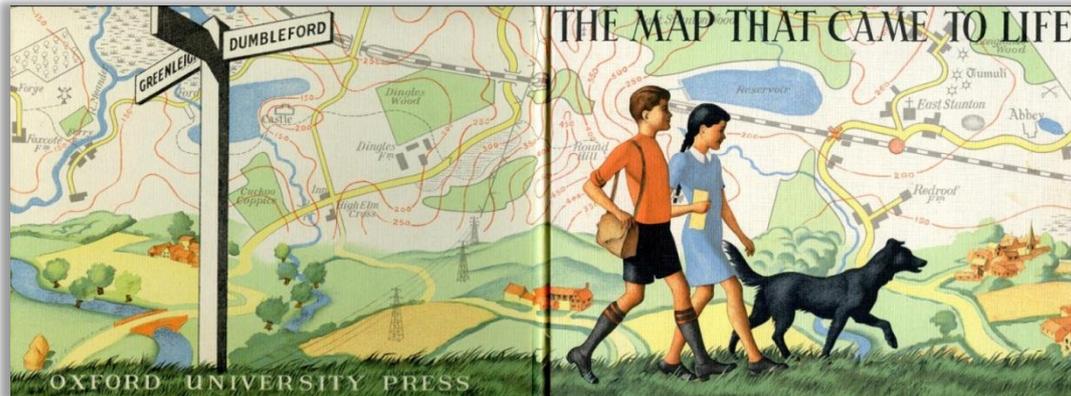


# Skills sharing day at the Museum of English Rural Life

University of Reading, Redlands Road, Reading, RG1 5EX

**Wednesday 24 April 2013**

This event offers a unique opportunity to hear about recent collections development projects at MERL and to help us shape future displays.



## Outline programme for the day

- 10.30** Arrival, registration, and coffee
- 11.00** Welcome and introduction to the day
- 11.15** *Collecting Rural Cultures* – case study and discussion
- 11.45** *A Sense of Place* – case study and discussion
- 12.15** *Countryside 21* – case study and discussion
- 12.45** Lunch and opportunity to view online resources, a selection of recent acquisitions and the current museum galleries
- 13.45** *Our Country Lives* – an introduction to key themes outlined in the Museum's Round One bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund followed by facilitated discussion
- 14.45** Closing remarks and tea

Places are free of charge and will be filled on a first come, first served basis. To book your place, please email: [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk)

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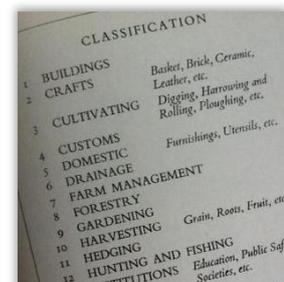
The day will focus on recent collections development projects and use these to inform discussion of major capital works and of the wider sector. The projects concerned are as follows.

In 2008, the Museum of English Rural Life was awarded support under the first round of Collecting Cultures grants offered by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Since then, over 400 objects have been acquired under the banner of **Collecting 20<sup>th</sup> Century Rural Cultures**. Specialist curatorial and conservation staff have been involved in every aspect of these acquisitions. The items have been integrated into galleries and temporary displays, including a collaborative exhibition at the Museum of East Anglian Life. This forms the basis of a touring show for museums keen to explore similar themes.



In 2011, MERL received an award from the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund for **A Sense of Place**. This project has sought to turn the traditional museum catalogue into a more flexible and interactive resource, engaging and connecting users by enriching content according to geographical context. We have enhanced over 10,000 records on our online catalogue, improved access to this facility, and helped to make searches more fruitful. We have also created and trialled digital resources in partnership with a village history society, with *We Are What We Do (Historypin)*, and with local charity iMuse.

Earlier this year MERL embarked on **Countryside21**, a project supported by Arts Council England's Designation Development Fund. As well as improving the Museum's existing image bank service, this project will provide potential for MERL to host and manage access to the digital assets of external partners, and will facilitate greater access to the rich visual resources housed in the University of Reading's own museums and archives. As part of this project MERL is looking to rethink and re-launch its well-known classification scheme in a streamlined and easily accessible form.



In November 2012, MERL received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a new project that aims to enhance the visitor experience at the Museum. **Our Country Lives** will redisplay the main galleries, deliver improved reception and learning spaces, provide more interactive activities and handling opportunities for visitors, and build on recent activity to offer improved digital resources in the gallery setting. We hope to share our initial ideas and consult with the wider museums community on how best to interpret our collections for a new generation.

Further details of all these projects are to be found on the Museum's website at <http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/research/merl-research.aspx>