



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL  
MATERIAL INC.

## **The Shock of the New: Modern Materials, Media and Methods Joint Objects and Electron SIG Symposium February 8 to 10 2017 - Melbourne Museum**

### **Abstract**

#### **Title:**

An investigation into the materiality and history of the sweetheart badge collection at RSL LifeCare War Museum

#### **Name of Presenter:**

Ashley Gilmour<sup>1</sup>

#### **Name/s of All Co-authors:**

Sophie Lewincamp<sup>1</sup>, Petronella Nel<sup>1</sup>

#### **Affiliations:**

1. Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation

#### **Abstract:**

The importance of documentation is never so apparent than in community cultural collections. The personal stories and geographical histories of a cultural item is paramount to its placement within a museum display and its influence on museum visitors. This is the object's biography. This thesis explores the possibility of creating a comprehensive biography for items, which have been disassociated with their histories and lack social and cultural contexts. A case study of nineteen sweetheart badges and five dies held in the RSL LifeCare War Museum demonstrates the feasibility of this practice. Drawing on a multidisciplinary approach, literature, interviews and material analysis are brought together to produce a historical, social and cultural context for the badges. Secondary literature places the objects in the historical contexts of the Second World War and the art being produced. While primary knowledge gained from interviews with Second World War veterans and museum professionals gives an insight into previously unknown manufacturing techniques and social motivations. The biography created, while generalised from similar items, draws heavily on original data, producing an invaluable understanding of the sweetheart badges, and providing future RSL LifeCare War Museum visitors with an object biography that reflects the badges' significance.

#### **Brief Biography of the Author(s)**

Ashley Gilmour has just completed the Master of Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne.

Sophie Lewincamp is currently completing her PhD at the University of Melbourne.

Petronella Nel has a BSc (Honours), PhD (Chemistry) and MA (Cultural Materials

Conservation). She is about to commence leading an ARC-LP titled 'A national framework for managing malignant plastics in museum collections'.

**E-mail contact:**

[gilmour.ashley.ellen@gmail.com](mailto:gilmour.ashley.ellen@gmail.com)