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Material objects and life stories

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Bicycle biographies. Material objects and life stories

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A bicycle today looks almost the same as in the late 1880's when the so-called safety bike came into use, replacing the high wheel bicycle or "penny-farthing". The meaning and status ascribed to the bicycle is, however, something that varies over time and between places. Furthermore, it has different meanings for an individual through out her life. In this paper I will examine how the bicycle is used in life stories as a means to explain and interpret habits, practices and experiences. Based on a previous presentation at ISCH in South Africa 2014, where I discussed this theme on a more general level drawing on material from a documentation project by the Folklife Archives, I will here focus on a few particular stories. The main source is a compilation called "Bicycle memories" written by a man in his 70's. It consists of recollections, diary entries and descriptions of bicycle rides written at various times in his life. I intend to apply Carlo Ginzburg's concept of clues to an analysis of how the bicycle is used in the narrative and how, when and why it is connected to specific events, situations and experiences. How can this concept help to advance the understanding of the relationship between an individual's biography and events in the surrounding world?

Charlotte Hagström is Associate Professor and lecturer in Ethnology, Archival Studies and Applied Cultural Analysis at Lund University, Sweden. She is currently working on *Bicycle freedom*, a research project focusing on cultural aspects of bicycling.