

# **AHRC Migration, Diasporas and Identities Programme: 'Artefacts and Narratives of Migration'**

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*KP: And you also talked about an old suitcase?*

*RK: Yes, mum's, I do believe she has still got it I will ask her, I remember very vividly as a child this brown leather suitcase with all these labels on it, I assume they had labels at that time, they weren't the kind you could take off, and mum saying dad had used it for several years and this is all the places he had gone to – I think she's got it somewhere (Interview RK Rotherham, South Yorkshire)*

# Research project

- AHRC 'Diasporas Migration Identities' grant
- Partners: University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, Creative Partnerships, Clifton Park Museum Rotherham, Rotherham Central Sure Start, Ferham School
- Community: Ferham, focus on families of Pakistani origin –initially Pakistani/Kashmiri, included Pashtun families as well

## Outputs:

- 'Ferham families' exhibition
- KTOF project to develop family learning resources:
- [Every object tells a story](#)

# Multi-agency, participatory project

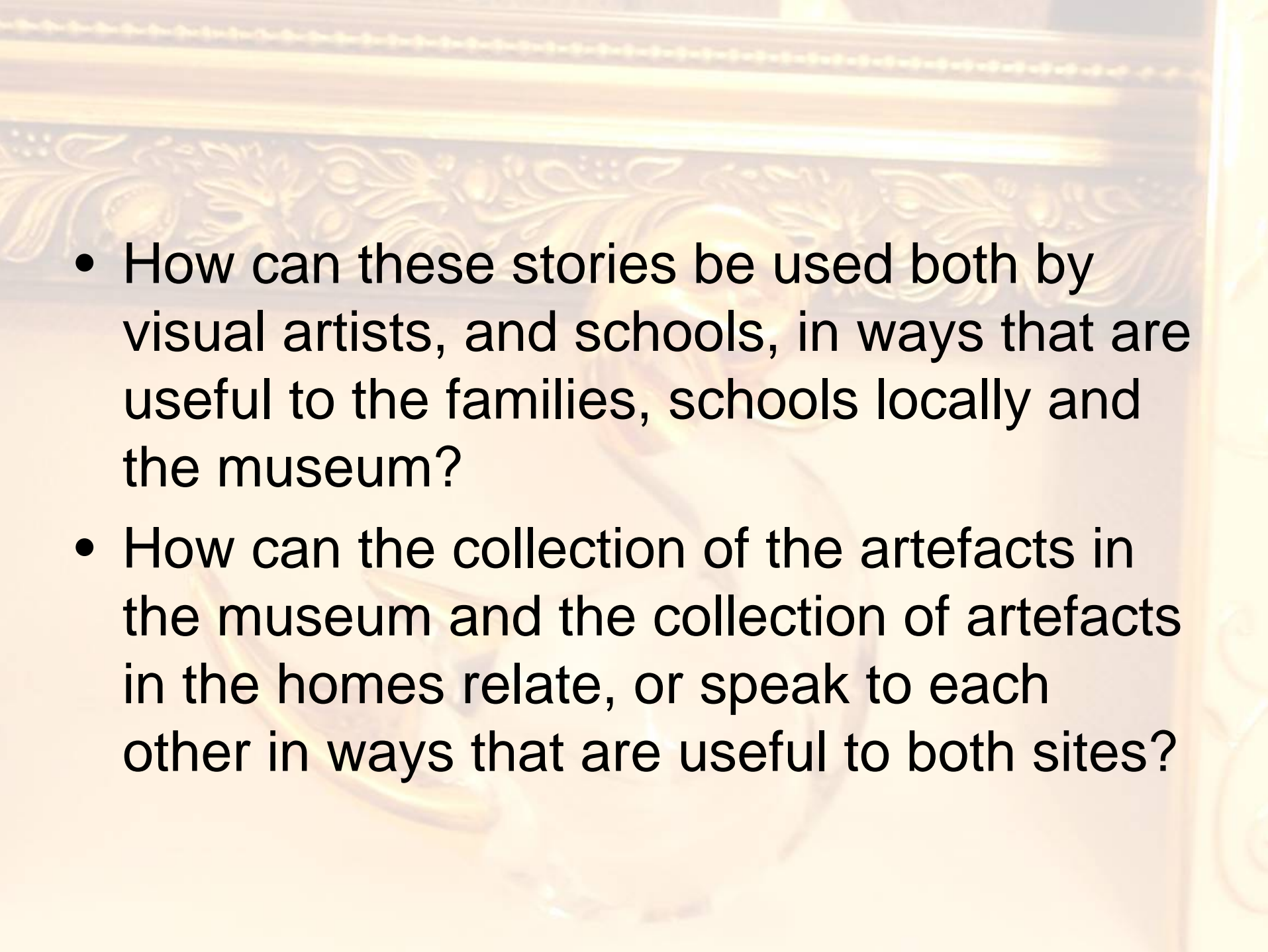
- Women's art project, based at Rotherham Central Sure Start, a family learning project, recruited women from the community into the project, created art-work focused on identity and community, including self-portraits and mapping community
- Visual artist, Zahir Rafiq, worked with children from Ferham school in a series of art workshops, created website for schools and families with children, funded by Creative Partnerships
- Ethnographic interviews in homes by researchers, Kate Pahl and Andy Pollard who also curated the exhibition with Zahir Rafiq as advisor and designer
- Exhibition and website created March – April 2007

# Methodology

- Ethnographic interviews, over 6 months
- Mapping the community through use of cameras and art work (women's art group)
- Reflexive voice, continual discussion with families in process of curating exhibition
- Zahir Rafiq as advisor to the project helped with trust in the community
- Continue to discuss effects of project with families and Zahir Rafiq, see *Moving Worlds* article. (Pahl, Pollard and Rafiq 2009)

# Research questions

- What do families of Pakistani/Kashmiri origin with primary school-age children make of the collections of artefacts in the Rotherham museum?
- What kinds of family stories can be found, and described, in connection with specific artefacts, produced in home settings in the context of experiences of migration?

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- How can these stories be used both by visual artists, and schools, in ways that are useful to the families, schools locally and the museum?
  - How can the collection of the artefacts in the museum and the collection of artefacts in the homes relate, or speak to each other in ways that are useful to both sites?

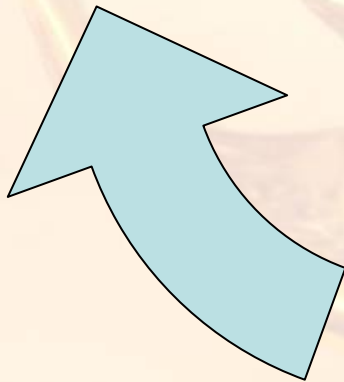
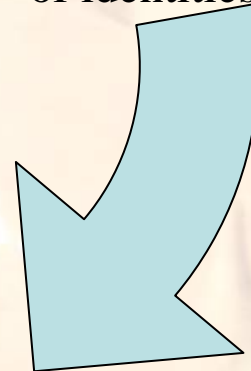
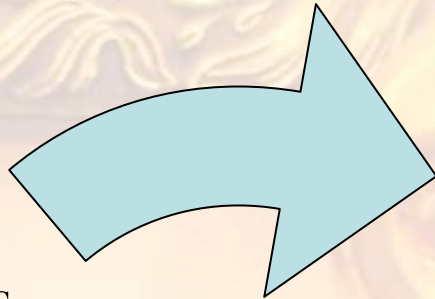
# Family background

- Mr K moved to Rotherham in the 1950's to find work, provided passports for many other families. Originally from Pathan regions of Pakistan, on Afghan border. Wife came over in the 1960's
- Pattern of gradual settlement with repeated visits to Pakistan. Mr K's body was flown to Pakistan when he died.
- Extended interviews with Mr K's four children, and his widow, together with creative work on website with Zahir with their children aged between 8 and 15.

Interviews  
with families  
2 stages

Coding  
drawing out of  
themes; taking  
themes to  
families;  
reconfiguration  
of identities

Creation of  
boxes and  
display panels,  
Families reflect  
on what they see



# Key themes

- Gold (gold spray, jewellery, cloth)
- Textiles (sewing machine, cotton, clothes)
- Travel (shoes, Pakistan, migrations)
- Family values (Koran, glass mosque)
- Toys (children's including Action man)
- Growing up in Rotherham (photo boards and home background with family trees)
- Weddings (case with wedding dress, textile case)

# Role of museums

- Museums, precisely because they have been so implicated in identity work and because of their more particular articulations with the kind of identities that are argued to be under threat, are significant sites in which to examine some of the claims of identity transformation.
- (Macdonald 2003: 6)

As an Asian person myself I thought it was a good idea to get positive messages across to the general public in Rotherham, to show that, you know, immigrants contribute to this town and work really hard and to this day, the present day, they still contribute in certain ways, positive images of Asians, in today's political climate, there is a stereotype of how Asian families, they just think about arranged marriages. I'm not saying that doesn't go on but the majority of people are just normal, law abiding, not boring, but to just get that normal view of Asian families, common view of Asian families, common something that the white population can relate to, because at the moment they can't relate to Asian families, at the moment, but there is so much that they can, and I hope that will come out of this project, that's why I wanted to do it, it's a great cause. (Zahir Rafiq in Pahl, Pollard and Rafiq 2009:84)

# Lost objects

RK ... they always had China on them and they had embroidered clothes and they had one of those lace cloths, like in Victorian times.

Researcher: A doily?

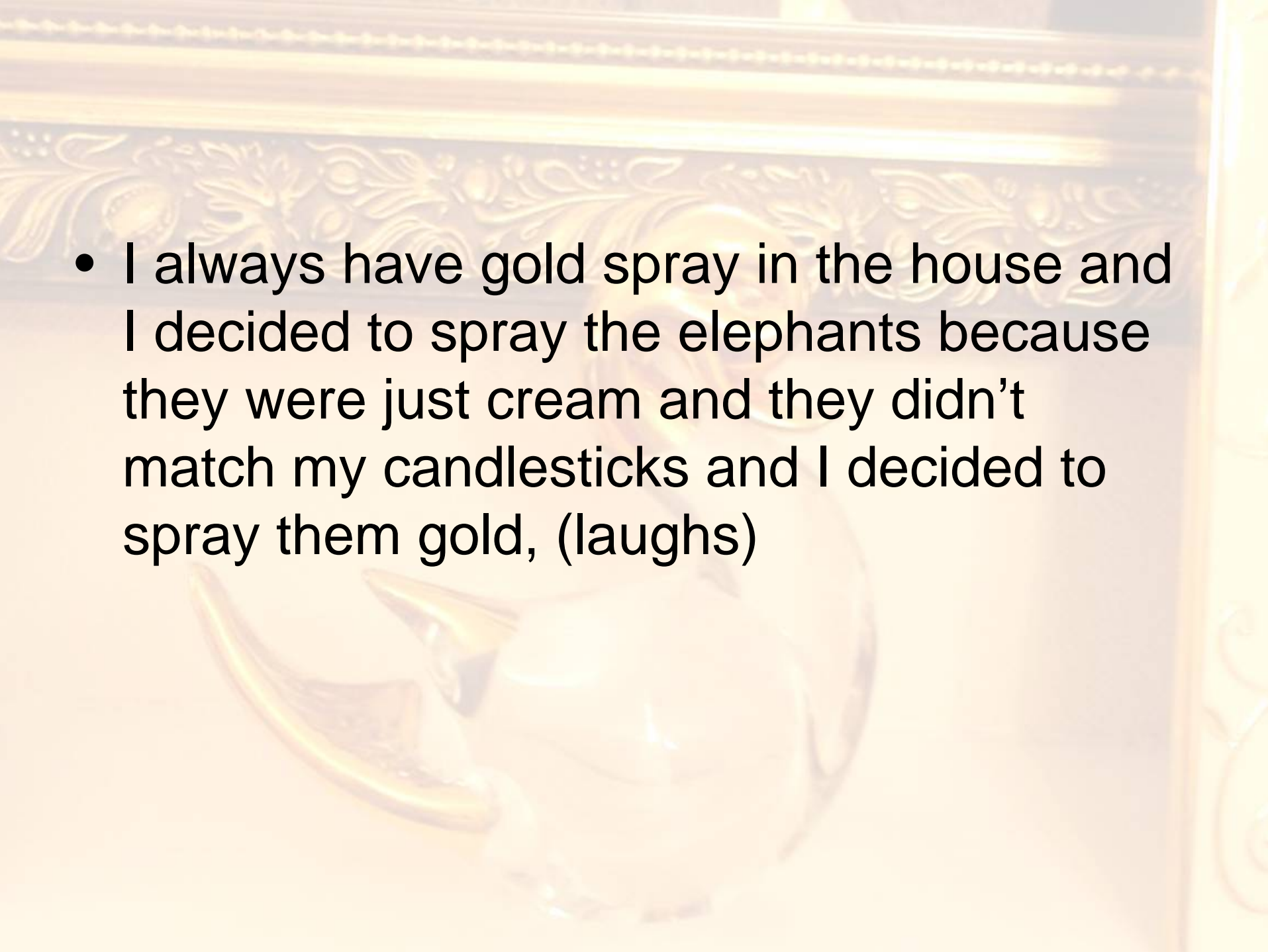
RK: Yes, we had china on that traditionally, to put them on. I don't recall mum having a doily when she came to England (laughs).

- RK: When you get married you also have duvets and they are generally made of silk or velvet, and they are hand sewn, they were at that time hand sewn, now they are not, the cotton inside is all from the local fields,

- he had a well put on there, that was his first project in this year and a half, much to my mum's dismay (laughs). And when he completed that he decided he wanted to grow cotton so he grew his own cotton and then it came back, ... from the cotton they made thread, and from the cotton they made these blankets, it wasn't actually wool, it was this very thick kind of fabric that was very warm, it wasn't like cashmere very similar, you see, and we have got several of those still, it had some embroidery on the side, hand done as well, no body has actually and I think he made one for all the boys and one for himself, we hardly ever go in winter anyway, (Interview, Ruksana)

- Mum sewed herself. She used to make dresses for me and everything, she'd crochet, embroider and sew, learnt everything at school.... she had a sewing machine. It is a Singer one and it was bought when my brother ....when he was born dad bought mum the sewing machine as a present. We still have it somewhere.  
(Interview, Ruksana)

- The story goes that he put the money in his shoes, he had little shoes built where he could hide the gold because people would steal from you when you slept on the boat, or the train, you know, it was great difficulty, and carrying cash on you, I mean it's difficult now but in them days, he brought whatever he had back, he came all the way back to Pakistan, India, and looked after his family there. (interview JK)

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- I always have gold spray in the house and I decided to spray the elephants because they were just cream and they didn't match my candlesticks and I decided to spray them gold, (laughs)

- As regards gold, culturally a girl is always given gold when she gets married as well as looking nice, because you wear the gold with your outfit, your wedding outfit, it is for a rainy day as well in case anything happens and you go, oh we'll sell the gold, not only are you given gold, you are given other things in the dowry, and that is like your part of your inheritance from your parents so you kind of take your inheritance with you when you get married. (Interview, Ruksana)

- He said he wanted a nice watch so I bought one for him ... It's very thin and it's a Seiko watch and it's got a golden chain. It was a nice watch that I bought for him at that time. He wore it you know, he used to wear it but he said "I want a heavy watch, this is a bit too thin" you know, but he used to wear it. So that's the watch that I have inherited from him. (interview AK)

- ...they knew all about cloth and they had a tie and gold pen, and they ate in that restaurant, you know the beauties and wonders of this world, before they left and departed (Interview, JK)
- [they] used to take pictures of their possessions, radio, with his camera and tell people back home how well he's doing.

Zahir: To me it was a heritage project – about identity – it was normalising and bridging perceived gaps about what these people want and how they go about their lives. I think things like the children showing their favourite football team and wrestlers, the images in their bedrooms, and the stories of the uncles who worked in the Hong Kong police force and working for the navy, and the armed forces, in Pakistan this was about the commonwealth. The family were keen to explore their New York connections – J was always talking about it. In terms of tracing ancestry, for Asian families how difficult would that be. Ferham families to me is the beginning of the ‘who do you think you are’ like the television programme (laughs). (Pahl, Pollard and Rafiq 2009:87)

Andy Pollard, curator and RA on the project:

- I believe that an extremely positive picture of the local British Asian population was painted.. ..We went in one day, and the teachers from the local secondary school were using the space, and it was their second visit and it was a really diverse range of kids and it was really important for those families and those kids – it sent a really strong message. (Pahl, Pollard and Rafiq 2009:88)

# Impact

- Website and learning resource pack developed from original dataset funded by KTOF
- Partnership with Museums Libraries and Archives Council – KTOF and My Family My Story
- Partnership with the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education
- Partnership with Almuneera Rotherham
- Inspire Rotherham evaluation
- Publications (Moving Worlds and articles)

# Knowledge Transfer

- Knowledge Transfer Opportunities Fund grant in 2008 to develop set of family learning resources from the ethnographic interviews.
- Website and resource pack designed by Zahir Rafiq with Sheffield Family Learning and Burngreave Community Learning Campaign with MLA as partner
- <http://www.everyobjecttellsastory.org.uk>

# Museums, Libraries and Archives

- Partnership with Museums, Libraries and Archives council in the 'Every object tells a story' project led to second project:
- My Family, My Story, a digital storytelling project on the theme of 'Every object tells a story' with the World of James Herriot and Thirsk, School, North Yorkshire
- [My family, My story](#)

# National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education

- Case Study in 'Families, learning and culture', on the AHRC funded project by NIACE led to
- Two keynotes by Kate Pahl for NIACE conferences and partnership role for NIACE in future bids together with informal advisory role for museums and family learning.

# Almuneera

- *Their Lives Our History*, an oral history project with Almuneera, Rotherham, in which teenage girls interviewed their grand mothers about moving to the UK from Pakistan, Kate Pahl in research advisory capacity,
- extended to working with teenage boys interviewing their grandfathers about working in the steel industry.

# Inspire Rotherham

- Drew on the Ferham Families AHRC project, to develop new bids and ideas
- ‘Then and Now’ in which children interview grandparents about the project
- ‘Suitcase Stories’ Clifton EAZ, storytelling project in schools to collect narratives of migration
- Kate Pahl evaluator for Inspire project funded by Yorkshire Forward for 2 years

# Two publications

Pahl, K. and Pollard, A. (2008) `Bling - the Asians introduced that to the country': gold and its value within a group of families of South Asian origin in Yorkshire. *Visual Communication* 7 (2) 170 – 192

Pahl, K., with Pollard, A. and Rafiq, Z. (2009) Changing Identities, Changing Spaces: The Ferham Families Exhibition in Rotherham. *Moving Worlds* Vol 9 No 2 80 – 103

# Themes in publications

- ‘Case of the disappearing object’ – lost objects and recalled narratives
- ‘Translating objects’ – objects having different meanings in different contexts (AHRC bid with Sharon Macdonald)
- Problems in partnership work across domains of practice – last minute curating versus planned programmes
- Identity shifts in British Asian families across generations and opening up of new cultural spaces

# Forthcoming publications

Pahl, K. and Rowsell, J. (forthcoming) *Artifactual Literacy: Every object tells a story*. New York: Teachers College Press

Pahl, K. and Pollard, A. 'The Case of the Disappearing Object' currently article under review.

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