

Thinking about people and Public History

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There are various definitions – and forms of practice – of Public History.¹ For some, Public History is based on the form and nature of transmission of historical knowledge to wider audiences. This might be exemplified by the Doing Public History website established at Royal Holloway College, University of London which is seeking to promote ‘cogent reflection on the relationship between the academic historian and the public.’² The use of the definite article provides a focus upon those who are seen to be creating history and those who are its recipients. In such a definition ‘agents’ and ‘consumers’ are promoted while the ‘thing’ being transmitted, History, is taken as a given. Such definitions imply that the historian, usually seen as professionally trained, is performing an active role and the ‘public’ a passive one. The onus therefore is upon the historian to ensure that the body of knowledge transmitted is accessible. This has the dual effect of engaging ‘the public’ but also of enhancing the separate status of the historian as the disseminator who not only possesses knowledge but the skill of transmission. This approach does not necessarily question such roles although, as John Tosh has suggested in his latest book, the dissemination of ideas can be a democratic impulse. Here Tosh defines Public History as involving ‘the free access of the public to the findings of historical scholarship.’³ He has rightly criticised a definition of Public History as ‘an option to be pursued by a handful of publicity-seeking academics.’ However for him the emphasis in Public History is both upon ‘the injection of historical perspective into crucial public issues’ and of academics ‘sharing with the public their own scholarly expertise.’⁴ A good example of this dissemination within the public domain is the approach of the History and Policy website. Its intention is both to influence the formation of government policies and inform public debate through providing ‘policy-relevant history.’ Its emphasis is upon demonstrating the relevance of history that might be used by policy-

¹ This paper draws on ideas discussed more fully in Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton, ‘Introduction: people and their pasts and Public History today’, in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts. Public History Today* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-20.

² <<http://www.doingpublichistory.org/>>, accessed 29 January 2009.

³ John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 119.

⁴ Tosh, *Why History Matters*, pp. 142-3.

makers. It also seeks to increase the status of historical research in relation to current policy.⁵

Pasts: processes and people

I want, however, to pose a different way of thinking about Public History which places less emphasis on any distinctiveness of ‘historian’ and ‘public’ and more upon the process of how the past becomes History. Access and dissemination are laudable, but by themselves are insufficient concepts with which either to explore the keen enthusiasm for the past in the popular domain or to develop creative ways in which such engagement can produce different understandings and practices by those who are not ‘professional’ historians. An aspect of this approach is to seek ways of de-mystifying what historians do through sharing conceptual and not just content-based knowledge.

We have tried to adopt such an approach at Ruskin College through conferences, courses and publications.⁶ A rigid demarcation between ‘historians’ and ‘their publics’ has not been the focus, rather emphasis has been on the processes and materials that might lead to new forms of wide understanding. The premise has been that people are active agents in creating histories. Included within this definition are those who make their living from this practice as well as those involved in community, local and family history projects. This ‘fudging’ of roles has been explored by Robert Archibald who has suggested ‘public historians do not own history’ but are merely collaborators, particularly in community-based histories.⁷ Rather, one might seek to explore the possibilities of a participatory historical culture, as David Thelen has phrased it, where the ‘past should be treated as a shared human experience and opportunity for understanding, rather than a ground for division and suspicion’.⁸

Sharing is surely positive. However, a definition of sharing that consists simply of ‘the historian’ sharing with ‘the public’ is rather one-

⁵ <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/philosophy.html>>, accessed 14 December 2008.

⁶ Public History conferences organised at Ruskin College have included Official and Unofficial Histories; Personal and Public Histories; Placing History; Radical and Popular Pasts; and People and their Pasts. Publications include Hilda Kean, Paul Martin and Sally Morgan, eds., *Seeing History. Public History in Britain Now* (London: Francis and Taylor, 2000); and Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton, eds., *People and their Pasts. Public History Today* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Since 1996 we have run an MA in Public History and organise a regular, open, discussion group with a range of speakers.

⁷ Robert Archibald, *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (New York: Altamura, 1999), pp. 155-6 as quoted in A. S. Newell, ‘“Home is what you can take away with you”: K. J. Ross Toole and the making of a public historian’, *The Public Historian* 23:3 (2001), p. 70.

⁸ David Thelen, ‘A participatory historical culture’, on the Center for History and New Media website, <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/survey/afterdave.html>>, p. 2, accessed 4 January 2007.

sided. We might also go beyond this, recognising the need to share, participate and engage not so much as ‘experts’ in ‘history’ but as people with an interest in the relationship between the past and present who are willing to explore, acknowledge and value different ways of configuring this. There may, of course, be a gap in historical understandings between those trained as historians and the audiences for their work but this gap will not be shortened by ‘historians’ merely reaching out to ‘the public’. Rather, as David Glassberg has suggested, new ways of thinking about the past may be grasped by ‘reaching in to discover the humanity they share’. The recognition of the historian’s – as much as the public’s – personal need for the past is key to different understandings of the past.⁹ If History does embrace an acknowledgement of people’s role in making history – and includes historians within this idea of people – this presents challenges.¹⁰ It can be an unsettling but perhaps a good place to start in opening up historiographical practice.¹¹ Exploring our engagement with our own and others’ pasts may help us develop different ways of thinking about Public History and of sharing ideas or validating – or scrutinising – experience.

Different historians’ approaches

The intellectual influence of Raphael Samuel has helped underpin this approach particularly his acknowledgement of the value of historical study to our very identity as human beings:

If history is an arena for the projection of ideal selves, it can also be a means of undoing and questioning them, offering more disturbing accounts of who we are, and where we come from than simple identification would suggest.¹²

Across the wide range of his research and publications, Samuel returned

again and again to the idea of history as an organic form of knowledge, and one whose sources are promiscuous, drawing not only on real-life experience but also on memory and myth, fantasy and desire; not only on the

⁹ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: Massachusetts Press, 2001), p. 210.

¹⁰ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 2, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain*, ed. Alison Light with Sally Alexander and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Verso, 1998), p. 223: my emphasis.

¹¹ Hilda Kean, *London Stories. Personal Lives, Public Histories* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2004), pp.186-90.

¹² Samuel, *Island Stories*, p. 222.

chronological past of the documentary record but also the timeless one of 'tradition'.¹³

History was *not* the prerogative of the historian but 'a social form of knowledge; the work in any given instance, of a thousand different hands.'¹⁴ As he elaborated in *Theatres of Memory* there was a long legacy of historical practice by self-educated 'amateurs', such as John Aubrey, the seventeenth-century notator of places including the World Heritage site of Avebury.¹⁵ Explorers of the past were not – nor could be – neatly divided into 'professional' and 'public'. Rather, if 'history was thought of as an activity rather than a profession, then the number of practitioners would be legion'.¹⁶

Both in *Theatres of Memory* and in his earlier work Samuel developed historiographical insights into the nature of material for writing history and the validity of personal experience and memory, to the extent that in their recent collections on memory and history, Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone situate their work as a development of Samuel's ideas contained in *Theatres of Memory*, stating that work on social and cultural memory 'has come to be known as 'public history''.¹⁷ Samuel recognised the value of autobiography, stories, legends or songs that a child might learn at a grandparent's knee, noting that a 'different order of evidence' would lead to a 'different kind of inquiry'.¹⁸ As early as 1976 in an important article on the diverse, non-traditional range of materials used by local and oral historians he had demonstrated both the validity and possibility of constructing different histories by using different materials.¹⁹ This position was later demonstrated in his book on the miners' strike of 1984-5, *The Enemy Within*. Here letters, diaries and speeches made during the strike provided a focus on individual experience, rather than on the nature of collective acts.²⁰ Using material created and collected by activists, the book attempted to show 'the ways in which history is made behind our backs, in spite of our best

¹³ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p. x.

¹⁴ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 11; Brian Edwards, 'Avebury and not-so-ancient-places: The making of the English heritage landscape', in Kean, Martin and Morgan, eds., *Seeing History*, pp. 65-80.

¹⁶ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 17.

¹⁷ Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, 'Introduction', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 3. See also Hilda Kean, 'Public History and Raphael Samuel: A forgotten radical pedagogy?', *Public History Review* 11 (Professional Historians Association, New South Wales, Australia, 2004), pp. 51-62.

¹⁸ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 11.

¹⁹ Raphael Samuel, 'Local history and oral history', *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976), pp. 191-208.

²⁰ Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas, eds., *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. xvii.

intentions rather than because of them.²¹ By the 1990s he started to discuss such approaches using the term Public History that was employed in the United States, he said, to encompass 'an assortment of retrieval projects, oral history projects and heritage interpretation programmes which exist in the civic sphere quite independently of the universities.' But additionally, he was concerned that this term was applied 'more ecumenically to the best of citizen initiatives and local enthusiasms.'²²

The nature of the historical process has also been crucial in the work of Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, in particular *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*.²³ Their survey of North American people explored historical activities and the social needs and historical sensibilities underlying them. They showed the complex ways in which people used the past in making their own identities, and negotiated the present and navigated the future. The past and the present were brought together in an analysis of the ways in which people both made the past part of their everyday routines and turned to the past 'as a way of grappling with profound questions about how to live.' People used their pasts, their work indicated, to address questions about 'relationships, identity, immortality, and agency'.²⁴ The past was not a distant or abstract, insignificant entity but a key feature of people's present lives.

Rosenzweig and Thelen's *Presence of the Past* was written against a politically conservative climate in the United States. Particularly controversial was their suggestion that people's understanding and use of the past was 'intimate and personal'.²⁵ For some historians working in the presentation of history, for example in museums, this was seen as potentially threatening. As James Gardner acknowledged in his presidential address to the National Council on Public History, the 'public's understanding and use of the past', as noted in the Rosenzweig and Thelen study, provided a 'fundamentally different sense of the past than what we as public historians are committed to exploring and sharing.'²⁶ Particularly worrying was the concept of valuing individuals'

²¹ Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanas, eds., *The Enemy Within*, p. xv.

²² Raphael Samuel, Handwritten notes for typed draft of Public History degree, Raphael Samuel Archive (Bishopsgate Institute), file 442.

²³ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²⁴ Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, p. 18. See also a discussion of an Australian version of this project in Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, 'At home with the past: Background and initial findings from the National Survey', in *Australians and the Past*, special issue of *Australian Cultural History*, 22 (2003), pp. 5-30; and Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads. Australians and the Past* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 2010).

²⁵ James B. Gardner, 'Contested terrain: History, museums and the public' (NCPH president's annual address), *The Public Historian* 26:4 (2004), p. 13.

²⁶ Gardner, 'Contested terrain', p. 13.

experience of the past, *unmediated* by the professional input of historians, since this was seen as part of the *raison d'être* of those seeking to present 'history' to 'the public' outside academic institutions.²⁷ As Thelen observed in his afterthoughts on the project, their book provided 'evidence that academic history differs from everyday history'.²⁸ Thelen has been critical of professionals who dismiss experience as inconsequential, private or self-deceptive or fail to respect 'differences in grandmothers' stories, museum exhibitions, and manuscript collections as trusted sources for approaching the past.'²⁹

Roy Rosenzweig subsequently argued that he recognised 'the terrain of the past that is so present for all of us' and did not dismiss the role of professional historians but rather sought to explore how such scholars can talk to, 'and especially *with*, those audiences'. In his attempt to bring the spheres of the professional and popular history-maker together, this involved, he suggested, working harder at listening to, and respecting, the work of popular history makers to see the common experience that bound them.³⁰ For his part Thelen maintained that in practice there was a blurring between personal/private and public. Such categories, he declared, were artificial: 'The dichotomy between 'intimate' and 'national', public and private, dissolves into dynamic and reciprocal interaction'. Respondents to their survey, he pointed out, 'more often mentioned public experiences than private ones as the most formative of their lives, but they mentioned those public events most often as intimate experiences.' This was not a rejection of national pasts, for example as treated in museums, or important political events. Instead, it was an acknowledgement that these occurrences are often remembered and perceived as personal events. Such a *participatory historical model* 'would take seriously how [...people] live lives and meet needs in relationships driven by forces different from those that power institutions and cultures'.³¹ For Rosenzweig and Thelen, history as practised within universities was but one of many historical practices.

Possible ways of breaking down barriers

As I suggested with Paul Martin and Sally Morgan in our collection *Seeing History: Public History in Britain Now*, 'Public History relies on a collective and collaborative effort of people often working in different fields.' We argued that 'what is seen and what is experienced in our everyday lives is as likely to be as significant in our understanding and creation of

²⁷ Gardner, 'Contested terrain', pp. 12, 13.

²⁸ Thelen, 'A participatory historical culture', p. 2.

²⁹ Thelen, 'A participatory historical culture', pp. 3, 11.

³⁰ Roy Rosenzweig, 'Everyone a historian', on the Center for History and New Media website, <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/survey/afterroy.html#32>>, accessed 7 February 2007.

³¹ Thelen, 'A participatory historical culture', pp. 7-8.

history as the reading of books or archives.³² This approach emphasised the value of different material in the writing of history, freeing a writer from the apparent constraints of the archive, and simultaneously acknowledging that materials found in the course of everyday life were important in understanding the past. Most of our contributors employed their personal experience of locality, work or leisure pursuits as ways of exploring their material. As Jo Stanley explained in her critique of the absence of women in public maritime history, it ‘matters to me because I feel hurt, excluded, angry and confused when confronted by any omission of a history that I know exists’.³³

Valuing local and personal experience and material is not necessarily counterposed to broader understandings of the past but rather can alter our perception of them, as Alessandro Portelli has shown in his studies of Italian post-war politics. In analysing his approach to oral history, Portelli has challenged the conventional notions of such an historian recording and analysing the material of the interviewee. Rather than privileging the role of the professional in this process, he suggested that *both* participants in this form of history-making are subjects. There is no oral history before the encounter of these two different subjects, ‘one with a story to tell and the other with a history to reconstruct’.³⁴ Recent work has led Portelli to revisit the way in which the memory of Italian Partisan history was being re-worked. Major historical events, such as the Nazi massacre at Rome’s Fosse Ardeatine, were re-appraised in the light of the oral testimony and collective memory of hundreds of Roman citizens. Here the personal and the public have been elided, rather than counterposed.³⁵

Longevity: family and national histories

Breaking down knowledge barriers, promoting the use of different materials, valuing engagement – these might all be seen as forms of Public History in which people and their lives and experiences are central. Such work might be said to have long traditions. In the self-declared ‘first book length reference work’ on the subject, *The Craft of Public History*, published by the American National Council on Public History in 1983, the authors debunked the apparent newness of the term describing Public History as an ancient approach to the study of

³² Hilda Kean, Paul Martin and Sally Morgan, ‘Introduction’, in Kean, Martin and Morgan, eds., *Seeing History*, p. 15.

³³ Jo Stanley, ‘Putting gender into seafaring: Representing women in public maritime history’, in Kean, Martin and Morgan, eds., *Seeing History*, pp. 81-104.

³⁴ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 9.

³⁵ Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 12.

past processes.³⁶ Professional status was not important. While official or government history was specifically excluded from their definition, genealogy and family history were acknowledged as being ‘among the oldest fields of historical practice’.³⁷ Certainly the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a good example of the ways in which family and personal histories can be relating to broader national and international pasts. Not only has this series responded to an engaged interest in pasts broader than the personal, but the programmes – and the website – have also encouraged viewers to undertake their own researches.³⁸ This has been achieved in part because the format of the series does not rely on the authoritative single voice of a professional historian, but draws on those with different expertise and experiences including members of the subject’s own family and a range of people with different knowledges which might relate to the subject’s past.

In a peevish article in the *Guardian* in Autumn 2007, television historian Tristram Hunt criticised *Who Do You Think You Are?* For Hunt this was history ‘presented as a form of psychological massage’ or ‘warm-bath TV’. The series was contrasted unfavourably with those on national identity by Simon Schama and Niall Ferguson, seen respectively as ‘an extended meditation on national identity’ and a ‘provocative re-assessment of our colonial legacy’. For Hunt, television history was apparently now in danger of ‘telling comforting stories about ourselves to ourselves rather than confronting the past’. ‘Today’s TV history,’ he argued, ‘all too often retreats into therapy: an attempt not to explain the past and its modern meaning, but an indulgent search for identity and understanding.’ However, often difficult subject matter such as racism, poverty and immigration is routinely tackled in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, creating different ways of engaging with the past and present. Alex Graham, the chief executive of the production company, Wall to Wall, responded, ‘This is surely an elitist view. Is a quest for understanding or indeed identity something to be denigrated? Or celebrated?’³⁹ The Spring 2009 series has included, *inter alia*, programmes that have covered both the slave trade and the English Civil War, through the ancestors of actor Kevin Whately, and aspects of fighting during the Second World War in the Netherlands and post-war reconstruction in Germany through a focus on comedian Rory Bremner. In both instances contributors to the programmes’ webpages added further information based on their own researches. One emailer contributed information from his own father’s

³⁶ David F. Trask and Robert W. Pomeroy III, eds., *The Craft of Public History: An Annotated Select Bibliography* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press for NCPH, 1983), p. xi.

³⁷ Trask and Pomeroy III, eds., *The Craft of Public History*, p. xii.

³⁸ <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/whodoyouthinkyouare/past-stories/>>

³⁹ Tristram Hunt, ‘Time bandits’, *Guardian*, 10 September 2007, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/sep/10/mondaymediasection.television1>>; Alex Graham, ‘Who do you think you are, Tristram Hunt?’ *Guardian*, 17 September, 2007, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/sep/17/mondaymediasection9>>.

diary on the specific fighting episode discussed in the Bremner programme; another added information about an ancestor of Whately who had been an MP for a 'rotten borough'.⁴⁰

While some historians have been threatened by such public discussion of the past, others have chosen to recognise the potentially inclusive nature of the term 'public'. In a collection which positively recognised the role of 'amateur' practitioners interacting with archaeologists, Nick Merriman helped unpack different ideas of 'the public', embracing within this terminology the state *and* groups of individuals who saw the potential for archaeologists to engage with alternative 'public' opinion to their mutual benefit.⁴¹ Merriman notes that, however hard archaeologists try, 'non-archaeologists will re-appropriate, re-interpret and re-negotiate meanings of archaeological resources to their own personal agendas.'⁴² Certainly those who engaged in metal detecting used to be frequently derided by archaeologists. However, the Staffordshire hoard, 'the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold ever found', of 1,500 unique items of precious metals and stones from the seventh century, was discovered by Terry Herbert, a metal detectorist, who then informed professional archaeologists. Dr Roger Bland of the British Museum paid tribute to Terry Herbert's actions in promptly reporting the find and for 'giving every assistance to the investigation of the site'.⁴³

In similar vein Paul Gough has shown the ways in which the meta-narrative of the National Memorial Arboretum, now run by the Royal British Legion in Alrewas in Staffordshire, has been challenged by individual organisations creating their own memorials. Labels favour the local and the known and act as 'a running sub-text to the larger ambitions of the site, quiet, unassuming graffiti that is slowly reasserting the private voices within the high diction of the garden's larger plan'.⁴⁴ A similar welcoming of 'public intervention' has been analysed by Jon Newman in an account of an exhibition of the photographs of Brixton photographer Harry Jacobs displayed in the gallery of Black Cultural Archives. Here visitors asked for and received post-it notes which they attached to the images to give information about the subjects of the photographs, thus breaking down barriers between personal information and public display. As Newman notes, the images briefly reacquired 'the

⁴⁰ <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/whodoyouthinkyouare/new-stories/kevin-whately/index.shtml>>; <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/whodoyouthinkyouare/new-stories/rory-bremner/index.shtml>>, accessed 23 March, 2009.

⁴¹ Nick Merriman, 'Diversity and dissonance in public archaeology', in Nick Merriman, ed., *Public Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-2. See also T. Schadla-Hall, 'The comforts of unreason: The importance and relevance of alternative archaeology', in Merriman, ed., *Public Archaeology*, pp. 255-71.

⁴² Merriman, 'Diversity', p. 7.

⁴³ <<http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/team/>>, accessed July 2010.

⁴⁴ Paul Gough, "'Garden of gratitude': The National Memorial Arboretum and strategic remembering', in Ashton and Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts*, p. 109.

shared life and meaning that they had once held for the individuals who commissioned and owned them and for the extended families and community who understood their significances'.⁴⁵

In Britain some academic journals have seen Public History as a new concern with which they seek to engage.⁴⁶ But, unsurprisingly, for the most part it is outside academic journals that historical engagement is thriving. The proliferation both of family history societies and magazines devoted to the subject, and of family history fairs, is an indication of how seriously the community of family historians see themselves – and makes them probably the single biggest constituency of practising historical researchers within the wider Public History community. Just as importantly there have been campaigns to erect new memorials to forgotten – or discredited – pasts. The memorial of the slave trade in Lancaster, for example, has drawn in a range of local people including historians, teachers, artists and politicians; as has the (currently unsuccessful) campaign to erect a monument to socialist Sylvia Pankhurst near Parliament, and Memorial 2007, a campaign attempting to raise funds to erect a permanent memorial in the Rose Garden of London's Hyde Park to 'honour and acknowledge the millions of enslaved Africans and their descendants'.⁴⁷

Conclusion

When I wrote *London Stories: Personal Lives Public Histories*, I was attempting to explore different ways of writing about ordinary people's lives for which there was often scant conventional material.⁴⁸ Much of the narrative of the book was about the *very process* of making history. It recounted a historical journey of sorts through house clearance in Essex, church graveyards in Kent and Shropshire, discussing and sharing of materials with historians of locality and family. It showed the different people involved in creating understandings of the past: a young man – accompanied by his excited dog – mowing between Kentish graves, who shared his local knowledge of his own topography (and that of my

⁴⁵ Jon Newman, 'Harry Jacobs: The studio photographer and the visual archive', in Ashton and Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts*, p. 276.

⁴⁶ The *Labour History Review*, for example, includes a small Public History Review section as does the *Oral History* journal; the *History Workshop Journal* includes a 'History at Large' section.

⁴⁷ Hilda Kean, 'Personal and Public Histories: Issues in the presentation of the past', in Brian Graham and Peter Howard, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 55-72; Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum, 2003); The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, <<http://sylviapankhurst.gn.apc.org/>>; John Siblon, 'Monument mania? Public space and the Black and Asian presence in the London landscape', in Ashton and Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts*, p. 159.

⁴⁸ Kean, *London Stories*.

ancestors); the prison officers at High Down Prison, the former Banstead lunatic asylum keen to discuss their knowledge of the former asylum's buildings and the way Victorians could construct strong walls; a family historian with whom material was exchanged through the happenstance of a visit to a Tonbridge church on an open day.

The book tried to suggest possible readings of memory, materials, souvenirs, maps, landscape, and different ways of making connections between people and places. It attempted to make the link between personal stories and how they can become histories that go beyond the personal. The voice I adopted was not the authorial single voice of certainty I had used in some earlier writing. The tone was more tentative and exploratory. I was attempting to listen and to share material and perspectives and analyses. Against the conventions of historical writing the book did not conclude with firm conclusions but with questions: 'Whose archive is this now? Whose story?'⁴⁹

Such an approach may well be challenging to those with particular views of historical professionalism. A participant at the recent symposium at the University of Brighton suggested that 'academic' historians *could* offer a broader subject matter context than the family historian.⁵⁰ This might be true. But, family historians – and members of 'the public' – are often well able to research social and political contexts. However, they may not have the confidence to pursue imaginative ways of thinking about the past and using materials in different ways. Professional historians may still have a distinctive role in the Public History pedagogic process, as facilitators and voices of encouragement providing a safe but challenging environment in which other historians can develop confidence in their own abilities.

As stated earlier, John Tosh rightly criticised a definition of Public History as 'an option to be pursued by a handful of publicity-seeking academics.'⁵¹ But we also need to think of approaches beyond that of dissemination and explore the value of sharing, participating and engaging not as 'academics' but as people with an interest in the relationship between the past and present who are willing to explore different ways of configuring this. *If* History in the *public* arena can be defined, as Raphael Samuel put it, as 'the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded or a dialectic of past-present relations is rehearsed',⁵² this presents challenges of opening up historiographical practice, of sharing ideas and validating experiences. Acknowledging these challenges may be a good, albeit unsettling, place to start in exploring our engagement as people with our own and others' pasts.

⁴⁹ Kean, *London Stories*, p. 190.

⁵⁰ Launch Symposium for The Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories, University of Brighton, 6 December 2008.

⁵¹ Tosh, *Why History Matters*, pp. 142-3.

⁵² Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 8.

