‘A rather undefined social position and public recognition’[[1]](#endnote-1): professionalisation, status, and masculinity in provincial museums, c.1870-1930

**Introduction**

In 1907 a row broke out between Frank Woolnough, curator of Ipswich Museum, and Nina Layard, an amateur archaeologist related to both Sir Austen Henry Layard, excavator of Nineveh, and Lady Charlotte Schreiber, an important collector of decorative art. The argument concerned finds which Layard had amassed from her excavations – important material on Anglo-Saxon and prehistoric Ipswich. These were on loan to Ipswich Museum; but the conditions of that loan were the subject of some disagreement. Layard objected to the fact that Woolnough had access to her collection; she understood that she ‘should have free access to the specimens in case of wishing to show them to experts or exhibit them at lectures etc’.[[2]](#endnote-2) Woolnough - and initially the council committee with responsibility for the museum supported him - wished to be present when Layard was examining the collection, and wanted the display arrangement maintained. Layard had a powerful ally in the shape of E. Ray Lankester, Director of the British Museum (Natural History) and was also on close terms with Sir John Evans, archaeologist and geologist, and Baron Anatole von Hügel, Curator of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge.[[3]](#endnote-3) The row became quite heated: the President of Essex Archaeological Society in a letter to Layard described Woolnough as a ‘-----!’ Lankester described Woolnough as ‘incompetent’ in a letter to Layard, while she described Woolnough’s behaviour as ‘possessive’.[[4]](#endnote-4) Layard told the museum committee that she would withdraw her collection if they did not back her up, *and* would publish all the correspondence on the topic. Some of her allies, particularly Lankester, met committee members in person, successfully recruiting them onto Layard’s side. Lankester reported to Layard that they were now ‘very anxious to do all they can to meet your wishes’, and by 1908 the collections were in a separate building with new cases to which Layard had the key. She was given the formal title of Honorary Curator of the Layard Collection of Local Antiquities, which she used on her headed notepaper.[[5]](#endnote-5) In 1909 there was a somewhat stiff formal reconciliation between Layard and Woolnough; she wrote to him that she would ‘like to think there is no ill-feeling between us’ and he replied that ‘none has appreciated the work you have done more than I’.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Whatever the rights and wrongs of this row – and Layard the prolific correspondent has certainly left far more of her side of the story than Woolnough the public servant – it opens up a glimpse into a world of social relations and identities in provincial towns and cities around 1900 which shows us the difficulty in being ‘manly’ for those lower-middle-class men in new professions. Occupations such as provincial curating were caught between the increasing status and authoritative masculinity of the grander professions, and the rising tide of a feminine professional identity which colonised the less glamorous jobs. Moreover, manly professional independence was a particular issue for provincial curators struggling to escape a subordinate role with regard to local elites arguably at the peak of their interconnected power and influence in towns and cities around 1900.[[7]](#endnote-7) The argument that men in the lower middle classes were objects of derision because of their apparently emasculated domestic lives can thus be extended to consider their working lives. While Mr Pooter from *The Diary of a Nobody* might have been mocked for his home-centred life, his job as a clerk also prevented him displaying appropriate masculine qualities, and in many ways exposed his simultaneously upwardly mobile and subordinate position. Mr Pooter was portrayed as unable to wield masculine authority in his own home, as his absorption in domestic details robbed him of patriarchal status; but he was also subject to subordination at work.[[8]](#endnote-8) Public mockery of the lower-middle-class man focused on his domestic life, but for many of the men themselves, the key to their sense of self was development, most centrally through education, work and consequent social mobility.[[9]](#endnote-9) For many clerks and others, though, women were appearing in their workplaces in increasing numbers, so feminisation threatened in various ways. These problems with status, work and masculinity went well beyond clerks such as Pooter to affect a range of lower-middle-class occupations.[[10]](#endnote-10)

This article explores these issues by examining the cohort of men who, like Frank Woolnough, formed the first generation of paid provincial museum curators in England and Scotland, usually in municipally-funded institutions. Most of them took up their positions between about 1870 and 1890, often very young and with little qualification or experience, and sometimes stayed in post for decades, into the twentieth-century inter-war period. In the course of this long service they often came to be seen as ‘characters’; slightly or even very eccentric local figures who were closely identified with their institution and who either died in service or very shortly after (sometimes forced) retirement. Their embracing of eccentricity and identification with the institution may have represented a means of sidestepping the difficult issue of ‘mainstream’ middle-class masculine identities.

**Middle-class masculinities, status, occupation and women workers**

The subject of middle-class masculinities around 1900 has been dominated by Tosh’s ‘flight from domesticity’ thesis, which focuses on the upper-middle classes moving into closer alignment with landed and aristocratic men through shared public school experiences, and rejecting ‘domestic’ masculine virtues in favour of more martial ones. For such men, marriage and a home-centred life started to seem ‘stultifying’, and bachelorhood, previously the sign of an ‘incomplete’ man, became more attractive.[[11]](#endnote-11) Tosh acknowledged the limited extent of the ‘flight’ socially - it was confined to the public-school and university attending classes; the lower-middle classes, he suggested, continued to value a domestic style of masculinity throughout the period. For Tosh, then, domesticity and attitudes towards it increasingly formed a major bifurcation within middle-class styles and ideals of masculinity and was a fundamental reason for the mockery of the lower middle-class man.[[12]](#endnote-12)

The lower-middle classes’ sense of and difficult relationship with masculinity, though, was not just about a particular investment in domesticity, however much our view of it has been skewed by hostile representations from more patrician men.[[13]](#endnote-13) Indeed, not all lower-middle-class men were even married, and many lived in lodgings, especially but not only the young.[[14]](#endnote-14) Under such circumstances men’s sense of self, of gendered identity and of aspiration focused on a range of aspects of their lives. Christopher Hosgood shows how clearly young lower-middle-class men took the initiative in developing a style of manliness which balanced respectability with worldliness and ‘muscularity’ through their leisure in a space outside the home, the YMCA.[[15]](#endnote-15) Nicola Bishop’s survey of ‘clerkly’ literature shows that much literature about clerks was written by clerks or ex-clerks and showed them in a sympathetic light, not usually focusing on their domestic lives but again on their leisure, which was even seen as a way to escape the domestic. Moreover, like Hosgood, Bishop identifies such clerks’ sense of masculinity as residing in their bodies; they took pains to reshape their bodies in ways which they saw as more manly than the stereotypical ‘clerkly’ body, effeminate in its neatness and weakness.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Even where lower-middle-class men were married with children, they could be very far from the home-loving types defined by these domestic relationships and routines depicted in satirical representations. The attention paid to masculinity’s relationship with a man’s intimate relationships, leisure spaces, and sites of daily life has meant that its link with professional identity has become less prominent.[[17]](#endnote-17) Although it is widely acknowledged that for middle-class men in particular, occupation was an important part of identity, what this actually meant in terms of values, status and codes of behaviour is less clear. Moreover, existing work has tended, naturally, to focus on those professions where public self-reflexivity was prominent, such as writing.[[18]](#endnote-18) As a key part of occupational identity, and as a simultaneously structural process affecting the numbers, distributions and wealth of different types of occupation at this period, professionalisation offers a way to observe masculine ideals and experiences developing within the middle classes at this time.[[19]](#endnote-19) Professionalisation, however, is not a process towards a stable, fixed end state, but a ‘historically contingent’ one, whose emphasis and parameters were unstable and shifting; it offered the possibility of ‘construct[ing] a particular kind of elite’.[[20]](#endnote-20) For many in the late nineteenth century, the professional was primarily the antithesis of the tradesman, not the amateur; an amateur ethos permeated the professional ideal, revealing extensive segmentation among the middle classes, predicated on gendered working identities and personae.[[21]](#endnote-21)

The professional ideal incorporated many of the qualities of the gentleman and was therefore inherently gendered. King shows how the ‘best’ – or at least oldest – professions of law, church and medicine were rooted in a status derived from birth and education, and their practitioners had to appear disinterested and financially independent, rather than in any way in a servile relationship with their clients. Such an appearance was more difficult for civil servants such as Anthony Trollope (who worked in the Post Office alongside writing until he was in his fifties) to maintain, because of the hierarchy and consequent lack of independence in their jobs; they were in fact employees not independent actors. For Trollope, the solution to this potential lack of manliness was to recast the mark of the professional as dedication to the job; they had a vocation which transcended financial reward, hope of promotion, and other less than gentlemanly concerns. A public service ideal of working to the greater good, offering self-sacrifice as proof of disinterestedness, was what marked the gentlemanly professional who was also an employee.[[22]](#endnote-22)

In science, which had a highly uneven path to professionalisation (in that it was not demarcated by a set of entrance examinations but remained open to anyone who could convince the wider world of their credentials), the gendering of professional identities took a more explicit turn. Professional scientists were, it was asserted, by definition male and manly, and the purging of women from sites of science was an important tactic in the struggle to turn scientific activities into a gentlemanly, respected and well-paid profession.[[23]](#endnote-23) Thus the male science professional was not so much distinguished by whether or not they had a paid position, as by the heroic way they forged new knowledge, objectively hewing discoveries from the realm of nature. They stood, James Mussell suggests, ‘on the brink of the unknown’, facing danger to bring back information for the benefit of all mankind.[[24]](#endnote-24) They were also, as highlighted by King, disinterested, distanced from and not motivated by financial concerns.

Yet neither of these ways of creating and stabilising a masculine identity within the professions always safeguarded them from feminisation.[[25]](#endnote-25) For those in the lower ranks of the new professions there was an influx of actual women. In occupations such as clerking, librarianship and teaching (in its lower ranks) the speed with which women became a significant part of the workforce around 1900 is noteworthy: by 1921, 46% of Britain’s clerks were women, while the proportion of women workers in libraries may have reached 52% by the same date, though data collection is not reliable.[[26]](#endnote-26) Women were often cheaper, and were additionally thought to lack the disruptive ambition to advance themselves, as men did; they were amenable to the discipline of lowly white-collar roles, and did not seek more control.[[27]](#endnote-27) Female professionals were therefore understood as dependent and obedient, in contrast to the masculine professional virtue of independence. Women also successfully established themselves in fields where mediation and communication were key parts of the job – popularising science, writing for children, and other occupations which could be seen as ‘caring’.[[28]](#endnote-28) Despite the view, then, that women entered these professions mainly by default (it was advised that parents who were ‘at a loss to know what to do with their daughters’ should direct them to librarianship) women arguably developed an alternative to the masculine model of professional identity as gentlemanliness.[[29]](#endnote-29) The idea of a feminine professional identity was based on a caring form of service, which was less independent, knowledge-oriented and authoritative, and more communicative. It was not prestigious, it often required obedience and submissiveness, and it was badly paid, but it was arguably successfully established as a naturally feminine arena.

**Curating – the difficult birth of a new profession**

Within this milieu, curators emerged as a particularly problematic type of professional. While there were people working in museums before the nineteenth century, the growth of museums of all sorts, national, university, voluntary and municipal, led to a significant expansion in people employed (paid or not) to run them.[[30]](#endnote-30) Municipal museums in particular, enabled by an Act of 1845 but most significantly expanding in the decades after 1870 as municipalities matured, were often seen as the most modern and dynamic of museum types, despite the significant problems facing them; indeed, by 1910 there were 255 such museums in Britain, approximately half of them founded in the preceding twenty years.[[31]](#endnote-31) These municipal museums were usually constituted (see below for more complex governance patterns) as under the control of a council committee, often with responsibility for other cultural provision such as libraries, parks, and historic buildings. These committees, staffed by councillors with particular interests in culture, natural science and the arts (often, as in Liverpool, among the social elite of the council), recognised the need for expertise beyond caretaking in paid curators; but this balance of authority, status and expertise between the council committee and the curator was key to the curatorial role, and tended to shift in favour of the curator during this period.[[32]](#endnote-32)

Curating, as J. Lynne Teather points out, was hampered in its aspirations to be a profession by the vast range of types of job it encompassed, from menial work lighting fires, cleaning and locking up, to increasingly specialised scholarship at national museums. Routes into curating she noted varied from collecting one’s own museum, to being an artist (often employed to run art galleries), to patronage links.[[33]](#endnote-33) Moreover, curating in all institutions remained dominated by amateurs; even in 1928 it was reported that only 14% of all British museums had a full-time paid curator, and only 4% had paid assistant curators.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Thus there were no obvious precedents for councils when they came to appoint the first paid staff to municipal museums in the nineteenth century. A widespread model adopted by such institutions was to source scholarly expertise for free from amateurs, specifically the local elites in the literary and philosophical societies who often supplied the core collections to the new museums, and to employ a ‘curator’ at a low salary to undertake more menial tasks and to carry out the instructions of the ‘honorary curators’, thus keeping costs as low as possible while indulging the vanity of the elites.[[35]](#endnote-35) Municipal museums were inadequately funded, and often functioned essentially to enhance the prestige of the local elites, showcasing their collections and objects in a grander setting than society museums could manage, so there was little incentive to employ a highly educated, prestigious scholar to run them (who would anyway be unlikely to take such a job: see note 72).[[36]](#endnote-36) And while national museums were moving towards increased specialisation, provincial museums doggedly stuck to a universal approach covering all aspects of the natural world and human history, on a local, national and international level, meaning that in-depth knowledge was secondary to being an ‘all-rounder’.[[37]](#endnote-37)

Under these circumstances curating in a municipal museum would obviously be a much less prestigious role than in a national museum.[[38]](#endnote-38) The ‘generation of pioneers’ of provincial curators were often appointed young and with little or no experience of museum work; they came from generally humble backgrounds and had limited educations.[[39]](#endnote-39) Elijah Howarth (1853-1938), son of a labourer, started work at Liverpool Museum at 15 and then moved to Sheffield to become the curator of the new museum aged only 21; he stayed in post till 1929, over fifty years later.[[40]](#endnote-40) Thomas Sheppard (1876-1945) was not appointed to be the first curator of the museum in Hull until he was 24 but still had no museum experience, having previously been a railway clerk.[[41]](#endnote-41) In Ipswich, the first curator after the municipal take-over of the museum was George Knight (background and dates unknown) whose role was merely to carry out instructions given by the committee; the second (in post 1872-93) was John Taylor, from a Lancashire cotton working family, an autodidact who worked for the Norwich newspaper, the *Norwich Mercury*, as well as publishing and lecturing on local geology.[[42]](#endnote-42) Frank Woolnough succeeded him in 1893 as the third curator; his early background is unknown but he had been a commercial traveller and confectioner as well as working at the same newspaper before his curatorial appointment.[[43]](#endnote-43) Dr E. E. Lowe appears to have started his first job in Warrington, as a museum assistant, at 13 in 1891, and though it is suggested that he had a BSc from the Victoria University, this must have been acquired after 1908 as he does not appear in the list of graduates up to that date.[[44]](#endnote-44) His father was listed in the census as a post office clerk and then newsagent.[[45]](#endnote-45) He went on to be curator at Plymouth and Leicester and to earn a doctorate from London University in the 1920s. F. R. Rowley was appointed sub-curator at Leicester Museum in 1883 at the age of 13 or 14, likely on leaving school; his father died when he was very young and his grandfather, a grocer, with whom he had been living in his childhood, had died before he became a teenager.[[46]](#endnote-46) H. S. Toms, with the humblest background, also had the most unusual route into curating: the son of an under-gardener in rural Dorset, he attended elementary school and like Sheppard was a pupil-teacher. When General Pitt Rivers selected him to become an archaeological assistant he got his entry to both archaeology and museum work; three years later he became curator of Brighton Museum and Art Gallery where he stayed for over forty years; with his background in archaeology, he had more single-discipline expertise than most of the others.[[47]](#endnote-47)

These men, then, tended to have a family background in the lower middle class or upper working class; and none are known to have been educated beyond elementary school level before taking up their first museum role. However, there are a number of notable autodidacts among them and some attended evening classes and short courses provided by Mechanics’ Institutes and similar.[[48]](#endnote-48) Moreover, a majority were substantially involved with provincial scientific club culture, which while deeply hierarchical offered some opportunities for upward mobility for those prepared to put in lots of work, although not in the same league as the national societies. Thus Sheppard, Taylor, Lowe and John Plant (briefly a curator in Leicester but from 1849-1892 curator of Salford’s Free Library and Museum) were all involved in local clubs and societies such as Manchester Geological Society, Leicester Naturalists’ Club, and Hull Geological Society before their appointment to curatorial roles.[[49]](#endnote-49) Such involvement in provincial science ‘on the ground’ could occasionally lead to contact with leading national scientific figures such as Thomas Huxley, but such patronage relationships did not always benefit the humbler man, and did not mean they were seen as serious scientists.[[50]](#endnote-50)

Once the new curators had been selected, they were given duties and salaries. The salary of the Ipswich Curator was £200 p.a. throughout the second half of the nineteenth century; although this was higher than average for a municipal museum curator, John Taylor found it necessary to make this up to £500 p.a. with freelance lecturing and writing, but still died bankrupt. Tom Sheppard started in Hull in 1901 on £150 p.a.; as did Frederick Rowley when he started as full curator at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, despite the fact that he had eighteen years’ experience as a sub-curator in Leicester by this point.[[51]](#endnote-51) A number of museums paid well under £100 p.a. well into the twentieth century. On the other hand, Elijah Howarth started at Sheffield on £200 p.a. and by 1900, after he had been given responsibility for the Mappin Art Gallery and the Observatory in addition to the museum, was earning £400 p.a.; even the assistant curator in Sheffield was earning £200 p.a. at this point.[[52]](#endnote-52) By contrast, salaries for clerks were averaging around £150 p.a. by 1900 and nudging £200 by 1910, though this was an occupation with wide variations in remuneration. By salary rate, therefore, curating was more or less aligned with the lower middle class and could not aspire to the income levels of ‘higher’ professions; professorial salaries, by contrast, could be £800 even in the provinces.[[53]](#endnote-53) These curatorial salaries corresponded to the rather menial duties expected of the post holders, insofar as these were specified. Tom Sheppard always maintained that he was instructed mainly not to spend any money, and secondarily to deal with enquiries and look after the collections.[[54]](#endnote-54) This menialness was a residue of municipal museums’ origins in the museums of societies; in literary and philosophical society museums, duties of curators were almost entirely restricted to fire-lighting, sweeping, cleaning and dusting, attendance, and secretarial duties; all the more ‘scientific’ duties were undertaken by Honorary Curators from the society, and paid curators were expected to answer to and follow the instructions of these Honorary Curators.[[55]](#endnote-55) This organisation of functions and roles was often directly copied by municipal museums, as in Leicester where initially the municipal museum retained Honorary Curators from the Lit and Phil and employed a paid curator largely to assist them.[[56]](#endnote-56) Similarly in Warrington, the first curator, James Cooper (who occupied the post from 1848 to 1874), was a former handloom weaver required to live on site and to devote himself to ‘the general care’ of museum and library, while specialised honorary curators for different disciplines developed the collection.[[57]](#endnote-57) Curators were, therefore, in an explicitly servile position relative to the amateur elites of the town, and even when the relationship between a curator and his Museum Committee was good, as in Sheffield, it was very clear that the curator might make suggestions to the Committee but the Committee essentially told the curator what to do.[[58]](#endnote-58)

**The Museums Association – professionalisation, ‘gentlemanly’ science, and the national-local dimension**

Largely in order to try and remedy these problems of low status, lack of autonomy, low pay and lack of training and education, the Museums Association (MA) was founded in 1889; its foundation has been described as ‘fundamentally reflecting the status aspirations of museum workers’.[[59]](#endnote-59) The bulk of the members initially were from local and regional museums, and a natural history background. Frank Woolnough became a member in 1895, and hosted the association’s annual conference in 1908, just after the disagreement with Layard.[[60]](#endnote-60) The aims of the MA were clearly directed towards the problems of provincial curators rather than curators at national museums who were more specialised, more independent and more likely to be university-educated; it focused on raising the prestige and status of the ‘all-round’ curator, as well as specifically to offer help to those curators struggling with the range of their duties.[[61]](#endnote-61) Along with practical matters like labelling and case construction, early conferences discussed issues of professionalisation such as training, salary, and valuation of curating.[[62]](#endnote-62) The members debated education and qualifications extensively; although this generation of curators were self-taught, they recognised that to enhance the status and definition of the profession, some sort of exclusive and specific knowledge was needed, allowing some measure of exclusivity.[[63]](#endnote-63)

However, at the same time as the MA tried to raise the status of curating as a masculine profession similar to science in its manliness, its discussions reveal the development of more feminised museum work. Gender issues were very much at the fore in the MA’s attempt to professionalise curating. Women’s strong association with low wages underlay efforts to exclude them from professions such as science.[[64]](#endnote-64) Museum curators, however, both wanted to boost their own salaries, and to keep the wage bill of their institution low, and thus had a more ambiguous attitude to women in museum work. At one of the early meetings, the woman printer from Manchester Museum discussed the role of women in cleaning museums, and after her paper there was a discussion about the problems and opportunities raised by employing women. On the one hand, it was claimed that they were prone to get married just when they had been trained, and were sometime asserted not to be suited to ‘scientific’ work, but on the other hand they were good at ‘delicate’ work (and cleaning) and were extremely cheap.[[65]](#endnote-65) Thus the MA never attempted to ‘de-feminise’ museum work as whole-heartedly as in other professions, and indeed, the period around 1900 saw women moving into museum work in increasing numbers. The areas where women were starting to establish dominance by the First World War – working with children, working with local communities, giving popular lectures, providing formal and informal education – were precisely those areas which were most important to local and regional museums rather than national museums, and thus contributed to a ‘feminisation’ of curatorial work in such museums.[[66]](#endnote-66)

Meanwhile, curating in national and university museums continued to be much more associated with ‘gentlemanliness’; paradoxically, this was what lay at the heart of Layard’s successful assertion of status. Layard came from a distinguished family and had plenty of money and confidence – the importance of her wealth should not be under-estimated, as local museums rarely had adequate budgets, and the fact that she controlled a substantial and important collection of objects was important, as such museums typically had no budget for object acquisitions and were dependent on donations and loans.[[67]](#endnote-67) She was in the tradition of, as well as related to, gentlemen amateurs like Austen Layard; and moreover many of her supporters also came from this tradition: Sir John Evans was a leading figure in archaeology despite being an amateur whose income came from business, and though Lankester always had a paid position at the Natural History Museum or at Oxford and other universities, he was a gentleman scholar; as Mussell shows, actually having a paid position in science was not the dividing line between the gentleman of science and the outsider.[[68]](#endnote-68) What mattered was fitting into the model of the manly scientist: disinterested, rational, hewing out original knowledge from the raw material of nature. All of them were closely aligned with the world of the most prestigious national scholarly societies, even Nina Layard, who wanted to give lectures with her excavated objects partly to convince the Society of Antiquaries to admit her (which they did not do despite lobbying from Evans); she was or became a Fellow of the Anthropological Institute and the Linnaean Society.[[69]](#endnote-69) The difference between national groups like the Society of Antiquaries and the local Field Naturalists Clubs which provincial curators tended to belong to was vast and increasing; while earlier in the nineteenth century local clubs had provided opportunities for men such as Taylor to meet important national scientific figures, by the twentieth century this was decreasingly the case.[[70]](#endnote-70)

These ‘men of science’ (Layard has many of the characteristics of this group despite being a woman) were, then, asserting a masculinity based on their creation of new knowledge, extracting discoveries from the natural world.[[71]](#endnote-71) They also fulfilled the criterion of disinterestedness, standing for the ‘truth’ against the forces of provincial small-mindedness.[[72]](#endnote-72) Lankester and Evans were emphatic examples of heroic-mould men of science and their vouching for Layard did much to elevate her status. She had also, it should be noted, built her collection through literally hacking out knowledge as an archaeologist; the heroic masculinity of archaeological excavation was a developing theme at this time despite the fact that few archaeologists, Layard included, did much actual digging, using labourers for most of the manual work; but they were ‘in the field’.[[73]](#endnote-73) Woolnough, by contrast, could be seen as concentrating on communicating knowledge to a wide public. In this he had more in common with the science popularisers also examined by Mussell, who stressed subjectivity over objectivity, and engaged in telling stories for non-specialist audiences featuring women and children heavily. As Lightman has shown, such popularisers were mostly women and clergymen and had lower status than the ‘men of science’, indicating a feminine gendering of both author and audience.[[74]](#endnote-74) The way in which Woolnough’s professional authority was entirely disregarded by other players in the dispute tells us that he was just not seen as authoritative as Layard. Social status interacted closely with professional status and both allowed Layard to display more masculine virtues than Woolnough. It is also significant that his argument was over his authority to *display* objects publicly; he had the professional expertise here, both in how to communicate, and in the best type of museum case; but this was trumped by Layard’s expertise in the production of knowledge.[[75]](#endnote-75)

**A profession of Pooters?**

Examining provincial curators, then, allows us to understand lower-middle-class masculinity more fully. It is clear that the broadening of the ranks of the middle classes led to a greater structural gulf between the status of the top and the bottom; men from the lower middle classes had few educational, financial, or social resources to draw on to try and assert a masculinity in line with new views of the manly professional. They were too menial, lacked independence, and could not be seen as having a ‘heroic’ approach to knowledge. Their masculinity was thus undermined not just by the representation of their domestic lives, but by the fact that the areas they specialised in were subordinate and increasingly associated with women workers during this period.

However, provincial curators did not accept their lack of status; although Woolnough tactically accepted Layard’s authority over her collection, in the long view he was more successful.[[76]](#endnote-76) Provincial curators asserted the independence and leadership necessary for middle-class masculinity partly through the MA. The MA offered men like Howarth, Sheppard, Rowley and Woolnough opportunities for leadership, and for contact with national figures in museum curating; Howarth was president in 1912-3, Sheppard in 1923, Rowley in 1925, and though Woolnough was never president he hosted the MA for its 1908 conference in Ipswich.[[77]](#endnote-77) This was, moreover, an opportunity to assert authority over Layard by administering a ‘deliberate snub’ to her.[[78]](#endnote-78) By the late nineteenth century, figures such as William Flower, Director of the British Museum (Natural History) and an enormously influential figure in both science and museums, were involved with the MA, allowing it to function even more strongly as an organisation dedicated to raising the status of curators. Flower, indeed, even said to the gathering of provincial curators at the 1889 MA conference that ‘You are not properly appreciated’.[[79]](#endnote-79) Moreover, although the MA did not oppose and in some ways encouraged the employment of women in museums, it enforced rigid and limited ideas about their contribution, seeing them as assistants, not suited to taking the initiative in museum work.[[80]](#endnote-80) This was in contrast to the American Association of Museums (AAM), an organisation founded later than the MA but more open to women as members, speakers, and office holders than the British one.[[81]](#endnote-81) It is noticeable that the roles ascribed to women by the MA are precisely those which had led to curators’ own positions being seen as menial and non-professional earlier; curating masculinised itself partly by pushing the less manly work onto women and carefully policing the line between male and female museum work until at least the middle of the century.[[82]](#endnote-82) Moreover, MA conferences, while including afternoon events suitable for wives to attend, also included more masculine evening events with a robust if respectable drinking culture. It is not clear that the tiny handful of women members attended anything except the official paper sessions.[[83]](#endnote-83)

The MA attempted to articulate a vision of the professional man which could include curating, despite its awkward alignment with more obviously learned professions. The presidential address of 1906, from W. E. Hoyle, of Manchester’s University Museum (notably not a municipal museum), complained that only middle-class parents whose children were not able enough for the ‘usual walks of life’ were keen they become curators. Hoyle asserted in contrast that curators should be educated to degree level, with a ‘good school’ education before that, despite the fact that as we have seen, few existing curators had been schooled beyond the age of 13. He also suggested the qualities which were needed by a provincial curator, starting with ‘General culture, tact and courtesy: an ability to “suffer fools gladly”’, and stressing the long hours and poor pay. He ended with the rather optimistic thought that ‘if we desire increased consideration … the surest way of obtaining it is to deserve it’. Thus he attempted to make a virtue out of poor working conditions; curators, he suggested, sought nothing worldly but to serve, and their forbearance was part of a gentlemanly (but practical) background.[[84]](#endnote-84) Similarly, Woolnough himself emphasised the gulf between curating and lowlier occupations: ‘our profession is free from the petty jealousies of …the trade professions’; and stressed that ‘we all work largely “con amore”. Long hours and tedious work with inadequate remuneration.’[[85]](#endnote-85) Merely working hard for poor wages was rather what women did, though, and the MA did not hesitate to lobby for higher salaries. William Flower had said to the MA in 1893 that ‘a man of education and refinement, who has to associate with his equals, and bring his children up to the life of educated and refined people’ needs a certain level of income ‘not dissimilar to that required for most of the learned professions’; of course most MA members at this point were not highly educated men but they certainly aspired to it for their children, and saw themselves as learned.[[86]](#endnote-86) In 1922 the MA published an extremely ambitious ideal salary scale for provincial curators based on the size of the town where their museum was based (which made sense as municipal museums were funded by a local rate). This would have given Howarth a salary of well over £1000 p.a. given the population of Sheffield and his length of service, while Sheppard would have earned substantially over £800.[[87]](#endnote-87) Although such salaries were never implemented, this was less important than making the claim to status which the ideal represented.

Outside the MA, individual curators, especially those who remained in the same job for decades, attempted to claim gentlemanly status in a range of ways. Several improved their educational qualifications while in post by acquiring degrees up to doctoral level. Despite Woolnough’s defeat by the combined forces of the Society of Antiquaries, other curators did become fellows of national learned societies in the later stages of their career: Howarth became a Fellow of the Zoological Society, the Royal Meteorological Society, and the Royal Astronomical Society, and through these bodies became acquainted with significant figures in the world of science such as Richard Owen and John Couch Adams.[[88]](#endnote-88) Sociability was a great asset to curators, allowing the more successful to form supportive relationships with peers and social superiors; Howarth, for example, had warm relationships developing from acquaintance to friendship with people such as James Paton, curator at Glasgow, and Henry Sorby, a wealthy Sheffield naturalist who was a major benefactor to the museum, and as well as swapping expertise with them, holidayed with both.[[89]](#endnote-89) Failure to form such friendships among his social superiors was likely one of the causes of Woolnough’s problems, although he was a popular, genial figure in MA circles.[[90]](#endnote-90) Sheppard was also known for his humour and charm and certainly made some important friends, but was also described as ‘arrogant and self-opinionated’ and alienated as many as he attracted.[[91]](#endnote-91) Rowley was unusually described as a ‘retiring’ man but was also said to have ‘personal charm’ and to inspire confidence; he was certainly very clubbable and belonged to a wide range of local Exeter organisations.[[92]](#endnote-92) It goes without saying that such networks of sociability were exclusively masculine, and that they were neither open to nor seen as necessary for women museum workers, with their circumscribed roles of assisting, cleaning, educational and secretarial tasks.

Moreover, long-serving curators tackled their own image by developing a persona as identical with and dedicated to their institutions. Howarth went so far as to say ‘the curator is the museum’ in his presidential address to the MA in 1913, and pointed out that he had ‘practically lived in a museum’ for the last forty years.[[93]](#endnote-93) He referred to a ‘living bond’ between the museum and its curator, especially if the curator had ‘untrammelled freedom’ to work.[[94]](#endnote-94) By identifying themselves so closely with their institutions (growing in size and importance through this period) and developing a reputation for very hard work in the service of those institutions –Sheppard was alleged to have worked in the museum till 10pm at night[[95]](#endnote-95) – they created a version of the disinterested service of upper-middle-class professional masculine identities despite their social backgrounds, and despite being employees technically under the control of local council committees (though at least the system of honorary curators had fallen into abeyance by around the 1880s). Although almost all married, they presented themselves as the antithesis of the domesticated Pooter figure; curatorial masculinity here rested very much on devoting themselves to work at the expense of their home lives.[[96]](#endnote-96) Moreover, these men’s very longevity in position gave them a public profile and they emerged as figures of eccentricity and affection. Towards the end of the more notable curators’ careers, local newspapers published profiles and caricatures of them; when Woolnough retired in 1920 aged 74, the most well-known of the museum’s stuffed animals were pictured shedding tears at his departure (figure 1), while several cartoons celebrated or mocked Sheppard’s notoriously robust approach to acquiring objects for the museum, showing him as a highwayman or even some sort of body snatcher.[[97]](#endnote-97) As an archaeologist, he was also pictured in possibly Shakespearean mode, holding a skull (see figure 2). H. S. Toms gave entertaining lectures in Brighton wherein he partly acted out his talks, wearing a fez to discuss magic, for example, and being seen as a reincarnation of a Stone Age ‘medicine man’.[[98]](#endnote-98) In Sheffield, Howarth was nicknamed ‘Elijah the Prophet’ because he had established a weather station at the museum (and possibly because of his lavish white beard which by the interwar period had become more singular).[[99]](#endnote-99) In coverage of his fiftieth anniversary of working at the museum, his retirement, and his death, articles in the local press paint a picture of a ‘character’ known for his humour, zeal, energy, talkativeness and geniality.[[100]](#endnote-100) Affection, though, is not quite the same as respect, and there is a sense in which their idiosyncrasies were in conflict with what was later recognised as museum professionalism.

Most also tried to directly enhance their curatorial authority by expanding their collections through hands-on means; this gave curators autonomy and a claim to knowledge creation in the field. Indeed, curatorial authority over individual museums emerges unevenly but extensively over the period as a whole, as their expertise in the very wide range of duties accrued, and particularly as they actively or passively presided over massive collection growth.[[101]](#endnote-101) Thus curators undertook their own collecting expeditions in the locality, ranging impressively from zoological collecting, to geology and archaeology; they shot and stuffed animals, opened barrows, and set up weather recording stations and observatories.[[102]](#endnote-102) This was undertaken to amass collections cheaply, and bypass the whims of donors, but had the important side effect of giving curators ‘their’ own objects, acquired in manly ways – authority could be materially produced and the bigger the collection, the better. As well as enhancing authority through direct knowledge production, such collecting also functioned in the same way as ‘rambles’ did for some clerks at the time, and as rugged fieldwork did for geologists: the contact with nature symbolically made them manlier, especially if it involved digging or shooting.[[103]](#endnote-103) It also developed their physique and affected their body in various ways, like bronzed and hardened rambling clerks, or like geologists who allegedly could be ‘no mincing town-dandy or sickly bookworm’.[[104]](#endnote-104) This suggests that distinguishing themselves from the stereotyped body of both the lower-middle-class man, and the new woman professional (both of whose physical presentation could be summarised as ‘meek’ and ‘neat’) was an important part of curators’ efforts to develop a masculine professional identity.[[105]](#endnote-105) Sheppard in particular tended to look neither meek nor neat indoors or outdoors, cutting a flamboyant and occasionally slightly dishevelled figure. He always wore a button hole and often affected unusual headgear, once being pictured in the local press wearing a pith helmet (figures 3 and 4 show him in posed and ‘action’ shots with button hole and assertive body language).[[106]](#endnote-106) Photographs of Woolnough on naturalists’ outings show him very much as the ‘type’ of the rambling clerk (he also undertook quite a lot of highly successful archaeological excavation around Ipswich despite the pre-eminence of Layard in this area).[[107]](#endnote-107) Both Montagu Browne at Leicester, who was a noted taxidermist but also undertook archaeology, and Howarth who pioneered Sheffield’s weather station, broadened their duties to include physical work which enhanced their masculinity.[[108]](#endnote-108) Howarth was described late in life as ‘picturesque’ in appearance, and the image of him at his desk which was published in 1904 as part of a ‘workers at work’ series in a local newspaper masculinises and heroicises the desk-bound figure by suggesting the depth of his scholarship (figure 5).[[109]](#endnote-109)

However, the toll which this active assertion of masculine professional status took can perhaps be deduced: many curators, especially in the early years, did not stay in their posts for very long at all, and often it was the strain of being subject to the whims of councillors which caused their departure. In at least two cases of long-serving curators, there were rumours of alcoholism.[[110]](#endnote-110) A reluctance to retire can also be seen in the case of the long-serving curators: if being a curator gave them masculine authority, then maybe retirement to the domestic sphere would show that they were, after all, no better than the stereotyped figure of the emasculated Pooterish clerk. Sheppard and Taylor were definitely pressured into retirement against their will, and Howarth seems to have worked to the point of declining faculties, and even after retirement continued to take meteorological readings.[[111]](#endnote-111) Rowley died a few hours after attending a Museum Council meeting.[[112]](#endnote-112)

**Conclusion**

The fact that so many long-serving curators became local ‘characters’ reveals the strengths and weaknesses of their position as male professionals, and gives us a fuller understanding of their masculine identities, firmly rooted in their work lives not their home lives. Like many in the lower middle class, their aspirations to higher status were complicated by inadequate salary, education, and social capital; and their job subordinated them to local elites. The role of ‘gentlemanly scientist’ could on occasion be more accessible to well-connected, wealthy women than it was to these men. Moreover, the qualities that they had originally staked out, broad competence rather than specialisation, popular interpretation, and working with the disadvantaged, were increasingly seen as feminine; a development which threatened their ability to achieve professional masculinity even further. Professional association helped them significantly; so too did increasing the size of the organisations they ran, so that they were soon responsible for big buildings, numbers of staff, and budgets.[[113]](#endnote-113) However, it was the ways in which their jobs became inseparable from their lives which marked their professional masculinity on their bodies: they put in too much overtime, they spent their weekends shooting or digging up new museum specimens, and, if at all possible, they died on the job. Such a merging of individual and institution was both a way of being ‘gentlemanly’ – in asserting that their work was vocation not mere job, they developed a sense of service comparable to high-status professions[[114]](#endnote-114) – but also tied them to jobs which set clear limits on their aspirations.[[115]](#endnote-115) For those below the top ranks of the middle classes, work was an important but increasingly complex source of masculinity and status as they attempted to turn servility into service. If, as Bailey suggests, the lower middle classes ‘were in the front line of engagement with modernity’, then both their distinctive vision of the professional man, and their struggle to bring that vision into being, are key shapers of modern gendered identities among the ‘ordinary’ middle classes.[[116]](#endnote-116)

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1. James Paton, ‘The education of the museum curator’, *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual General Meeting of the Museums Association* (1895), p. 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Letter from Layard to Ipswich Museum Committee, 2 September 1907, in Steven J. Plunkett, ‘Correspondence of Nina Frances Layard (1853-1935) transcribed and collected’, unpublished typescript, Ipswich Museum, 1992-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Plunkett, ‘Correspondence’. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Letter from H. Laver to Layard, 30 September 1907; letter from Lankester to Layard 8 October 1907; letter from Layard to E. Packard, 11 March 1907, all in Plunkett, ‘Correspondence’. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Letter from Layard to Ipswich Museum Committee, 2 September 1907; letter from Lankester to Layard, 22 October 1907; letter from Layard to Frank Woolnough, 30 October 1917, all from Plunkett, ‘Correspondence’. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Letter from Layard to Woolnough, 15 February 1909; letter from Woolnough to Layard 15 February 1909, Plunkett, ‘Correspondence’. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The coherence and influence of upper middle-class civic elites is discussed by Barry M. Doyle, using a case study of Norwich, in ‘The structure of elite power in the early twentieth-century city: Norwich 1900-1935’, *Urban History* 24 (1997), pp. 179-199. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. As Hammerton suggests, historians have linked this mockery of the domesticity of the lower-middle-class man with the ‘flight from domesticity’ discerned among upper-middle-class men, so that the changes in ideal upper-middle-class masculinity tended to produce a view of the lower middle classes as emasculated by their home life. A. James Hammerton, ‘The English weakness? Gender, satire and “moral manliness” in the lower middle class, 1870-1920’, in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1999), pp. 164-184, here p. 168. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Mr Pooter, the ‘hero’ of George and Weedon Grossmith’s *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892 – this ed. London: CRW Publishing 2008) is the most well-known comic representation of the lower middle-class man, but Hammerton shows that the trope extended beyond this, becaming more cutting by 1900: ‘The English weakness?’. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Bailey suggests a characteristic of the lower middle-class man around this time is that he was ‘always en route’, his upward mobility making him perpetually ‘arriviste’: Peter Bailey, ‘White collars, gray lives? The lower middle class revisited’, *Journal of British Studies* 38 (1999), pp. 273-290, here p. 286. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1999), pp. 172-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, especially part three. See also Tosh, ‘Home and away: the flight from domesticity in late-nineteenth-century England re-visited’, *Gender and History* 27 (2015), pp. 561-75. See also Hammerton, cited in notes 8 and 9 above, who largely concurs with this in terms of discursive representations. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. That *Diary of a Nobody* is hostile and scathing in its satire is argued by Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2005), p. 190; this text also focuses on the domesticity of lower-middle-class men in the form of the suburb. Upper-middle-class derision, aimed at lower middle-class men emasculated by their domestic lives, is also the subject of Christopher P. Hosgood, ‘Mrs Pooter’s purchase: lower-middle-class consumerism and the sales, 1870-1914’, in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1999), pp. 146-163. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Hammerton, ‘The English Weakness?’, p. 166. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Christopher P. Hosgood, ‘Negotiating lower-middle-class masculinity in Britain: the Leicester Young Men’s Christian Association, 1870-1914’, *Canadian Journal of History* 37 (2002), pp. 253-73. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Nicola Bishop, ‘Ruralism, masculinity and national identity: the rambling clerk in fiction, 1900-1940’, *Journal of British Studies* 54 (2015), 654-678. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Early attempts to consider the lower middle class historically did focus on occupation but not masculinity. See Geoffrey Crossick, ‘The emergence of the lower middle class in Britain: a discussion’, G. L. Anderson, ‘The social economy of late-Victorian clerks’, and Thea Vigne and Alun Howkins, ‘The small shopkeeper in industrial and market towns’, all in Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm 1977). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Marysa Demoor and Andrew King, ‘Why gender, professions and the press now?’, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 5: 2 (2009), online, available at <http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue52/issue52.htm>, accessed 21 November 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Diane van den Broek suggests that ‘there has been much less historical analysis of masculinity and occupation’ than femininity, and that ‘for middle-class men a career was an important part of masculine (breadwinner) identity’. ‘Strapping, as well as numerate: occupational identity, masculinity, and the aesthetics of nineteenth-century banking’, *Business History* 53 (2011), pp. 289-301, see especially pp. 290 and 293. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, ‘Amateurs and professionals in one county: biology and natural history in late Victorian Yorkshire’, *Journal of the History of Biology* 34 (2001), 115-147, here p. 129. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Andrew King, ‘“Army, navy, medicine, law,/ church, nobility, nothing at all”: towards the study of gender, the professions and the press in the nineteenth century’, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 5: 2 (2009), online, no page numbers. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. King, ‘“Army, navy, medicine, law”’. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. D. E. Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1976), pp. 150-152. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. James Mussell, ‘Private practices and public knowledge: science, professionalization and gender in the late nineteenth century’, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 5: 2 (2009), online, available at <http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue52/issue52.htm>, accessed 21 November 2018, paragraph 2. The importance of research to scientific manliness is also discussed by Heather Ellis, ‘Knowledge, character and professionalization in nineteenth-century British science’, *History of Education* 43 (2014), 777-792, p. 785. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, ‘Shared histories – differing identities’, in A. V. John and C. Eustance (eds), *The Men’s Share? Masculinities, Male Support and Women’s Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920* (London: Routledge 1997), pp. 1-37, here p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Gregory Anderson, ‘The white-blouse revolution’ in Anderson (ed.), *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1988), pp. 1-26, here p. 2; Evelyn Kerslake, ‘A history of women workers in English libraries, 1871-1974’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Loughborough University 1999), p. 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. S. J. Coleman, ‘“No room for her here!”: the numerical feminisation of public librarianship in England, 1871-1914,’ *Library & Information History* 30 (2014), pp. 195-209. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Alberti, ‘Amateurs and professionals’, pp. 121-2; Bernard Lightman, ‘“Voices of nature”: popularisers of Victorian science’, in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997), pp. 187-211, and ‘Depicting nature, defining roles: the gender politics of Victorian illustration’, in A. B. Shteir and B. Lightman (eds), *Figuring It Out: Science, Gender and Visual Culture* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press 2006), pp. 214-239; Mussell, ‘Private practices’; Kate Hill, *Women and Museums 1850-1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2016), especially chapters 1 and 7; Anne Summers, ‘Public functions, private premises: female professional identity and the domestic service paradigm in Britain c. 1850-1930’, in Billie Melman (ed.), *Borderlines: Gender and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930* (London: Routledge 1998), pp. 353-76. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Coleman, ‘“No room for her here!”’, p. 98. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Before 1850 there were very few paid curators; until 1836 the British Museum only employed (apart from manuscript and printed books staff) a Keeper of Natural History and a Keeper of Antiquities, with a Keeper of Prints and Drawings also in the Department of Antiquities; and they were under the authority of the Librarian: Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (London: André Deutsch 1973), pp. 364-8. There were also a few proprietary museum curators who owned often travelling museums, such as William Bullock, but most museums evolved from the collection of either a learned society or a wealthy aristocrat, requiring only menial duties from any employees. Kate Hill, *Culture and Class in English Public Museums, 1850-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005), p. 38. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Figures from J. Lynne Teather, ‘Museology and its traditions: the British experience, 1845-1945’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester 1983), fig. 12 p. 141. For positive views of these institutions, see Thomas Greenwood’s extended paean to the municipal museum, *Museums and Art Galleries* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co. 1888). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. On Liverpool and the status of council committees more generally, see Hill, *Culture and Class*, pp. 54-57. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Teather, ‘Museology’ pp. 189-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Henry Miers, *A Report on the Public Museums of the British Isles (Other Than the National Museums)* (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable 1928), p. 20. See also Teather, ‘Museology’, p. 195. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. This was the case initially in Leicester and led to the resignation of the first paid curator. Hill, *Culture and Class*, p. 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Hill, *Culture and Class*, chapter 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Hill, ‘Manufactures, archaeology and bygones: making a sense of place in civic museums, 1850-1914’, *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 8 (2013), pp. 54-74. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. It was also contrasted unfavourably with working in the new colleges which evolved into provincial universities, as Alberti shows; professors there constructed their professional status in opposition to local curators: ‘Amateurs and professionals’, pp. 130-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Anon., ‘E. Howarth, a founder of the Museums Association’, *Museums Journal* 38 (1938), p.115. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Anon., ‘Obituary notices: Fellows – Howarth, Elijah’, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, 99 (1939), p. 311. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Tim Schadla-Hall, *Tom Sheppard, Hull’s Great Collector* (Beverley: Highgate Publications 1989), p. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Steven J. Plunkett, ‘Dr John Ellor Taylor: guide, philosopher and friend’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* 40 (2002), pp. 164-200. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Plunkett, ‘Dr John Ellor Taylor’, p. 181. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Anon., ‘E. E. Lowe, BSc, 1922-3’, Leicester Lit and Phil Society, online, available at <http://www.leicesterlitandphil.org.uk/1922-e-e-lowe-b-sc-1922-23/>, accessed 9 November 2018; Victoria University of Manchester*, Register of Graduates up to 1 July 1908* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1908). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. 1881, 1901 census records, Ancestry.co.uk, accessed 9 November 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. 1871, 1881 census records, Ancestry.co.uk, accessed 5 December 2018; anon., ‘Election of curator’, *The Devon Evening Express* 25 November 1901. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Alison Petch, ‘Herbert Toms’, Rethinking Pitt Rivers project website, online, available at <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/article-index/12-articles/695-herbert-toms.html>, accessed 5 December 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Plunkett, ‘Dr John Ellor Taylor’, p. 164. Rowley had ‘first class certificates’ in geology and botany by the time he started work in Exeter, probably from the South Kensington Science and Art department: anon., ‘Election of curator’. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. M. Howe, M. Evans, J. Carney, P. Wilby, ‘New perspectives on the globally important Ediacaran fossil discoveries in Charnwood Forest, UK: Harley’s 1848 prequel to Ford (1958)’, *Proceedings of the Yorkshire Geological Society* 59 (2012), pp. 137-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Plunkett, ‘Dr John Ellor Taylor’, p. 169. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Schadla-Hall, *Tom Sheppard*, p. 1.; anon., ‘The Albert Memorial at Exeter: Appointment of Curator’, *The Daily Gazette* 26 November 1901. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Anon., ‘Particulars of staff’, handwritten notebook, Sheffield Museums, n.d. Howarth also supplemented his income through the development and sale of a proprietary cockroach powder which one of his daughters worked on: personal communication (email, Alistair Maclean to Kate Hill, 8 January 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. John Roach, *Public Examinations in England 1850-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1971), p. 137. Kerslake gives £155 p.a. as the average salary for men in the ‘lower professions’ in 1913: ‘History of women’, p. 50. Later, in 1938, less than one in eleven curatorial salaries were said to match those of secondary school teachers, and some curators were said to be paid less than dustmen: S. F. Markham, *A Report on the Museums and Galleries of the British Isles (Other than National Museums) to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees*, (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable 1938), p. 61. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Bryan Sitch, ‘Thomas Sheppard and archaeological collecting’, *ERAS News, East Riding Archaeological Society* 41 (1993), pp. 5-13. Whether this was true or not, the application form for the position of curator stated that cataloguing the collection would be one of the first duties of the new curator: ‘Application for the post of curator: Thomas Sheppard’, Hull History Centre, C TCE/14/4/10. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Anon., ‘Duties of a curator’, *Museums Bulletin* 15 (1976), p. 157. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Kate Hill, *Culture and Class,* p. 56; Teather, ‘Museology’, pp. 193-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Masanari Oki, ‘A comparative analysis of professional association in the museum sectors of Britain and Japan’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester 2014), p. 143. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. See for example Minutes of the Museum Sub-Committee 24 July 1876, Sheffield Museums. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Oki, ‘Comparative analysis’, p. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Geoffrey Lewis*, For Instruction and Recreation: A Centenary History of the Museums Association* (London: Quiller Press 1989), pp. 10, 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Oki, ‘Comparative analysis’, pp. 114, 164 [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Lewis, *For Instruction and Recreation*, p. 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Lewis, *For Instruction and Recreation*, p. 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Jordanna Bailkin, *The Culture of Property: The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2004), chapter 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Hill, *Women and Museums*, pp. 32-3; see also Bailkin, *The Culture of Property*, especially chapter 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Hill, *Women and Museums*, especially chapter 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Her wealth at death was £3475 17s. 11d. in 1935. Steven J. Plunkett, ‘Layard, Nina Frances (1853-1935)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), online, available at https://doi-org.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/58931, accessed 26 November 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Mussell, ‘Private practices and public knowledge’, npn; see also Ellis, ‘Knowledge, character and professionalisation’. On the backgrounds of Lankester and Evans, see Peter J. Bowler, ‘Lankester, Sir (Edwin) Ray (1847-1929)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), online, available at https://doi-org.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/34406; Yolanda Foote, ‘Evans, Sir John (1823-1908)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), online, available at https://doi-org.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/33040. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Plunkett, ‘Layard, Nina Frances (1853-1935)’. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain*, especially chapter 8; David E. Allen, *Naturalists and Society: The Culture of Natural History in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2001), chapter 8; Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, ‘Field, lab and museum: the practice and place of life science in Yorkshire, 1870-1904’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield 2000); Alberti, ‘Amateur and professional’, p. 138; Simon Naylor, *Regionalising Science: Placing Knowledges in Victorian England* (London: Pickering and Chatto 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Mussell, ‘Private practices and public knowledge’. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Cf. Alberti’s discussion of provincial professors’ dismissal of curators and amateurs as ‘happy fungus hunters’: ‘Amateurs and professionals’, p. 132. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Stephanie Moser argues that ‘the romanticisation of fieldwork … assert[s] a certain kind of masculinity’ based on physicality, adventure and the outdoors: ‘Archaeology as fieldwork and its gendered connotations’, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 14: 3 (2007), pp. 235-263, here p. 249. Layard stressed her fieldwork credentials, saying that ‘I superintend the work myself …, and help the men in the more delicate part of the work’: letter from Layard to C. H. Read, 2 March 1906, transcript in Ipswich Museum. For more on the masculinity of heroic excavation, see Gavin Lucas, *Critical Approaches to Fieldwork: Contemporary and Historical Archaeological Practice* (London: Routledge 2001), pp. 7-8. In geology, fieldwork was allegedly ‘a kind of predatory sexual combat’: Michael Shortland, ‘Darkness visible: underground culture in the golden age of geology’, *History of Science* 32: 1 (1994), pp. 1-61, here p. 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Mussell, ‘Private practices and public knowledge’; Lightman ‘Depicting nature, defining roles’. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. F. Woolnough, ‘History of Ipswich Museums’, *Museums Journal* 8 (1907-8), pp.191-200. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Hosgood, ‘Negotiating lower middle-class masculinity’. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Oki, ‘Comparative analysis’, p. 123; Sitch, ‘Thomas Sheppard’, p. 7; Lewis, *For Instruction and Recreation*, p. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Stephen J. Plunkett, ‘Nina Frances Layard, prehistorian (1853-1935)’, in W. Davies and R. Charles (eds), *Dorothy Garrod and the Progress of the Palaeolithic* (Oxford: Oxbow Books 1999), pp. 242-262, here p. 248. The snub probably consisted of not mentioning her in his paper on Ipswich Museums: Woolnough, ‘History of Ipswich Museums’. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. W. H. Flower, ‘Modern museums’, *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual General Meeting of the Museums Association* (1893), pp. 27-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Indeed, a female museum assistant at Sheffield later remembered that Howarth was much less keen on women working in museums even than his interventions in MA debates suggested; she felt that he wanted to get rid of her on principle and replace her with a man: Doris Parkin, ‘Reminiscences of a museum assistant’, typescript, Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, n.d. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, ‘Innovative niche scientists: women’s role in reframing North American museums, 1880-1930’, *Centaurus* 55 (2013), pp. 153-74. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Parkin, ‘Reminiscences’, makes this very clear. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. The account of the 1908 conference at Ipswich includes a photograph of assembled members and their wives in the museum gardens, while speeches and comic poems from the dinner are also included: *Museums Journal* 8 (1909), pp. 1-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. W. E. Hoyle, ‘Presidential address: the education of a curator’, *Museums Journal* 6 (1906), pp. 4-24, here p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Woolnough, ‘History of Ipswich Museum’, p. 199. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Flower, ‘Modern Museums’, pp. 27-9. Flower also stressed that ‘indomitable and conscientious industry’ was required of the curator. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Anon., ‘Salaries and museums’, *Museums Journal* 21 (1922), p. 245. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Anon., ‘An eminent curator: Mr Elijah Howarth’s impending retirement’, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 28 June 1928; Anon., ‘Obituary notices: Fellows – Howarth, Elijah’; Minutes of Museum Sub-Committee, Sheffield Council (held at Weston Park Museum) 18 January 1881. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Parkin, ‘Reminiscences’; letter from Howarth to Paton, 30 September 1909, transcript at Weston Park Museum, Sheffield. See also card catalogue, D. 89-3, Rock Goby, collected by Dr H. C. Sorby and the Curator, Weston Park Museum, Sheffield. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. For example, he wrote a comic poem for recitation at the MA conference dinner in 1908: anon., ‘Annual Report of the Council’, *Museums Journal* 8 (1909), pp. 1-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Sitch, ‘Thomas Sheppard’, p. 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. F. R. Rowley biographical file, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. A number of curators actually lived in their museum, although this was more associated with caretaking work than with curating as the MA would like to see it, and thus became rarer during this period. Caretaking staff, but not the curator, lived in at Sheffield Museum until at least 1885: anon., ‘Particulars’. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. E. Howarth, ‘Presidential Address’, *Museums Journal* 13 (1913), pp. 33-52, here pp. 35, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Anon., ‘Hull City Council and museum salaries’, *Museums Journal* 25 (1926), p. 241-2. For men spending a lot of time at home see Hammerton, ‘Pooterism’, p. 319. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Women workers in museums, by contrast, were of course always unmarried (with the exception of cleaners) because of the marriage bar whereby they were required to resign when they married. Although they also provided selfless service to the museum, they were never publically identified with it in the same way as the curators, in the local press. While having a neglected or invisible home life was seen as a proof of a male curator’s worth, it was not an asset to a woman museum worker, largely because their talents were assumed to be domestic ones. See Hill, *Women and Museums*, chapters 1 and 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Sitch, ‘Thomas Sheppard’, pp. 9, 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Claire Wintle, ‘Visiting the empire at the provincial museum, 1900-1950’, in Sarah Longair and John McAleer (eds), *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2012), pp. 37-55, here p. 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Parkin, ‘Reminiscences’, dwelt on his white hair and beard. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Anon., ‘Death of Mr Elijah Howarth’, *Sheffield Telegraph* 4 April 1938. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. On the agency of a museum curator at the time, albeit a more expert one, see Sarah Byrne, ‘Trials and traces: A. C. Haddon’s agency as museum curator’, in S. Byrne, A. Clarke, R. Harrison and R. Torrence (eds*), Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum* (New York: Springer 2011), pp. 307-325. The ways in which collections of objects could create agency and even authority is explored in this volume as a whole and also in, for example, Chris Gosden and Frances Larson, *Knowing Things: Exploring the Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum 1884-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Hill, ‘Manufactures, archaeology and bygones’. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. The importance of feats of physical endurance, at their desks and in the countryside, to naturalists’ identities (and most curators were originally naturalists) is noted in some extraordinary anecdotes by David Allen, *The Naturalist*, pp. 67-9. Alberti relates that the Field Naturalists Clubs to which so many curators belonged often set up ‘Rambling’ sections around 1900: ‘Amateur and professional’, p. 134. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Quoted in Shortland, ‘Darkness visible’, p. 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Bishop, ‘Ruralism’, p. 654. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. Schadla-Hall, *Tom Sheppard*, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. Such excursions also involved plenty of drinking. Plunkett, ‘John Ellor Taylor’, p. 183. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. Hill, ‘Manufactures, archaeology and bygones’. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. Anon., ‘Popular curator’s passing’, *Sheffield Daily Independent* 4 April 1938. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Plunkett, ‘Dr John Ellor Taylor’, p. 191; Mark Seaward, ‘Sheppard, Thomas (1876-1945)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), online, available at <https://doi-org.proxy.library.lincoln.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/57394>, accessed 27 November 2018. On high turnover of curators see Teather, ‘Museology’, p. 206. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. Sitch, ‘Thomas Sheppard’, p. 12; Plunkett, ‘Dr John Ellor Taylor’, p. 191; Parkin, ‘Reminiscences’. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. F. R. Rowley biographical file. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. An emphasis on the difference between the size of the museums and collections when he started and when he retired are a feature of press coverage of Howarth’s career: see for example anon., ‘An eminent curator: Mr Elijah Howarth’s impending retirement’, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 28 June 1928. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Howarth is described as having made the museum his ‘life’s work’, and as having ‘found his real vocation early’; he is said to have given ‘real service to Sheffield’: anon., ‘City’s weather prophet: museum curator to retire’, *Sheffield Daily Independent* 28 June 1928; anon., ‘Sheffield curator: fifty years at Weston Park Museum’, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 23 December 1925. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Bailey memorably describes the lower middle class as ‘agents and casualties of modern mobility’; ‘White collars, gray lives?’, p. 288. On the relationship between identifying with the institution and failing to use professionalisation to enhance status, see Teather, ‘Museology’, p. 208. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. Bailey, ‘White collars, gray lives?’, p. 288. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)