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Tracing George

Stories of dwelling and the experience of place in archival records

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2017

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hagström, C. (2017). *Tracing George: Stories of dwelling and the experience of place in archival records*. Abstract from 13th SIEF Congress Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany.

Total number of authors:

1

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Panel

Dwelling in the cultural archives: traces, experiences and meanings

Title

Tracing George. Stories of dwelling and the experience of place in archival records

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Short Abstract (300 characters) (304 inkl blanksteg)

Based on a written recollection in the Folklife Archives, I trace the movements of George who, now in his 70's, uses bicycle riding to describe his childhood in a small town. By focusing on descriptions and memories of dwelling, I ask what kinds of places are mentioned and what meaning they come to have.

Long Abstract (250 words) (236)

In 2015, I received a document entitled "Bicycle memories" by George, a man in his 70's. He had learned that the Folklife Archives, where I had previously worked as an archivist, ran a project documenting bicycling and bicyclists past and present. This spurred him to recall the role that the bicycle had played in various periods of his life, and to remember specific bicycle rides. Based on his own memories and bicycle diaries, together with conversations with childhood friends and his father's photographs, he compiled a document of 128 pages. In this presentation I will concentrate on the first part of the text, which centres on his boyhood years in Gamleby in southern Sweden. Though the bicycle is central in the different narratives that the story consists of, and the very reason for retelling them at all, it is often used as a starting point for recollections of various aspects of growing up in a small town in the 1940's and 1950's. Reading the text closely I intend to trace George as he moves in and around Gamleby, focusing on descriptions and memories of dwelling. What kinds of places are mentioned in the narrative, which experiences are they connected to, and what meaning do they have? What can a biographical story, initially set out to centre on a specific aspect such as bicycling, tell us about experiences of dwelling and everyday life in a local community?