



PRESS RELEASE

The Great Diary Project

Until 12 October 2014

The Great Diary Project is a display of diaries written by children and teenagers, revealing unique insights into the lives of young people at particular moments in history. On public display for the first time, the accounts date from 1813 to 1996 and demonstrate dramatic changes in the experience of childhood. The majority of the documents come from The Great Diary Project archive, which collects personal diaries for future research and as an invaluable source of social history. The Great Diary Project opened at the V&A Museum of Childhood on 17 May and runs until 12 October 2014.

“The children’s diaries from the collection reveal another world through the smallest details. Ideas and stories are suggested, offering a glimpse into a child’s life from another era of formal tea parties, curious games and changing fashions.” – Laura Barnicoat, researcher for The Great Diary Project

The Great Diary Project began in 2011 with the private collection of historian Irving Finkel, who has been rescuing diaries for years, storing them in his office at the British Museum. Finkel and his team of researchers and volunteers recognise the importance of diaries as records of stories, language and details of everyday life that might otherwise be lost. Soon to be based officially at Bishopsgate Institute in London, the Project will accept donations of diaries from all over the country.

Focusing on children’s diaries, this display uses loans from the collection and from the Edward Hall Archive in Wigan. They include tales of bed bugs and leeching at boarding school during the Napoleonic Wars, the pop culture of early twentieth century American Scout diaries, as well as coded accounts of wild teenage behaviour during the Blitz.

Although fragmented, the stories focus on key moments in 20th century history, and show great shifts in attitudes over time, from the pre-Victorian children’s acceptance of being flogged at school, to existentialist despair in the classroom of the 1990s. The diaries give a glimpse into children’s private worlds, often enigmatic, but imaginatively rich. They illustrate how an individual’s unique character can be captured in this very private kind of writing, providing a way of listening to these almost-lost voices from history.

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA

Admission free. Open daily: 10.00 – 17.45, last admission 17.30

Nearest tube: Bethnal Green. Tel: 020 8983 5200 www.museumofchildhood.org.uk

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