Alt Text

Personal Belongings: On Display

Look around you. The objects that belong to you embody the story we tell about ourselves. Whether bought or handmade, our belongings are small snapshots of who we were at a particular moment in time. Such personal belongings are often private and intimate. ​

Historical personal belongings can often end up in the public space of a museum. Some of these objects belonged to famous or historically significant people. But many belonged to people like you and me. These personal belongings were often not intended to be on public show. ​

The age of the internet has softened the boundary between our private space and public space. In 2021 we frequently display our personal belongings to the world through social media and video calls.  How much of yourself do you really want revealed to the world? ​

We encourage you to reflect on this question and share your own special personal belongings through Instagram. Tag @personal\_belongings\_ and #FAHACSPersonalBelongings​

Roman Jewellery

[Image Description]

A necklace made out of blue, glass beads. Two jet black bracelets and two ivory bracelets of roughly the same shape and size.

71-410 AD​

York, Yorkshire​

Glass, Jet and Elephant Ivory​

This jewellery belonged to the 'Ivory Bangle Lady', a young woman of North African descent living in Roman York. The jet bracelet is likely a local product from Whitby, the imported ivory reflects her African heritage and blue glass necklace shows both her wealth and fashionable tastes. ​

Within her grave, they acted as private representation of her identity. Now returned to the public eye, they highlight the presence of prosperous women of colour in the ancient city.​

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Uncleby Knife

[Image Description]

A rusted knife, it is damaged and has lost its shape significantly.

600-866 AD​

Uncleby, Yorkshire​

Iron​

Worn at the hip on a belt, knives were an essential utility tool for Anglo-Saxons and are commonly found in graves of both sexes. This knife belonged to a woman, who would have used it for butchering cattle meat and various daily tasks. Women’s knives are usually shorter than men's, making them more practical for everyday use. Once a tool so personal that it was buried with its owner, this knife now provides an insight into women’s roles in Anglo-Saxon communities.​

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Bead

[Image Description]

A singular, round bead. It has a red and yellow pattern on it which swirls around.

Would you want the private items you'd been buried with to end up on display at a museum?​

Join in on Instagram​

@personal\_belongings\_​

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[Image Description]

A large, cream ceramic jug glazed with blue decoration. Along the top edge there is a repeat pattern of architectural features from York Minster. The main body of the jug contains a picture of the Minster on fire. Along the bottom it reads: ‘YORK MINSTER ON FIRE FEB 2ND 1829’

York Minster Ornamental Jug

1829 AD​

Unknown Location​

Ceramic​

​

It is uncommon to see a Minster engulfed in flames as a decorative pattern on ceramics. The owner of this item might’ve used it for daily chores, a constant reminder of the tragedy. The jug is both a commemorative souvenir from a significant moment that rocked the public and made headlines in Yorkshire. Yet it also served a functional, domestic purpose. ​

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[Image Description]

A yellowed newspaper page. The headline reads: “EXAMINATION CONFESSION​ And Committal of Jonathan Martin, to take his Trial at the next Assizes, for Setting Fire to the York Minster, on the 1st of February 1829.”

Do you use anything day-to-day that reminds you of big news stories, or pivotal moments in history? ​

Join in on Instagram​

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[Image Description]

Two images of a bell-shaped loving cup with two handles. The first image shows the front of the cup which reads ‘Sarah Bland York’ painted in black, with a red, floral decorative border. The interior of the rim is painted with scrollwork patterns also in red and black. The second image shows the back of the cup. Painted on it in red and black, there is a bird on a branch with fruits falling from it, and birds in flight in the background.

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Loving Cup

1780-1822 AD​

Hartley, Greens and Company, Leeds, Yorkshire​

Creamware​

​

This loving cup is an example of the Hunslet-based creamware, popularly known as ‘Leedsware’. The two-handled cup is designed to be shared and passed along, used for ceremonial drinking, symbolising bonding, unity and celebrating love. Its design helps to share memorable occasions with others, yet its inscription suggests it has significance to one individual in particular.

[Image Description]

This slide contains a large image of the Heslington Baby House, next to it are small picture of miniature furniture items. The first image shows a white, three-storey dolls house with the front open, revealing 9 rooms inside. The bottom floor is the tallest, the middle about half the size; the top floor is a narrow height. The walls of the house are patterned like wallpaper, and each room is filled with miniature furniture and figurines. To the side of this image there are small pictures of some of the furniture inside the house. This includes chairs, equipment for a fireplace, tiny plates, and decorative items such as a frame and a bag.

Heslington Baby House

1695-1870 AD​

Yarborough Family, Heslington, Yorkshire​

Wood, Fabric and Feather

Miniature replicas of their owner’s homes, doll’s houses were snapshots of the time in which they were created, telling a microscopic story of domestic life. Never intended for public display, this house may have been used as a teaching tool for good household management. The female doll in this house may depict the woman’s role within the home.

[Image Description]

The image shows a circular pin cushion, containing an image of a kneeling person in shackles.

(C)York Museums Trust (York Castle Museum) CC BY-SA 4.0]​

Pin Cushion

1828 – 1840 AD​

Unknown Location​

Silk

In the nineteenth century women were expected to be reserved and confine themselves to the private space of the house. Engaging with charitable and religious causes like the abolition movement was a way women could engage with the public world of politics. By owning this pincushion, a woman could discreetly voice her subversive political views on slavery. The object would have only been used at home while sewing but connected her to a widespread global movement.

[Image Description]

This image shows the back of the circular pin cushion. It has text on it which reads: Royal Jamaica Gazette, of August 1 1837​ "Take notice, That on Wednesday, the 5th. Of August next, I shall put up for sale at Miss Whately's Tavern, at Yallah's Bay, a negro child. About 7 years of age, named June, or June Delpratt, to be sold for taxes due by Mount Sinai Estate" Joseph Delpratt, C.C.."​ Lord of the poor! The poor and helpless save.​ Giver and Lord of freedom, help the Slave. Heber.

(C)York Museums Trust (York Castle Museum) CC BY-SA 4.0]​

Do your personal objects have a political message? Do you share them with the rest of the world?

Join in on Instagram​

@personal\_belongings\_​

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[Image Description]

An image of an unframed cross-stitch sampler. The fabric is discoloured cream linen. Along the top there are three lines of text, cross-stitched in black. They read "This work My Frends May Have When I Am Dead And In My Grave”. Underneath is a line of flowers, birds, trees and a large basket of flowers, cross-stitched with pink, green and purple thread. The workers name and date are stitched along the bottom in light blue, it reads “Elizabeth Groves 1822”.

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Embroidery Sampler

1822 AD​

Elizabeth Groves, York, Yorkshire​

Linen with Silk Thread​

Learning to sew was a crucial life skill for girls in the nineteenth century. They learnt by copying text and decorative designs to create samplers. Elizabeth's sampler is wonky and misspelled.  We don't know if she created a more polished version of this sampler.  It was probably a practice piece and not intended to be on display to the public. Her work has therefore been immortalized to us as imperfect.

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[Image Description]

A large, silky patchwork bedcover. The central panel features a double eight-pointed star in cream on a black background. The panel is enclosed by a border, a narrow band of overlapping scales followed by a white chain, inlaid on grey fabric. This is followed by three further borders of elaborate geometric blocks, all different. Each patch contains either triangles, stars, patchwork sunbursts or lightening flashes. They are all a combination of different colours, mostly warm shades of pink, burgundy, yellow, orange, brown and lilac. Some smaller details are indigo, blue or khaki. Finally there is a thin outer-border, pieced from tiny diamond-shaped cuts of fabric.

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Quilted Bedcover

1837-1844 AD​

Ann Hutton-Wilson, Yarm, Yorkshire​

Cloth​

Patchwork quilting was a fashionable pastime for middle-class women during the nineteenth-century. Crafted by Ann, this quilt is made from decorative dress fabrics. The eight-pointed star includes wedding dress material belonging to Ann's best friend, a celebration of love and family within the period. Laid upon the marital bed, this intimate object was never intended to be on display to a voyeuristic gaze. ​

How would you feel about your intimate objects being on display to people you don't know?

Join in on Instagram​

@personal\_belongings\_​

#FAHACSPersonalBelongings

What is our relationship to personal belongings in 2021?​

The age of the internet means we often share intimate parts of lives to people we don't know very well. The lockdown in the UK during the coronavirus pandemic, dramatically changed our relationship to our private spaces. As we retreated into our homes many people felt a loss of connection to other people. By displaying posters in our windows, video calling our family and sharing our banana bread on social media, we opened our personal spaces up to the rest of the world. ​

​

For some of us, having our objects on display in a museum may feel like less of an intrusion then it does for people in the past.

Ilkley Lockdown Community Quilt

Personal Belongings to Patchwork Memorial

During lockdown in 2020, Ilkley Manor House Trust brought together the local community to create a visual memorial of the pandemic. ​

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Some of these patches have been crafted from cherished personal belongings, kept as keep sakes by their owners. Each patch is a thought-provoking example of how personal belongings have been used to publicly connect shared experiences.​

​

This quilt suggests a shift in the idea that certain items are not for public display. It willingly displays intimate memories and emotional stories proudly to the rest of the world. ​

[Image Description]

On a burgundy piece of fabric there sits 15 small squares of fabric, five rows of three. Each patch is intricately decorated. For example, one has a bouquet of flowers stitched into it. One has a flag and hole on a golf course. One has half a rainbow with a cloud at the end which has ‘NHS’ written inside of it. One has a crossword stitched into it. One has 3 figures, a doctor, a nurse and a figure in blue scrubs, with ‘heroes’ written across the top’. One says: ‘Thank you to all our KEY WORKERS’.

(C) Ilkley Mannor House. No image can be used for any purpose without the express permission of Ilkley Manor House Trust.

Patchwork Squares​

Maker; Janet Simpson​

2020​

Fabric

Submitted for public exhibition, Janet donated two patches to the project. The blue checked is made from her late father's shirt, a personal item kept in her mother's belongings. The floral patch is made from Janet's late mothers dressing gown, who passed away shortly before the first lockdown.​

​

Janet explains that her mother was ''excellent at needle craft''. She expressed how she wanted to make her mother ''part of the design''. ​

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By using her parents personal clothing, Janet allows others to find solace in the shared grief experienced during the pandemic.

[Image Description]

Two images of the patches by Janet. The first is a white, fabric square with purple and yellow flowers painted on, and six badges with multi-coloured trees pinned on. In the middle, the text reads ‘Treat every day as a Gift, That’s why it’s called the Present”. The second is a blue checkered fabric square. It has a wavey line of musical notes stitched across it. There are also four small badges with musical notes pinned on, and a large badge which says “Keep Calm and Play the Ukulele”. At the bottom there is a ukulele badge pinned on.

Dressing Gown

Catherine Lansfield Home​

2015​

Polyester​

​

Submitted by Holly Lown, curator.​

​

I worked from home full time during the lockdown in the UK. I soon realized my work colleagues could see my dressing gown hanging on the back of the door when we video chatted. It felt weird and intimate, I had never thought these people would be looking inside my house. After seeing other people's workspaces, with fancy bookshelves and beautiful artwork, I put it in another room. Now they just see a plain white door.

[Image Description]

A grey dressing gown with purple stag-heads dotted over it.

Books

Gifted by Malcolm, owner's Grandad​

1947 and 1957​

Hardback​

​

Submitted by Alex Stewart, curator.

These books were a gift from my Grandad before I moved away from home to go to university. He read poems from these books to me, which is one of my last memories of him. When my bookcase appears in video calls, or when friends come into my room, they are unaware of the cherished memory that these books will always hold for me.

[Image Description]

Two books sat one on top of the other. The bottom book is slightly larger. It is yellow and reads: “Collected Poems 1909-1935 \* T.S. ELIOT COLLECTED POEMS Faber & Faber”. The top one is blue with gold writing, and reads: “THE FABER BOOK OF MODERN VERSE edited by MICHEAL ROBERTS”.

Tea Towel Bunny

Maket; Marie Taylor, owners' mother​

2013​

Terry Toweling  ​

​

Submitted by Krista Jarman, curator.

My most cherished gift, is a rabbit crafted from my late grandmother’s tea towel. The fabric evokes personal memories of my childhood and my grandmother busy in her kitchen. One of her small pleasures, was a pristine tea towel. This ordinary domestic item belonging to her, has become a public object on display within my room. Its tiny presence, often glimpsed in the background of my online meetings and Instagram photos.

[Image Description]

A bunny shaped teddy bear made from white and purple terry cloth. Around it’s neck there is a red heart and a label that reads “Merry Christmas” on one side and “Love Mummy” on the other.

York Ghost Merchants Collection

Handmade by the York Ghost Merchants​

2020-current ​

Clay​

Submitted by Chelsea Knight, curator.​

This collection started as a birthday gift from a friend and has been added to by my household. Through collecting ghosts, I have met new people on social media via ghost collectors' groups and group chats. In our household, we take photos of each new one we buy and post them into the collectors' group chat to share the new designs and patterns we find with others in the group. They may be small, but they have led me to new friendships and experiences. For example, the York ghost week a week-long event in which the is a treasure hunt for ghosts around the city where we got to meet a few other ghost collectors.

[Image Description]

Fourteen Clay ghosts of different sizes and painted with different colours.

Crochet Cat Blanket

Sandra Phillips, owner's grandmother​

Modern, 2020​

Wool ​

​

Submitted by Charlotte Whelan, curator​

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Most of my working from home was done from my bedroom, and my blanket was often visible in the background. My Nana found the cat pattern especially for me, and the colours match my real life cats. Whilst it is incredibly personal and sentimental, I don't mind that it ended up on display. My Nana is very talented, and I'm happy that more people were able to see her work. ​

[Image Description]

A patchwork of cats in grey, cream and brown.

Acknowledgements​

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With thanks to:​

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York Museums Trust Collection​

Ilkley Manor House Trust​

Janet Simpson​

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Join in on Instagram​

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#FAHACSPersonalBelongings

Alexandra Stewart​

Charlotte Whelan​

Chelsea Knight​

Holly Lown​

Krista Jarman