do, but also allow for visitors to undercut the potential seriousness of the didactic official interpretive voice with their own toilet humour. The text panel that introduces York Castle's Kirkgate beside the window seen earlier in Figure 4.1 begins 'Queen Victoria is on the throne.' This phrasing prompts many visitors to make a pun on the alternative meaning of 'throne' as a slang term for toilet, essentially providing the reverse of the carnival tradition of boy bishops and twelfth night kings by bringing the monarch down to the level of the same common bodily functions as any citizen.

Bakhtin linked 'carnivalistic debasings and bringing down to earth' with obscenities related to bodily functions.¹⁶ Recordings of visitor conversations around museum street scenes show visitors responding to recreated privies with laughter, playful performance and mild profanities, as can be seen in these examples from beside the privies on Abbey House's Abbey Fold (Figure 9.1).

Mother – There's a toilet.
 Daughter – Toilet. [Giggles]
 Mother – Well, if you need to go.
 Daughter – Fine, I'll go. [Sits down on privy and makes straining noises] (AHM Visitor Group 3)

First Mother – And then those there are the toilets. You'd have to sit on there to go to the toilet.
 Second Mother – Oh yeah?
 First Mother – And you'd sit there in the open and have a poo.
 Second Mother – Here, let me take a picture of you having a poo.
 First Son – [Sits down on privy and makes straining noises]
 [Camera clicks]

¹⁶ Bakhtin 1984, p. 123

Second Son – [Laughs] (AHM Visitor Group 15)



Figure 9.1: Privies on Abbey Fold

These scenes of visitors interacting with the privies show how the display invites an informal, performative engagement. With the privies on Abbey Fold on physically accessible open display, visitors are able to sit and pose on them and make a pantomimic public performance of the usually private act of defecating. While other sites do not allow the visitor to sit on the privy itself and play out the full performance, visitor interactions still tend towards laughter around bodily functions, as in these examples from York Castle.

Woman – Is it a toilet? [Laughs] Do you reckon it's real poo?
Oh, it stinks. Smells like Jorvik. (YCM Visitor Group 11)

Mother – Look at the bed. Does that look comfy to you?

Daughter – No. Look there's a poo bowl.

Mother – A what?

Daughter – There's a poo bowl.

Mother – Oh yeah, a poo bowl. [Laughs] There's an actual poo somewhere. (YCM Visitor Group 15)

For Bakhtin laughter is essential to the power of carnival, especially when included in what he dubbed 'profanation': texts and voices that involve 'bringings down to earth, carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive

power of the earth and the body, carnivalistic parodies' and other subversions of authoritative voices through colloquial and profane speech.¹⁷ These visitors' toilet humour and pantomimic play of the private act of defecating within the public space of the museum gallery allows them to undercut the distanced seriousness of official narratives of the Victorians and form a playful performative bodily connection to the people who would originally have used privies like these. As with Bakhtin's carnival folk, laughter and parody allows the visitor to feel like they have some control over the course of the narrative, that they are not just receiving information, but are themselves playing with it.

Returning to the scene in the Thackray Museum's Slaughterhouse Yard, we can see how the languages of the marketplace and the museum can come together to create meaning in such a scenario. In the following recording of a visitor group at the museum, a dialogue occurs between two young adult visitors, a man and a woman, and the inanimate character of the museum's night soil collector Thomas Sowden (seen earlier in Figure 3.4).

Woman – Eurgh! [Reading] 'The night soil...'

Man – These pies look nice, though. [Laughs] [...]

Woman – Not a great place for the pies, look. He'd have got shit on his pies. [Laughs]

Man – [Laughs] [To Sowden] 'Take the shit off your pies!' (TM Visitor Group 2)

Here we can see the construction of a dialogic narrative between the authoritative official voice of the museum, whose interpretive text panel explains an illustrative image of 'the night soil men removing filth from a yard' and discusses the problems created by a lack of proper sewers, the more informal voice of the imagined street's imagined inhabitants in the form of Sowden, and the visitors. The latter responded directly to the figure of Sowden in the playful, colloquial and crude terms of the carnival, telling him to 'take the shit off your pies.' Meaning is constructed in the display of Slaughterhouse Yard and privies through this dialogue. The visitor group simultaneously absorbed the textual interpretation on night soil work and the

¹⁷ Bakhtin 1984, p. 123

scene that accompanies it and responded to it with their own profane dialogue. In the confluence of these elements meaning is made around the viscerally unhygienic qualities of 1840s urban slum slaughterhouse and toilet facilities.

Role Reversal of Parent and Child

In the scene above the young couple worked together in playing with the museum's scene and interpretation, they laughed together and developed each other's responses to the unhygienic pies. They subverted the authority of the museum's official voice together. In the absence of any other indicators, it seems that they shared equal authority within their group. In other examples, however, visitor groups entered the museum with their own dynamics of authority within the group, as well as between the group and the museum. Most obviously within family groups, the visitor demographics most targeted by the marketing of museum street scenes, parents may assume an authority role in leading the group with their children as audience. However, as with other audience roles discussed in the previous chapter, this is not a permanent position, and parent-child dynamics are fluid through the museum visit. Urry and Larsen referred to the 'parental look' to refer to how, within a family group, the attention of the parents' gaze will often not be on the site or attraction that they are visiting. Instead 'children influence the rhythms and gazes of their parents' with the parents' gaze often on their children or seeing the attraction through their children's eyes. However, the parental look is not a constant family dynamic, as there are other occasions in which 'children are forced to follow in their parents' footsteps and see "adult" things.'¹⁸ Thus, even in a simple parent-child family group, the roles of parent-supervisor and attention-demanding child are varied or even subverted by the relative pull of elements of the site that the group is visiting.

¹⁸ Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 201

One Thackray Museum curator pointed to this concept as indicative of the need for flexibility in the museum experience, suggesting that:

One visitor can have various capacities. So, you can have someone who comes with a family, but then also comes as a professional visitor, but then also comes as a visitor with their friend, and all of those will impact the way that they are engaging with the whole museum.¹⁹

As one example of this flexibility of visitor group dynamics in action, a child visiting with a school group learns not only the museum's educational message but also directly about the form and contents of the museum, a lesson which then allows them to assume the role of educator when they return along with a family group. At that point their parent or guardian, ostensibly the group member with the expected expert educator role, is a novice visitor, while the child has valuable experience that they lack. In discussing how this idea was built into the design of the Thackray Museum's street scene, one of the original developers pointed to secret or surprise elements, such as when a visitor attempts to open the privy door, prompting some further profanity in the form of a recorded voice to tell them to 'sod off!':

If the children go and have an absolutely fantastic time, they want their parents or grandparents to take them again, because, you know, it's the kind of thing where they lead grandad to the toilet door and they press the latch and it goes 'Oi, sod off!' They like that pre-knowledge, the fact that they're smarter than their parents.²⁰

There are no signs or indication within the street scene that pressing the door latch will provoke this response: it is a secret that only experience can reveal. An example of this occurring can be seen in one of the recorded conversations taken from visitors to the Leeds 1842 Street, in this case a boy, his mother, and father.

Son – Dad, come over and queue for the toilet.
 Father – What?
 Mother – Queue for the toilet.
 Voiceover – Oi! Sod off!

¹⁹ Interview TM C1, 19.05.16

²⁰ Interview TM D1, 22.10.15

Mother – [Laughs, takes photograph] (TM Visitor Group 11)

During this group's visit up until this point the son had been an audience for his parents' previous knowledge and expertise. However, his own experiential knowledge of what would happen when trying to open the privy door allowed the son in this moment to reverse the roles so that he became the authority. He can be seen in this extract directing the action, inviting the father to 'come over and queue for the toilet', ensuring that he can use his prior knowledge to play a prank on his father. This displays the power of parody and laughter in carnival's ability to reverse typical roles.

It should be noted that in this interaction it is only the father's authority that is being subverted, with the mother's input and laughter required to make the scene work. This is indicative of the limitations of Bakhtin's scheme for carnivalesque role reversal. Michael Bernstein's criticism of Bakhtin's idea of the carnival – that its status as licensed subversion, authority figures allowing their authority to be reversed within set limits of time and space, does little actually to challenge existent values and instead can serve to prop up authority – can be applied here to question whether temporary role reversals on the museum street really serve to challenge the authority of museum or parents.²¹ The parents in this interaction are the ones who allow their son to take control and play a prank on the father. It is they, and on a larger scale the authority of the museum itself, that license this brief role reversal within the museum's carnival marketplace. However, even if we assume that the child's moment of role reversed authority is only able to occur under licence from his parents, it still demonstrates that the child is in part the director of his own museum experience.

Experiential knowledge of the displays in the museum itself is just one way in which children can use their own pre-visit knowledge to reverse the traditional authority roles within the family group. Children may bring subject-specific knowledge gained from learning about the nineteenth century in

²¹ Michael André Bernstein, 'When the Carnival Turns Bitter: Preliminary Reflections Upon the Abject Hero' in Gary Saul Morson ed. *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 106

school, knowledge which means that they may have more reference points for meaning-making from the museum displays.

In these interactions part of what is occurring is the validation of the children's prior knowledge and experience and, thus, parents are happy to play the role of an audience in order to encourage their children to demonstrate what they have learnt. In an example from York Castle, a Scottish student acted as the expert teacher for her parents when utilising what she had learnt about the Rowntree family in her higher history class.

Daughter – They were known for, like, creating really good working conditions for their workers.

Mother – Oh yeah.

Daughter – And building little houses and giving their kids schools, especially Rowntree was quite well known for that. He went – we did this in history – he went round the streets of York and documented the poverty and he created a book. Because everyone was very, like, blind to the poverty, so he just went round York and documented in a diary and then presented it in a book, which is supposed to have really changed people's perceptions of poverty. I'll tell Dad.

Father – Are you being arrested?

Daughter – No, Dad. You know Rowntree? We did this in higher history. He literally just sat on the streets of York and documented the poverty. And then he compiled a book, which supposedly shocked the middle classes and helped produce reforms. (YCM Visitor Group 9)

In this interaction the daughter clearly derived value from her ability to bring her prior learning about the Rowntree family's philanthropic pursuits in making meaning from the Rowntree material on display on Kirkgate. That she made a point of saying 'I'll tell Dad' and then interrupted his attempt to direct the conversation into a more playful space ('are you being arrested?') to give him the Rowntree story indicates the validation that she received from being the authority figure in her group over her parents. She was directing them how to act as her audience and how to make meaning from the museum street environment.

In another example, the Thackray Museum's basis in the GCSE history Medicine Through Time curriculum allowed the street to provide the backdrop for a teenage girl (who elsewhere referred to herself as currently

studying this module) to share with her mother the knowledge gained through lessons in this subject, thereby assuming the role of expert guide.

Daughter – The meat with all the flies there, that's spontaneous generation links to that.

Mother – Spontaneous generation? Of what? [...]

Daughter – It's where people thought that when things went off [...] it produced bacteria, but in fact bacteria is in the air and it's attracted to it.

Mother – Right?

Daughter – So, they thought, say if you saw some meat out and it went mouldy, they'd say: 'Oh it's producing bacteria.'

Mother – Oh, right, so they thought the mould was coming from the meat itself?

Daughter – Yeah, yeah. And then Louis Pasteur in 1861 proved, with his test about wine and milk going off, that the bacteria was all around and was just attracted to it. (TM Visitor Group 9)

The information about Pasteur's experiments with wine is in fact given in the section of the museum that these visitors had come through to get to the street scene, the introductory 'Puzzlers' display. However, without having read that, the daughter was still able to use the museum's prop of the butcher's stand to explain the theory of spontaneous generation and how bacteria really functions. The mother, meanwhile, assumed the role of student, asking questions such as 'so they thought the mould was coming from the meat itself?' to prompt her expert teacher to clarify or develop explanations. In other moments in this same visit, the roles reverted and the mother became the teacher.

With much younger children, the demonstration of knowledge can often involve rephrasing concepts that they have just learnt in the museum as if they are the ones now teaching them to the parent who earlier explained the same concept. In one visitor group at the Thackray Museum a four-year-old child came in with her parents. On encountering the tray of pies beside the privy's midden heap, the following exchange took place:

Daughter – Look, that's where they used to have a pee and poo!

Father – Oh, in there? Is it an outhouse? Look at these pies. Ew, no wonder they all got ill, [Daughter].

Daughter – Why?

Father – Because you don't have food next to all that yucky stuff, do you?

Daughter – Yeah. No wonder they got ill. No wonder they died.
(TM Visitor Group 16)

Minutes later, while looking through the window opposite the privies, the child and her mother saw Mary Holmes the dressmaker (the character card that the child had picked).

Mother – That's you. She's not very well, is she?

Daughter – No wonder they all got ill. Do you know why they all got ill?

Mother – Why, darling?

Daughter – Because they ate all the pies.

Mother – Yeah, they ate those pies next to all that yucky stuff, didn't they?

Daughter – Yeah. She got ill. (TM Visitor Group 16)

The daughter used the repeated refrain 'no wonder they all got ill' twice, first in response to her father and then in her explanation to her mother. The father himself used these words when drawing her attention to the tray of pies, providing a model in how to draw attention to interesting objects and related explanations. In parroting the phrase, the daughter provided a parodic performance of her father's explanation of the display of the pies, whilst also developing skills of good museum visiting practice. As in Bakhtin's concept of carnival and the performances of the streets, the museum street allowed her to present a performance of authority reversed, in which this four-year-old, like the carnival kings and queens, became a parody performance of her parent as expert historical guide.

This is not the only kind of parodic performance of authority that occurs within family groups on the museum street, however. As has been argued in previous chapters, the stage-like environment of the recreated museum street lends itself to forms of in-character performance which involve both museum staff and visitors. Unsurprisingly, these performances also occur in the absence of any interpretive staff. Typically jokey in-character or first-person period performances can happen spontaneously within groups in the reconstructed shops or schoolrooms of the museum

streets. Children in family visitor groups tend to use these environments to enact scenes in which they can reverse the usual familial roles of authority figures and audiences. In the following example from Abbey House, a girl visiting with her grandparents entered the schoolroom and instantly assumed the role of a teacher.

Granddaughter – [To her brother] What have you brought into class there, [Brother]? A stone? Tuck it under your desk, please! Pass it to your teacher!

Grandmother – This is a Sunday School.

Granddaughter – [Brother]! Work! Finish it!

Grandmother – What does he have to finish, Miss?

Granddaughter – He needs to finish his writing a story. You need to carry on reading.

Grandmother – Out loud?

Granddaughter – No, in your head.

Grandmother – In my head.

Granddaughter – [To her grandfather] Would you like to play the piano, young man. Please get a seat.

Grandmother - I've finished, Miss!

Granddaughter – No, you haven't. Keep on reading! You need to learn it off by heart and you need to never forget it, so keep reading on!

Grandmother – Yes, Miss.

Granddaughter – Put your hand up when you speak!

Grandmother – Is it lunch time now, Miss? Is it lunch time?

Granddaughter – No, it is not! Now, shut up. Shut up.

Grandmother – [Referring to the grandfather] He's being naughty, Miss. See, he's gone out the class without being asked.

Granddaughter – He's allowed. It's play time.

Grandmother – It's play time? Can I go too, then?

Granddaughter – Off you go. Go away! I don't want to see you.

Grandmother – Class dismissed?

Granddaughter – Class dismissed. (AHM Visitor Group 11)

The child here did not just assume the role of the teacher within the role-playing scene, she also directed the interaction, dictating that the group will now move from the role as museum visitors into performing as school teacher and pupils. When the grandmother attempted to discuss the environment as a museum visitor – ‘this is a Sunday school’ – the granddaughter continued to play her role as teacher until her grandmother acceded to taking a role in the scene. There were repeated occasions in which the grandmother attempted to finish the scene in-character – ‘I’ve

finished, Miss', 'Is it lunch time?', 'It's play time?' – but only when the granddaughter said 'class dismissed' was the role play allowed to conclude.

As well as in recreated schoolrooms, this form of role reversal also occurs in the museum streets' recreated shops, with children from family groups assuming the authority role by moving behind the counter and playing the part of the shopkeeper with their parents as shoppers. One family group visiting York Castle used the schoolroom, cocoa room, grocer's shop and toy shop to play out short scenes with the children role-playing authority figures. In the following example of this group in the toy shop, the roles of mother and son and customer and shopkeeper remained fluid and flexible throughout.

Mother – What's this? An old-fashioned toy shop?
 Oh, are you the toy seller?
 Son – What would you like to buy?
 Mother – Are you going to sell us some toys today?
 Son – You can buy anything you want to.
 Mother – I would like a top, please. Do you know what a top is?
 Daughter – A spinning top?
 Mother – A spinning top, yeah. Do you have any spinning tops today?
 Son – There you are.
 Mother – Thank you very much.
 No, don't open them really, love, just with your eyes.
 Oh look, there's an old yo-yo.
 Son – Do you want a yo-yo?
 Mother – And an old croquet set or something.
 Son – Do you want a yo-yo?
 Mother – This looks like a hard game. I think you hold that little white handle and you try and catch the ball on the stick.
 Son – You can buy one. It's only for one... That white thing is for free!
 Mother – Free? I'll have one! (YCM Visitor Group 10)

This recording was made in 2016, before the former toy shop building was switched with a permanently-staffed sweet shop in 2017, meaning that interactions such as these within visitor groups are now less likely to occur. It is important that the museums continue to provide shop spaces such as this where visitors can move behind the counter and role-play the authoritative shopkeeper part, if the museum wishes to continue encouraging active meaning-making. As with the schoolroom examples above, in this conversation the mother came into the shop as a museum browser, but,

when the son took up position behind the counter, the interaction shifted and became a role play of shopkeeper and shopper. The son-shopkeeper only remained in control, however, as long as the performance played out within safe and controlled parameters. When the son broke those parameters by attempting to open the case and get to the objects the mother resumed control as the authority figure to say 'don't open them really', before moving back into her subordinate customer character. Ultimately, this is the case with any of the many roles that an individual museum visitor performs within their group. They rarely maintain a single role, but are constantly switching between different ones. Just as with the different audience roles discussed in the last chapter, the visitor-as-performer is one minute a parent-carer and the next a customer in a shopkeeping role play (but without ever losing sight of their simultaneous ongoing parental role). In each performance the visitor has multiple voices and all of these act in dialogue with the official voice of the museum itself to make meaning from the exhibition.

Museum Staff as Audience

One of the more obvious forms of dialogue between visitor and museum occurs in the direct dialogue that takes place between visitors and staff members. This was covered in detail in the previous chapter with specific reference to performance and audience in costumed interpretation. However, a separate aspect of visitor-staff interactions is also worthy of mention here, as it involves a further form of performative dialogue in which the role of official voice of authority is reversed. Typically, interpretive staff are conceived of as acting as the mouthpiece of the museum's narrative and their relationship with the visitor is imagined to be one in which they are the authoritative expert guide and the visitor their attentive audience. However, as the previous chapter has shown, this is not always the case. Instances can be found of visitors using their interaction with staff to reverse the expected roles so that the interaction becomes focused on them playing the part of the expert, pushing the staff member into that of an audience. At Abbey House, for example, a volunteer acting as a costumed interpreter in

the Hark to Rover pub was approached by a visitor and the following exchange took place:

Visitor – Do you know a lot about the pub?

Volunteer – I know a few things about the pub. I know that that's a -

Visitor – - 'Cause you know there's a real Hark to Rover, or there used to be, down the road.

Volunteer – Yeah. I know. I know how it got its name, the Hark to Rover. Basically, this didn't used to be a pub, it used to be a house. And a monk lived in the house. Now, this monk wasn't very fond of people, he actually hated people quite a bit. But he loved dogs and he had this little Irish terrier, you know the ones.

Visitor – Yes.

Volunteer – And this one time the house caught fire while he was upstairs. And the little dog noticed the fire and ran upstairs and he barked at the monk until he woke up, and thus the name, like 'bark' - 'hark'... to Rover. [...]

Visitor – That's good, isn't it? [...] My husband used to go into the real pub when he'd played tennis for years and years, but it's shut now. (AHM Visitor Group 9)

While the exchange initially appeared to set up a scenario in which the visitor would serve as an attentive audience for the volunteer's expert authority, the question 'do you know a lot about the pub?' was actually asked in order to lead in to the visitor's demonstration of her own knowledge and experience. The rapid interruption when the volunteer attempted to reply to the initial question indicates that the visitor was the one in control and saw the volunteer as audience not authority. Nevertheless, these roles remained fluid. The position of who is the authority and who the audience became almost competitive with neither visitor nor volunteer settling into the audience role, but rather responding to each piece of information by asserting their expertise again. Thus, the volunteer responded to the visitor's knowledge that there was a real Hark to Rover in a nearby street by stating that he already knew this and offering supplementary information about the pub's name. The visitor in turn responded with an appeal to her own personal experience (or, at least, her husband's) of the pub.

In conversations with staff, then, it is the visitor who tends to dictate the style which the conversation will take. In the following example, the same

visitor group from the previous interaction took a different approach when talking to a costumed volunteer playing the role of the ironmonger.

First Visitor – Hello, what have you got to sell us?
 Volunteer – Lots of stuff. Lots of quality merchandise. Yeah, lots of quality merchandise. What are you interested in?
 Second Visitor – I'm interested in cooking. Perhaps I need one of those, er...
 Volunteer – We've got aluminium saucepans in, if you're interested.
 Second Visitor – Oh, have you?
 Volunteer – Very expensive material, aluminium. Very expensive.
 We also do irons. This iron is very, very expensive.
 First Visitor – That looks like the up to date one.
 Volunteer – Very up to date. It heats from the inside, which is very new.
 Second Visitor – Ooh.
 First Visitor – You don't put it on the fire then?
 Volunteer – No, don't put it on the fire. You don't need to, 'cause it heats from the inside. It heats from the inside and releases the energy from the holes, you see. [...]
 Second Visitor – Bet you're learning a lot yourself.
 Volunteer – I am, yeah. I am indeed.
 Second Visitor – [Laughs] How we did things in the old days.
 (AHM Visitor Group 9)

Here, unlike the same visitor group's interaction with the costumed interpreter in the pub, the first visitor led the conversation by role playing in-character as a Victorian shopper with the question 'what have you got to sell us?', leading the interpreter to respond in kind, by also playing the role of a shopkeeper. She followed the model of interaction laid out in the same shop's depiction in the Pathé newsreel film discussed in the previous chapter, highlighting developments in homewares in the late-nineteenth century as if they were new inventions, pointing to the iron's heating method as 'very up to date' and 'very new.' As soon as the visitors switched their form of performance to a present-day engagement by suggesting that the volunteer must be learning a lot herself from these interactions, the volunteer also switched from a first-person in-character performance to acting as herself in response. There was also an acknowledgement in the volunteer's agreement that she is herself learning a lot that there is potential in these interactions for a further real role reversal, for the knowledge and experience

of the visitor to serve to educate the museum rather than the museum educating its visitors.

In interviews, visitor-facing interpreter staff and volunteers working on the Victorian street scenes suggested that their role was often one of receiving rather than giving information. However, there is then a cyclical potential for passing on some of what they have heard as an audience when they are then themselves in a position of authority. Much as the children in the earlier examples used information that they had previously learnt to assume the role of educator themselves, interpreters at the museum can use the personal knowledge of past visitors in discussion with future visitors. Thus, the multiple voices in the dialogue of the museum also involve a virtual conversation between two different sets of visitors coming to the museum at completely different times, conducted through the conduit of an interpretive staff member. One volunteer working in York Castle's reproduction of Leak and Thorp's draper's shop noted that many visitors remember the real Leak and Thorp on York's Coney Street, which closed in the 1980s. She noted that 'they can tell you things and they can tell you how they remembered it, and maybe little snippets of things that you can then pass on if the conversation goes in that direction.'²² This shows the value of having live interpretive staff on the museum street. Their ability to respond, not just to present visitors' contexts and concerns but also to information provided by past visitors and to pass it on in a colloquial, unofficial voice, makes them invaluable to the polyglossic museum. This is well understood by senior staff in the Yorkshire museums discussed here, with York Museums Trust's Chief Executive Reyahn King, appointed in 2016, telling *Museums Journal* in February 2017 that she was 'really keen on person-to-person interpretation and on developing our volunteer offer,' as best exemplified by the live interpretation on Kirkgate.²³

It is worth noting, though, when considering the authority dynamics at play in staff-visitor interactions, that these are not formal learning environments. As outlined in Chapter One, museums in general and the

²² Interview YCM V5, 14.10.16

²³ Phil Sayer, 'King of the Castle', *Museums Journal* 117 (2) (2017), p. 35

street scenes specifically tend to be perceived as leisure activities with an educational function rather than primarily educative institutions. Staff do not dictate the terms of the interaction as a teacher or lecturer disseminating information might. The balance between the museum's leisure and learning imperatives was described by Beamish founder Frank Atkinson in Chapter One as a tightrope – and balancing on this tightrope effects how museum staff choose to assert their authority on the museum's narrative or otherwise. Interpretive staff are educational staff, but they are also customer-facing staff in a leisure environment. In striking the balance between the two, they often find themselves leaning towards the leisure or entertainment side of Atkinson's tightrope. They may perhaps be more concerned with giving the visitor a satisfying leisure experience than providing didactic education. As one volunteer costumed interpreter on York Castle's Kirkgate said, when asked to consider the balance of entertainment and education in her role, the museum is 'interested in that we give them the correct knowledge, but I would think, as a business proposition, [the priority is] satisfying the public.'²⁴ With the emphasis on 'satisfying the public,' it is perhaps unsurprising that visitor-facing staff and volunteers can often end up reversing their role of expert guide and instead playing the role of audience to a visitor who wants to share their own knowledge, whether or not that knowledge is relevant or reliable.

Another York Castle volunteer, who noted that 'there are people who come in and they just want to tell you what they know,' even added: 'And, even if some of it's rubbish, there's no point in arguing with them, just let them enjoy themselves,' an acknowledgement that there are occasions when satisfying the visitor-customer takes precedence over the museum providing an accurate narrative.²⁵ While it is often true that Bernstein's criticism of the carnival in Bakhtin can also be applied to the carnivalesque museum, instances such as this suggest that at times the visitor does have genuine power over the course of the narrative. Typically the museum allows these other unofficial voices into its space while maintaining the authority of the

²⁴ Interview YCM V3, 04.10.16

²⁵ Interview YCM V1, 13.09.16

official textual interpretation above all else; nevertheless a form of ‘customer is always right’ attitude clearly affects staff who view their role as ‘satisfying the public’ and it means that visitors have the chance to assume control over the narrative. By deciding that ‘there’s no point in arguing with them’ whatever the visitor says, the staff member hands power to the visitor. At this point, however, the emphasis on an experience in which they ‘just let them [the visitor] enjoy themselves’ could mean that the museum no longer has any voice at all in the dialogue. A successful polyglossic museum requires dialogic contributions from both official and unofficial places in order to contribute to successful meaning-making. Just as the group in Chapter Four struggled to understand the status of people with ASC or multiple sclerosis in the Victorian age without any interpretation from the museum, these visitors require input from the official voice of the museum in order to add their own voices and build a narrative collaboratively.

Graham Black, whose outline for the planned Thackray Museum in the early 1990s stated that the museum’s potential visitors ‘expect to learn’ but do not ‘wish to be preached at,’ that one would ‘expect to enjoy himself/herself, to be stimulated, to be given the opportunity to participate, to learn through doing,’ advocated visitor experiences that were active and involved collaborating with the museum, but disputed the value of the constructivist museum as outlined by George Hein.²⁶ Black argued elsewhere that visitors ‘create their own personal, exploratory routes’ and that any exhibition therefore will automatically have a partially constructivist quality to it, but that a purely constructivist approach ‘is likely to require hard work on the part of the casual visitor’ unsure how or where to proceed. In Black’s view, it is the museum’s responsibility to provide the visitor with ‘a physical and conceptual orientation from which they can select at will.’²⁷ The presence of layers of textual interpretation panels, the character cards and mannequins and the recommended route laid out in whitewash are all aspects of this conceptual orientation as laid out in the Thackray Museum’s street; and it is this kind of framework which is necessary for the museum to

²⁶ Graham Black, ‘Thackray Medical Museum: An Outline Interpretive Approach’ (1993), p. 9

²⁷ Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 140-9

create a space in which successful dialogic meaning making is possible. The museum must provide some framework in which the many voices of a polyglossic narrative can exist, but it must do so with a light touch so as not to overwhelm the other voices involved. If, as suggested by Francis and others, the polyglossic, dialogic Bakhtinian museum finds its expression in Simon's vision of the participatory museum, then the official voice of the museum is an important element of that dialogue. In her 2010 work *The Participatory Museum*, both manifesto and guidance for other museum professionals, Simon echoed Black's view in arguing that open-ended museum activities 'can feel daunting to would-be participants,' especially 'on the spot in the context of a casual museum visit.' Instead, she argued that the museum should scaffold and support active visitor engagement with some form of structure, 'a kind of research activity' as the Thackray Museum developer described the 'choose a character' activity in the introduction which began Part III.²⁸ The various roles that visitors may choose to play at the Thackray Museum are a strong example of this scaffolding, allowing visitors to follow the museum's designed path, to play with or parody it, to defy or subvert it.

Participatory Museums

Simon argued that there was little active fulfilment in 'watching a performance or passively walking through an exhibition,' but that museums rarely embrace the possibility of opening themselves up to visitors' active engagement in the museum experience, taking part in the museum's narrative process and sharing their own knowledge and ideas.²⁹ The reconstructed Victorian street scenes offer an individual and unusual potential to embrace the chaotic carnival of active meaning-making through the Bakhtinian dialogue of multiple voices, official and unofficial, expert and novice, serious and subversive, parodic or grotesque. In Simon's view, 'social objects' are key to a museum experience that engages visitors and

²⁸ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), p. 12

²⁹ Simon 2010, p. 18

therefore results in a more fulfilling and more memorable visit. Objects that prompt the greatest variety of voices speaking around them, social objects are prompts for polyglossia and thus tend to be those which are active, personal or provocative.³⁰ 'Highly designed immersive environments, which provide context,' of which the full-scale street reconstructions are obvious examples, were seen by Simon as ideal for making objects social, a form of physical design which accentuated objects' evocative or provocative qualities.³¹ Performative interactions with museum staff were also held up by Simon as the ideal way to make objects social, and thus make the museum polyglossic: 'Staff members are uniquely capable of making objects personal, active, provocative, or relational by asking visitors to engage with them in different ways.'³² If Simon's participatory museum is the ideal form of the Bakhtinian polyglossic museum, the museum street scene with its immersive, engaging design, put together to understand each and every object in its Victorian context and populated by staff to engage visitors and prompt their dialogic responses, has the potential to be a far better expression of this museum form than a more traditional passive display.

This chapter has demonstrated how visitors use the carnivalesque environment of the street scene, which recreates a staged version of the real carnival space of the city streets full of sensual cues, traders' cries and play around the borders of life and artistic recreation, to play with, parody, and subvert authority. We have also seen how the museums themselves introduce layers of additional voices, the unofficial atmospheric voices of the streets, the languages of the marketplace, on top of the authoritative and didactic voice of historical museum interpretation. These then prompt a greater variety of voices added to the dialogue by the different roles that visitors assume and slip between. But we have also seen that there are occasions on which the dialogic construction of narrative breaks down, times when the museum may exert too much narrative authority to allow visitors to build their own story or too little so that visitors are lost, left asking questions, or construct narratives that are unwittingly ahistorical (as opposed to the

³⁰ Simon 2010, pp. 127-52

³¹ Simon 2010, p. 138

³² Simon 2010, p. 152

ahistorical narrative that an aware counter-tourist may produce by deliberately defying or subverting an official narrative). In the future the museums which contain street scenes must embrace their unique potential to be particularly participatory, polyglossic, and dialogic. They must push for an even greater and closer collaboration in meaning-making between the museum, its staging, its staff, and its visitors.

Conclusion

Personalisable Victorians

Today, in the early years of the twenty-first century, we live in the age of historiocopia, to use Jerome de Groot's term. The general public has access to an abundance of narratives of the past as presented across a wide variety of media forms, both factual and fictional, from which they may make meaning of the Victorian past. The presentation of the Victorian past in museums must both compete with the other elements of the contemporary historiocopia and work complementary with other forms of public history media to act as just one aspect of how the public understand the nineteenth century. I suggest that the distinctive qualities of the museum street scene as described in the preceding chapters mean that it offers a different way of relating to the Victorian past from other media forms. It provides something designed to engage a wide audience in a process of actively entering into an immersive simulation of the past.

From the start, street scenes inside museums were designed to be something that would reach out to an audience of the 'Man in the Street,' to tell the story of the common people in the cities of the past to the common people of the city of today. Although the connection to open-air folk museums must not be completely ignored, the narrative of the ordinary people who populated the nineteenth-century city streets was effectively told by adopting the display forms popular with urban tourists on those same streets, something which previous scholarship has not explored. The museum streets felt distinct from the other galleries in their own museums because their curators were not drawing on previous museum design schemes. The street scenes felt like theatrical spectacles because the street scenes were inspired by the scenography of historical dramas on stage, and the rational recreations of panorama and diorama shows. They felt like real streets because the curators were inspired by the high street shops outside, because they wanted visitors to cross over from the real streets into the museum street and read both as part of the same building blocks to the construction of a local civic identity.

Naturally, these theatrical borrowings, this emphasis on the tradition of rational recreation over a perceived more serious educative purpose of the museum, and the desire to create a museum deliberately to popularise engagement with the Victorian past, has caused critics to dismiss the street scenes as inauthentic, 'dumbed down,' 'theme park heritage.' It would be short-sighted completely to dismiss such concerns. It is indeed impossible fully to recapture the streets of the past and rebuild them within the walls of a contemporary museum. Just like the arcades which preceded them in making walled and covered micro-cities, the indoor museum street scene does take the dirt and chaos of the real streets of the past and make it into a cleaner, more comfortable and more manageable version for the urban tourist. However, this does not mean that even a partial reconstruction which can immerse a visitor in a suggestive simulation of the streets of the past does not have great value in providing another strand of Victorian historiocopia. By appealing to the ordinary 'Man in the Street,' it gives access to the stories of that era to an audience who would not necessarily read scholarly historical texts or even visit more traditionally arranged museums. The street's narrative and staging of ordinary street-level life helps to democratise the past. At the same time, it would be wrong to assume that the visitors to the museum street scene are unaware naïfs just waiting to absorb whatever message that the museum presents – and my work challenges this perception. As the audience observations recorded in the preceding chapters demonstrate, visitors are aware of and play with the staged nature of their surroundings.

The nature of the museum street scene – presenting a democratised, street-level story of the past – means that visitors can write their own street level story through their pedestrian exploration. Invited to build their narrative of the ordinary pedestrians of the Victorian city street by stepping in their footsteps, many visitors can be seen assuming a browsing behaviour akin to a window-shopping *flâneur*, a switch in behavioural practice from their more detached spectatorship elsewhere in the museum. By stepping through the proscenium divide, which exists between traditional museum visitors and objects encased in vitrines just as it does the theatrical audience and

performers on stage, the visitor to the street scene becomes themselves part of the performance. Removing the proscenium divide allows the visitor to toy with the script provided by the museum in its interpretive and marketing materials. Given their status as self-aware postmodern visitors, post-tourist visitors on the museum street scene slip between their myriad roles. The carnivalesque environment of the reconstructed street can create a playground for visitors to bring their own fun and often parodic responses to the museum's official, authoritative narrative.

The museum street scene is at its most successful when both the museum and its staff and visitors embrace the strong potential for the collaborative, dialogic, multi-vocal meaning-making that this theatrical, performative environment offers. It is here that its unique offer, something whose promise of active immersion goes beyond what can be provided by other media of urban public history, makes the Victorian street scene an invaluable asset. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, this is not always something that has been fully embraced. The very embodied experience that is for many the appeal of the reconstructed street scene may provide its own barrier to access. Visitors such as those who are neurodiverse, people with autistic spectrum conditions or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, may struggle with the sensory overload of a highly stimulating environment and all visitors with disabilities may not see stories of people like them recognised within what the museum considers the narrative of the ordinary and the everyday. I have argued, too, that the dynamics of who has the authority over the narrative produced in the museum can resist collaboration and instead swing either towards a didactic museum that does not allow significant visitor input or unsupported visitors struggling to make sense of their surroundings without sufficient interpretative signposts from the museum. The future path for museums which use street scenes (and those which have the potential to adopt this or similar approaches in future) is to embrace the active, collaborative and even counter-tourist aspects that their streets can offer, to follow Nina Simon's advice and become more participatory museums.

Simply walking into the museum street gives a visitor more choices on how to proceed than any other gallery in the museums discussed here: whether to enjoy the wide main street or turn down a dark side alley; whether to browse shop windows or go inside; whether to play the role of yourself as time traveling urban tourist to the past or assume the part of a genuine Victorian; whether to follow the museum's proposed scripts and the unwritten rules of good visitor practice or resist them. Moving forward through the twenty-first century, the museum street's version of the nineteenth century can only become more effective by embracing this element of choice and helping it to grow. Simon's participatory museum concept draws repeated links between the functions of the museum and the expectations of the contemporary public used to using modern digital media. This is not to say that museums need necessarily embrace more contemporary digital technology, but that the way that users interact with media today is far more customisable and personalisable than ever before. If museums want to maintain the interest of their audience, they would do well to embrace the potential for their streets and people of the past to be customisable as well.

When interviewed, museum staff at York Castle, Abbey House and the Thackray Museum, both curatorial and visitor-facing staff, were all asked how they would improve and develop their museum's street scenes going forward. The concept of a street scene that offered more choice to its visitors, that could be more flexible to different wants and needs was a common refrain amongst the answers from staff at all levels within all three museums. 'I'd like it to be more personalisable,' was the suggestion of one Thackray Museum learning officer. Under the umbrella of 'personalisable,' she described adding a more diverse array of characters and narratives to the people of the Victorian street ('more rich people [...] as a sort of contrast [...] at the minute it seems like Leeds was just one big slum'), more live costumed interpreters who could respond to individual visitor interests, specific one-off events that can use the street as a stage for different dramas (for example, 'have a day when you come in and there's a cholera epidemic happening'), and a more 'easily adaptable' set of sensory cues – light levels, smell effects, and atmospheric sounds – which could both serve to vary the

visitor experience and if necessary lessen the sensory overstimulation for neurodiverse audiences.¹

The idea of varying the sensescape was also raised by other staff. One Thackray curator suggested that it was important to develop the Leeds 1842 Street ‘so that people can feel more involved with it,’ advocating a variable soundtrack ‘so you can experience it at different times.’² Another learning officer suggested a ‘night-time setting where the sounds were maybe a little bit more swearing and arguing and drinking’ and something ‘a little bit brighter there with some children’s sounds,’ which could be varied depending on the event and the audience.³ Meanwhile, staff at York Castle Museum suggested the addition of gustatory as well as aural cues, with one learning officer advocating ‘hot chocolate served in the cocoa room,’ where there is currently a perfumed cocoa smell.⁴ As well as developing the museum sensescape, other prompts for a more embodied participatory experience suggested developing the offer for visitor costuming. ‘It would be nice if people could dress up on the street and feel more part of it [...] actually dress up and be in character and actually walk around like that,’ was one Thackray Museum visitor assistant’s suggestion for future developments, as well as encouraging enthusiastic visitors to come to the museum in costume.⁵ Another of the same museum’s staff added that the ‘Choose a Character’ activity could also be enhanced by becoming more personalisable to each individual visitor by the addition of an interactive touch-screen in which ‘you could put in your own details and see, if you were alive in the Victorian times, how long you would survive for, what you were likely to die from.’⁶

The ability to put oneself further within the exhibition, to explore physically deeper and deeper was also an important aspect of visitor choice that was emphasised among museum street staff. ‘I’m sure if some more of

¹ Interview TM L1, 19.05.16

² Interview TM C1, 19.05.16

³ Interview TM L2, 19.05.16

⁴ Interview YCM L1, 14.12.16; Interview YCM V3, 04.10.16

⁵ Interview TM F1 19.05.16

⁶ Interview TM F3 20.05.16

the shops were open, people would be interested,' one volunteer costumed interpreter on York Castle's Kirkgate observed.⁷ Another noted that the experience was enhanced when the normally closed grocer's shop was opened, adding 'another room to explore that suddenly makes the whole place feel a little bit bigger.'⁸ Meanwhile, at the Thackray Museum, a visitor assistant argued that: 'It could be quite like what they have in York where you can actually go in the shops' to enhance the exploratory nature of the visitor experience.⁹ Many of these suggestions, especially those which require considerably higher numbers of costumed staff, may be expensive or difficult to achieve from a collections management perspective. However, they point the way to a desired future in which the inherently active and participatory nature of the museum street scene is emphasised and developed to become a flexible, personalisable space that is open to all to use as they will.

In the first half of the twentieth century, curators and museum directors such as Thomas Sheppard, John Kirk, John Bowes Morrell, Cyril Maynard Mitchell and Robert Patterson saw a future in which an understanding of everyday life in our collective urban past would be open to everyone through the populist and democratised medium of a reconstructed urban environment. Anyone from the public outside could in theory step from the real streets of the contemporary city onto the reconstructed streets of the museum micro-city and develop their understanding of both the city past and present. It will, of course, never be possible perfectly to capture this vision. The city streets of the past will always remain in the past and the version in the museum as much of a staged construction from the contemporary mind as the streets of revolution-era Paris in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. And there will always be some barriers, physical, intellectual or sensory, which may exclude some members of the wider public. Nevertheless, each development that the museum street makes should be in service of fulfilling that vision of popular public history which can inspire a closer link to the Victorian past. It should give at least some sense of what it would be like to

⁷ Interview YCM V5, 14.10.16

⁸ Interview YCM F3, 22.09.16

⁹ Interview TM F2, 20.05.16

be there, and push visitors to explore more across other media. As the museum street scene moves forward through the twenty-first century, therefore, it would do well to capture the vision of men like Sheppard or Morrell in embracing the street's potential for playful, dialogic, collaborative meaning-making by providing an ever more personalisable museum experience.

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Interview with Abbey House Museum Front of House Staff Member 1 (AHM F1), 17.11.15

Interview with Abbey House Museum Front of House Staff Member 2 (AHM F2), 17.11.15

Interview with Abbey House Museum Front of House Staff Member 3 (AHM F3), 21.11.15

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Development Team Member 1 (TM D1), 22.10.15

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Development Team Member 2 (TM D2), 10.11.15

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Curator 1 (TM C1), 19.05.16

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Curator 2 (TM C2), 20.05.16

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Learning Officer 1 (TM L1), 19.05.16

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Learning Officer 2 (TM L2), 19.05.16

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Front of House Staff Member 1 (TM F1), 19.05.16

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Front of House Staff Member 2 (TM F2), 20.05.16

Interview with Thackray Medical Museum Front of House Staff Member 3 (TM F3), 20.05.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Curator 1 (YCM C1), 21.09.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Learning Officer 1 (YCM L1), 14.12.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Front of House Staff Member 1 (YCM F1), 22.09.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Front of House Staff Member 2 (YCM F2), 22.09.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Front of House Staff Member 3 (YCM F3), 22.09.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Volunteer 1 (YCM V1), 13.09.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Volunteer 2 (YCM V2), 22.09.16

Interview with York Castle Museum Volunteer 3 (YCM V3), 04.10.16

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Audience Study Visits

Abbey House Museum

01.05.15 – Visitor Group 1

04.05.15 – Visitor Groups 2-6

09.05.15 – Visitor Groups 7-10

25.05.15 – Visitor Groups 11-14

27.05.15 – Visitor Groups 15-19

29.05.15 – Visitor Groups 20-22

31.05.15 – Visitor Groups 23-26

31.07.15 – Visitor Groups 27-28

04.08.15 – Visitor Groups 29-32

26.08.15 – Visitor Groups 33-35

03.09.15 – Visitor Group 36

17.11.15 – Visitor Groups 37-38

21.11.15 – Visitor Groups 39-40

Thackray Medical Museum

11.02.16 – Visitor Groups 1-2

15.02.16 – Visitor Groups 3-9

17.02.16 – Visitor Groups 10-16

20.02.16 – Visitor Groups 17-23

York Castle Museum

27.09.16 – Visitor Groups 1-2

13.10.16 – Visitor Groups 3-6

14.10.16 – Visitor Groups 7-12

22.10.16 – Visitor Groups 13-17

26.10.16 – Visitor Groups 18-20

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