

Derby Museum's latest venture - a journey *Down the Back of the Sofa* with Charity Shop DJ at the Vintage Festival on the South Bank, London – July 29 -31.

Every day, people bring things they believe to be of value to museums - and *de facto*, to the community. Everything from old hair dryers to new road kill - for stuffing.

A museum then uses its own criteria for accepting or rejecting these things – its collections policy will help the museum decide what to accept and what to reject. The same collections policy will set out an active acquisitions policy which the museum will use to seek out objects and works of art it would like to add to its collection.

But most museums have a lot of stuff – and spend time and resources storing and looking after it. And of course much of it is never seen or used. Beyond exhibiting in the traditional way – what else can a museum do with the many objects it holds in its collection?

Derby Museum has been trying out different ways of making its collections accessible to the community – using objects to make connections with people's personal histories and to stimulate creativity – getting people to think about the stuff in museums in a different way – to personally relate to and value the things the museum holds and by default – to see and value their museum in a different way too.

Generously supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, through the Museums Association Effective Collections Programme, Derby Museum's latest venture is a journey *Down the Back of the Sofa* with Charity Shop DJ at the Vintage Festival on the South Bank – July 29 -31.

[Derby Museum](#) has worked with [Charity Shop DJ](#) and other performance organisations to design and create a 1981 'lounge', using stuff from Derbyshire charity shops mixed with objects, artefacts and oddities from Derby Museum's extensive store. The objects have all been donated to Derby Museums and many will be on public display for the first time.

But *Down the Back of the Sofa* is more than a quirky exhibition space. Activities like *The Five Minute Curator* let you create your own exhibition, share your own stories and explore your own past. Maison Foo's memory library allows you to choose objects from the filing cabinet of your life and leave behind your personal memory. Charity Shop DJ invites you to choose your cheese from its extensive vinyl collection, have your picture taken, tell your story about your selection and play your choice to the crowd.

What will Derby Museum gain from *Down the Back of the Sofa*? The event lets the Museum reach people who might not visit a museum and get them to think about museums and their collections in a different way.

Do the objects and the whole *Down the Back of the Sofa* experience stimulate ideas and opinions about design, colour, form and function? Do they bring back memories, loves and hates? Connect people together who do not know each other? People's thoughts and responses to the objects and activities will be captured on film and in on the spot evaluation throughout the event.

The film and evaluation will explore the implications for the Museum and its collections and exhibitions policy and practice. Should the Museum collect only objects that have a clear local provenance? Or can found objects have a value in for connecting people to the past and to each other? Does an object become more valuable if someone can connect it to their life? What should happen to the Museum's collected ephemera in 50 or a 100 years' time when personal connections with such objects is lost? How might this affect what the Museum collects today?

Can people's personal stories aid the museum in interpretation? And enable the Museum to connect others to its collection in new ways?

These questions will be examined in detail in an evaluation report published in the autumn 2011 and in filmed interviews with participants, performers and museum staff.

...*"We used to have a suitcase like that..."*