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Judy Faraday
John Lewis Heritage Centre
7th November 2016

JF: Judy Faraday
HC: Helen Casey

JF: I'm Judy Faraday, my title is Manager Heritage Services, that involves looking after everything to do with the history and heritage of both John Lewis, Waitrose and all the various companies and areas of the business that we have responsibility for now and have had responsibility for in the past. We're based at Cookham in a purpose built heritage centre which opened three years ago, and we take in anything that's of interest to the history of the development of the business.

HC: Can you tell me a bit about what you hold here?

JF: We basically have quite a large business collection which is divided up mainly between the business records for John Lewis, Waitrose and everything else, and a textile collection which originated in Stead McAlpine a factory we used to own in Carlisle. That textile collection holds we think around 25,000 designs going back to around 1800, they're mainly the paper and the fabric samples, and we use those both within the business and as a licensing opportunity outside the business as well. So those are the two parts of the collection. The business collection has been in existence for around 50 years and the textile archive was collected gradually during the course of the production of...used at the factory.

HC: Tell me a little about your background at John Lewis and how you've come to be here and where you sit in terms of decision making for the archive?

JF: I joined the John Lewis Partnership as an A-level trainee in 1977 and went to work on the shop floor in a variety of departments and a variety of shops. I then spent six months working with Waitrose, went back to the department stores and left to start a family. Came back and got a part-time job as an archive assistant when the archive was based at Stevenage. And when the archivist retired in 1996 I took over from her. At that time, it was a very small department, I was part-time, I had a part-time assistant but when we moved to the Heritage Centre we then had to increase the staffing numbers. So, we now have a team of four, I manage two professional full-time archivists, and a part-time admin assistant. And we also run the centre with the help of a group of around 25 volunteers who are retired Partners who come in and help out in a variety of tasks.

HC: You call yourselves a heritage centre, how do you define heritage?

JF: Heritage as far as the John Lewis Partnership is concerned is corporate memory. We look after all of the things which help to identify our business in whatever form that might take. So, everything from your regulatory requirements, reports, accounts things like that, right the way through to our community archive work, looking after things like the snowman from the John Lewis advert, right the way through to the property deeds for the properties that are owned... And we look after those on a records management basis for our legal team who are based up in London.

HC: What would you say is the heritage of John Lewis?

JF: The heritage of John Lewis is... A nice way of describing our heritage I think, is up in everybody's loft they have a shoebox, and in that shoebox are lots of things that tell us about your past, how you've grown up, what you've done, your school records, maybe your first pair of football boots, whatever that happens to be. Now you don't need to see those every day, which is why they are in the loft, but you do need to know they are there, because it helps you understand who you are, where you came from, and how you got to where you are now. And that is what I see as the role of our heritage, is just being able to signpost people with why we do things the way we do and where we come from. And that helps people to understand why we move in a certain direction and the changes that we make within the business can often be seen on a cyclical basis as things which have happened in the past and that helps Partners understand where they sit within the organisation.

HC: In terms of digitisation, you've been at John Lewis really from the point from the existence of the internet in the first place coming up at the end of the 1990s, what has been John Lewis' digitisation story in terms of the archive?

JF: We have never sought to digitise or have digitisation projects unlike most other businesses that I know. We have always chosen the path of simply digitising material - this is not born digital material obviously - but digitising material which people have asked us for, so it's been on an 'as and when we need to' basis. Because we can't apply for external funding, and initially if you think about ten years back, there was a lot of money available for digitisation projects, but because we're a business, we were never eligible for any of that funding. So that was one reason why we were never looking at that route. Another reason is that I was always quite fearful that putting material on to the internet or making it available in some other digital format would hinder us in our collecting policy. Because if we didn't know what people were looking at, it was very difficult to make sure that the collecting policy of the archive reflected what people would want to look at. So, although we do have a strong collections policy, that really does help to know what people want to look at, rather than allowing them simply to browse the collection online, which I think can be counter-productive. One of the things we were always aware of is that however good your catalogue might be, it's quite easy for people to misinterpret the information that is on the catalogue and would create a lot of work both for them and for us, which in fact wouldn't help them with the project they were working on. So, to require people to contact us and talk through their research before that happens really irons out that sort of duplicated or wasted effort. So, in many instances the digitisation projects that I've come across have in some cases been quite successful but in the majority of cases I would say leave a large amount of material which has cost a lot of money to digitise completely unused and a wasted resource. The additional problem with that of course now is as formats change the cost of initial digitisation needs to be added to the option you have to make sure you keep those systems up to date and able to be read. So, you then compound your digitisation costs by requiring a proper digital preservation policy and systems that will allow you to do that and the different systems need to be upgraded.

HC: You've said you digitise as and when, can you give me some examples of what has ended up going online and whether you've kept it there or whether it's come down again after projects have been finished?

JF: If you're looking on the internet, the only things which we have on the internet are our community archives. That has been because as a private business archive we want to maintain control over our collection. Again, we want to know what people want to use our images or documents for and when we digitise them and put them on the internet we lose that control. However, we do appreciate there are people who want to know about the history of John Lewis usually from a less formal viewpoint and we've found the community archives allow us to put up information and images around different aspects of the business without compromising the main and valuable collections that we hold.

HC: So tell me a bit more about this community archive - who digitises it, how it is digitised and what are you digitising?

JF: We started up quite a long time ago - about 2009 - with our first community archive project which was more of an educational resource. It was set up for Key Stages 2 and 3 it was called The Memory Store and we organised that with... in collaboration with some educational providers who helped us create a website which could be used by school children and looked at the history of John Lewis through its merchandise and gave some activities for the teachers and people like that to use. From that we then realised that when we were coming up to the 100th anniversary of Waitrose that it would be an opportunity to maybe develop a community archive, to look in more detail at specific branches. Obviously, we have just one Heritage Centre and three-and-a-half people so to try and cover the three hundred Waitrose branches and to talk about the ones that are no longer open would have been too much of a task. So, we, in line with what was going on in the business, tried to handover responsibility for a lot more of the - not just the heritage but throughout the business

we're trying to give Partners more responsibility for their own business. So, what we did was set up the community archive, the Waitrose Memory Store, to allow Partners to add their own memories, photographs and information on their own branch to try and build that into a much more comprehensive history of each branch. We had some money from Waitrose and it was part of the project to celebrate their centenary, we recruited a group of volunteers and they uploaded all of the information and photographs which were held in the archive relating to every branch. But from that time onwards that relied on people from the branches and to some extent on our volunteers to add information as and when that has come up. So that's now quite a comprehensive resource for Waitrose. And when we had the John Lewis 150-year anniversary a couple of years ago we then set up the John Lewis version as well. So, we wanted then to cover the two major divisions of the business and then to over-arch that because there are other parts of the business which don't fall into the John Lewis or Waitrose divisions we set up the John Lewis Partnership Memory Store which is sort of an over-arching website from which you can access the other two and which contains things which wouldn't normally sit within either John Lewis or Waitrose.

So those three websites combined are our digital presence on the internet. We also contributed a lot to all of the work that was being done by the business to celebrate particularly the John Lewis 150th Anniversary. So, for instance their online shopping sites there were references to various things that they wanted to cover, so we simply took images and information from our archive and sent them in digital format over to the relevant department within the business. So, they were responsible for that, the content came from us, but they actually performed the digitisation or getting it from an electronic format we sent actually on to the web. We aren't interested in putting our catalogues online at the moment because we don't feel they are in a particularly easily understood format. We also think that that sort of work will probably come out of a long-term project and what we're trying to do here is consolidate our databases and if we're going to do that there is no point in putting one database on there and then having to change it all and consolidate it with the others. So perhaps in the long term we will but at the moment we have no plans to digitise anything in the form of catalogues or individual documents.

HC: In terms of what is on your community archive how do you rate the quality of that because presumably you're not curating it, you're just letting it happen. Is there any interaction at all between heritage professionals or are you just letting staff do their thing?

JF: The website is curated in as much as anybody can log-on and upload information or images on to it. But then it comes to us to edit it, so do have overall editorial control over it so if we know anything is not accurate or unsuitable for publication then it won't get through. So, there is a degree of security around that, and that was something we were quite keen to make sure of right from the word go. But as far as that's concerned we've found it absolutely invaluable to fill in gaps that we couldn't otherwise find. And to make the archive that much more accessible to people who can't get to the Heritage Centre because obviously we stretch right the way down from Truro right the way up to Aberdeen - so it would be very difficult for those people to have access any other way.

HC: In terms of the reasons for not digitising I've written down what I've sort of guessed they could be. Could you talk a little bit about each one and maybe sort of rate the Top Three for me? So the ones I've written down, number one, cost; number two, time; number three, expertise or IT skills; number four, fear of obsolescence; number five, lack of political will which doesn't really mean politics but kind of company, overall company will; number six, privacy or copyright issues; and seven, any other thing I haven't thought of.

JF: Well I think you've got them all in absolutely the right order. By cost, the main issue as far as we're concerned is cost equals resources, and with a small team there is no... it's not a priority and therefore because we have, we want to spend our money on other things, digitisation is a very low priority. Also demand, I mean we don't have a big demand, perhaps we have maybe half-a-dozen people in a year would ask us for our catalogue, a view of our catalogue. And to be honest it's not worth the cost of doing it just for half-a-dozen people. Whether that is, we haven't got it therefore they don't think about it, is another matter, maybe the demand is there but we have never been

approached by more than half-a-dozen people. Cost is a factor in as much as I mentioned earlier business archives are very unlikely to attract external funding. The time, moving on to time, the time involved in putting forward a case either to an external funding body or to the business and the possibility of the return on that is so low that it really isn't worth considering. Time is certainly a huge issue, again with the limited resources, there are other things we'd rather spend our time on. And I think if you do digitise in a big way, that can create more demand, and one of the things we're always keen on here is to maintain a very high quality service and I fear that the time it would take would mean that we have to reduce the level of service we offer and I'm not prepared to do that. I would rather have fewer people and serve them well, rather than lots of people who don't get what they want and then that's a reputation risk that I don't want to consider. So that's as far as time is concerned. Expertise and IT skills, I think there are enough IT skills and expertise in the sector not to worry about that. I think that the systems themselves are quite easy to understand and operate and I don't foresee that as being an issue. Even our volunteers are computer literate and would be able to pick up the system if we showed it to them. So as far as expertise is concerned, it's more the selection of material that would be of concern rather than physical putting that material onto some sort of system. But we have to build into that the fact that any digital system which would sit on our servers or anything to do with a Partnership system would need a considerable amount of IT input from our own internal IT team who are under a lot of pressure and wouldn't see something like that as a high priority. So, again, it's down to resource, I wouldn't feel happy persuading our IT department to spend their time doing something which isn't of a high business priority or would have a huge impact on us as a team here at the Heritage Centre.

A lack of political will? Yes, there is no political will for us to do that, within the business people are very happy in the main for the service they receive from us and there has been no - apart from maybe one or two incidences of people saying "It's a shame there isn't more material online" - but they say it's a shame it's not "Why is this not on there?" And unless that changes I don't think there would be any need to go down that route. Certainly, the only issue we have which is obviously the biggest issue around, which is the preservation of born digital records will change the nature of the whole thing. We are in the same boat as 90% of other businesses at the moment who are in the process of looking at what systems to use to retain our electronic documents. And I think from that will come a system which will enable us to make a lot more of our catalogues available online - not necessarily the individual documents and we would also have to be very concerned about the levels of authority that would be required to access documents online anyway.

Privacy and copyright comes into that of course. Again, we like to maintain control of our collections, we don't have to show anybody anything, we aren't as in the case of some other businesses, we don't hold public records therefore it's down to us to choose whether we show anybody anything. And our digitisation happens when we have agreed that something can be made available, and we wouldn't do that regularly or at all without careful consideration on a case-by-case basis.

HC: You didn't mention fear of obsolescence, you did talk about it a little bit earlier.

JF: Yeah, fear of obsolescence comes in... Well, because we don't have many records online anyway, the fear of obsolescence and upgrading system really doesn't come into it. If we had spent a lot of money digitising big collections - like someone like BT for instance - then obviously the need to introduce some sort of electronic documents records management system would be of a higher priority. We can't list that on our top ten reasons for why we want digital preservation, because there isn't that amount there. Our systems at the moment are all held on the Partnership's own servers and would be upgraded as part of that package. And we have stuff in very few formats, all of which are very well known and easily understood and would not cause a problem if we needed to upgrade them.

HC: If you could wave a magic wand and have all the time and staff at your disposal is there more perhaps that you would do? And if so, what would you do?

JF: If time and effort was no problem, first of all we would set up our digital preservation, so we would have a system which then collects all of those documents into one place. What I would like to

do is to be able to amalgamate our existing databases into that. If that was the case and we had that set up, then the next thing would be to make our catalogue available online. However, given the amount of material that we have in documentary sources in the archive, I can't see that ever being the case because probably 70% of that material would never be requested so it wouldn't really be worth doing. I mean if you look at one small part of the archive collection we have 39,396 of John Spedan Lewis's memoranda which were all typewritten and kept and now form part of the collection. That collection is used... Probably we go into that once every fortnight to look something up, and that's still on index cards, that's not even on our database. Now it would be lovely to be able to show everybody all of those documents, but the amount of sifting we would need to do before that could happen is really quite problematic, particularly because one of the issues around making things available on the internet is that quite often you lose the context behind those documents. So, we might have something which is of great importance to the business, something that Spedan Lewis said in 1943 or something in the middle of the Second World War which might relate to, I don't know, as he called them, as they were known then as "aliens". He might have written something - I'm not saying that he did - but he may have written something about people coming into the country and about whether or not they should be employed. Now, if you take that out of context, that could present a huge reputational risk to the business. However, in the context of the time, and in the context of the other things he might also have written around that time, there is probably a perfectly good reason why he wrote what he did. And one of the great problems with digitisation is you remove that context, and if you've removed that context then it's open to misinterpretation, and I think that's one of the biggest problems with digitisation of records is that people pick and choose small snippets, soundbites, whatever, out of a much longer and more complicated picture and they can misinterpret that in such a way that could be detrimental to the business. And that's one of the major reasons why I feel that people have gone into digitisation as a way of democratising information but in fact it has... a lot of problems... around the fact that people can misinterpret that information and not use it in the way that it was intended. That for me is a great drawback for digitisation.

HC: In terms of who you are digitising for, to what extent is what you're putting online in your fantasy world for Partners and to what extent for the public? Your fears seem to be around public but if you could do more for Partners and just do it in that world, would that be worthwhile?

JF: Once you make anything available on any electronic format it is extremely difficult to stop it going from one place to another. Once you have opened that Pandora's Box who knows who will find it and who will use it. So, I think... There are obviously ways of restricting access, however again that is a very time-consuming part of the whole process. I don't have any fears that the majority of Partners who would be wanting to look at material wouldn't use it in the correct way. However, there are always opportunities for mischief-makers to take things and use them in a different way. In no way would I ever restrict what people see, and I'm quite happy if somebody asks for a specific document to scan that and send it to them. However, I need to know what they want to use it for and I think that's perfectly reasonable. I don't think that there's anybody who is doing worthwhile and authentic research would have any problem in describing why they want to use something. If they do, then I think that's a bit of a shame because I think there is something quite wrong there. We treat our academic researchers with a great deal of respect, they are allowed to see whatever they like, because the understanding of academic research is that the material is used in context, and it is not in any academic's interest to misuse archive material - because they'll get found out sooner or later. And they probably wouldn't come back to an archive again if they do that. And they wouldn't be much good as academic researchers either. So, from that point of view we aren't afraid to show anybody anything in whatever format they want to see it. However, to undertake a full blown digitisation project to make it available to anybody, I think many people have come to regret the fact that they've done it, so I would be very hesitant to do that.

HC: Thank you.

Richard Martin
Royal College of Music Museum
3rd March 2017

Helen Casey: HC

Richard Martin: RM

HC: Okay, so first of all, so that I know who you are, could you introduce yourself for me, and tell me what your job is?

RM: Sure. My name's Richard Martin and I'm the Digitisation and Documentation Officer for the Royal College of Music Museum. So, I'm responsible for implementing the digital strategy for the museum, digitising objects in the collections, storing and managing images, documentation, metadata and records using our collections management software, taking photographs and arranging for audio and video recordings to be made, liaising with various departments relating to the museum's digital projects, facilitating public awareness of our digital resources, overseeing digitisation work undertaken by volunteers and in terms of placement students and the like, and assisting colleagues in reusing the digital materials that we create and supporting the long-term preservation and sustainability of those materials that we digitise.

HC: Tell me what kind of collection that you have.

RM: So the foundation of the museum collection is really its musical instruments, the origins of that lie in the donation of the Donaldson Collection of instruments, which came to us way back in 1894. Since then, that area of the collection has grown to about 1,000 historical instruments and related items. We hold some very unique items in that area including the earliest surviving string keyboard instrument and the earliest surviving guitar. And, a collection of rare 16th and 17th century viols which are still in playable condition. And about 3 or 4 years ago the iconography collections of the college were also transferred to the museum's holdings, which features over 100 paintings and thousands of engravings, prints, photographs and other bits of ephemera which we now look after.

HC: Fantastic. Tell me a little bit about your background and has heritage been a part of that? Or, have you come from somewhere else, a more digital background?

RM: My background is more digital than heritage. It primarily comes through my education where I studied music in terms of the collections here, but I was then involved with publishing for a number of years, working on medical and music psychology lists, but my job involved a lot of work with digital projects, a good deal of data engineering, some archival work, image management and understanding of image technology and metadata, all of which transferred into the new role.

HC: How would you define heritage for the purposes of what you do with your collection?

RM: For us it's the things that we recognise as having a historical or cultural value which we then want to conserve, research, interpret and to help understand the heritage of our collections and of the college.

HC: And what do you see as the heritage of the museum. What is it that you are preserving?

RM: I guess heritage is a big part of the college as a whole because students are told about historical performance here and the history of music, the RCM itself has an important place in international heritage, both in terms of the area that we're in in London, the Albertopolis areas of Kensington and through the many talented musicians who've come through the doors of the college, and a large part of our museum work is to support the RCM's activities through our collections and the interpretation of that and to preserve the institutional memory of the college. So I think that's the biggest part of our heritage.

HC: Okay, this is part 2 of the recording. We've moved somewhere a bit quieter because of the building work that's going on here. Can you talk me through your history in terms of digitisation, perhaps not here, but in other places that you've been before you came here?

RM: Good question. Previous examples in publishing would have been receiving materials from authors of images to be used in books, so they would be digitised, to the kind of highest resolution, we'd keep a master copy, we'd assign metadata to it so we knew what it was, and where it came from, or what it was meant to be, and where it was meant to go, and we'd keep a master copy, we'd also create digital surrogates where necessary for online use and we also did audio and video recordings occasionally, so we'd have videos of various procedures that authors might have sent, again we'd keep a master copy and convert as necessary for various outputs like DVD or online reuse. That's the main one really.

HC: So, what about here? You've obviously got a big digitisation project underway. Can you talk me through how it came about and what the thinking was about what it was you were trying to do?

RM: Yeah, so really, one of the main justifications for starting it was the closure of the museum, so that we would have access to the materials. Once we were closed, we couldn't actually physically get to the objects and the space. So really, the cataloguing and digitisation in our actual collections management system has been done from scratch, from when I started. Before I arrived, our museum assistant put together lists of available information about each object and where to find that information, and from there we kind of built up information in our CMS, our collections management system to Spectrum standards. And then, as I was finding other information in various paper and digital formats, I was bringing that into that collections management system where required. The musical instruments, which are a core of our collection, we were quite fortunate because we were able to scan existing photographs. Negatives that had been taken previously were available, and they'd been taken from previous catalogue publications for example. And that helped reduce the need to handle the instruments. And also, conservation information was sometimes limited about them as well, so we don't really know whether we could handle them properly. But we did purchase a new DSLR and various lenses, studio lighting, backdrop, colour patches for calibration of images, but we had to limit photography to times when the museum was closed, because that was the only available space that we had to set up kind of a mobile studio, so to kind of maximise the efficiency of photographing them, we organised them by size and type of instrument, to ensure a quick changeover so we didn't have to keep changing the camera set-up. In terms of the other parts of the collection, our portraits have been relatively simple to do as they'd been previously digitised to the Public Catalogue Foundation, so the method there was, kind of, ensure our information, metadata, was up-to-date. Really, the most pertinent experience was the sheer volume of materials that we had to get through because most of it was paper and various dossiers and bringing that information together into our collections management system and scanning it all was the most time-consuming aspect really.

HC: Was there ever a conversation about a plan to put this out publicly so that everybody can see it, and if so, how have you made decisions around that?

RM: Yes, so, in terms of creating our master digital copies of everything, the idea was always to create derivatives that we could reuse for online purposes. That's kind of taken a couple of, been taken in a couple of different directions. We've got an online collections catalogue coming soon that we've been working with a supplier to build. And we also have a relationship with Google Arts and Culture, formally known as Google Cultural Institute, which came about through our marketing department, and we've put a number of collections items on there, kind of highlight objects as it were, and virtual exhibitions which people can explore.

HC: How do you think what you've put online represents your brand and how do you, have you had a conversation about that officially, or have you just picked things that you like?

RM: Well, we do tend to highlight our star objects. So, you know, the guitar, the clavicytherium, the portraits that I've mentioned before, in terms of what we present, it's generally a conversation between the museum team, the curator and myself, and what we want to present, why we want to present it, is there any particular topic that's very pertinent at the moment, a composer's anniversary, or an event that we can tie collections items into? That sort of thing.

HC: And, is there any message aside from putting out interesting things about what you have? Is there an overriding aim of bringing more people in?

RM: Yeah, well, I mean the aim really at the moment is to make sure people are still aware that we exist as a museum despite being closed. So, that people can still access the collections items virtually, and by tying these objects into various activities, people can see what we're doing, because we're going to be having pop-up exhibitions and things while we're closed. And just to keep that awareness going until we reopen again.

HC: In terms of influences to digitise, you've said that closing the museum was the main push towards that. How did you reach your funding decisions, where did the money come from and how did you decide what to do with it?

RM: So, the initial funding came from the RCM itself, basically the need to ensure stuff was available while we were closed and the need to ensure we fulfil museum accreditation standards meant that appointing this role and making sure that everything was documentation in a collections management system to existing standards became a necessity, basically. We were really happy that we've received support from the Heritage Lottery Fund recently, to support the redevelopment of the museum and part of this funding will go towards cataloguing and digitising the iconography collections, which are the other big chunk of work that we need to do.

HC: When you're talking about online visitors looking at your collections online, do they count in any way as real people, or do you still need to have people through the door when you're open again – are virtual visitors as important as real ones?

RM: Yeah, they are while we're closed. I mean, I do maintain that I think the physical experience of visiting a museum is preferable and better, it's a more fulfilling experience for people. But I think by providing the right information to virtual visitors, you can make it easier for them to find things that they're interested in, lead them to new avenues. People aren't always going to be able to visit the museum physically, but that shouldn't stop them from having access to the collections. So, yeah, that's it really.

HC: In terms of what you haven't digitised, have decisions been made there, and I've put together a list of the reasons why you might not digitise. If you can have a look and tell me if any of those have, sort of, been to the fore, and if so, which ones and why?

RM: Yeah, I mean, we've not really made any decisions not to digitise anything as yet, but that's likely to come about as we explore the iconography collections further and we catalogue them, find out a bit more about what we have in there. We've already prioritised a number of materials based on their perceived potential for research and interpretation but I think if we find duplicates of things, then we might not choose to digitise those. We'll have to see what we find. In terms of reasons not to digitise, time is the main one, it can be quite a time-consuming process, it can be repetitive, but I think identifying important areas of your collection for research and development help mitigate against that, you know, it's not necessary to digitise everything I don't think, just find the stuff that is the most interesting to prioritise, plan how you'll do it, who'll do it and how you'll present the results within the time restraints you have. Expertise and IT skills are important to have. Digitisation doesn't have to be a complex process but it helps to understand how it fits into producing the outputs and the importance of creating and maintaining the good digital masters. But things can get really more complex with customisation of your collections management system, managing all your assets and preservation, getting it out there. The equipment can cost a lot, so having the funding in

place is important, but a solution can usually be found, you don't necessarily have to have the £20,000 camera. A decent DSLR can work perfectly well. In terms of lack of political will, I think this can usually be overcome by presenting the benefits to visitors and researchers to your senior management. We're very happy and lucky that we've had good political will here at the RCM. Privacy or copyright, that's an interesting one – generally our collections, we don't have any issues with that because a lot of our stuff is so old, so we'll probably stumble upon that issue when we get to our photography collections, but we're aware of the guidelines around copyright, so if you stick to that then you're usually fine. In terms of fear of obsolescence, digital preservation is a concern, but if you stick with well-documented and commonly-used open formats in terms of file formats, that usually helps against that.

HC: Great. I'm going to take another break. Okay, so this is part 3 of the recording. I did have one question from an earlier section, which I was just interested to know. When you've explained to me in the past your digitisation technique, you've talked about the colour thing, so that you make sure, the colour management, so that the colour is true, and you've used European standards to make sure that everything is the same in terms of image. But you're not digitising the sound of the instruments, is that correct?

RM: We are in some cases, some of the instruments are playable, but we're very fortunate in that we have our studios team here at the RCM who've been responsible for doing audio and video recordings of some of our instruments. So, we already have the experts on hand to, kind of, deal with all the necessary standards there. So, that's been very helpful. We have done recordings of our museum concerts before, for archive purposes, and we've used a similar set-up to what we're using today to record, you know, with a stereo recording, and again they've provided some advice on that and the results have been quite good. But those are more kind of records of events rather than a technical archive of the sound of the instrument itself.

HC: How much resistance has there been from a conservation point of view to actually using some of the things, you say some are playable, some are not playable. How is that decision made?

RM: We have a conservator who looked at the instruments. I mean, some of them have been well-maintained over many years, particularly the keyboard instruments, so they've been regularly tuned and looked after by both our internal piano workshop and external experts. Our conservator is reviewing the collection at the moment, and will be doing some conservation and restoration of certain instruments so that more of them are playable, and can be used for research in future as well.

HC: And do you see that if you do play them as a sort of digitisation process, do you see that as part of the conservation of it because if that exists, it doesn't need to be continually played for people?

RM: Yes, to an extent, yes. And, there's things that you can do with an instrument. You can play scales for example, if you play a piece that's historically relevant to the time the instrument was made, then that's helpful. So, it means, it might reduce the requests to play an instrument to an extent if you already have a digital record of it being played, yes.

HC: So let's go on to the next section, looking back. Obviously, being a very young thing, you weren't involved in heritage in the early days of the internet, because you were too young to be having a job back then. But do you remember around the turn of the millennium the excitement about everything that was going to happen, and can you remember what you would have thought would be online by now?

RM: I do remember starting to get access to the internet around that time, and being a consumer and the available digital materials round then were, like, these CD Rom resources like Microsoft Encarta, which had, you know, basically digital encyclopaedias, and did present images and audio and video and multimedia in that way, and I guess it became apparent as, kind of, communication technology advanced, that it would be possible for those sorts of methods to be transferred over to

the internet, and for it to be networked and explored and for all these things to be made, so for me, I guess that's where it became apparent.

HC: And do you, looking at what's online now, my feeling is that there isn't nearly as much, there was a lot of talk at the time about sharing of resources, about the democratisation of heritage, and it seems to me that's not happened. What's your feeling now that you are involved in a collection about why that might be the case?

RM: So I think organisations need to improve the kind of, their communication of what they've digitised and what they haven't digitised, because there is a tendency sometimes to put stuff online in an online catalogue for example, without making it clear that that isn't the whole collection. On the other hand, some of the bigger institutions have been really good at democratising their content, the Rijksmuseum in the Netherlands provide free access to everything and they've really truly integrated their collections search into their website with excellent results. But I think there's a gap between those larger institutions and the smaller institutions where it requires, you know, good technical expertise and the funding to achieve a similar goal. Whether that gap will ever be closed, I'm not sure, but hopefully it will.

HC: Would you have any advice for smaller collections about whether to go ahead and how to go ahead, and how to keep costs down, because now that you're in the midst of doing a digitisation, you've said it doesn't have to cost that much. Do you think that cost is the only reason and the, sort of, IT fear?

RM: Sort of. It's just available resources as well, you know, you do have to have the person doing the work, the volunteers with the required knowledge might not necessarily be available. If you are a smaller museum you might not just have the time or the money to do it. You might just be, you know, your main focus might be on where your next bit of funding is coming from for example. You know, with various cuts that have been happening, you know, to local authorities for example, you know, museums have to prioritise differently, really.

HC: The other side of the coin in terms of what the predictions were around the millennium, which is what I'm looking at, is that we could be losing control of collections – curators would put things out and if people can curate their own collections online, then what happens to the expertise of the curator? How do you feel about that in terms of where you sit and the expertise of this organisation?

RM: We're lucky that we have a curator who's very, very knowledgeable, particularly about musical instruments and a whole group of faculty here, and researchers that we can refer to as well if we need to. I think the key is to present the platforms as the reliable source as much as possible. I think it's fine to let people interpret their collections how they want to. One of the things that we've seen with our presence on Google Arts and Culture is people have made their own virtual exhibitions based on the items that we've presented. But what they tend to do is stay, use the information that's already there in the item information that we present, so they are reusing our information to create their own stories, their own narratives, and that's fantastic really.

HC: Okay, this is section four. So, what you can do if you can't look back too far, you certainly can look forward. What have you learned from the experience of digitisation if you were to look at going perhaps to a different institution, starting a digitisation project. What kind of things have you learned through the experience?

RM: Actually, I think really there's a very supportive community within the museum digital realm. Everyone is kind of looking at this area a lot at the moment, and they are thinking about how they might do it, and there's groups such as the Museums Computer Group who are great sources for advice and, you know, you can really get kind of a hive mind as it were, you know, advice, a critical but friendly eye on a digital approach or strategy. You can say to people, this is what we've got, you know, what do you think we could do? So, you know, my experience has been just to connect with

the museum community really and seek out their experiences, there's lots of standards out there which are available to be reused, find the ones that are relevant to your materials and use them.

HC: How did you go about doing that? How much research was done before anything actually happened?

RM: Quite a lot. In terms of photographing the musical instruments, we have the standards which were created by the Musical Instruments Online Group, which have been fantastic. It provides standards on which views to photograph the various different types of musical instruments with, so we were very fortunate in that respect. Again, we've been able to get advice from our studios in terms of audio and video and in terms of iconography, there's lots of existing metadata standards for images, it's very well documented, so we've kind of picked and chosen really.

HC: Looking forward, where do you see that digital technology will take the world of heritage in the years to come? Because, back then, a lot of the predictions made sort of 20 years ago really haven't come to pass, but things have sped up so much in the last few years. If you can cast your mind 20 years into the future, where do you see us?

RM: I think 3D scanning is the most immediate technical advance that's kind of, you know, starting to see outputs from that already. And it's interesting because it does provide new ways to analyse and interpret objects. And it should produce some really interesting research outputs, we're really excited to see what it might be able to do for our musical instruments for example. The key there though is access to the actual scanning equipment, which can be expensive. You need time on it and not many people have the equipment, basically. If augmented reality and virtual reality platforms become more accessible and more used by the public then I think there's really good scope for really immersive experiences there, so those are the two main areas really, for me.

HC: Okay, this is now part five. In your experience, the speed of change of technology, can you see this being an issue. I mean back in 1997, people weren't even sure what type of format to use to save an image. Things have really standardised out over the last 20 years. But can you see, again, another burst of change and if so, how do you think you'll cope with that?

RM: I think the drive to take advantage of the new technology is always there, I think the resources and training for museum professionals is already available, you know, the expertise that comes about from the research doesn't always transfer to the museum world. I think the key is collaboration, so there's initiatives such as Share Academy to help mitigate things like this, which we took advantage of, we collaborated with the Computer Science department at UCL to produce tablet-based audio guide which was navigated through Bluetooth beacons. There are digital seminars in conferences being run to share ideas and experiences. They're usually attended by, you know, both the bigger museums and the smaller museums. So, there's opportunities to share experiences there. Again, the online groups are happy to provide support and just taking advantage of any free or cheap training is really important. The Museum of London run an excellent museum development programme. Larger museums sharing their knowledge, because they tend to have the real innovators embedded in their teams, I think that's really the most useful thing to have.

HC: Does this essentially all come down to money in terms of the cost and the time to do this? And is it a collaboration really that can solve the issue of small collections not having that? Or is it more about will?

RM: I think it's probably a bit of all of those things really. It's kind of, the line is somewhere between the venn diagram is somewhere, the join is somewhere between all of that, and I'm not sure where, necessarily. The cost and the time, yes, are always going to be important, but having someone to guide you in the first instance and just say this is what you can do with what you have available, I think mapping the resources that you have to start off with is the first step. Then, see if you need to bring anything else or anyone else in, and have someone who's done it before just to give you their advice to say, you might be able to do this or that, that's the key really.

HC: Do you think there'll come a time where pretty much every object in every museum will be online, and if so, how far into the future is this perfect world going to be?

RM: I don't think everything will be online, I think there's just too much stuff, basically, and when you say 'everything', do you mean, a 2D image of everything, or are you going to 3D scan everything, or are you going to video everything, you know? So, but I think collections will get better at getting their really key objects online, they'll be able to punch above their weight in terms of impact a bit more, and target their audiences more efficiently. I think the collaborative platforms that are becoming available are really helping with that. For example, we put our portrait images of various sitars in our collections on the respective pages of Wikipedia, and now if you search for those people through Google, our portrait images are the first things that come up, you know, on the images on the panel for example. The aggregation projects, such as Art UK, or the Minim UK project, which I'm on, to produce an online catalogue of musical instruments in UK collections means that a flute in a village museum will be seen alongside a flute in the RCM collections for example, or the V and A. So I think drawing in those little bits of expertise from various points, for example on our project we have cataloguers going round to various collections photographing instruments for them and providing advice and a bit more knowledge about them, bringing in those segments all help bring those collections online.

HC: Do you think there's pressure for you and for others to monetise digital assets? Is there ever a conversation about 'but is any of this actually going to increase our revenue?'

RM: Yeah, so we do licence our images, the high-resolution images, through an image licencing partner that we have. But there's an interesting area here where, for national museums for example, since the Free Admission Act was enacted in about 2001, I think free access has become an expected cultural norm, for both the physical and the virtual realms, because museums are sharing things through social media as well, and if you share a surrogate of an image, people might say, well why can't I have the high-resolution one for free as well? And, if it's a national museum, people might be just fine in saying, you know, my taxes are going towards supporting this museum, so why can't I have this for free? And again, you know, the Rijksmuseum approach. At the same time, museums are applying their own expertise, they are paying to hire people who can provide their knowledge about those things, and they may well feel they're justified in monetising it because they've put the work in and the expertise to digitise. I think it depends, institution by institution, people just have to find what works for them. They may find that the effort of actually digitising and trying to monetise it just isn't worthwhile, basically.

HC: So this is part six. So, just finally, how much of this is about personalities, because a lot of what we were expecting to happen given the predictions back in the turn of the millennium, it was about sharing, democratisation, it was all about this wonderful free world of bringing heritage to everybody. In terms of your experience, have you found that lots of places are willing to share when you work with small museums who have interesting musical instruments? What is their thinking behind sharing and have you come up against any kind of resistance to freely sharing?

RM: Generally people have been very excited, I mean with the Minim UK project, people have been, you know, very happy that we want to come and photograph the instruments and, you know, with our joining agreement that collections sign up to with that, we say that we'll give you the high-res tifs to reuse, and the jpegs, and reuse them as you like, they're yours, you know, Minim UK doesn't own any copyright on it, we waived that to them. But, each collection has its own approach to copyright, and you do sometimes find some resistance in reusing their own images. In Minim UK, we'll only be sharing lower-resolution versions, so generally people have been happy to sign a public domain or creative commons agreement to reuse those. There is some resistance occasionally from collections, but when you explain the benefits and how you'll be using the images, people tend to be happy to allow reuse.

Fiona Courage
The Keep
11th May 2017

HC: Helen Casey
FC: Fiona Courage

FC: My name is Fiona Courage. I am Special Collections Manager and Curator of the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex

HC: Can you tell me a little bit about digitisation of collections... Who's responsible within the organisation for any kind of digitisation and how decisions are made about what goes online?

FC: Can you define what you mean by digitisation?

HC: I really mean putting things online. So that they can be seen... How do you define digitisation?

FC: Well, anything that is digitised whether it is accessible or not. So, there is digitisation in that people might request material that we digitise for them as a copy, you might see that as facsimile or a reprographic order, but we will see that as an opportunity to digitise that piece of that document, or that book or what-have-you. And at some point we hope in the not too distant future to be able to put that on to our catalogue so people will be able to download it readily. But we're working on those systems at the moment, hopefully we'll have that, you know I have programmes going on at the moment to digitise material that we will deliver that way. Hopefully within the next 12 months or so. But then there's a larger scale digitisation which is much more... Rather than being ad-hoc it would be a planned project digitisation and we've had several of those over the years as well. We've got one going on at the moment and we participated in a very large scale one which was to digitise the original part of the Mass Observation Archive with a commercial publisher.

HC: Why did you choose a commercial publisher when you did the Mass Observation online project? Was it the size of it?

FC: In part, I should also say that Mass Observation is a charitable trust in the care of the University. So, for a charitable trust it requires some form of income to be able to keep up its current project work and also just to continue looking after itself. And in order to do that... Sorry, not just to keep up the project but also to be able to invest in disseminating amongst not just academic users but with school children and at the moment we've got projects going on with prisoners, with homeless community, veterans... So, in order to be able to do all of that work Mass Observation wants to generate an income, and the opportunity came up with a publisher which we had worked with for a long time before - because they'd microfilmed Mass Observation archive to be their first digitised resource. And I guess, it was partly that but also because we knew we would never have the facilities to be able to digitise on that scale, to digitise potentially millions of pages, and to create a resource that could then be sustained in terms of usability that was of that scale. And also, it coincided with the time that I was finishing my Masters Thesis back in -when would that have been? - the early 2000s and that was actually on a pilot to digitise the Mass Observation archive.

HC: Did that work that you had done come in handy when the actual project went ahead because as you say it was their first digitisation project - how did you move forward in terms of making the decisions?

FC: I think it did come in very handy, more so now that I look back and have spoken to those original directors of the project who when we were celebrating, I think it's their best-selling resource at the moment. And we went to a celebration at one of their anniversaries and said "Do you remember that time that we sat in the staffroom at the university library and you were telling me about your project? And I thought, "Oh that sounds interesting..." and I don't think I realised how much that influenced them in terms of taking on-board which parts of the archive to tackle first... Because it was such a large-scale project it couldn't be done all at once, in part because it would be too big for them but also we couldn't afford for the archive to be gone for 18 months basically in terms of research - or however long it would have taken - research and the provision, the teaching that we do

using it, so it was done in a phased, in several phases, which I think took nearly 10 years altogether. So, to be able to advise them on what I believed was the best bits to start with, which would be for them the most profitable financially but also for researchers that would be most profitable was invaluable. Whether I needed to have done a Masters dissertation on digitisation I don't know, it may just have been my research knowledge of the collection that would have been more valuable. But it did mean I could talk to them at their level, I understood when they were talking about how to digitise stuff, I couldn't do that now it's gone over my head now!

HC: What was your original interest in that particular part of the archive and the digitisation of it? How did you get there?

FC: It's the part of the archive that we always used to use to introduce people to the archive because it was a very complex archive or is a very complex archive. And if we were telling anybody how to sort of dip their feet into it we would say start off with this particular section. So, you know, that was the easiest way to do it. And after it sort of made sense to do it section by section and then within sections to do it chronologically.

HC: In terms of your background leading up to that point, what sort of brought you to the archive field in the first place?

FC: Serendipity! I worked after graduating in the university, I needed a job, I worked in the library part-time, I was issuing books to students and eventually a job came up in Special Collections, an 18-month secondment, and I thought that sounds interesting and I was doing my Masters at the time so I wanted to buy time... I was interested in Virginia Woolf and I thought I'll take an 18-month job and 18 years later I'm still here!

HC: Looking back at the digitisation project that was done with a partner, the decisions to put it behind a paywall obviously you've explained, but can you talk through the challenges that you had, the decisions that had to be made and how you got through them? So, can you talk me through the digitisation process, how decisions were got to, who led the way and made decisions...

FC: Well, I mean we're very lucky, the relationship we have with this publisher and I think in fact in many ways it's that relationship that's made it something I can trust. Because I know them, I've known them for a long time, I know them individually. I think if I was working with a larger publisher or someone who I knew didn't... Because I know they listen to us, they think that the curatorial voice is very important which is something I believe in as well, and they take on board when they are redesigning, they take on board our feedback about the site... In a sense they still allow us ownership of that product. For that reason it makes it a lot easier to trust that relationship and I know that when I say something it will be listened to and appreciated and if they can't go with it then they will take it into consideration at least. So from that point of view those decisions were relatively easy to make in terms of going with that publisher. But the things that make it more difficult are essentially the kind of risk assessment. So particularly at the moment we are talking to them about publishing material that is being, that has been gathered over the last 30 years, rather than 70 years ago. And some of that material is still being submitted. So, people who are writing for Mass Observation at the moment we are going to have to write out to them and ask if they mind being digitised, because the proposal is to digitise that part of the project. And that's something that I have really struggled with... Not in a bad way, but you know I've given it a huge amount of consideration and I've had lots of backward and forward arguments with myself, and with colleagues, and with the publishers - who are very understanding of it I should say - about our ethical obligations towards writers who might be writing about their lives, in a very immediate sense and reflecting on their lives and making that digitally available albeit behind a paywall but still digitally available. So those decisions have been harder, very much having to take those ethical considerations into view. In terms of sort of the logic of what to digitise, and the order to digitise it in, I've already mentioned with the old one there was a very obvious one because we kind of followed the research process with that view of we'll, sort of, go with the easiest things to understand first and then by the time you get to the more complicated things you've already got the rest of the resource as a context to help understand it. But with other projects that we have, so at the moment we are doing a project to digitise our German-Jewish

archives, we've had to be driven by the amount of funding we have to do that work, and the kind of resource that we are hoping to create. And in the end, we went with this idea that it was easiest to create an educational resource that happened to have a lot of images that might be useful for research. Rather than to create a resource for research which required a corpus of material that we wouldn't be able to fulfil, I mean digitising the whole lot basically! And I'm kind of wary about being driven by research needs because very often a researcher only you know there may be only one or two researchers who require a specific section and the idea of doing that entire collection for something that might only be used a couple of times is you know, problematic. As I'm sure many of your subjects will have told you!

HC: So obviously funding has been an issue in terms of what you can do and what you choose to do, when you at - just going back to Mass Observation for a moment - you have put the things themselves online, you have scanned them, but not all of them, some of them have been transcribed for other projects and particularly with Nella Last she got transcribed for that but I don't think that's available online... Was there a decision made not to transcribe? Because it makes it non-searchable from the point of view that you literally have to go in and read everything?

FC: The idea of even trying to transcribe even Nella Last would be, it would take years especially for double-key entry, it would... it's not sustainable and until OCR is good enough to read handwriting and I've been waiting for that for 16 years... I don't think there is anything you can do from that point of view. The stuff that is on Mass Observation online - which I assume is what you are referring to - that has been transcribed, was actually OCR'd rather than transcribed. So those transcriptions - it's why if you look at them carefully, you'll realise they're sometimes a little bit odd, so there are spaces in the wrong places... We also a few years ago tried, we had a Hack Day for want of a better word, where we had several developers came in and started playing with some of that data and one of them thought they'd have a go at Sentiment Analysis and running that through their programs we realised that the OCR had produced a lot of symbols that I'd never even really noticed, but of course the human eye says "Well if it's an ampersand that probably means it was meant to be an E or something" and you just read that word. Whereas of course the machines couldn't do that, and that highlighted to me the issues about using that transcription, that OCR transcription. But it's better than nothing! Certainly, the diaries on Mass Observation online have only been indexed and that indexing took place by I think by one of the Adam Matthew personnel basically going through and pulling out keywords as they were flicking through the diaries. And if you think how many diaries there are that's never going to be comprehensive. So, yeah, we just wait on a day that there is OCR that you know can - not just handwriting but also wartime typing. That's something that's going to change obviously with the new project, where more and more material is being sent in as a word-processed document, or indeed as an electronic file. So that will open up a whole new world of search ability or us.

HC: If you had a magic wand and could wave it, would you literally digitise everything you have and have it all searchable? What would you do if had ultimate resources?

FC: With a magic wand yeah of course! It would make life so much easier for everybody wouldn't it! You know because then you would... there would be resources to be able to store it, regardless of if anybody ever looked at it or not! At the end of the day though, it's... Having said that, there's also a lot to be said about an original item isn't there? And you know we mustn't forget that digital does lose quite a considerable dimension of the object itself. And from that point of view I don't want to just sort of think about archives or documents as the information that they contain in the texts, or indeed in the photograph, but much more in terms of what else they can tell us.

HC: Just going back to heritage, how do you define heritage and what do you think is the heritage of this organisation?

FC: Blimey. That's a big one, isn't it? I don't actually know what I define heritage as, it's what I do! But interestingly one of the things that for many years as we were preparing The Keep we would have these constant discussions about whether it as a history centre, and I was very adamant that it couldn't ever be called a history centre and we couldn't have a strap line that said "900 years of

History” because actually the people who use us certainly the people from the University, the literature students, the anthropology students, the sociologists, and likewise we’re used by journalists, artists and it’s not just about “history”. And I think that’s a problem with “heritage” you know people start immediately thinking about history. So, I would... I don’t know I could be very glib and say I think heritage is what creates our cultural knowledge and our cultural beings... But then we get a bit “Baudelaire” don’t we? Let’s avoid that for now! So, from that point of view I think it’s a very broad term. In terms of the heritage, here at The Keep we do span so those different sorts of.. those different genres but equally I think we are quite unusual in that we’re not a record centre, so we’re not collecting active records, in a way other record centres might do that then becomes an archive... Like a business record centre or something like that... But what we are doing certainly for Mass Observation, and not so much with any of our literary authors because we’re not actually at the moment collecting a contemporary writer, but we could in theory be going back to somebody each year and collecting the next tranche of their writing or their artwork, or their photography. And indeed that’s what we do with Mass Observation, we collect most recent... So people are sending in material at the moment which will be archived and we have that then we can range all the way back to the earliest document of 1100s so from that point of view we’re looking at technologies for example that just sort of span millennia.

HC: So going back a little way we’ve got The Keep which is a purpose built archive. Tell me a bit about decisions which were made in terms of how it was planned out. You said you didn’t want it to be labelled with history - what do you want it to be labelled with and how have you designed it to work the way you want it to... Or not?

FC: Well I think interestingly -oooh I’ve never thought of that before - but actually we designed this building to be as accessible as possible, physically accessible so we worked with accessibility consultants, and as you come into the ground floor everything that’s public is on, there’s no step access required, the facilities and what have you. And funnily enough that’s - certainly for me - a huge driving factor in terms of this building is about allowing people to use archives that they may not have used before. So for example for the University we were on the top floor of the library, which was great for everybody on campus and it can be quite hard to get to come across the road to see us now, but it acted, you know the turnstiles to get into an academic library and in the academic library and perhaps even the campus itself was a barrier. Not for everybody but for a lot of people who wouldn’t consider coming in. Whereas being here we get many more people that might just wander in, that might be doing family history and suddenly stumble across some of our “academic” collections and think “That’s interesting” or “That’s relevant to what I’m doing” and they start looking. So we’re able to pick up on the serendipity of the collections and open their accessibility that way.

But also it’s very much designed about kind of attracting the audiences so the building itself we’ve purposefully put function rooms in that can be used for teaching, and seminars. You know we’ve got a public lecture on this evening about the Sussex Modernism Exhibition that was going on in London that we lent material to. So, it’s about bringing people in. Now I know that is my reason for being but I’ve also got colleagues particularly in East Sussex who would say “The point of the building is to protect documents, to look after the documents” so we have wonderful discussions shall we say about the balance of that and I think at the end of the day that’s such an ontological belief what we’re here for that it’s something that everyone holds quite personally but I certainly know that I tend to employ people who want the documents to be used.

HC: In terms of digitisation, wanting to be seen and wanting to be used, how has that filtered out into decisions over what you have and haven’t digitised and how you’ve used those online?

FC: I think we would go for things we think would have as wide, as broad appeal as possible. It’s really important for me to think that young people can benefit from what we would digitise. I don’t know actually that’s quite a difficult one because the other thing is that where people have just ordered stuff I would still make that available too. But if you said to me “What would you use?” I think in some ways I might actually go for the stuff as well that is the most valuable, not because it’s

necessarily intellectually valuable, but because it would make it a lot easier to look after! So, if we just put Virginia Woolf's original letters to Leonard Woolf out digitally, people can use them, and then we don't ever have to worry about getting the real thing out. I mean we would still get it out because I think again it's the power of the object... I wouldn't want to be driven by financial value, but I think there is a benefit in doing that and fragility of course as well. But again I think there is very little that is so fragile that it can't be used with care - so if there is something I knew was going to come out regularly... there might be, I don't know, a document that we find is really useful when working with school children for example, and what I don't want to do is deny the school children that physical encounter with the archive because that's what they'll remember. They won't remember a digital encounter they'll remember the time they came in saw that really old book and were allowed to touch it and they'd never been allowed to touch anything like that before. So, it's about getting that balance between saying "Well there's a book you can touch and here's one that's really interesting but it's really fragile, so you can have a look online" if that makes sense.

HC: Do you think putting stuff online, do you think it loses something? I mean with the bits that I've read, you do need to see the handwritten part of it in order to kind of understand how they were feeling when they wrote it... But in terms of not being able to touch the physical books themselves are things being lost when things go online?

FC: This is interesting and I don't know if everyone would agree with me. I think researchers, academic researchers, unless for a very specific reason they want to look at the actual piece of paper, like they want to know the weight of it or... If something has been digitised properly and that means look on the Verso and I'm thinking about Virginia Woolf and how on the back of some of her handwritten material her fingerprints, her grubby fingerprints... and actually that's quite important I think because it does tell you how she physically works, so she's resting on that, she's writing on the other sheet. So, if it wasn't for that, if it's digitised properly and you're an academic researcher... I don't think it matters. I don't think you need the physical object, certainly the researchers I've spoken to would very happily just be able to sit in their office and know that they could productively use their time researching a broad range of material without having to have the travel time. Although I do know they like the travel as well! So, I think the actual physical contact is more important for those people who don't automatically understand the benefit of using heritage documents or collections. For the same reason that people understand going to a museum because you connect with an object, you see it, it's very visual, if you're lucky you might get to touch it but it's an object. And I don't think we should lose sight of the power of doing that with a physical document. I think I've lost the thread of what you're saying but I think that to me is the importance of the physical then is establishing an understanding and almost like an emotional contact with that object. And not everybody gets it. You know I've worked with schoolchildren that really don't get it and then other people just go "Oh my god" and you know that it will change their attitude, it won't change their life but change their attitude, because they understand their responsibility and their ownership towards it because it's part of their heritage.

HC: When you put things online do you... Tell me about the decision about interpretation. What have you done to give some context to things? Have you added things? Have you written about them and put those online? What's been the decision?

FC: I haven't to be honest - I get other people to do that! What is it that I'm instructing them to do? To give context certainly... I mean with Mass Observation online that was quite an interesting one because it's very much put on there as a corpus so it's the volume of material that's there, and around it we have been consulted in terms of what essays we want on there or who we think will provide a really good introduction to that section. And then other material like I think they have interactive maps and timelines, those are... I hate to say the word gimmick but they're tools in a word. Tools that Adam Matthew developers have already developed so they put them on there because they are interesting and they do help and I know that people use them. In terms of projects that we have, or when we put digital material online, we put it on with very specific purpose. So I'm thinking here about a project we did, a JISC-funded project a few years ago called "Mass Observation

Communities Online” and we only digitised a small amount of material but that was to demonstrate the value of observation, keeping diaries and recording your community and what we put around that was the context of the purpose for doing that. So I think it was very much the purpose of the project and what we wanted people to use those collections - those digitised collections - for that drove the writing around it. But then another project that we did more recently which was called “Observing the 1980s” was about putting raw data out there and allowing people to just do their own interpretation and that was presented in a much more sort of almost basic way... That surround and around it were people’s blogs about how they were using that data rather than an instruction on how to use it.

Does that make sense? So I think the purpose that we are digitising for is what would drive how we decide what context we put around it.

HC: How do you feel what you have put online represents your organisation, and has that been planned or is that something that’s just happened organically?

FC: Ooh that’s an interesting one. Umm. At the moment I would say it’s organically in the sense that it’s driven by what funding opportunities there are. I think having said that it represents our organisation because we would only select those funding opportunities because they represent our values and our objectives and what our strategic plan is. So, access is very important in terms of that but also that the opportunity to provide as far as possible open access to materials hence the “Observing the 1980s”. Other part of question? In terms of representing the organisation. Well yes I’d have to say in terms of driven by values and objective but actually whether they represent the sum total of what we’ve got, no, really because I think people know me from Mass Observation and I have to remind them or say “Oh but actually I also look after all the other special collections.” And equally when I’m working with other people... So, at the moment I’m working with some academics about digitising some Virginia Woolf fragments and putting those on to our website, again within context... And they think I only work with Virginia Woolf! So, at the moment no, I don’t think it represents our organisation. I think in order to do that we need to take much more ownership of the digitisation so that we are driving it, and I think that’s going to be very much a long-term thing that as we are able to... If I could get funding to employ somebody permanently to do digitisation for me I would then start identifying different pockets and putting those essentially on to our catalogue. So that you find the catalogue record then you can click on the image and you can access that image. And that is what we’re aiming for in terms of the catalogue and making the system available but I don’t think I’m going to get the money to have a digitisation person doing that so it’s going to be much more ad-hoc.

HC: One of the previous people I’ve been to see has talked about putting their star attractions online and that seems to be something that is driving the digitisation. Do you that’s the case here? Do you have that in your mind that the is something that’s also going to promote us, bring more interest in, bring people in, and do you have the star things in your mind?

FC: I do but in some ways I think that’s a real kind of late 1990s, it’s kind of last decade, the idea of doing an exhibition or online gallery. I know that when we first got an electronic or a catalogue driven - public catalogue - as opposed to just sort of HTML word documents, that was one of the facilities on it, that you could do online exhibitions and I just find them a little bit... I’ve never looked at them. I just find... but I don’t actually want to look at Japanese prints, I want to look at your Caxton or something. So, from that point of view, no. I think we would be more likely to be driven in terms of large scale or larger scale digitisation driven by need and requirement rather than marketing.

HC: Good for you. Have decisions been made not to digitise and is that just driven by money or are there other reasons not to digitise?

FC: No, they haven’t been any conscious decision not to. I think the only time that would be - assuming that money was available - would be purely through... for legal reasons.

HC: Bringing on to that. I’ve got a list of seven things and they are reasons not to digitise. Can you go through them and sort of talk a little bit about how they might be reasons not to digitise?

FC: Cost is very fundamental. And of course, not just the cost of a person to do the digitisation but the upkeep of the equipment... But also, one of the biggest issues for us is storage and sustainability. You know we're working on a digital preservation system and process at the moment and just finding a buy-in from the institution to be able to support that is hard enough. So, the idea of spending - a bit like those New Opportunity Fund digitisation projects from the late 1990s, that you could spend thousands digitising thousands of images and then within 3 or 4 years they're just not usable any more. So that's a big issue.

Time is tied in for me with cost. If we had the money to have somebody then we would have the time to do it. Similarly, with expertise or IT skills I think. If I had the money I would be able to buy that in! We've certainly tried to develop our knowledge in-house and the way that I'm able to do that is to bring in people through funded projects. For example, our German-Jewish project at the moment we have been able to use that to develop our process of digitisation so our standards that we want to digitise to and are then experimenting with then how we do the displays and everything so that kind of expertise we bring in from that point of view. Fear of obsolescence is always in the back of the mind and I think we're much more... I'm less worried about that now than I would have been a few years ago, because I think we're much more conscious of it so we try to take... learn from lessons and make sure what we do is less likely to be.

Lack of political will I don't think is such a problem because there will always be researchers who want stuff on there. And not just researchers you know, the general public. The amount of times that my colleagues downstairs will get a phone call saying "I can't get the document. I'm on your catalogue and I'm clicking and nothing's happening..." and they're saying "Well you've actually got to come in." I think there's a public expectation now that if they know that a record is available they can access that record online. Which is ironic how quickly we've gone from the excitement of knowing that a record is available to expecting it to be available online. Privacy or copyright issues is probably the most... along with cost is the most likely to stop us, cause problems or indeed be the most protracted to deal with. And I think in many ways is the trump card because you can have the money, but you can't do anything with it. Not sure about 'other'. You've depressed me enough as it is!

HC: Well you've said you've never not digitised. There are people who don't digitise at all because they don't want to. And I think that's exactly opposite to your open approach and I think the open approach is the one I'm finding more often you'll be glad to know.

FC: But I think that's changing. I do think that's changing and that... If we'd had this conversation a few years ago I'd have gone "Yeah it's really good for some things but I'd want everything behind a paywall. I'd want everybody to sign a copyright declaration" and I still feel that, you know I still feel concerned for that, but a lot of the projects... The project we did with the JISC about Observing the 1980s, we had to go through this whole thing about writing to people and asking "Do you mind if your material from 30 years ago goes up online?" and they all said "Yeah that's fine." And it made me think I'm being overly cautious, on behalf of other people. I think you have to be but I'm trying to move into that open access frame of mind and a takedown policy rather than don't put up policy.

HC: That's really the point of where I'm coming from in that this kind of leads us into looking back. Back in the early days of the internet I remember the very late 90s, early 2000s there was a real sense in the academic world particularly that soon pretty much everything was going to be online and that was going to be wonderful because people would collaborate and, I just have a sense that it hasn't happened. And can you get a sense of why that might be the case?

FC: Interesting. I think it has happened to an extent, I think collaboration has been there but we're still talking about it - that's the collaboration! So rather than being able to flick a switch and suddenly we went from talking about it to enacting it. The system's advancing all the time and the talking has to keep up with those systems. So, you know a year or so ago I was lucky enough to be able to be included in some European discussions about sharing metadata - specifically on Holocaust resources actually - but that opened my eyes to how much work is going on in Europe, but equally how differently we're all doing things and that's just from the professional point of view of cataloging. So,

when you get into the concept of digitisation, and then you get into the whole thing about academic input into that, I think it's... 16 years isn't actually that long is it? The printed word has been around however many years... So why it hasn't happened is because we're still, still doing our everyday jobs as well. So that sort of... Those discussions that I was having about collaborating with professional colleagues are on top of what I do day-to-day and as a result that it just slows down the potential to drive that forward.

HC: Do you think digitisation is still seen as something that's nice to have rather than a necessity?

FC: Yeah. If you were to translate it into Maslow's triangle of need, yeah. I think at the bottom we're talking about storing the originals, we're talking about having enough public service staff to be able to provide access to those originals. Now, what would happen if I turned around and said 'okay, we're going to shut down the public service for 12 month and everyone is going to digitise and we're going to put the whole damn lot online. Your job now is just to write copy, and context and answer enquires online...?' I don't know, oh that would be interesting.

HC: What's your sense of how people would react to that?

FC: Well I know that the people downstairs wouldn't like that because what they love is interacting with the researchers, they love learning from the researchers... And the idea of replacing that with a virtual environment, which you could still work with the researchers in I think is... I don't think it's that far away to be honest. If you think that people now are holding their entire social lives via the internet rather than going out and meeting each other, maybe it's not that far away in terms of archive use. I've never actually thought of it that way though. I've never thought of it as closing, let's just shut down the book service and just digitise everything. It's just an example I think of where something like Europeana is an interesting one because that in theory was the model you were talking about in terms of collaboration, let's put all of our museum and gallery material out online and people can use it. And why is that not seen as collaborative? Why are we not seeing that actually that's the way to go? And I think people... I just get an impression that people feel a bit snotty about it, almost "Well that's just a showcase isn't it?" Maybe it goes back to that gallery thing, that online gallery, it's about that engagement process.

HC: Is it also about control?

FC: Oh, there's a lot of control in there and I think that is still existent definitely. I'm not going to mention the place but I've been having discussions with academic colleagues about digitising some material that we hold some of and part of it is held in another archive. And I was up for it "Yeah let's get it up there, it's out of copyright, we can put transcriptions next to it, people will be using it". It's part marketing, you know people know it's here but also it markets our availability to do projects and availability to engage. They said: "Yeah but the other ones won't countenance that" "How do you mean?" "Well they won't even let you through the door. They won't let you look at the original material, you can only look at photocopies and you have to have 3 letters saying that you can come in and look at those photocopies." So, I think there are still places that are existing like that, and that is about control and I don't understand what they're trying to control.

HC: I think there's partly a fear, because I think as a curator you have such an important role. If you put everything up online other people can do what they want with your stuff. And I can understand that as a human being but do you think that's a bad thing for heritage?

FC: Yes, I think it is. There would be no art if people didn't do that. There'd be no questioning, there'd be going back to Derrida that idea back to that idea of the archon, the power. The sanctity of the archive means that it becomes the Holy Bible and to me there lies the tyranny, dictatorships...

HC: Let's throw the story forward. Where do you think technology is going to take heritage specifically through digitisation in the next...

FC: Star Trek!

HC: You've looked back 16 years, look forward say another 20 years.

FC: OK well funnily enough with my colleague today - I manage a research fellow in Digital Humanities and he's based here at The Keep and he works for Sussex Humanities Lab and he's got an engineering and science background and we were looking today at these wonderful, sort of 3D

voiced animations he's done with the Old Bailey from the 1700s. We were talking about so what is it? Is it a tool? Is it a tool of engagement? Is it a tool of research? And I think just having that conversation immediately set me on fire about all these exciting things we can potentially do and I think that's where it lies, that technology is opening discussions with other experts, I don't want to say other technologies but other expertises, so working with informatics, working with linguists, working with... To think of new ways we can apply these technologies to our collections, to open more avenues for research, for engagement, for preservation, for usage.

And I think that's where I see in the next 16 years we're going to be... I don't think we're going to kind of be holographing everything, or bringing Virginia Woolf back to life but I think what we're going to do is revitalise her, by being able to analyse, by being able to... she's probably a bad example... but you know sort of being able to bring back these transcriptions of trials to life has made me realise how scary it must have been to be a poor person sitting in the Old Bailey accused of something in a way that I wouldn't necessarily get just through reading.

HC: But even in a more sort of prosaic way do you think your text will be able to be read by a computer in 20 years? It hasn't happened for 16 years so...

FC: I don't know. I genuinely don't know. I would have said yes, but then I'd have said that 16 years ago! So, I think technology doesn't move as quickly as we assume it will and... I don't know.

HC: In your experience how well has the heritage industry and your part in particular coped with the speed of change because things do change insanely fast but like you said not in the way we thought it was going to. So how has the industry that you've been in coped with the speed of change?

FC: Some parts of it have coped better than others. I think there's a lot of adoption, my sense is there's a lot of adoption, for example by museums, in terms of interactive tools that allow engagement but behind the scenes I'm not sure how much that's actually that technology has given us a leg up in terms of progressing and I think a lot of that is to do with the traditional, professional, sorry, the professional tradition shall we say, so this idea about sticking with an industry standard for a cataloging system for example. And when I say I want to throw that out the window to get something new and let's play around with that, let's give ourselves 3 years... People will say "Oh but everyone else is using the same so are you sure you want to?" And, I think from that point of view innovation is very much seen as a tool for a certain part of the sector to use. In terms of archives I often, sort of, think about... Years ago I read this thing by Manuel Castells when I was doing my Masters about where we all were in the information world, you know America was 10 years in front and France was 2 years behind and if we were zero hour and that sort of thing. And I've kind of always thought that about libraries and archives and museums that in some ways museums are sort of well in front in terms of technologies, but then they're sexy. Libraries are quite far behind and I think archives sit sort of somewhere in the middle of that because they're given freedom that libraries - public libraries - can't have... I'm not sure that's answered it..!

HC: Looking at what's online now how do you think heritage is represented overall? I mean I'm interested to see that some have done a lot and some have done nothing at all - it's a real mixture. So how do you think everything is represented and do you think that will change?

FC: I think it's patchy isn't it? I think there are some institutions that are just very happy they've finally got their catalogues up and sometimes they haven't got all of their catalogues up. And you get others like the Wellcome that are just kind of leaping forward and just like the British Library to some extent as well, their material. The British Library is an interesting one as an example isn't it? Because they had all the turning the pages stuff, and I have noticed they've got quite a lot of material online now but not as much as I would have expected them to, if I kind of thought 16 years on what they would have had there. So, I think it's patchy. Looking forward I'm not sure that will change, because I genuinely can't see where the money is going to come from to do these things. And even if equipment gets cheaper you still need people to do it, if you can get people to do it, we're being told we can use volunteers but volunteers actually need to be managed and also you need to manage the metadata and I'm not sure that is going to change. I don't think this is seen as a priority.

HC: And do you think that means that heritage organisations will inevitably fall behind places like Google who are trying to consume everything?

FC: I think they might fall IN to places like Google! I think that might be the other alternative, is that we start looking at commercial partners like Google. I mean the Internet Archive's a really interesting example of that as well, which is one that certainly academic colleagues of mine have just said "Look just digitise everything and stick it up there - it'll be fine! It'll get looked after..." And actually it might not be ideal but it... Maybe that is a good way of doing it. So if I've got material and I'm happy for it to be Open Access, I'll just digitise it. Indeed that's what the Wellcome have done and then they put it on to the Internet Archive they have the collections up there and eventually you can say that if enough people are doing it there's such a body you know... there's so much of it it's just going to live, it'll carry on it has to carry itself on, a kind of perpetualising? That's not a word... but (inaudible) like the rolling stone... So, I don't know, maybe we should all digitise everything and stick it on the Internet Archive if that would be the easiest thing to do!

HC: Do you think that would damage the curators role?

FC: Yeah, I think it would, but is that something I should be worrying about? Or am I just being a bit selfish by saying but you need me! I think the people that need me are the... I think people... There is help for interpretation and there is space for that but you know I always struggle with the concept of "gatekeeper" and in some ways I feel I am a gatekeeper because I'm there to try and protect the rights of the people whose material is here, against being exploited or used in ways they wouldn't want it to be used. But at the same time, I think what right have I got to be that gatekeeper? What makes me so special that I can make those decisions on their behalf? Or indeed on anybody else's behalf so... I'm pondering that one, not sure I'll ever get an answer.

HC: Just finally for your organisation is a virtual visitor worth as much as a real visitor? And is that something that could change?

FC: Increasingly, yes they are. And I think that's because our... It's happening across the board I believe, that the visitor numbers are going down and certainly in terms of my business reporting to my management teams I now have included performances indicators and indeed Key Performance Indicators that relate to the production of digital images and so the performance of digital visitors so we count those now as visits to our archive. And I think quite important perhaps in terms of the role of the curator there then you'd say well we have to have done something in order to deserve that visit. So, you know, maybe just sticking it out there on Google, how could we count that? We're still valid because the image is just on Google and anyone can use it and anyone can use it and it's got a life of it's own. So I think from that point of view yes we probably do have to make sure we're still working at it to give the "value-added" we call it the value-added that people can get.

HC: So if you could tell me the range of things you have in your collection - although I could probably look it up on the internet - but it's nice to hear it from you!

FC: Well within Special Collections we have... I'm trying to think, I don't know now, something like 6000 archive boxes of material but that might be a bit over, largely relating to the 20th and 21st century, social, political and literary figures. We have the Mass Observation Archive which is the largest collection of social survey organisation which started in 1937 and still collects material today. In terms of our star collections we have the Woolf and Leonard Woolf collections, Rudyard Kipling. We're just in the process of acquiring Richard Attenborough's papers. We've also got the New Statesman archive and Commonwealth papers so again kind of political and social strengths. We also have about three and half thousand rare books which is one of the things I should probably think more about in digitisation because there aren't any rights in many of those.

Rick Lawrence
Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery
31st August 2017

RL: Rick Lawrence

HC: Helen Casey

HC: If you could just introduce yourself for me?

RL: Yup. Hello, my name is Rick Lawrence, I'm Digital Media Officer at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter. So, I did a postgrad in Heritage Management, handily, at Extras Distance Learning. So, armed with a certificate in Heritage Management, I changed career. The first job that came up, coincidentally, was here, and I've been here nine years now. So, I'd always had a lifelong interest in heritage, particularly archaeology, prehistory, Iron Age, but also military history, and eighteenth and nineteenth century... History in general.

HC: How do you define heritage?

RL: Well, it was really interesting, and coincidentally, I've been discussing this with one of my collaborative PhD students, so, I ended up actually with something fairly distilled, but I'm going to cheat and have a look... And... I'm just trying to find the question on the list, now... Ah, yes: It really came out, I suppose, tangible and intangible heritage, so very much the objects, the material culture being the tangible, and the intangible being more the oral history, memories, perceptions even. Assumptions about the past are a form of heritage, I think, and I think something that's important to recognise about heritage, is we tend to think of it as a shared, public heritage a lot, you know, go to a National Trust house, go to a museum... But there's also very much a private heritage, as well, that sometimes we may come across if somebody publishes a personal archive, and also all the family stories that we accrue, through families, which are private heritage that overlap with public heritage. For example, the Somme: public heritage, personal heritage... My grandfather was gassed towards the end of the battle, I believe. So, yes, the past, in all its guises, would probably sum it up neatly.

HC: Is it- how is it different from history? Is there some sort of belonging?

RL: Yes, I think that's a very- that really is it. I think that's why the private heritage is important, rather than the public heritage, it's the "Ooh, I can connect to it." And history is very much more, I feel, shared documentation, creating an agreed memory of the past, whereas heritage is much more around the physicality of the past as well, and the private memory of the past, and joining that private memory to a more public narrative through place and through objects.

HC: Let's move on a little bit to digitisation. What's been your position here, in terms of the digitisation?

RL: Right, well... Digitisation at RAMM really started from a review in 2007, into overall ICT use within the museum, and basically, all we had was a collections database, and that was it. So, the – working with some consultants recommended by the Collections Trust, is agreed to create the role of Digital Media Officer, as a third person in this role. So, that was done, and part of that was to be very much about digitising the information around the objects in the collections, and making that available online, and also using it as a resource within the museum. So, that was very much where digitisation started, and to enable this, we used a collections management system called Adlib, which could put out a website, and very early on in the process, we took the decision of, shall we either just publish all of the data – and we've got 250,000 records for a million objects, so even for a smallish museum, that's a lot of data. But a lot of that had two issues with it: one, it would make sense to museum professionals; two, a lot of it hadn't actually been checked, and that's in terms of accuracy, whether even the fields were completed, or whether it would just almost literally be a name, "Coin of Edward the First," then everything else a gorgeous blank. So, we took the position that, with digitisation of objects, we'd provide interpretation as well, and this is very much so any of our visitors would be able to get a handle on what an object was. So, we agreed two things: one is that there would always be a plain English description of the object – "This is a hat, worn in this

place in these circumstances” – and there would be a photograph of it, as well, we aim- still try to do that as a bare minimum. And if you look at our collections website, you’ll see we’re still working on the photos. But- and the other thing that we agreed was, with this curated approach, we wouldn’t publish every field of an object, but we selected twenty-six fields that worked across the collections. And that way, for the casual visitor browsing through the database, they wouldn’t look at an object, then spend the rest of the afternoon scrolling down the screen, looking at fields which may have little interest to them. But we made sure, if somebody was a researcher, say, or simply wanted to know more, they could either comment on the record on the website, which’d then go to the curator, who could reply, or there’s a contact form, so there’s always a scope for people to ask and learn more. And that way we tried to make it easy to use, manageable to use, not: “My goodness, what a lot of stuff, I’ll go and do something else,” but also, people can- they were able to follow it up, and communicate with us, either publicly, through comments, or personally, through the contact-us form.

HC: What was the thinking behind the decisions that were made? What was the aim of putting this stuff online in the first place, making it readable for everyday folks? What was the whole aim?

RL: It was really to try and lift the lid on the store, in that classic way. Also, of course, where we’ve got stuff on display in the museum, we may have that classic, small, four-inch-square, little interpretation piece of paper, and there’s only so much you can say. So, it was really being able to put related objects on, and also, to do things like give us a web resource, so if we were talking about something, a new story, we could link to the objects, and could see, literally see what we were talking about. Instead of us just saying: “We’ve got a wonderful collection of clay lamps from the Romo- Hellenistic and Roman periods,” they could actually see what some of these look like. And it wasn’t something that looked like a standard lamp at all. They could actually see how they’re small objects that could be held in the palm of a hand. And so, it was very much about making visible that which would otherwise be sat in a box, and people would have to use their imagination to find out about.

HC: And in terms of your collection, what kind of collection do you hold, and how were decisions made about what to digitise?

RL: Well, that was always one of the great things about working here, is our collections are really diverse. We’ve got fine art, we’ve got decorative art, we’ve got costume, we’ve got archaeology, we’ve got ethnography, the World Cultures collection is a designated collection, we’ve got a huge range in natural history, the Slade collection is of national importance, our 24,000 snails are of international importance... So, we’ve got all of these things tucked around in the collections, and even though we focus on Devon and Exeter collecting now – we’ve got a firm collections policy – we still have all this other content that’s there as a resource, both for visitors and researchers, and it was really how we make sure we don’t overlook anything. And so, we do that classic thing: set curators targets, so in a redevelopment programme, from 2007 to 2010, it was “You will put this number of objects on, with a photograph.” We also provided all of the curatorial and collections team, and documentation team, which we then had, with training in taking photos of objects, so everybody had the skills, and also, we bought new equipment – as in, cameras and lighting – so they also had the means to do it well. And that meant, sort of, having to book a professional photographer, and it being a big- light budget, when curators are working on collections for exhibitions, for conservation, with a researcher, they could always enter the photography set up, take a photo, and then we could get that onto the website.

HC: In terms of budgets, digitisation is an expensive thing to do did you come across problems while you were doing- did you understand how much it was gonna cost, did anything take you by surprise while you were doing it?

RL: No, but it might have surprised some of my colleagues. No, because by coincidence, when I did my heritage postgrad, I was looking at digitisation projects, and the pitfalls in learning, and also, my volunteering with the National Trust was working with collections and object photography, so I had a good- I got my eye in early, as it were. But for a lot of colleagues, having digital as part of their way

of working was completely new. And this was something our management team were keen, that we develop a digital culture, where digital isn't something done by somebody because you commission them to do it, but it's part of the workflow, part of the job. And I'm really pleased to say, in the collections team, everybody really rose to this, and got on with it. And I think, though, because we had that redevelopment, that time away from exhibitions, that time away from the museum, that meant we had the time to start learning those new skills, to making them part of the team ethos. And really, without that time, I think we would've struggled, everybody saying "I can't do it now, I've got to do this." And it would be that classic thing of, once you start doing it, it might only be half an hour a week, but learning how to do it, those two or three days, never finding time, and also having the object photography training course really made people start thinking about it. Also, going from storing images on CDs and DVDs sculling around on windowsills to actually putting them on a server that got backed up, and managing on them, rather than just hoping you remember where you left the CD... That, again, made people think about it. We also got the main museum website going at that period, so people were writing about their collections for the website as well. So, it was various things, to build up and get people going, and make it part of their workflow. This meant by 2010 we could drop the targets, and now people just, as part- much as I said earlier, as part of their day-to-day work, they will record object information, take photos, and put it onto Collections Explorer, and we update it each month.

HC: So, in terms of how people access this, is it- does it come straight off the main website, or is it a separate thing?

RL: Because we started out, really, with our first website, it was really getting the key museum "visiting-us" type information out there. So, the original idea was, we'd have a collections website that you could also order prints from. And it didn't quite work for two reasons: one, the website wasn't very good anyway, in terms of usability; and also, the hosting our own print-online service really wasn't economically feasible. So, our Mark II version was much more a conventional website. Instead of using a collections data company we just used a software company that makes websites. So, they were able to take our data and just stick it in the website, and make it usable, and do what we needed so we could just use it, which was much, much better. And we could just put links in to buy prints on demand from Bridgeman, who, like many museums, we use so we can get a bit of income generation going. And that's really – again, we've reproduced that in the third version of our collections website – very much about trying to put usability first, make sure, if there's more than one image, it lightboxes, make sure people are gonna share the data, which we've still got links between, letting people set up their own collections... And generally trying to make sure, whatever you want to do, you can do it. So, there's an API if you want to pull data into another website, you know, if your area of expertise happens to be Roman armour fittings, you can pull those records through. And also, we did a, sort of, sub- piece of work, funded by Esmee Fairbairn, which we call the Research Collection, and this was simply looking across the collections, "What have we got in the store that researchers might use?" So, all the curators put up research collections to tempt researchers, we paraded it through social media, and through mail shots to universities, and we do a monthly research blog as well, to promote it, and invite people to get in touch with us. And that's worked really well, it's produced new research, we've had bits of the collections not seen before looked at by people, and raised awareness, so, yeah.

HC: In terms of the importance of visitors, are general Joe Bloggs of the public as important as researchers coming to do work in your collections? And how do you measure them, and do you report back on them, and how do you look at them?

RL: Yeah, we do. We really look at our visitors as a whole. We classify visitors using the audience agencies classifications as recommended by Arts Council England, because Arts Council England fund us as a narrow-end National- oh, God- Portfolio Organisation, we- and previously, we were a Major Partner Museum. So, we see all of our visitors as important, and very much part of the life of the museum and who we're here for. So, I mean, you know, we were created originally, and opened in 1868, to provide learning and information to the public of Exeter, very much in Prince Albert's ideas

with the V&A and so on, hence it was decided to make it the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, and we've got a statue of the man himself there. And from there, it evolved much more into the actual teaching, as well, and the University of Exeter started off here, until they moved from here in 1952, so not that long ago. And since then we've been very much classic regional museum collections, exhibitions and events and talks, and very much a collections-based museum. And when we were reopened, the Art Fund prize judges did say it's very much a curators' museum, from the way we manage to pull out something from right across the collections everywhere, and the courtyard display, in particular, being like a slice through the collections. So, yes, so all of our visitors, who vary greatly, from regular, local mums and dads and grandparents bringing in children, school parties, researchers from the universities, college students coming in to do sketching, family visitors coming for family activities, people just popping in for the day or the afternoon to see something... Yeah, we do value them all, as without them, you know, we're just gathering dust! So, yeah, we do- some activities will focus on specific audiences, but that's for a reason, related either to some benefit for that audience, to getting the collections more widely seen. So, we try and treat all our audiences equally, but at different times focus on different parts of our audiences, and we're trying to get to know them better at the moment, as well, hence using the Arts Council categories.

HC: Start again...

RL: Ok, so, the exciting table... Right, I really like this challenge, it's really neat and interesting, and I've had several goes at this, this is my final draft. Privacy and copyright issues I've put first, because if you get that wrong, it's reputationally damaging, and you have to remove things that people might be linking to, and that's really, really annoying for everybody. So, basically, everybody here is well aware of this in the collections team, and knows to check it. We did a review of one of our websites that was created in 2003, as part of an early e-government initiative, and we found on there, somebody just published stuff, and we had to get permission for some of it to actually stay on, so, yes, that was a very good object lesson for us. And, so, cost... Yeah, if you can't afford the staff to do it, you can't do it. If you can't afford the website, you can't do it. So, that's really the next thing. Time: making sure your staff have time to do the interpretation and to check the content's working, making sure people in my role have time to, again, make sure that everything's working, and to let people know it's there as well, promote it across social media and so on. Expertise or IT skills, that was something, again, I mentioned earlier about us having that closed period, was really good in helping people get to grips. And it's- one of the interesting things, is we've gone from a very bespoke museum system, which was quite challenging to learn how to use, to using WordPress, Open Source, free software that people have come across using on blogs, for projects, and all sorts of things. So, everybody finds it straightforward, and we just use our own collections management system for the actual data, which we just export. So, it's just, literally, put a tick in a box, put the data in, and bang, off it goes to the website, and that's as sophisticated as it gets. So, it's- yeah, but getting those skills in place, again, we had that opportunity, and it was really good. Lack of political will, people saying, "Ooh, we needn't do that..." Well, I've put that fairly low down now, because that's very much where we are. So, it really was the museum management team at the very beginning, in 2007, saying, "Look, we need to do more, commissioning the research," and I said, "Yes, you've got nothing you do need to do more," and then them leading on it. And now it's ingrained into our ways of working. It's really- it doesn't need that big push anymore, it's very much part of what we do. Fear of obsolescence: yeah, that's something we always do consider, but we try and keep everything really simple, by using HTML, by using common standards, JPGs for- and if we do use PDFs or documents, using then PDF or Microsoft documents. So, again, we try and keep to common standards, and keep an eye on anything changing, and try and cope with it that way. But we are aware, one day, something might happen, we might have to review, and convert everything. Other: put that as seven, because I couldn't think of anything else, by the time I'd gone through those, really!

HC: It's quite interesting to me, that you've picked privacy or copyright issues as number one, when it sounds like you're quite an open, sharing organisation - is it really important to get one right, in order to be able to do the other?

RL: Yes.

HC: And can you explain- have you come across any issues-

RL: Yes, yes, it is a constant challenge, because often, in exhibitions, they'll be mainly from our collection, but there will be items from other collections, and their copyright restrictions may be really strict. You know, you- sort of, almost to the level of, where you feel you're lucky to have actually got it there for people to see. And it is only by negotiating and agreeing what you can and cannot do, that you get to borrow objects. So, it's- when I say reputationally damaging, there's not just the page one in the local paper: "RAMM Distresses Owner of Painting," it's also much more, wherever we're borrowing from - whether it's a private collection, or the V&A, or the British Museum - it's that element of trust, that we'll do what we say, that we'll look after the work, both physically and in terms of access to it. And similarly, online, just publishing stuff for anybody to use, that could break the terms of copyright. And some of our work is still within copyright, that- even though it's been donated to the collections, that's the understanding: that the collection will remain with the previous owner, sometimes. So, we do need to make sure, if we're using it. And equally, sometimes, we will use loaned items, or images from other collections, to illustrate something in our collection, so it's making sure we've got the copyright there to do that. And also, because we like to link our objects up, where possible, to buy a print, or to use an image in a publication or a website... Again, knowing we've got the copyright clearance, to say to somebody, "You can do this, but we do charge." So, yeah, so it really is the starting point. If you can't share it with anybody, don't do it. You'll be in trouble legally, ethically, and so on.

HC: I guess that leads on to looking back, because the point of my whole thesis is really: "Why isn't everything online by now?" Because I'm looking back at predictions from around the year 2000 so if you can you cast your mind back to then, and the early days of the Internet, and what would you have been thinking would be the future of heritage online, at that time?

RL: Well, I'd expect to have had a screen on my jetpack to look at while I'd commute into work! It's very much- I would've expected a much larger volume to have been published by now. I was thinking back, when I was looking at this, I was thinking to- Nick Poole, former chief exec at the Collections Trust wrote a blog post, called: "Is it time to shoot the digitisation puppy, should we still be trying so hard to digitise things?" And it's really interesting when my paper came out the other year, seeing that, what's the digital activity? Digitisation, that, despite those expectations, seventeen years ago, of "Oh, this'll all be so straightforward, we can almost just put it in a digitisation hopper, and it'll just churn out." But actually, it is that time it takes, we still haven't cracked quick and easy ways. And it's really interesting, when you talk to the big players in the game, like the V&A, like Natural History Museum... The V&A have almost created a conveyor belt to digitise some of their objects, and even- but even with doing that, they're still crunching through slowly. And the NHM, really, they are- they've now published all their data, but we know, from working with them on specific projects, that a lot of it hasn't been sifted in any way, and it's really, really raw data. So, arguably, is it just useful to do that, or is it just, sort of, like, you know, floating a balloon and hoping somebody spots it? So, yeah, I think, the biggest thing is, really, that there is still that lack of volume, and the fact that we still are curating stuff, and we need to curate it, otherwise, really, it's such raw data. Unless you're a real specialist, you're going to look at it, and go: "Goodness me, that's nice gobbledygook!" And it's quite interesting- we worked with a lot of- twenty-three museums, on our HMS Challenger project. And looking at the state the data arrived in, and some of the problems they had exporting it from their own internal database - like Inverness Museum, their system was particularly odd in terms of what it exported - and in the end, we just took what they could provide, and actually separated it out into a spreadsheet. And it is still- we are still facing problems like this. A lot of our spectrum compliant museum collections management system providers still haven't put a bigger tick in the box that says: "Can you export data easily from this collections management system?" And it- they

are still not doing that, there's still odd things, like having their own version of XML, which doesn't work with the world standard, which has been around for years now. Also, metadata standards: why aren't we all using a metadata standard? And again, why didn't we agree this years ago? We've looked at metadata standards lately, because of trying to digitise our archives, and all the information around the objects we've got, and we ended up using the Lido standard. But we found most standards are very art-based, so art museums definitely lead the way, and is that just because there's lots of pictures and sculptures that look great on websites? But, yeah, really interesting, seeing how much- all the vocabularies, even, that both the Getty, and now Google, are looking at using. Again, very art-weighted, and as we've got collections across everything, trying to get these art vocabulary and thesauri to work with natural history collections was an experience, and much frowning over several days.

HC: Do you think that digitisation has revealed, in a way, that collections managers sometimes know very little about a lot of what they've got? Do you think that's something that's-

RL: Definitely. Yeah, oh gosh, it certainly has here. And this is really why we thought, we can't just publish everything, because that will be just, literally, publishing a series of question marks, almost, when with a bit of time, we could do something a hell of a sight better. And that's really why we went via very much looking at the broad swathe of visitors, you know, the general visitor who might be interested in what something is and knowing a bit more about it, and giving them the means to using their homework, their project, and if they're a researcher, do that as well. But, yes, it is a thing, we have so many objects. This is after we did a big collections review, as well. So, random things we had, like, some- I think it's some Spanish furniture, a collection of carrier bags, and somebody's Christmas cards from one year, recently, they were de-accessioned. But the same with doing the collections review, yeah, we still- it's made us much more aware of what we don't know, which is really the start of addressing this problem. But, yeah, so I'd say- and particularly, look at smaller museums and talk to the curators there. If they have a curator, there is so little that's known, and quite often, objects get research separated from their archives, as well. So, again, how you could even address putting things back in their context, well...

HC: In terms of democratisation, that's something, very much, that was talked about, as something that would happen naturally as this flow of information came out online. Do you think we're still very much at the beginning of that process? And if so, why aren't we getting anywhere?

RL: I think, yes, we are- I think we're getting better at it, because we're making the web-based resources much more user-friendly. We've now realised, if you do something that baffles everybody, it's a bad idea and won't get used much. And I think, basically, people putting Google analytics into websites and seeing, "Oh, only my Uncle Fred, who told me about this, has looked at it..." In fact, somebody- one of the London museums, when they first put their collections data online, it was only their mum looked at it, because he told her about it! You know, about the first week or so, and things- and then suddenly, it started getting seen. But yes, and again, this is why we took the interpretation route, so it was accessible to people, and it wasn't just, "Goodness, they've published all this stuff!" And really trying to make it engaging. And I think this is a key thing, is people expect to be able to engage, and not just look at something, anymore. It's no longer just, "Oh, we'll give you a window into the collections store." It is that they'd like to comment, they'd like to share it with friends, they want to know more. And it's enabling that engagement around the collections, as well. I think that's really where it does start getting more democratic, and not just the: "Here's a nice slideshow you can look at, or you can browse each one, one by one." I think, if we want people to actually access, use, and enjoy collections online, we need to really make it easy for them, as- why wouldn't we?

HC: In terms of interpretation, it seems to me there's quite a challenge, because one object can have several different interpretations, depending on where you're coming from. How have you, kind of, wrestled with that?

RL: Well, we tried to keep it really simple, to start with. So, our initial concept was: write for the web, plain English, no writing in terms that only curators and museum geeks would understand, really

make it- write for every man. This was great. And we had a word count, and generally felt quite happy, that we'd done something to help make it achievable in-house, with a word count and clear to the end user. However, we rapidly realised, just as you described, you can't really compress everything into 250 words, can you? So, we've now taken off the word count, so where there is multiple interpretations, where there is interesting, contentious interpretation, where there's simply a lot of interesting stuff to say, we can now do that. And it's not only curators work on this, but also our volunteers within the collections team, they contribute to the information that goes into the description field, as well, from the research they may be doing, and the work they've been doing, just checking and finding out. It may be as simple as just checking all the dates and everything are correctly filled in on an object, but also then find out something else about it, which can then go into the description. So, yeah, we are constantly reviewing, and every time we do a monthly update, we'll find some records do get updated, simply because we've found something new and interesting, so we ought to add it. So, yes, we are very much, sort of, growing that side of it. And our current aim is to enable- is to digitise all the archives around the objects, so correspondence, photographs, etcetera, etcetera, so that, again, will give a wider and deeper context to the object, and make that accessible, as well.

HC: In terms of... Looking back, I mean, I think we all thought there was going to be a lot more online now. Has it changed the way that you look forward, in terms of realising what's achievable, versus having this great idea of walk-through virtual reality galleries?

RL: I think definitely, there's nothing like experience to make you more pragmatic. And it's really looking for simpler solutions, looking... And we're- you know, the last seven or so years, we've been seeing budgets reducing, we've lost staff – makes me sound very careless, when we say that... But, yeah, everything has reduced, I mean, like I'm- my hours reduced from five days a week to four days... Yeah, so we're trying to still do as much with less, and struggling to make the balance there, which is- so, really, it is very much looking at what we can sustain, and if we are asked to do a project, which might be really exciting and have some really good bits, it's: how sustainable is that? As once we can give visitors maybe a one-off experience as part of the project, that's it, and is that one-off experience worth the time and effort that we put in, and just the brief novelty for visitors? So, it's more looking towards: what can we do that'll be more sustainable? So, it's things like, with the Turner exhibition we did, we produced an app, so you can go and stand where Turner painted, but also see a local artist's interpretation of that Turner painting from when he stood in that spot. And it was giving somebody- using technology, kind of, augmented reality, to give somebody a really specific experience. But we've still got the Turners in the collection, and those places are still there, so it's a nice, sustainable experience, and we'll keep that going until the technology goes "bang" (is the technical term!). Yeah, certainly, we also- one of the things we do, is try and give people the tools to use our content, and that sort of goes back to the: making sure the copyright is in order, so that somebody can re-use something, without it suddenly becoming an oh- you know, a big problem. So, this is why we've been very strict about making sure we have an API on the website, where, if you collect a group of objects on the website, you can save it as just a simple CSV file in Excel, that's whether you want to use it for research, for homework, for a project, or just out of interest. And so, it's very much trying to make sure that, what we do, we do well, and it gives people a good experience, but accepting that "times be harrrd!" So, we may not be able to do everything we want to do.

HC: Looking forward, if you can, sort of, project ahead twenty years, what can you see as what's achievable, and what would you really like to see happen, if you had a magic wand?

RL: I think, really, it would be enriching the visitor experience. So, instead of going into a museum and downloading an app to find out more about the object, or using your phone or tablet while you're in the gallery and searching for it on the website, it would be- again, I think wearable tech will start growing again. I think Google Glass will reappear. It's been used in industry, interestingly enough. But I think it will reappear in various ways and forms, so you will then be able to, when you go through a museum, you will be able to look at something and have the option of: "Want to know

more,” and be able to say, “No, I’m on my lunch break, I’m busy,” and carry on, or just say “Tell me more.” And already, we’re talking about things like using beacons that will be smart enough to see, are you briefly looking at something? Or if you’re standing there for five minutes, you’re more interested, and give you a deeper level of interpretation than the person who just glances at it, and might want to know a little more. So, I think it will be much more user-driven, how that experience, the interpretation around objects – whether groups of objects, or an object. And I think augmented reality and virtual reality will become very much part of this. And also, again, with wearable tech, it’s close to the body, so you can experience AR. And I think, rather than the all-embracing headsets we’re seeing at the moment, where you kind of jump backwards with fright and land in somebody else’s lap, it will be part of a worn device, and your vision won’t be blocked. So, it might be less of an immersive experience, but it’ll be much more of a consistent experience that you can access anywhere, without risk of injury to yourself or anybody else. But at home, it could be a whole different thing, where you really have the complete immersive experience, with physical sensations. I think, really, physical feedback and sound are going to be where we see developments in virtual reality. Particularly personalised sound and 3D sound, which we did look at doing as a project, but it was gonna be so brief, only one visitor at a time, almost, I mean, it’s just not... Yeah, we’re going to annoy more visitors – well, not annoy, but we’ll disappoint more visitors than get to try it, so we decided not to do it, in the end.

HC: How do you see digitisation being part of this? Do you think people will continue to try and get everything online, and- or will it be done in a different way?

RL: Yes... I don’t know... I mean, I think this is- I think this is really one of those, sort of, tipping-point questions, where either we’re going to simply have to carry on as we are, doing it really thoroughly... And of course, we now have 3D scans of objects already coming through, and we’re doing that on the basis of: if we get the opportunity, we’ll do it. But really, whether it’s just going to be setting up some sort of conveyor belt system, and just having a group of people dedicated to doing it being the only way to get through it... I mean, it really is- the volume of objects is- and just having the space to do it in, as well. We have a photography room in the museum here, but at the store, we have to use a corridor, as there isn’t a dedicated space that we can use without telling people to go and stand outside while we do it, sort of thing. It is, really, addressing that issue of people and space and time, and then looking at the store and seeing how we can do that, at the moment. So...

HC: Is it an aspiration, to get everything online? Do you think that’s something that- I mean, I’ve talked to other people who’ve said: “No, that’s not- I don’t think that’s what we want to do.” But given an absolute freedom and money and time, would you?

RL: I would love to. Quite simply, because it’s another different way of giving access to the collections. You don’t have to make an appointment to go and see something in the store. A lot of people might not want to do that, it might be really inconvenient, if you live in Alaska and want to come and see some of our Iron Age bits and pieces... So, yeah, I think, if we can get it all on there so people can see it, and at least know about it, and ask us about it, I do think that really would be the proverbial “good thing.”

HC: And in terms of the museum professional, the curator, the archivist... There is an argument, that once everything’s online, you’re going to put yourself out of a job. Do you still see that there’s an important role, and how do you develop your role in the digital age?

RL: Yes, oh yeah, I mean, very much so... I mean, all my colleagues have developed their digital skills, and even if we did reach a happy day of everything being online, we’d still need curatorial staff to communicate about the collections in other ways. I mean, without- they all publish stuff on our main website, we blog regularly, they publish on other blogs, contribute to articles... And without the curatorial staff, you wouldn’t have any exhibitions unless you bought in other people’s. It’s when we come up with an exhibition theme, or a partner suggests it, you need the curators because they know the collection and know what’s possible with the collection. It’s that knowledge, and that specialised- and those skills, to be able to use a collection, really, and that’s where having a person triumphs over flat data, no matter how good your search is.

HC: This is probably the important one, at the end, is... Looking at what you have online, and what you've seen online, and considering the issue of democratisation... If you were an alien who came down and you couldn't see anything physical, you could just see what was online, how do you think our heritage is represented now, and is there a bias of some kind?

RL: Randomly, I think is the word I'd use, simply because it varies so much from institution to institution, and very much because of reasons we've touched on, somebody who may not have enough time to do any interpretation around it... So, the alien might find something from a smaller museum, and go, "Wow, that's fascinating, I wish I could find out more about it, but I can't," just because they've put the raw, basic stuff there. It's quite interesting, when you look at the National Trust online database, there's loads of information there, but so much of it... They've been really, really thorough in getting content done, but they haven't been able to have the resources to put the interpretation around it, and so it's, you know, one of those: "It's full of stars, but I'm not sure which star I'm looking at and why it's an important star." So yeah, I think aggregation is really going to start being more important, as well. It's: "How do I find stuff across the country, across collections?" And I think this is really where people are going to see the Collections Trust taking more of a lead. To- now that people have- there are all these bodies of data around, and people are getting them onto URPL like we are, because URPL is a nice, visible aggregator, and the more you can get your data mixed in with other people's, the more visible it becomes, as well. And the sum can be greater than the parts, simply because, an object, saying: "Oh, we'll tell you about that object," but seeing the context of similar objects, it can tell you more about the usage in that context, and so on. So, yeah, I think aggregation is going to be something that'd really make a big difference to the alien, if they could then find: "Ah, UK museum stuff, wow, brilliant."

HC: Do you think there's a private/public partnership to be done here? Because, again, you're talking about doing more with less. When you're looking at Google Scholar, or- I mean, Google do a lot of stuff in this arena... Is this something you would embrace, or do you think it's very important to keep a public presence, as well?

RL: Yeah, I think it is, because the great thing about a public presence is, it is there for the public. Whereas, the private one, you are rather- it's really, what they do with it is up to them. I mean, we contribute to the Google cultural institute as another way of getting data out there, but doing everything through a body, I think it's, you know, it's a bit like giving it- any large body to a corporation. You need to be really, really sure what they're gonna do with it. I mean, for example, if somebody made some changes, would you be able to get the data back, or would you have to pay them to get it back? Because they'd be running it as a service. And it really is looking critically at what the relationship between you as data provider and them as providing the access service to it, what that would be. So, again, I mean it- you know, because all of our websites, that are developed for us, we don't have time to do that ourselves, we pay developers. So, it's not a big jump from that, but something we're doing already, where it's very much making sure who controls it, who has the IPR, and what the costs are in maintaining it. A bit like, I was saying, that project, is it- are they worth the cost and time, or are they sustainable? And it's that sustainability, and whether or not a large entity like Google would have that sustainability, and why are they doing- you know, what's their reason for doing it? They may be looking at a very specific learning outcome, for example, for schools, like they do with Expeditions. Whereas we're looking much more at a wider audience, in the- both in the museum, at home, and the researcher as a niche audience.

HC: So, is control really the issue here? Do you think the reason that there isn't so much online is that people want to keep control, and therefore they're not openly sharing, and taking back and forth and that's why that's not happening?

RL: I think...

HC: And do you see that as still being an issue?

RL: Oh, gosh, yes. Yes, definitely, from the Challenger experience, twenty-three museums, and "Do you want to use the National Archives' standard public licence, or do you want to use your own one, or do you want to use Creative Commons? And here's a generic one we've prepared in case you

want to edit that,” and it was, “Ah, we’ll produce our own,” and... Yeah, no one-size licence fitted anybody, and yet it was all, really, basically covered by Creative Commons. And ownership is still a big concern. It was very much, “Hah, we can’t put the collections online, what’ll happen?! Somebody’ll steal it, and print it!” Well, no, it would be such a horrible quality print, we really needn’t worry about that. We could still see, if they want a print, they’d still need to buy one, and... And it is interesting, looking at people – like the Rijksmuseum is the example I was given – who’ve gone down that experience, of: “Hey, let’s release a high-quality image and see what happens,” that they’ve found they’ve built up a good sales market with their images online, and when they released them, the sales market did take a dip. So, you definitely, I think, need to get your market built up before you do that, and accept there will be a bit of a dip, from the odd person, thinking: “Oh, I’ll just print it out at home on my A3 printer.” But we know about things like that, now, so it’s, I think should be less... You can take an informed decision, rather than a panic: “Oh my goodness, what if?” Which seemed to be what a lot of people are seeing as a reason not to put things online. But even so, this is why we edit the data we put on, as well as I said earlier, sort of then get a whole, sort of, wallpaper-load of fields, and think: “Goodness!” It’s- as well as condensing the content to the main useful things, that people want to know, we don’t put things on like values, and physical locations, and so on, because that would inspire- it would be a bit like a burglars’ toolkit! So, there are security things like that, and also, any confidential information from the donor we wouldn’t put on, either, like people’s names and addresses. So, there is that- what you make public very much needs consideration. It’s quite interesting, I think, the way, at the moment, there’s lots of concern about keeping things private, but also, people agree to terms and conditions just by putting a tick in the box. It’s: “Will ticking this box get me something I want? Good, then I’ll agree to sell my soul to Satan, or whatever.” It’s...

HC: Have there ever been- some final, personal points... Every time you have a digitisation conversation, is monetisation an issue? Back in the day, I remember, around the year 2000: “We must monetise what we put on the Internet. Has that really gone away, have we totally given up, now?”

RL: No, no, it definitely hasn’t gone away. It’s definitely: “How can we do it sensibly?” As I mentioned, originally, back in 2007-8, we looked at setting up our own selling-prints system, because then all the profits would be ours. But once I explained about the costs of hosting, the cost of penetration testing, the cost of customer care, customer service, the: “Who’s actually gonna physically do the printing?” And the cost of the printing, and framing, and so on... We just realised, yeah, how much we’d have to sell to make a small profit, compared to the- I think the cheapest we worked out we could do it for was about – without staff time – was £18,000. So, we rapidly went off that idea. But it is doing the small things: we licence images through Bridgeman, we’ve got a printer to mark through Bridgeman. So, just putting in links to that will- on our collections website, we’re adding other museums, as well, we’re encouraging them to put- if they’ve got an online shop, put a link in, so people can buy the related item on the online shop. So, it’s low-key stuff, but it keeps money coming in. Nobody here can really see how to make a fortune out of collections data and stuff online. You know, the talk of charging researchers to access it would be very quickly dropped, because nobody’d pay for it, they’d go and use somebody else’s stuff that was free. In fact, you know, we’re looking at it more the other way, now: “How can we use Wikimedia, and so on, to increase access to the collections?” So, so, yeah, it’s being realistic- again, like I was saying earlier, about now, with the experience we’ve got, since 2000: “Be practical. What’s realistic?” A vast financial empire isn’t. Adding to the cash generation to systems you’re already using is, so do that.

HC: Great, thank you very much indeed for your time.

RL: That’s ok, pleasure.

Adrian Glew
Tate Archive
13th November 2017

AG: Adrian Glew

HC: Helen Casey

HC: So, if I could just ask you to introduce yourself and tell me your role here.

AG: So, my name's Adrian Glew and I'm the Tate's archivist, and so I manage the Archive section of the Library and Archive Department.

HC: Ok, lovely, thank you. Ok, so, for the first part of this, I just want to ask a little bit about you. Can you tell me a bit about your role here, and a little bit of background about you, where you've come from?

AG: Sure. So, as I mentioned, I manage the Archive section of the Library and Archive Department. So, we have 900 collections, 20,000,000 items or pieces, and the aim of Tate Archive is to document the history of Fine Art practice in the UK. And I sit alongside 3 other permanent members of the team, plus, at the moment, 4 cataloguers on contract – short-term contracts – and we sit in the Library and Archive Department. So, there are 6 colleagues in the Library, 3 in Public Records, and 5 in Reader Services.

HC: Great. Can you tell me a little bit about what kind of collection it is? You've- it sounds enormous, but-

AG: It is...

HC: -is there any way of categorising it a little bit?

AG: So, in a sense, we're the de-facto National Archive of British Art, and the world's largest, and one of the largest art archives in- in the world. So, we've been running since 1970, and the prime reason we were established was through the efforts of a previous director at Tate – so, Norman Reed – and he commissioned a survey, which was funded by the Sainsbury Family Trust, 1966. Because he was- as an artist, he was very concerned that artists' archives were being sold abroad, particularly to US universities, and the Trust recommended that Tate should establish an archive, which they did in 1969, and we acquired the very first collection in 1970. So, 2020 will be our 50th anniversary.

HC: And what types of things are in this archive?

AG: So, we would collect artists' papers, the records of commercial galleries, artist-run spaces, art writers, printmakers, collecting bodies – sorry, exhibition bodies, such as the Contemporary Art Society, Commonwealth Institute – funders like the Art Fund, commercial galleries, and so on. So, the whole range of Fine Art practice in the UK. Primarily from 1900, although we do have certain key items from particularly the 19th century.

HC: Can you talk a bit about the digitisation that's taken place since you've been here? How long have you been here, and how much of that have you seen?

AG: So, I've been here since 1985, and I've been Head of the Archives since 2010, and... I'm trying to recall, now... Yes, the first digitisation projects we did were, sort of, stand-alone microsites, so they would look at a particular collection that had been catalogued, either an artist or a group. And, thinking back, we got some very early Heritage Lottery Fund New Opportunities funds to digitise 3 aspects of what we have here, so there was money to digitise aspects of- and tell the story, really, of the history of the Tate, the Bloomsbury group, and an American art historian called Barbara Rice. So, they're still on the website. They're- because they were stand-alone, they're, kind of, losing some of their currency, because the things like the copyright were negotiated solely for that project and they were time-limited. So, some of the thing- some of the items have had to be taken off, due to copyright issues. But that would be the first major digitisation of any of our holds. And I think, overall, it's around 5,000 items.

HC: What was the motivation? Can you think back? Was there a driving force, to seek the money, or was the money the driving force? What was the motivation behind picking those particular things, and for digitising?

AG: I think- we spotted a call from the HLF, about this- this new fund, towards digitising archives, and we thought we should go for it, and we were quite keen to dip our toes in the water, and this seemed like an ideal opportunity. It wasn't too large, but it wasn't too small either, so we could work out some protocols, and also bring on board new staff, to work on our digitisation procedures, which did happen. And we had our own scanning suite set up, and staff working on adding the metadata to the images captured. So, it was a good pilot project for us. And from that, we then went on to produce further microsites, using facilities in Tate's Digital Department, specifically web architects, who were working for Digital at the time. So, they created bespoke microsites, again, for the Outsider Art Trust, Artist Placement Group, the ICA, and other similar collections, again, that we'd catalogued and wanted to make more visible. In a sense, they were unlike the digitisation we've done recently. They were much more along the lines of, almost, Wikipedia entries, and thematic, they were very much thematically based. Whereas, nowadays, we're digitising material for specific reasons, in terms of conservation: if something's very fragile, or for... Particularly if we were needing to digitise material in preparation for a display or exhibition, because, of course, our main role here is working with the curators, on exhibitions and displays. And then, also, for making some of the hidden parts of our collection more visible. And particularly those areas of the collection which may not have seen the light of day in the past, or they relate to, say, for instance, female artists, which are under-represented in the digitisation we did before, or black British artists... So, that's something, particularly, that we did for the HLF project, the Archives and Access project, which is just finished, after a 5-year length of time.

HC: What were the conversations around interpretation? You've said that the early ones you tended to do in a thematic way; how have things changed over time, in terms of how to surround the images that you put up there? Because, presumably, mainly what you're putting up are digitised images from pieces of paper. How do you decide what to surround those with, and how's that changed?

AG: Yeah. So, with the New Opportunities Fund, one of the members of staff was creating descriptive comments and text around the images. So, in a sense, creating a journey through the digitised items. So, in a sense, digitised items were illustrating the timeline, in a way, of whatever it was that we were digitising. Whereas now, it's more a question of trying to replicate how one would find material within an archival hierarchy. So, we're very keen, with this, the most recent HLF project, to try and replicate the levels that we have, from the fonds down to the piece. So that visitors could trace, if they wanted to- most visitors, I don't think, do this, but if they wanted to, they could trace all the way back from the piece, see the contextual information relating to the file, and the series, sub-series, and back up to the collection-level, fonds-level entries. So, that was quite new for us, and meant that we had to amend our, sort of, cataloguing procedures and standards, to actually go right down to piece-page level.

HC: Why did you think that was important to do?

AG: There was also an imperative from the digital and IS side of things, that they needed a unique identifier for every single side for the page, and for photography, so that was one of the other reasons. And in fact, we'd found, in the NOF project – this was also necessary in the NOF project – we did that by giving a date to everything, and then just numbering after the date, plus some other numbers beforehand. But in the most recent HLF project, we've used the catalogued list as the basis for the piece-level entries.

HC: So, it's been a technical requirement, almost, that's driven the increased sharing of what you have, and the information around it?

AG: To some degree. In terms of getting it out there, we needed to do this. What we discovered was, if the item was just an item, we didn't need a piece level! Whereas, if the item was a volume, with

lots of pages within it, then we did. And so, that extended the amount of cataloguing time that was needed. And so we learnt a lot from that.

HC: Ok. Let me just have a quick pause.

HC: Ok, Part 2. Going back a bit to the beginning, can you talk about your background in heritage, and how you've come to define heritage? As broadly or narrowly as you like.

AG: So, my background is slightly unusual. I studied Asian and African geography at SOAS, and then graduated in a pretty poor job environment, at the time, in the early 80s. So, I went away- I went abroad for a year, with an artist friend, and came back after that year, and I was lucky to get a job at Lambeth Palace Library and Archive. I'd always been interested in art and history at school, even though I didn't study the subjects, but I used to sneak out to the art class in my free periods at school, so that was always an interest. And the fact that my parents had a business, and kept records – they're the bound volumes of accounts and things, and allied to my own collecting interests... This was always a feature, growing up, and deciding, in terms of a career. But obviously, geography, at school, was my best subject, so I ended up doing a geography degree. But having the experience of working at Lambeth Palace Library and Archive really inspired me to seek- you know, to become an archivist, and seek other jobs after the contract had ended there. And I worked for a couple of other archives, or information offices. One a management consultancy, and the other was an oil company, so that was quite different. And then the job here, as an assistant archive curator, came up in 1985, and as I mentioned, I've been here since then, working in Tate Archive. And so, that's really the background to my work here. And I guess, the fact that, not only do you have visual material here, but also art-historically important material, it kind of aligns the two interests that I had very early on. And it's interesting that it's only recently that one could call what we do here as "heritage," as such. It's- I would say it's quite a recent definition. And it's also something that the HLF are keen on, as well. But the way I see heritage – and it's something that we did reflect in the learning outcomes for the project, actually, Archives and Access project – heritage, to my mind, encompasses our archives, libraries, museums, galleries, possibly even historic houses... The whole, sort of, cultural heritage arena. And it was quite nice, in the learning outputs that we did for the Archives and Access project, that we went out to communities, and inspired them to investigate their own local archives, libraries and museums. So, it was one heritage body inspiring others to explore other heritage bodies outside London, as we worked in 5 different locations. So, it was particularly nice, for instance, in the Joseph Hermann Foundation, in South Wales, that they worked with the Morgan Archive Service, and it inspired them to obtain some further funding, to get an assistant to work with them. And this is what I was hoping would happen: a kind of snowball effect, and more of a tangible linkage, between a national institution and a local foundation, that could also tap into local heritage assets.

HC: Do you think there is something about heritage that is intrinsically local, and based in a community? Or do you think it's something else? It's-

AG: I think it's both, actually. I think it's both local and national, and the national and local can become international, as well. I mean, you can, sort of, think of, say, the Dylan Thomas Centre, or Anthony Burgess Centre in Manchester: they're both local, national, and international. So, I think they can fulfil a number of purposes, in a sense, and "local" doesn't necessarily mean "parochial." It can be- the local heritage centres can be doing very important work, and can lead the field, sometimes.

HC: What would you say is the Tate's heritage? Which is what your collection consists of, essentially.

AG: Yeah... There're two sides, I guess. Because obviously, Tate has its own history, so there's the public records of the Tate, which is managed in a- by another manager and two- two members of staff – I should've mentioned that at the beginning. So, again, that was important for the Archives and Access project, because our digitisation project was aligned to a capital bid, and they were very keen for that capital bid to reflect the history of the Tate, which is one of the reasons we have a site timeline, now, in the Tate Britain. So, there's that aspect, and the other aspect is the collecting side of the archive. And that's the local, in terms of London-wide, national, in terms of the whole UK, and

international, in terms of its impact, archives relating to all those 3 areas. So, in a sense, they're fulfilling many, many different purposes in one repository, which is centred at Tate Britain.

HC: ...Let me just have another pause.

HC: What you've put online is obviously distinct from what the Tate has put online. But is there a joined-up thinking, in terms of how you put yourselves out there for virtual visitors, and what somebody who can't be here physically is actually getting, when they go online to look at Tate Archive?

AG: Yeah, I mean, one of the key outputs of the Archives and Access project was the fact that one could move seamlessly between the archive and the art collection. If one looked at material related to a particular artist, and that artist had had some material from the archive digitised, then one could then link into that, and thereby get further contextual information. With the redesign of Tate's website, that linkage is not so strong at the moment, but we're trying to get it back, because we did find that online visitors, you know, did find that really, really useful. And in fact, when we launched the archival elements online, I think the first day, or the first week, we got a million hits. So, there is an awful lot of pent-up demand out there, to see this material, and particularly from outside the UK, so we had visitors from South America, Australia, the Americas, Africa, Asia... whole world. And that was rather satisfying, to see that. Because obviously, physically, we can only accommodate- well, overall, the Library and Archive has 20,000 visitors a year, so physically we can only accommodate that number, whereas, in one week, we got a million visits, in a sense. So, yeah. That was one of the drivers.

HC: How important are virtual visitors? Do they count, as much as the physical visitors through the door?

AG: Yeah. They're equally important. We always mention our online visits to Tate. I think, at the last count, it was 14,000,000 a year. So, that's always mentioned in annual reports, and whenever we're highlighting the amounts of people we get through the doors, or through the portals. So, it's all part of Tate's reach, I guess.

HC: Have decisions been made not to digitise? Are there things that haven't been digitised, because of difficulties, because of copyright...?

AG: Yes. Yeah, I mean, with the Archives and Access project, one of the reasons for going for that funding, was to actually test our copyright procedures. So, although we chose a lot of collections where we knew there was just one copyright holder, for instance, like the Donald Rodney sketchbooks, there were others, where we didn't have copyright holders at all. And, so, that was very instructive. And in the end, I think we cleared 3,000 copyrights, and 99.95% of those were positive, which was very interesting. And, plus, the majority agreed to creative commons licences, which means that anyone can then use it for non-commercial usages, particularly teachers and students. So, yeah, that was crucial, I'd say.

HC: That's surprisingly positive. Do you think there's something about art which has a more- which has a stronger history of sharing and giving for free, than perhaps some other collections have? I don't know whether you have any experience of-

AG: Yeah...

HC: -other collections, and- and whether they have more closed-door policies, in terms of sharing and opening doors to people.

AG: Yeah, I suppose it's quite different from a- so, we digitise a lot of photographic collections, for instance, and certainly, commercial photographic agencies are very protective about their images they put online. One has to go through and clear them, as much as possible. Whereas the ones we placed online, we- in a sense, we got prior agreement, for those to be shared, as much as possible. So, yeah, in a sense, it's part of the ethos of the Tate, to be both a, sort of, visitor attraction, but also an educational resource, as well. And, you know, I would see the digital images that we created as being part of that resource for teachers and students to use alike, you know.

HC: In terms of the 7 reasons that I've come up with-

AG: Yes, I was looking at that...

HC: -can you go through them, and just tell me to what extent you think any of them have had a bearing on the digitisation that you've done?

AG: Yeah, so, if I was to rank them, reasons not to digitise, I would put privacy or copyright issues first, actually. And that did come up, sometimes, and obviously, if there was something sensitive, or we approach the copyright holder and they asked us not to digitise it, then we would fold that. And there were also- we also had a few issues with – what would one call it? – yes, adult material. So, again, we had discussions about the kind of adult material we, perhaps, could put on, particularly for a project funded by the HLF, which would be going to people of any age, so we're very conscious about that. What would be the other? The next one would be... Cost, I guess. For our purposes, obviously the Archives and Access project gave us all the infrastructure – provided all the funds for the infrastructure. But even so, we found that, having done this project, and having cleared the copyrights, and gone through the legacy cataloguing issues, and going through the whole digitisation process, and the future preservation of all the digital metadata, and so on... It's about £10 an image, so it is still quite costly, when you add up all those different elements. So, we're only able – even though we have the infrastructure – we're only able to digitise 500 items a year, within our core budget, in a sense, although we are open to other funding sources. And in fact, we did receive some money from a private, charitable trust, to digitise an artist's archives, immediately after the Archives and Access project. So, that's just about to go on the stream soon, next few weeks. And so, cost is a factor, for us. We don't really have the capacity, here, to do within-house, apart from these 500 items. Timewise, as well, it's also a factor. Not only the length of time it takes to digitise something – and in fact, the Archives and Access project, from conception to completion, was about 5 years, and that's for 52,000 items. But, of course, we were getting a lot of the infrastructure up and running. But there's also the time factor in terms of legacy cataloguing. A lot of our catalogues of material acquired in the 70s were not fit for purpose, so we had to refine the cataloguing for those. And then, of course, there's also, the – particularly, this isn't a criticism, but with the HLF projects, there were no funds for back-filling your post. So, the permanent members of the team, in a sense, took on another full-time role, which was quite difficult, at times, to manage.

HC: So, to understand, you did digitise 52,000 objects in 5 years, and on top of that, you can digitise 500 beyond that. So, this was a specific one. And these were just members of staff doing extra work, but you had an extra layer of new staff, on top of that from the funding.

AG: We did. Yeah. So, we had contract cataloguers, there were people in photography, in the digitisation suite, there was an extra copyright clearance person, and so on, Tate Learning received money for their staff. So, yeah. So, that was not inconsiderable. And then, one also was trying to rapidly acquire expertise and IT knowledge, for all members of the team. And the fact that we had fortnightly meetings for all – I think it included 11 departments at Tate, altogether – and we'd all meet, together. And that was really, really useful, in terms of devising glossaries, and just working out how the other person worked, and other personalities involved, and the terminology people used... It was very, very helpful. And having, obviously, a project manager, was crucial.

HC: Where did you go, to look for the technical and IT expertise, in terms of how to put all this together. Did you go outside, or did you bring it in? And if so, who was the driver?

AG: It was mostly brought in, or existing. So, photography, for instance, have an enormous amount of expertise in their department, as do Tate Learning, the education department. So, it was a question of bringing in the right calibre of staff for what was needed. And similarly, for the archive, we needed cataloguers and data inputters, so that's something that we're used to employing. So, it was mainly using the expertise of people here. But also, taking on new areas, like, particularly, preservation, metadata and preservation protocols, which we hadn't really explored fully, so that was a steep learning curve for everyone. And then, of course, there's the fear of obsolescence, which is also in the back of one's mind. So, we started to look for open-source ways of dealing with metadata, and we're currently exploring Archivematica, particularly for time-based media assets. And, in a sense, the project has helped the rest of the work in the Archive. So, although it was a lot

of time spent, by all of us, there have also been benefits, in terms of increasing our skill sets, in these areas.

HC: Just take another quick break.

AG: Yeah.

HC: I want to go back a bit. You were here, happily, during the time that I'm looking at. So, there was an explosion of predictions, about what wonderful things this new Internet was going to do for us, around the turn of the millennium. Can you remember, at the time, thinking about what might be possible, and what you would like to be possible?

AG: Yeah, there was a lot of talk, at one time, and there was something that I was quite keen to see happen, but it hasn't happened yet. And that was, to actually streamline the whole digitisation project- process, so that the cataloguer would be the digitiser, as well. So, there would be a scanner beside the person cataloguing, as they catalogued, they scanned, and went on to the next thing. For various reasons, that hasn't happened. I can see it could happen in the future, and it's something the BBC tried, I understand, with their camera people: they actually captured all the metadata as they were filming. But again, that system has gone by the wayside, as well. And, yeah, I think, in one sense, practically speaking, it might be best, for the cataloguer to do all their cataloguing, and then for the material to go to the digitisation suite, and for professionals to then capture the image that way. Certainly, that's what's gonna happen here, now, because we have all that infrastructure in place. But that was very much at the forefront of people's minds, I would say, in the late 90s/early 2000s, that it would be more of a seamless process. And I think, people out of the heritage sector, perhaps, think it's a very simple process, because they're used to scanning things at home, and taking images with their smartphones, and can't understand why an institution like Tate doesn't do that, with its artefacts. But obviously, we have different standards, and some of those are national and some of those are international, so we have to abide by those, and we want to put out the best quality images possible.

HC: Taking that into account, are you surprised that things have moved so little in the last 20 years? Because the predictions – the optimistic predictions – were full of walk-through galleries, and curate-your-own-exhibition, and all that kind of thing. A huge opening and democratisation and sharing of our heritage, new links made internationally, finding out more about objects, multiple interpretations... All kinds of real exciting ideas, but we still see the same museum – to differing extents, but we still see information online, but you generally can't drill right down into each object in a collection, as you might have thought you could. Why do you think that might be, and can you explain why those people thought that at the beginning?

AG: I think, they probably thought it was a simpler process than it is, and also, perhaps, we've been slightly fooled by commercial companies coming in to digitise lots of material, particularly in archives. The genealogical companies are digitising en-masse, you know, huge amounts of material, that are relevant to them. And also relevant to the Record Office, but it may not be a priority within the Record Office, but it becomes a priority because there's funding attached, and it means they can get a whole series digitised in one go, without any cost to them. But that does mean, then, online visitors have to go through a commercial portal to access that material, unless they go to the Record Office, or the National Archives, where they can access it for free. Whereas our view is to try and create that hierarchical drilling-down, through the collection, to items, and also as open source as possible, and freely available as possible. But it's a slow process, and you don't get many commercial companies who want to fund that sort of work, so that's tricky.

HC: Do you think that's resulted in the opposite of a democratisation of heritage? Because the digitisation seems to be where the funding is.

AG: I mean, certainly, in genealogical research, great strides have been taken, and people are now able to locate much of their family history, although sometimes at a cost. That is something to bear in mind. Whereas the rest of the resources within a gallery, museum, archive or library are, perhaps, still hidden from people, and they have to physically go there to access it. But, I mean, the way

things are going, I can see that most archives will have most of their collections digitised by... 2100?! It's going to take a while!

HC: Is there a movement towards having everything that you have- if you could wave a magic wand, would you digitise everything you have?

AG: Oh, there's another question! Probably not, no. I mean, I think, users often think that's probably the best thing to do, is to digitise everything, but it's not necessarily the case. But there again – I'm toying with two ideas in my head, now – there again, it is more democratic if one does digitise everything. Because, who knows, even the laundry lists could be of use to someone, you know, doing history of laundries – who knows! So, you can never tell, you know, what might be of use to someone. But I guess, being an art archive, we're perhaps more concerned about getting the visual material out there, as much as possible, which is helpful both for external online visitors, and curatorial staff here, as well.

HC: So, you're talking, there, about sketchbooks, and drawings, and notes, from artists themselves?

AG: -preparatory sketches, sketchbooks, drawings, writings, photographs, posters... That sort of thing, yeah.

HC: And why is that – I mean, it's kind of obvious, really, because you're- that is the heritage of the art that you're displaying-

AG: Yeah...

HC: -in the gallery. So, would you see that, really, as the heritage of the Tate, then? The, kind of, back-story that relates to the important works that are in the...

AG: Well, it's interesting, because although Tate Archive sits within Tate, it is a national archive of British Fine Art practice, and in amongst that, there's a lot of social history. For instance, when we digitised Felicia Brown, who was an artist who was killed in the Spanish Civil War, there was a lot more about the Spanish Civil War that came out from digitising that collection than we thought, actually. And although we digitised all her sketches and drawings, it's that aspect that the press and others have picked up on. So, that was surprising to see.

HC: So, you're much more than an echo of what's going on in the main gallery, there's much more happening in the Archive as a separate institution?

AG: Yeah. And we can, sort of, reach areas that the main collection – art collection – can't reach. So, quite often, we would acquire material like correspondence art, which the collection doesn't acquire, or multiples, like Flexus, the Flexus collective editions. And, just generally, there're aspects of history, art and life, that come out of our holdings. I mean, there was one example – although we haven't digitised it – we've got an autobiography of a sculptor that no-one's ever heard of, Henry Sibson. And he was a jobbing sculptor, but he wrote his autobiography in 7 volumes. And there's wonderful vignettes of growing up in the Georgian-stroke-Victorian period, of his walks through London, then he goes to Paris, works on Notre Dame cathedral, is employed by a hunchbacked sculptor who lives next door to Victor Hugo... You know, there're all these interesting, strange connections, that only archives can make, and it is a, kind of, unique selling-point for archives, I'd say.

HC: So, as I've just mentioned, on the Tate Britain website, if you are looking at an artist, there's a link to their Wikipedia page. That is very counter-most-museology-practices, in terms of what's acceptable. Can you talk through that decision, and- and why that was made?

AG: That's actually a decision that was primarily made by the digital team, to really, in a sense, democratise information about artists' biographies, so it's not necessarily one person's take on someone's biography. Previously, curatorial staff had created biographies, and they can be useful. I would also say there's a place for those biographies, and also for biographies that are written for archive collections, as well. Particularly when you're digitising just a part of a person's archives, then you might want to just hone in on certain aspects of the biography, rather than the whole biography, which might be on Wikipedia. But conversely, I think it's important for Tate to also add information to the Wikipedia entries, so that they continue to be accurate and apposite what we're doing. But there was quite a lot of debate within the Tate about that, when it happened, and I guess there are

pros and cons either way. But that's another example of democratisation of, sort of, reference resources, I guess.

HC: So, have you now taken it upon yourselves to make sure that the Wikipedia entries for everybody you've linked to, on the site, are correct?

AG: We do try, yes, and we will do that more in the future, you know, as we catalogue collections. And quite often, you know, we might be dealing with an artist for which there isn't a Wikipedia entry, so in a sense, we could create the Wikipedia entry and link back to ourselves, and backwards and forwards! And in fact, we've also had researchers here who've researched a particular artist, and created incredible Wikipedia entries, which are so detailed. So, that also happens here, as well.

HC: That's really interesting. I've not heard of anybody else doing that. It- does anyone else do that, as far as you're aware?

AG: I think, more institutions are doing that. I've got a feeling the NPG might do that now, or the V&A, but I think, perhaps, we were the first.

HC: You're almost giving credibility to an organisation that's really been held at arm's length. Will we start seeing people sourcing Wikipedia as their sources, or are we legitimising it, by doing this?

AG: Well, I think, Wikipedia have also sharpened up their act, as well, though. They're much keener on having proper citations, which are, almost, in a sense, peer-reviewed. I know they have some very - have lots of, kind of, super-users, who keep an eye on everything. So, and, you know, it is much better than perhaps it was at the beginning, which is understandable.

HC: Looking at what's online now, if an alien came down – this is the question I normally ask – and couldn't go to the physical place, but could only see what was online, how do you think our heritage is represented, in terms of what you can actually see online?

AG: Well, it's still patchy, I would say. But obviously more than the optical disc on the Voyager probe that has left the Solar System! So, it's getting there, but it's still going to take time. But, you know, there'll be information about the built heritage, about the artistic heritage, in all those different forms. So, taken as a whole, you'd probably get a good sense of – if you were an alien – what humans were up to, in terms of the Arts, but you wouldn't get the whole picture.

HC: Do you think there will ever be a time when the online image is as acceptable as standing in front of the piece itself?

AG: Well, you do lose things from just seeing an image, of course, and particularly with 3D items, you can't circulate a 3D item and see the size of it and how it relates to your person. You miss the smell of something. We have things in the Archive, we've got a multiple called a "Vanilla Bag," which is a bag which you squeeze, and the wonderful smell of vanilla enters your nostrils! So, you wouldn't get that unless you have "smellivision" in some way. So, there are lots of different aspects that one misses out on, once something's digitised. And, at the beginning of the project, I think we thought – at the Archives and Access project – I think we thought we'd get more visitors coming in to see the originals than we have had, which has been surprising. I think a lot of people, now, are just looking for the information content of something, not necessarily the physical manifestations of an object, which is a shame, really.

HC: Most heritage professionals still consider the object to be the thing, and anything other than that is a facsimile. Do you think that's something that will change slightly?

AG: Well, I think, with, maybe, a digital facsimile of a photograph is very close to the original, whereas a digital facsimile of a 3D item can never be, really, unless you have 3D printing, or some other way of dealing with that. But again, you know, it's the best we can do, in terms of getting the material out there, to as many people as possible, who can't physically get here. I mean, not necessarily because they live so far away, but they could be disabled, and it could be difficult for them to see things. So, yeah, there is an imperative to digitise as much as possible, so that people can, at least, experience the 2D image of something, and gain something from that.

HC: And do you think that heritage professionals will become comfortable with letting people curate their own exhibitions? Are they not, in some sense, putting themselves out of a job?

AG: Well, in one sense, in the Archives and Access project, we did this. We created an “Albums” feature, so anyone in the Internet sphere can actually pick and choose, and curate their own exhibition online, their own album, like a scrapbook. And we’ve had notice of teachers using this, in preparation for lessons for their students. So, that’s a really interesting aspect of the HLF project, that is, kind of, mushrooming, as more people find out about it.

HC: Do you think there’s still a place for the curator and the archivist to- because they have that specialist knowledge, and the ability to hold several interpretations at the same time, there is a profession around this. Do you think that’s safe, and do you think that’s something people are always going to want?

AG: I’m not sure “safe” is the right word, but I think, in a sense, one- because there is- there is so much information around, I think you do need the knowledge and experience of an information professional, or a curator, to guide people into different interpretations of things. But also, be open to their own interpretations of things that you digitise. I know, for instance, I think, the National Maritime Museum, they put a lot of their images on Flickr, and they got a lot of users using Flickr, and for some of the super-users, they invited in and asked them to curate a display. And I think that’s a really nice idea.

HC: That’s great.

Lesley Miller
V&A
19th December 2017

LM: Lesley Miller
HC: Helen Casey

HC: Could you please introduce yourself, give me a little bit of your background, and how you ended up here, please?

LM: Right, my name is Lesley Miller. I joined the V&A as senior curator of textiles in 2005, having taught in higher education for over twenty years, in particular, the history of textiles and dress design and bits of art. As senior- my role in the organisation has, kind of, shifted over time, in that... My basic role is the senior curator of textiles and fashion for the period before 1800, but I was also seconded as lead curator for the Europe 1600-to-1815 Galleries between 2010-2015, was acting keeper of this department (Furniture, Textiles and Fashion) for eighteen months, until September 2017. Now I'm back to normal.

HC: OK. First of all, just a, sort of, general question: how do you define heritage? What do you think are the important things? It's obviously very widely defined by various different people, but what is it for you, and what do you think it is for the V&A?

LM: Well, if you take it on the local level, the preservation of heritage is the preservation of objects from the past – that's small objects, big objects, the buildings – but, I mean, beyond the museum, obviously. It can extend beyond that, to landscape or whatever. We have, like most heritage organisations, a collecting policy, which defines what we consider heritage that we would collect and preserve. And usually, that's based on the kind of principles that came into being in the 1850s, which were about things of high aesthetic and technical value, from the point of view of skill, etcetera.

HC: Fantastic...

LM: Preferably with a really good provenance!

HC: Can you tell me about your particular area of the collection? What kind of collection is it and what are you responsible for?

LM: I'm responsible for textiles. That means Western textiles, so all Asian textiles are looked after by another department. It's misleading for people, because we're the Furniture, Textiles and Fashion department; it does not mean we look after all textiles, it means we look after textiles from Europe and America and Africa – anywhere that's not Asia, basically. What was the second part of that?

HC: It was just a bit about the collection

LM: So, Textiles and Fashion covers- so, the department basically divides into two sections: Furniture and Woodwork; Textiles and Fashion. And the Textiles and Fashion holdings number about 80,000 pieces. And that's a mixture of flat textiles – big furnishing fabrics, fragments- archaeological fragments – through to contemporary fashion.

HC: Fantastic, thank you. You've been here since 2005, as far as your experience goes, what has been the attitude towards putting the collection online? And by that, I don't just mean for internal use, but as a person from outside, interested to see what you have, but not physically able to be here... How have you seen that change?

LM: The way that has changed is that now you can access the whole of our catalogue online. That means it has the deficiencies you might expect from that, in collections this size, in that, what you have is a basic description that comes from the original catalogue, so that's online. But unless an object has been researched recently, the information may not be absolutely accurate, or be accurate for the time it came into the museum. So, some records are extremely detailed, and some records are... Well, they have no photograph, they have a strapline that doesn't really tell you a tremendous amount; it probably tells you what it is, what its date is, what they thought- where they thought it was made... But of course, that could have changed radically, in terms of what we know, through

scholarship over the last decades. The basic principle always is that we upgrade catalogue records for any big project. So, that's the great advantage of a big project, like the Europe Galleries: every single object in those galleries will have multiple photographs, probably details, possibly the back, and will also have up-to-date records of current thinking of what it is, and what its date is, etcetera. And the same would apply for objects that've been put in exhibitions – major exhibitions, or small displays – that is an opportunity to upgrade records, and there'll always be photography with that. The other stage at which there's always photography is at the stage of acquisition, so now – and I'm sure that was already in place when I came in – objects that come into the collections will come in and will be photographed in some form. The other way that we in Textiles and Fashion update, when we can, is – as you probably know, we have what's called the Clothworker Centre, which is at Blythe House in Olympia, which is our storage. That's a centre – and you'll have to check I've got the date right – it's been there for about five years now. And moving the objects gave the opportunity for upgrading catalogue, in the sense that every object that was in our old textiles study rooms was taken out of its frames, and record shots were taken. So, they're not brilliant shots, but they're enough for somebody to identify something, it's much better than it was. And every time a visitor at the Clothworker's asks for particular objects, record photographs are taken and put online, so that we enhance the records through what people are asking for. There're obviously issues in doing it that way, but at least it moves things forward. And those photographs are record shots, they're not good enough to publish, in most cases. The other project at the moment – because, as you probably know, we are moving out of Blythe House – is that there is advanced work going on, which is funding the photography of all the large, rolled textiles, which are the things that wouldn't be photographed last time, because they were just moved as they were. The large- so, the tapestries, for example, where you need somebody- very complicated technology, where they take parts of the tapestry and then they, kind of, sew it together, that is currently underway as part of the advanced work. So, we will have a much better photographic record than we had before. It doesn't mean that the catalogue record will necessarily have been updated, but it does mean that people will be able to see something, zoom in on it, etcetera, which should make a big difference.

HC: How much have you been involved in this, over the years, and who else has been involved, and how- how have those decisions been made, as to when things are going to be done and how?

LM: That's quite a complicated question. I probably can't answer it completely convincingly, other than that, as long as I've been here, the ambition was that the catalogue would go live. So, that happened within the first few years of me being here. Our then director was very clear, that the best thing was that everything was out there, available to everybody. And I daresay that there was- in some circles, there would be some anxiety about copyright, etcetera, but his view was very much that it should be out there. So those are decisions taken at senior management level, no doubt with advice from Records who, kind of, manage the catalogue system, as such. And I think, Marion Crick, I will just mention her as the person who can probably give you chapter and verse about the process. In terms of how to get the photography done, given that we have a photography department of a certain size, that is always overwhelmed with work, I think it was presumably a strategic decision, that big projects lead to new photography. So, there is a, kind of, system in place, in terms of priorities, which is that, firstly, exhibition photographs and- so, photographs and big Future Plan projects take precedence, in photography priorities. Then publications, so you'll – as you know, we have a Publications department, and they have the next, kind of, place in there. And then it's other, smaller projects, that people might be working on. Although, I would say, in this department, most of the time, we're working on those big projects and that's what keeps things ticking over. Yeah.

HC: You've talked about the director, and I think it's important that, in a big institution like this, that that, sort of, drive to be open does come from the top. Can you talk a little bit more about that, and how that has, sort of, manifested itself, from him down to you? What kind of personality are we talking about?

LM: Ooh! That's a very difficult question to answer, because you're asking me to remember, and as you'll realise, Mark Jones retired, ooh, six years ago, or thereabouts. And I was relatively... new, I

was going to say, during most of his time; in V&A terms, I was very new. So, I'm probably not the best person to ask that question. Somebody who had, obviously, a very strong view about public service – which I think is an ethos that is definitely embedded in the V&A. Certainly with people who've been here for a very long time, public service is what they see their role as being, and I hope that we can inculcate that in the next generation, as well. Which, of course, is quite different from the experience I had with colleagues in institutions in other parts of Europe, where public service is not the first thing at the front of their minds, I think, in terms of thinking about their collections. That's a broad generalisation, but it's definitely, I think, something that is very noticeable here, that that's part of what we're about. And that no doubt explains why leadership, at the time that digitisation was taking off, was very much interested in disseminating what we have.

HC: How do you notice your European counterparts not putting that at the forefront? What does that mean? Practically?

LM: Well, practically, it means, for example, we have a twenty-day response imperative, for any enquiry that comes in. Every enquiry that comes into this department has to be answered. And that is not necessarily the case with colleagues in other museums elsewhere, which has sometimes been a bit of a shock to some of my younger colleagues, when they have encountered their methods of sifting through enquiries. But here, everything has to be answered.

HC: Great. I'm just going to quickly switch off.

LM: I mean, I suppose it's probably just worth saying, Helen, that I wouldn't have come to work in the museum, I wouldn't have wanted to leave higher education, if I hadn't thought the museum had moved forward a lot since I was a PhD student, for example. And I think that's the, kind of, outward looking- first really major manifestation of the museum looking outwards was the opening of the British Galleries, in the early- in 2001, where you could see this completely new approach to history.

HC: So, in terms of what you put online, you're saying that a lot of what happens, almost happens accidentally, in terms of... Whatever you're doing as a big project, that gets absorbed online, as part of that.

LM: I don't- yes, but that's not accidental, in the sense that it's planned at a much higher level. So, Future Plan, for example, which is the major renovation planned for the museum, which tends to- you know, the Europe Galleries were Future Plan Two – the end of it. We're now into Future Plan Three, and that's the major renovations, which are restoring the building to its original architectural form, and that has to be recognisable within the displays. But that – as I understand it – was something that was put in place by Mark Jones when he came: this very careful planning, where everything- there is a plan, if you like. It's not done piecemeal. So that you know that the Europe Galleries are the next galleries up for this, so now we know that the 19th Century Galleries are the next major project within the South Kensington area, which has followed Europe. The Exhibition Road entrance. And other gallery renovations are a much lighter touch. So, the 20th Century Galleries are getting upgraded because they sorely need it, and that's something that's been put in as a smaller project, so it counts more like a Public Programme project. So, we have Future Plan, which is the major stuff, about the building and the logic of the displays, and then there are the – which, let's face it - are calculated both in terms of the logic for the buildings and the objects, but also in terms of logic for raising money. Because, as you know, just to take an example: the Europe Galleries, we're talking about a third of the costs coming from Heritage Lottery, and the rest being raised by our Development department. And that's when you start seeing the financing of it all, as a jigsaw, as much as the- what's needed, from a conservation and pre- preservation point of view. So, you can look ahead at Future Plan, and you know what sequence things are going in. But then, running alongside that, you have the Public Programme, and the Public Programme is the programme of temporary exhibitions, largely. And sometimes, within that, you'll also find minor renovations – well, what we consider minor renovations – on current galleries, and the 20th Century Gallery, at the moment, is the one that's getting that. So, to be an eighteen-month project, turn things round and refresh, and so on. And it won't involve major funds, relatively speaking. It's not going to be £12.5 million! So, there are these two things. So, they are planned. The Exhibition Programme – which is

the Public Programme side of it – of course, is much more fluid, in that it's about curators coming forward with proposals for exhibitions, which are then programmed in, so that you have a programme that is balanced in any given year. So, interestingly, you know, you would have Balenciaga alongside Pink Floyd and opera and plywood, as being a balanced programme, where you wouldn't have four fashion exhibitions on at once, even if we know that they bring in lots and lots of visitors. Yeah.

HC: In terms of how these things move, from reality to online, is there a process there that you're involved in? Who decides what interpretation goes round which objects, and how they're presented in a very different format, on a screen?

LM: You're working with the digital team, so that any major gallery project- and, I suppose, an exhibition, in, kind of, in miniature, reflects this. You have teams of people working side-by-side at different stages on the project, and therefore, I think it would be fair to say that, in the case of a major gallery, you're talk- you have a concept team, that comprises – for the narrative – which comprises curators and Learning department. And then, that discussion will, you know- they might have ambitions which would then involve discussion with other departments within the museum, and it is a very big institution. And if you asked me to name those departments precisely, I wouldn't get it right, because they shift. But you would, at certain points, as we did once we got to certain stages in the development, be working alongside the team that's working on the digital content. And we would then be dealing with the traditional forms of interpretation alongside the digital. And I fully admit that traditional is something that I – which, yeah, largely text-based and display-based – I'm much more comfortable with than digital, where I know it has to go into a different type of language, which is not a language that comes naturally to me. But I think, then, it's very important that you have lots of different members of the team involved in that. Especially some of the younger members of department, who are much more au fait with digital and with using the internet in creative ways, in a way that, quite frankly, I probably am not!

HC: What do you mean by 'a different language'? Is it because you are speaking directly to a person you don't know, and you don't know what their expertise in...? What's your thought around speaking slightly differently online?

LM: Because you're presenting something... It's not the same as presenting something physically to people. So, people are walking through into a three-dimensional space, and they have certain expectations doing that. They're immediately getting the impact of scale, which, I think, it's quite difficult to convey online. Certainly, in a catalogue record with a photograph, you're not really conveying (except for those who understand what the dimensions mean) the impact of something. And I think that needs other people, who- who understand how to do that in that medium, to do it. I don't think it's, so much, talking to people you don't know, because that's what you're doing in a gallery: you're talking to people you don't know. You have a pretty good idea who the target audiences are, so that, for the gallery, we know that we are- because of where they're located, for example, and because we know what's taught in the National Curriculum, and because we know who our core visitors are, and who we want to attract. We have some kind of, in a sense, market segmentation, where you can start matching some of what you're trying to do against that. Whereas online is a slightly different way of thinking about things. And I'm not suggesting you can't do that type of segmentation with it, but I think it needs a different approach, to convey what you convey through the physical reality in the museum. But that's- but, you know, you have to take my age into consideration when you're listening to this!

HC: Let me just take another break, quickly.

LM: Can I just say, if we're at number twelve: "Are virtual visitors as important as physical visitors?" the answer is: "Yes, definitely." And that's something that I think is underlined, but that's also thinking about how you convey things to them. But also, part of our remit must surely be to try and encourage people to come here, as well.

HC: In terms of what is represented online, if you were a visitor from outer space, and you couldn't get anywhere near the actual V&A, how does what is online represent the institution as a whole?

LM: Gosh! Well, it gives you a partial view, inevitably. I think there's an increase- I mean, I think that's something that the digital team, and the web team, have been working towards changing, as you can tell from what is up, and what has changed over the last year, in particular. I think you- my own view is, at the moment, when you go in, you get a very good idea about exhibitions that are on, so the ephemeral part, on some levels, and that you have to look much harder for the actual collections, as such. Which, as you can imagine, is one of the things in the meetings that I have not attended, that curators are raising. Which is, it used to be that you could go on and you could – and this was an assistant curator, raised this with me – you could immediately see where it said: 'Collections', and you could drill down as a research tool into 'Directions'. You now have to scroll right down a page, in order to find that thing that lets you into the collections. So, there are- it is a different impression that's given. It's more, in a sense, like the billboards outside, than it is like being inside the museum, where you have all these different options. Now, of course, the options are there. It's just how that's laid out, and how you access it. And as someone who, obviously, only uses that site in particular ways, because I am here physically, it's quite difficult for me to assess exactly what's happening. If that makes sense.

HC: In terms of what not to digitise, are there things that have been left out when things go online, and would there any be any reason why that would be?

LM: Not as far as I'm aware. Although, I suppose, the one thing that was definitely discussed, and I can't- you know, I haven't investigated since, was whether some of the what might be considered slightly boring, archival types of things, that make curators' hearts jump... At one point, certainly things like obituaries of past keepers were not there anymore, and that was- it's that, kind of, level, of how much you archive, how much archival material is there, I suppose is the thing that one might question. I think you can probably get at it, but it's not instantly visible, as a resource. But I don't- I really can't answer that question. I'm not sure that it was... I can't answer that question!

HC: Isn't it- there's no racy material that doesn't go on for any reason? I mean, I guess it's not so much your department...

LM: There's nothing racy about textiles! No, it's not my - I mean, I think it's probably important to realise that there is a lot of archival material, and that that may take considerably longer to digitise than the process we're going through with the collections, as such. Just simply because of the quantity of it.

HC: And what type of stuff is that? Just briefly...

LM: Well, you've got the Museum archive, you've got the archive of Art and Design, you've got the many, many archives that Theatre and Performance have... That kind of thing. Well, there's other ones that just- so, what this- the material that is at Blythe House, is archives for the museum, essentially. So that, yeah...

HC: Does that have its own separate web presence? And if so, how is that managed differently?

LM: You would go in and you would look for- I think you'd have to check that, because again, I wouldn't access that through the web. And I would be drilling down in a very particular way. I would know exactly where I was going from, because it would be from an object. You might find it useful to talk to a colleague who's in the Marie Curie Fellowship here, who's working on particular aspects of the textile collections, which is allowing her to look at collecting practices across time, and link them to museums in other parts of Europe. And I think that's where you need a dedicated research period, in order to do that kind of work, which is not really the experience that I have.

HC: No problem.

LM: But I'm very happy to pass her details on, because it might be interesting for you to talk to her.

HC: That would be great.

LM: Yeah.

HC: Talking about reasons not to digitise, it sounds as though the will has been there to do it, but what would be the things that would hold it back, and in what order would you put them? This is the list on your sheet.

LM: I'm sure cost, time... What order would you put them in? I think, there is the expertise and the IT skills... I can't comment on fear of obsolescence, it's not something... that I've heard [*unintelligible*]. I think cost and time are probably the key factors.

HC: Perfect. Let me just stop quickly. So, looking back, obviously you were working around the year 2000. Not here, specifically, but can you remember the early days of the internet, and what were your thoughts, around what this new technology was going to do for us, and what we might be able to do in the future?

LM: I don't really think I had any thoughts on the subject! I mean, seriously. I was teaching. I guess that by the 2000s I would've realised that access to what was available in other places was key. But as an 18th Century historian, I knew that the archives and the objects I needed to look at would not, in my lifetime, be priorities.

HC: Why do you think that is?

LM: Why is that? Because... just because of the quantities, and the period, really. Not... you know, I was... Yes, why?! Just because of the quantities of documents, of which, you would need to go through, in order to find one that was useful. And this would apply to any number of researchers. And the sheer time it would take to digitise those, when there were probably other things that people considered- and now you're going to ask me: "What things people considered more important?" And that's- I don't know that I can really- I mean, I think digitising images, for example, I would've seen that as being a fantastic opportunity. All those things that you can't get access to. But in terms of documents, of the type that I would've wanted access to, I don't think they would've been a priority.

HC: If you could wave a magic wand and put everything online, would you do it? And if not, why not?

LM: Well, as you might imagine, I'm someone who believes in the real thing, and that it gives you a completely different experience. My great concern, with the next generation of historians, is that some of the fundamental skills you need to develop, you can't do without actually handling the real thing, whether that's a document or an object. Because it's about building up an experience of what's authentic and what is not. And that's to do with physical characteristics of it, which you could argue can be conveyed, in some way, digitally, but I don't think we're at that stage, yet, certainly. And it means that people digitising would have to be aware that those were characteristics that had to be captured. So, that's a very unsophisticated way of thinking about things. I also think that the sheer experience at the physical contact with things is very important. It's a strange, kind of, empathy thing. And I also think that moving across cultures is very important, physically. I'm a French historian, I think being absolute – well, amongst other things – being immersed in a culture explains that culture, and gives you a better understanding of the actual artefacts, or the documents you're using, from that culture. And I find it difficult to believe you can absorb that, other than being somewhere physically and in the present, as it were.

HC: That's good. There was a lot of talk, around the year 2000, of the democratisation of heritage, which means that, if you put it all online, we all have access to it, we can share... And it seems to me that we don't really seem to have that. Do you think the spirit of sharing is there? And- but maybe just the technology hasn't quite caught up to speed? Or do you still think that there's very much a, you know: "This is our collection and this is us, and we're here and..." Just, not to give everything away?

LM: I've not come across that, particularly. I think that- well, obviously, again, this is generational. I think you need to understand how to access material, and that, inevitably, you will find barriers of different types for different people in this country: one being access to a computer, for starters; two being access to the diverse ways you access things. And so, I don't know that it's necessarily a conscious desire not to share things, or to keep things back, but rather, that facilitating access is the issue. And that's not one-size-fits-all. That's-

HC: Good. So, looking ahead... I mean, we've looked back a bit at how things have changed. How does the last twenty years of working in heritage, and in the area, make you look forward to what you think we can expect in the next?

LM: My goodness! Well, I'm really not absolutely sure, because there's such an expansion, there's been such an expansion. And I would probably have been someone who, on some levels, was quite pessimistic about some of these things, because I do believe in the real world. But I think it has opened up lots of routes into new experiencing, and new ways of thinking about things. Having said that, I also think that it's thinking about what those opportunities are critically, and how you can develop a critical evaluation of them, as people are using them. And I think that, maybe, doesn't sound surprising, coming from a teacher. It's- in a sense, it's applying some of the principles you would've applied to the hard copy in the past. So, I think there'll be more and more. And I think 'more and more' begs the question of how we start distinguishing, in terms of different benefits, and disadvantages, of certain types of material. How we distinguish the authentic – I know these are bad words to use – authentic versus the fake, etcetera. And we only need to mention fake news on the Catalan situation to underline that very definite danger. It's not that it's not existed in the past. It's maybe been a bit a bit slower in the past, but I think these are the things that- I think it's how you manage the, what could be an absolutely overwhelming experience, of the digital world. And it overwhelming, and not creating enough space for critical thinking, I guess, is...

HC: Can you see the benefit of having, perhaps, an object online, and multiple interpretations, with discussions-

LM: Oh, yes, yes..

HC: -to say that: "This is contested"-

LM: Yes, oh yes...

HC: -I mean, there is obviously...

LM: Yes, yes, absolutely. I think that's a fantastic. I think, what I would feel quite strongly about, is that we need to, who- you know, so, it's the classic one: we need to know whose voice it is, that's talking, so that we can then understand why they're coming from different directions. That's...

HC: I- when you're talking about critical thinking, we're really talking about authority, and the authority of the curator. Why is it so important, and how can that authority, which has obviously permeated throughout an exhibition you've curated, how can you bring that online, and keep the expertise, that you have, safe from the deluge of other people's opinions, that may be completely ignorant?

LM: Presumably, that's what the web content we put online is about. It's about: that is the curator's voice. I think, as long as it's very clear what is the curator's voice, and what are the other voices, I don't think that's a problem at all. I'm sure that's where, you know, tremendously traditional things, like books, might continue to be quite useful. And the documented record, of what the exhibition looks like, is clearly very important, as well, from that point of view, because that is the curator's view.

HC: Can you- because you like the real thing, as it were, would you be happier with a virtual reality walk-through, where you are in the space, and you are looking at the objects themselves, with, perhaps, the interpretation that you choose? Would you rather see a much more literal translation of the space that you've created, in the V&A, online, as a VR walk-through? Would that be something that would be more acceptable to how you see objects?

LM: I think that's very useful. I think it's useful both for people who've been, and people who might be thinking about coming. But... I think it's only one option. I think there are other creative ways, no doubt, that you present the exhibition, but that is not going to be the way that it's been thought through by the curator. That's the only difference. I don't think walking through, looking at a walk-through on a screen, actually necessarily conveys exactly what the experience of walking through is like, but call me old-fashioned!

HC: You're entitled to your thoughts! Looking at what's online – I presume you do go online to look at collections of, you know, other people's museums – how do you think heritage is represented, overall, online? And are you surprised that everything isn't there yet, sort of thing?

LM: No, because I know how much effort and cost it takes, to get everything there. So, I'm not surprised at all. I think, what's interesting, is just to see how it has developed over the last few years,

and how increasingly sophisticated it's becoming. It's very clear, of course, that different organisations are targeting different audiences, and they're very conscious about that, in terms of what we might have called, in the past, the graphic design, etcetera. So, yeah, I think that's...

HC: Yeah... I guess, the question I'm trying to ask, is: how good does the technology have to be, before an experience can really be good enough? Because you've talked about immersing yourself in French culture. I presume it- that means walking to a French building, speaking French to somebody, going into the archive... And it's very much about a sense of place. But on the other hand, if somebody's not in France, they won't have access to that material. So, how good's the technology going to have to be, before it's an acceptable visit, for you?

LM: I suspect that, for me, it's never going to be that good, because it is, very much, a visceral experience. And I also think it's the way – and again, I think this is personal – I think it's the way that certain people are grabbed, to be interested in something. So, when I first went to France, I was fighting wanting to go to Spain, really. And once I found myself in the archive, and in, you know, the historic building – which, of course, it's not anymore, the archive I have to go to. Much more efficient, from a point of view. But it's being grabbed by the historical- the converted convent, that is where you get these piles of paper nobody has looked at for 200 years. I don't know how you recreate that online. I really don't!

Kathryn Eccles
Oxford Internet Institute
19th February 2018

HC: Helen Casey
KE: Kathryn Eccles

HC: Okay, if I could ask you to introduce yourself, and give me a little bit of background as to how you got here and what you do here.

KE: Oh, well, OK, so, my name's Kathryn Eccles. I'm a Research Fellow at the OII [Oxford Internet Institute], and a Senior Research Fellow at Pembroke College. I've been the Digital Humanities champion for the University of Oxford, the first and only, so far. My background is as a historian, actually, so ten years ago, I finished my DPhil in Modern History, Modern British History, nothing to do with mainstream collections, or to do with digital, actually. But towards the end of my DPhil, I was really starting to notice how the practice of History was changing as a result of new, digital archives becoming more prevalent. And so, I started getting interested in that, which led me to my first job here, at the OII. So, I joined as a research assistant ten years ago, looking at Humanities as a broad set of subjects that were being really quite dramatically changed at that point, by promises of digitisation in some of the key, sort of, foreground in digitisation projects, back then. Like British Library Newspapers, British Library Sound Archive, the Old Bailey Online, some of the really massive, game-changing Humanities databases. And I've been here ever since, really looking into the impact of digitisation on scholarship, and then, increasingly, on the shared space between scholars and the public. So, that's what I do now.

HC: Okay, so, starting at the beginning, what sort of collections i- does your role, sort of, have responsibility for? What kind of collections, at Oxford, do you look at, when you're doing your work?

KE: Well, I don't have any responsibility over any collections, because my role is independent, and so, I don't have any... I suppose, my only real responsibility, to frame it like that, over collections, would be the ones that I'm currently involved in digitising, for a project called 'Cabinet' that I run. Cabinet is a project to try to increase the number of objects being used in teaching, by making them digitally accessible, in a platform that we've built. And we digitise in 2D and 3D, collections from across the University, from all four museums, and from other hidden collections. So, the only- I would say those- looking at the data, surrounding the use of those collections, is my only, sort of, I'd say, responsibility over the collections in the University. But obviously, my work is about the interface between the public, the scholar, and the collection. So, I'm interested in collections throughout the University, from the mainstream, wonderful collections in our four University museums – millions of items – to the really small, hidden collections, in colleges, and, sort of, archives that aren't so well-known.

HC: And what, kind of, size are we talking about, from an outsider point of view? Museums are things that are quite well-known, and you can look up, and see what they have. But what about some of the other, hidden collections? What kind of things does Oxford hold?

KE: Oh, well, I mean, the most extraordinary things... So, we have, you know, wonderful Medieval and Early Modern manuscripts sitting in college libraries, we have, you know, incredible portraiture sitting around in the colleges... I mean, we have extraordinary things. Jamie and I went to the Medical Sciences building, to talk about digitising materials for use- objects for use in medical teaching, which is part of- it's a, sort of, minor but interesting arm of Cabinet. And the walls of that building are lined with early experimental equipment, with documentation, with photographs, with excerpts from diaries, that are just sitting around, and, you know, providing an interesting backdrop for scientists who are walking through those corridors. So, there are extraordinary collections like that, that are neither archive nor really on display, in the way that we would think of 'on display', not really publicly accessible. So, you know, a huge range of different collections. Including, of course, the built environment... Oxford itself is a, sort of, laboratory of science and history. And so, you

know, just going to look at the sundial, of course, at Christi College, or the early anatomy theatres that, you know, those that have survived, those are collections in the- you know, in their own right. So, they're hugely variable. And we're talking millions of items, from the very, very small, to the very large.

HC: The reason that I became interested in, particularly, talking to somebody who's interested in digitising at Oxford is, I'm looking at around the year 2000. And just around that time, the digital library collections did a huge, extensive, optimistic, and very confident report, about digitising what it called 'a critical mass'. And I presume, as a library, it's talking mainly about items on paper.

KE: Yeah.

HC: But do you know how that went, and in terms of a 'critical mass', did that ever happen?

KE: I'm not sure we ever got to a 'critical mass'. So, my own memory of that time- that's the, sort of, time that I was getting interested in how digital was changing the landscape in the Humanities. And so, those really early, big projects, like Old Bailey Online – which I think is genuinely transformational, in terms of Humanities scholarship – they were starting to be put together, and started, sort of, leeching information about what they were doing, and it was really, really exciting. And I think there was a lot of money back then, you know, coming from the funding councils, to enable that sort of research, and platform building. And I think we all felt really optimistic, that that funding would continue, and, you know, the lessons learned would make things much more efficient and cost-effective. And actually, it just takes a lot of money, and a lot of time, to build really wonderful, usable, digital collections. And I think, by the time people had realised that – so, in the mid-2000s, and towards the end of the 2000s – I think, you know, the money started to dry up, because we just couldn't sustain it. I think there just wasn't enough money to produce the kinds of 'critical mass' that, really, all the scholars were looking for. So, no, I don't think we've got to a 'critical mass' at all. I think what we- I mean, if you look at something like Digital Bodleian, for example, if you think about it from the libraries angle, then you'll see the, you know, the collated offerings of individual digitisation projects. And each of those will have made the, you know, had to go out and do their own fundraising. Some of them, like the John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, came from that, sort of, early wave of digitisation funding, from JISC. And they were, you know, terrific, some game-changing projects, but there just was- you know, I mean, if you look at what they've actually produced, it's great, but it's a fraction of the collection, still. So, we don't even have the whole of the John Johnson Collection online. And I think it's the same with the British Library Newspapers, you know, they carved, you know, a specific sub-set of newspapers off to digitise, as, sort of, best practice, as an example.

HC: I'm sorry... First rule of doing an interview is: Turn the sound off on your phone...

KE: Don't worry!

HC: Sorry. As you were saying...

KE: So, yeah, so, if you look at the British Library Newspapers collection, it's a tiny fraction of what was then in Colindale and now is in Lincolnshire, I think. And, you know, it was all done- I think, you know, all of those early digitisation projects were done at a very high quality, because they wanted something that was fit for scholarly use. And the cost of that is just so huge, but you don't want to sacrifice quality in or- you know, for quantity. So, I think they were, sort of, stuck in a bind, after a while.

HC: Just go back... What decisions do you think, looking at what they did do, or made, in terms of, if you only look at what's online, what was chosen, and why do you think those particular collections, or groups of things, were chosen for digitisation at that time?

KE: Well, I think a case had to be made for each of them. And I think, you know, increasingly, if you look beyond the, sort of, original large-funding, council-funded projects, I think, the decisions that had to be made were: "Which of our collections will be interesting to a donor? Which donors are, sort of, around, and thinking about funding this sort of thing? And what can we interest them in?" And I don't think that's wrong, you know, I think you have to move forward in any direction you can. But it does mean that what you end up with is a slightly haphazard arrangement of different

collections. So, I think, with- you know, when I studied those original JISC-funded projects, back in 2008 and 9, the process, I think, that they went through, involved looking at things like British Library resources, very mainstream, you know, huge, sort of, publicity machines around them. Things like the Newspapers can be interrogated from so many different disciplinary angles, and are interesting to the public. So, I think that made a really solid case. And then, there were some really tiny resources, like the online Population Reports, which- and I think, always said: "We have quite a niche audience, we think we know exactly who'll be looking at our materials online, but it will be game-changing for people, to be able to look at them online." And actually, you know, those little, niche projects started to have a much, sort of, broader readership, and audience, than they ever thought they would have. So, I think it was a balance between, you know, big projects, that would be interesting to a huge audience, for a variety of different reasons, to niche projects, that had a very specific, but very well-known and very well-established audience. And things like the Ephemera, which, you know, are, sort of, quirky, and, you know, have a lot of public appeal, you know, there's an awful lot of stuff to do with murder and death, and hangings, and public spectacle, and all that sort of thing, in that collection. So, I think it has, you know, I think each of those projects has a scholarly arm, but also great public appeal.

HC: Great. Thank you. So, in terms of what's motivated digitisation, what I've found, looking through this, in terms of making a case, it feels very well-organised, and that they all have a set of criteria, and... Do you think, the way that they did things back then, it feels very of its time... Do you think, how you would decide what to digitise now, is slightly different in- because this had a working group, and it had a metadata working group. It had every- it really thought everything was going to go according to plan. That's how it felt.

KE: Yes.

HC: So, is the way we do things – now that we find out that the plan doesn't quite work – how do you make decisions now, slightly different from this?

KE: Well, I think things have been different in the interim, but I think, perhaps, now, you might find – and I'm- this is a, sort of, partly educated response, but you could find out more about it – I think there's been a real initiative, over the last twelve-to-eighteen months, in Oxford, to try and pull things together again. So, there's been a digital strategy written for the gardens, libraries, and museums. And look- you know, there's a real effort, I think, to bring all of those collections – museum, library, and other – all together, and to try and look holistically at some of the challenges that are preventing them from putting everything online. Or even, you know, just putting the catalogues online. Not even all our catalogues are online, so we don't even know what we have, in terms of, you know, we don't have a data set that represents what we have, let alone digital images for everything. So, I think, actually, maybe we're coming a bit full-circle. We're returning to this kind of optimism that we had nearly twenty years ago, around what should be digitised, and what standards should be imposed, or recommended, and what, sort of, public access we want, and what, kind of, scholarly access we want. So, I think that digital strategy is a real milestone, in the life of Oxford collections online. Because it really started to look more collectively at some of those issues again. And I think, in the interim, I think, once that, sort of, initial wave of funding and optimism died down, I think people just went back to doing what they could. And the resources, you know, in the different museums, are really variable. So, there are museums that have, you know, a lot of funding, a lot of people, like the Ashmolean. But there are others, like the Museum of History of Science, that has a tiny staff, and a tiny budget, and really does a lot with what it has, but has limited capacity for some of the more risky or experimental work in digitisation, I would guess. So, I think there's probably two book-ends here, in terms of what you're interested in - the, sort of, original wave of optimism and collective thinking, and that's, sort of, been revisited more recently. Because, I think, and not that I think there's more money, or more resource available now, I just think that that haphazard or more fragmented approach hasn't been as successful as it could be. And that's knowledge- I think it's more about knowledge sharing, and agenda setting, and strategy, bringing together all of those things, is now being felt to be much more effective.

HC: Do you think there's a change in the way that we put things online? In terms of: Do we need to put everything on? The original idea was: Everything's gonna be online! And it clearly isn't. But also, I'm not sure that everyone thinks it should be anymore.

KE: Yeah.

HC: Given a magic wand, would you put everything online, or would you do things slightly differently?

KE: Well, I think, if you had a magic wand, you'd want to put everything online. And, I think, the reason I say that is because, just from my own research, the sorts of serendipitous encounters with objects online... And the way that it transforms the way that children think about material culture, and learning, the way that it reconnects elderly people, or people who can't get out of their homes, to connect with collections physically... I think there are so many beneficial reasons to put heritage online, if you possibly can. But, given that we don't have a- have a magic wand... I think it's really important to put what you can online. And I think, by putting things online, what you do is shine a light on part of the collection. And I think that can often lead people to think: "Oh, that's some of what's there, what else is there?" And that forges a, sort of, a connection with the archive, or with the collection, or with the institution, that prompts more questions, and more connection. So, I think, you- you don't have to put everything online, in order for a digital collection to be transformative for the non-digital parts of the collection.

HC: Fantastic. Let me just take a quick break. Okay, so, yes. Tell me about the 2009 JISC Report, and why that's the best one to read.

KE: Oh, yeah, so, well, I think, again, just thinking about how things change over time... So, in 2008/9, we did some work for JISC, around looking at the usage and impact of some of their digitised Humanities collections, and it was a really fascinating project to be involved in. Partly because, I think, nobody really knew how to evaluate digitised materials, and so we were experimenting with different methods. And also the projects themselves, as a historian, you know, they were just amazing to play with, and really, I think, opened the door to the, kind of, scholarly potential of some of these materials, for me. So we came up with quite a lot of interesting reflections on how things were being used at that moment, but one of the things that we said in the report, to JISC, was: "Some of these things won't really be felt for a number of years, so what you really need to do, is to come back – semi-regularly, but certainly in a few years' time – to see whether the things that we're predicting might happen now, are actually going to be happening in the future." And they've been terrific, and gave us some additional... In fact, the first thing they did was they funded, I think, five-to-ten other resources, to use our toolkit that we built, based on our own research data, to go out and, sort of, try and work out how they were doing, using our methods. So, things like Old Bailey Online are in there, the Siobhan Digital Dance Project is in there, the British History Online... All sorts of different platforms, and different types of resources, are in there, all trying to work out what impact they were having, who was using them, how they were using them. And then, two years ago – where are we now? So, it was 2016. JISC gave us another tranche of funding – small tranche of funding – to go back and look at two, key resources, that we'd looked at from the very beginning. One was EEBO, the Early English Books Online, the other one was the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, which had gone through various incarnations and digital facades over the years. And we went back and looked at how they were doing now, what we could say about them now, that we couldn't say about them then. And I think there were two interesting developments, that I can think of off the top of my head. One of them was that we could trace the impact, across different subject areas, by looking at how they were represented in journals. So, just using really simple, sort of, science-metric methods, you can look at where they're cited in all sorts of different journals, and then, sort of, paste them into a bit of a map, so that you can see, they're clustered around certain, pretty expected subject areas. But then they, sort of, proliferate, around very non-traditional, or unexpected subject areas. So, the fact that more scholars, from different subject areas, are becoming aware of the collections, I think, really shows how things grow over time. And the other finding was that EEBO, in particular, have been really great at putting their metadata out

online. So, they released a huge sub-set of their collection, of the TEI encoding, out on GitHub, a couple of years ago, to, sort of, celebrate what they've been doing. And that has enabled scholars to create their own data sets, that have been cleaned in various different ways, that are constructed in such a way as to answer particular questions that they might have. And I interviewed a few students – PhD students – who had this incredibly complex workflow, of working with all of these different data sets, in very specific and known ways, in order to answer their own questions. So, the facility that people had, with the back end, the data behind the collections, I found really astonishing, and really suggestive of a different kind of scholarship, that was growing up because of the availability of – not just the, sort of, digital facsimile, the beautiful manuscript or the front page of the newspaper – but the data underpinning all of that. That was really fascinating.

HC: That's really interesting. Thank you. How do you make digitisation decisions now, and has it been different since you started?

KE: So, I mean, so I can only talk about the digitisation decisions that we make, here in the Cabinet project. And I suppose that's- that- I guess that, sort of, connects with the practice of the collections that we work with. So, I hope this is helpful, but... The way that we make decisions now, is that Cabinet enables faculty members, from across the University, to put in, sort of, mini-collections of objects, into the platform, for use in teaching. So, it's organised by course, usually. Those courses can be anything, from a, sort of, four-hundred-undergraduate survey course, to a special subject that's taken by under ten students. So, they- faculty members will, sort of, select objects that they want to be digitised, or to have access to in the collection, in the Cabinet collection. And we go and try to find what's already there, in the collections. And if they don't exist, or if they want a 3D, moveable object, then... If they want 3D, then we ask Jamie to go over and assess whether it's suitable for 3D modelling. And if it is, then he does all of the digitisation. So, we have a, sort of, full-time person who's available to go and digitise in 3D. Or he'll- or we'll request that something is captured in 2D. So, it's all, sort of, led by the faculty member, at the moment. It's all, sort of, bespoke digitisation. I mean, one thing that does do, is it brings us into contact with what's already digitised, and what people are prepared to give us access to. In general terms – and you could ask Jamie about this, if it's important – in general terms, I think, we've found that people are very willing to give us access to things, including objects that are on display, that need to be taken out of cases and moved in order to be photographed. Huge objects that require, you know, putting somebody up on a ladder, to take photographs of things. Generally, people have been very open to it. Because, I think, we always try to hand back the images – the 2D images and the 3D images – to the collection. So, it's a way of- for them, of getting access to digital materials, that they wouldn't otherwise have the budget for. And it's interesting, 'cause we're experimenting with methods for digitising in 3D, so they're quite minded to work with us, at the moment.

HC: It's interesting that you're using your students, internally, and teaching, to lead this, that's almost like looking in, instead of looking out...

KE: Exactly.

HC: How has that come about, and why do you think that's come about?

KE: I don't know if I can answer that. I mean, I think... I think there've been some really great initiatives, within the museums, to try and get faculty to teach with their collections, but I think it's- there are lots of barriers in the way. So, you know, resource from the museum, you have to have somebody who's really dedicated, and has the time to dedicate, to working with faculty members. The collections are really diverse, so you might need to bring in several different colleagues, to try and bring together a course, because it will naturally tap into different people's responsibilities. I mean, I think, time and cost, of curator expertise, is a real barrier. So, I think, sort of, bringing the faculty in, came about... I mean, so, when we started the Cabinet project, we had a really super-keen faculty member, who was desperate to put all of his courses online, and it was a real transformational course, because it depended so much on Oxford materials. So, it was about the transformation of, sort of, Scientific Revolution in the 17th Century, which is, you know, represented in the built environment, in experimental - objects to do with experimentation. There are beautiful

frontispieces from important books and documents, there are portraits of key characters. I mean, there are, sort of, every kind of material, from the collections, that you could possibly imagine. So, it was a really fascinating, dispersed collection to work with. And I think, it does change the terms of engagement, when you have a faculty member saying: "I'd love to work with these collections." I suppose it's the same sort of thing that you get with donors, you know. A donor will have a particular, sort of, favourite, or desired collection to work with, and that then sets the tone, for how the collection works with that project. And I suppose it's similar with the faculty members. I suppose the interesting thing, about faculty members, is that they tend to want to work with lots of different kinds of objects, that can be dispersed, not only within the collections of one institution, but across multiple different collections. And that brings people together in a very different way, actually. And I think, our project is to think about the, sort of, democratisation issue. Our project is fairly agnostic, in terms of, we want to work with everyone, and we don't have a, sort of, favourite collection that we work with, we work with whichever collections the faculty member nominates as being important. So, off we go, and, sort of, try and track down the objects of interest. And that means that we have a fairly- we're seen as fairly benevolent, across the collections. And that really helps open doors, that one is not being, sort of, favouritised over another, and- or one collection is getting a, sort of, higher-quality or, you know, more beautiful environment – digital environment – than another. And that's helpful.

HC: What's really interesting in what you've just said is, what I said just before was, you're not being democratic because you're looking in. But actually you are being democratic, within the world of Oxford.

KE: Yes.

HC: And actually, that's about as big as it can be. You can't be democratic across the world, because where on Earth do you begin? So, do you think the key is actually working within institutions, to actually connect within, and that work needs to be done before anyone can share outside?

KE: Well, certainly for Oxford, I think, that's a hugely important driver, at the moment, is that we all work together, and that we all share the, kind of, standards and expertise, and adoption of new technologies, new techniques, for digitising. And that's, yeah, really, really, tremendously important, because we need to, sort of, put up a fairly unified shop window, or façade, to the world. In terms of across the world... I mean, I suppose, big institutions have a responsibility, don't they? Because they have that money, and they have a little bit more than other people. So, they work through a different set of questions, and I suppose our responsibility is to share that thinking with the world, to- and I personally, think – we have a responsibility to share as much, in open access, as we possibly can. But I also think we need to share the thinking behind the decisions that we make, and the types of techniques that we've used, and all of those sorts of things. Because sometimes that part is the most difficult, for smaller institutions to start thinking through. Yeah.

HC: In terms of what Cabinet does, so you use internal enthusiasms to borrow objects to digitise, which then go back to teaching. But presumably, you then project those out, so that they're available for public viewing?

KE: So, not everything is available for public view yet, but a lot of it is, and we're working really hard to make sure that the rest of it becomes publicly available, as soon as we can make it available. So, when we first started, there was a bit of reticence around sharing materials. I think institutions are still quite careful about what they're- you know, about making very high-resolution images available to the world. Because people can just, you know- even if they're told not to, people can just take them and use them for their own purposes. I think there's still quite a lot of nervousness around what happens when that, sort of, appropriation occurs. But, you know, our ethos is, really, to make as much available as we possibly can. And actually, I think that's pretty much shared amongst most of the collections that we work with. But it's got- at some point, you'll reach somebody whose decision is to release that, and then, of course, the buck stops with that person, and you can completely understand why they might be a little bit more tentative than- than their colleagues, for whom that responsibility is not a burden.

HC: Let me just have a quick pause. That's quite interesting, what you say, about it getting to the top, where the buck stops. Do you think there... What I've found, is that everybody says they want to share, but they don't necessarily, actually, share...

KE: Yeah...

HC: It's like the big idea is, kind of, knocked down by all of the small details that go along with that.

KE: Yeah.

HC: Is there, still, that within what you do, a concern about monetizing? A concern that, you don't want to give away something that is valuable and could bring incomes? And where are you seeing that?

KE: Yeah, I mean, I think that's still a huge concern. I think there's some really well-established research, that shows that if you make your materials available, then you drive interest. I mean, you only have to look at the Rijksmuseum, and the way the Rijksstudio has opened up the collections, and made people work with them in ways that drive capitalism, actually. It's difficult to say where we're seeing it. I suppose, one thing I would say, is that I don't feel that the- so, describing why the buck stops, I don't think it's actually at the top. I think the message from the top is always: "We want everything to be open, we want everything to be shared." And I think that's the case for most of the layers in between. But at some point, somebody has to operationalise open access, and they, then, are responsible for what happens, when they have done that. That's neither at the top nor at the bottom, and I think that's where the difficulty lies. People who, you know, have to explain to their colleagues, who look after licensing, why they're not getting the requests for licensing anymore, if that's one of the consequences. Or somebody who's going to receive all of the complaints that they've found such an image on this website, and they didn't have permission, and what are they going to do about it? So, I think, there isn't enough support, perhaps, at that level, to try and manage the aftermath, in making things open access.

HC: Right. In terms of decisions not to digitise, just trying to, kind of, look at Oxford as a whole, which I know you're not responsible for... How do you think these reasons rank, and what- have you had any experience of any of them as you've gone along?

KE: Well, cost is, rightly, at the top, because I think that's the great barrier to digitisation. I think, you know, Oxford has a fairly well-known problem with just having a good understanding of what material lies where. So, you know, not all of our catalogues are online, not all of our collections are catalogued, you know. I mean, some of our collections are beautifully digitised, in 2D and 3D, available, open access, to the world, and it's a wonderful, wonderful shop window. But in the basement of the shop, there are lots of boxes, that nobody knows what's in, and have been sat there for quite a long time, with the greatest will in the world to deal with them, but just no time to deal with them. So, there's a huge spectrum of- of states in between. I mean, cost and time, I think, are pretty much the same thing, aren't they? If you have plenty of money, you can make decisions about people's time, in different ways, I think. You know, the lack of person resource, in some of the museums, is profound, and a huge reason why they can't be as enthusiastic about digitisation as others. Even to the point where they just don't have the time to write the proposal that would get the funding to do the digitisation. Even fully costed, they just don't have that kind of resource. Expertise, I don't think has been a problem here. You know, we have a terrific building full of IT experts here. You know, thinking through the history of Digital Humanities, we had the Humanities Computing Service here, that was, you know, a, sort of, forerunner of modern-day Digital Humanities. And that was, you know, a huge resource that Oxford had access to, and probably was, you know, to some extent, responsible for the forward-looking report that we were talking about earlier, that Stuart Lee wrote. He's been a driving force, I think, behind digitisation in Oxford. So, we've had that expertise, we've had that responsibility for standards, particularly around text, for a really long time. When we started putting Cabinet together, we worked with the Software Development people here, and it's- you know, they've created a beautiful, beautiful platform for us. So, I don't think that's a barrier, particularly. I think that's a huge resource that we've got access to. I think, privacy and copyright issues, I'd probably put higher up on the list, actually. I think they'd go

right up there with cost and time. I think people are still nervous of what happens when you put things online. That's been, I think, a surprise to us, working on Cabinet, that people are still so reticent, about some collections in particular, that are, sort of, treasured, and people still want to keep relatively limited, in terms of their access. The other things, I don't think I've encountered, myself. There's a huge amount of political will. There's a real drive-in community, in the University, at the moment, trying to get this done. Trying to think through what the barriers are that are preventing more of our collections going online, or you know, a, sort of, slow-but-sure institutional effort, to work towards goals- you know, shared goals. So, I'm not sure any of the other issues have come up. For me, certainly.

HC: In terms of the privacy aspect, that you think is still, surprisingly, there, does that mean virtual visitors are still not as important as physical visitors? And have you seen any, sort of, thought about that, that's surprised you?

KE: I don't think it's about virtual versus physical, actually. I think, you know, if you think about the experience of walking through the doors of the museum, everything that's on display has been carefully chosen, all the- you know, a lot of time and effort's gone into the displays, many of them have been there for a long time. And then, you know, behind the scenes, and underneath, and all around, are all of the things that you don't get access to. And I think, with digitisation, what often happens, is that a light is shined on those hidden collections. A- sort of, eighty percent of the materials held by collections that aren't on public view, at any one time. So, in a way, it's about treating your virtual and your physical visitors the same, you know. Keeping the veil. Hiding those other collections. And I don't think it's a, sort of, deliberate, universal decision to exclude. I think it's just a case of people being nervous about the demand, what the demand might look like, if you give people a little peek at what's there. We did have, just once, I think, some concern about pointing to items that were on display, and saying, very specifically, where on display they were. And I think that was driven by a nervousness about theft. But that was- I think that only really came up once. I think most of the anxiety has been around, you know, showing some of what might be in a collection, and opening the floodgates to enquiries, or demands, to see more of what we've made available.

HC: Is there a part of it that's almost about ownership of the curator role, as well? Because it seems to me that there was originally a fear, that if everything was online, then who needs curators? We'll curate our own exhibitions. Does that fear, of a loss of our expertise, and a lot of the control that we have over what we put out there... Is that still there, and is that still important?

KE: Yeah, I think it's definitely still there, and definitely still important. We had Martin Roth here a couple of years ago, talking about that very thing, and very provocatively saying: "I think the role of curator will- you know, as it stands at the moment, will fall away, and the curator will start being a different kind of operative in the museum, because the public will take over a large amount of their current role." And you could hear- you know, the audible gasps, all over the audience! It was an incredibly shocking thing for a lot of people to hear. Yeah, I think there is a nervousness about how things will be presented, who's going to be presenting them, who, you know, who gets to create and maintain that, sort of, institutional voice. And I think, you know, sometimes it's quite freeing. Certainly, the faculty members that we work with, you know, they really enjoy being able to put things together themselves. And they are experts, you know, they're experts in their field, they're talking about objects that are at the heart of their research. So, these are people who, you know, you might invite to curate guest exhibitions, or, you know, create new labels for objects. But even there, there's a little bit of, you know, just nervousness, around sharing that role, and- or indeed, handing it over to somebody else, even for a short amount of time. So, yeah, I think that's about ownership, and authority, and that, sort of, you know, authoritative voice, yeah, being somehow diluted.

HC: Fantastic.

KE: I think, one thing that that Martin Roth thing made me think – this is apropos, nothing much, but – it made me think about things like, do you know Melissa Terras's work, on the, sort of, digital miscellanies? It's a great paper, I'll send you the reference. Talking about publicly, sort of, hobby-

curated sites, and the extent to which these have- the, sort of, I guess, the openness of digital spaces allowing people to create and curate their own digital collections, in a way that's quite rigorous, and informed, and, you know, it's... I was thinking about this recently, because we were talking about the difference between family historians and histories of family, and the professional historian, and whether- whether there's any space between them anymore, because they're sharing the same physical and digital spaces on- I think. And the expertise required, to navigate some of the sources for family history, is profound, now. You know, you have to, like with those PhD students, who are working with all those incredibly complex data sets, essentially, family historians are doing that, and then going to the local history archives, and digging through the physical collections, too. So, I think that notion, of: "We are the experts, because we're professional, and we have these skills," that's starting to fall away.

HC: And actually, the enthusiasm's- one of the things that you see, about online, is because enthusiasm breeds a lot of stuff online, you do see these, kind of, things like Civil War in the United States. Huge numbers of people who are utterly obsessed with their subject-

KE: Yes!

HC: -and do you think that one of the reasons that people don't put so much stuff online, is because there's so much 'Wild West' thinking out there? And they don't want to, kind of, be part of that? They feel like what they have is separate, and ought to be kept separate?

KE: Well, possibly. And there's a, sort of, veneer, isn't there? To some of the collections online. But I think, you know, you just have to look at the Flickr comments, and the way that some really massive institutions have embraced what is a fairly 'Wild West', sort of, space. You know, it's collaboratively tagged, and curated, and open, and, you know, I think, it's brave, and brilliant, that so many collections have ended up in Flickr. I think they really give a very different feel, you know. It feels pretty no-frills, doesn't it? When you're looking for materials in Flickr. But it's still my go-to space, for open content, for presentations or even, you know, teaching about digital heritage.

HC: And I've spoken to the Tate Archive, and they now link to Wikipedia. And- and that is something that, twenty years ago – well, first of all, it didn't exist-

KE: Yeah!

HC: -but as soon as it existed, there was very much a, like: "No Wikipedia in academia"-

KE: Absolutely, yeah...

HC: -rule. The end. End of.

KE: Absolutely.

HC: Is that going away?

KE: Yeah, I think it is. I mean, so, ten years ago, I interviewed groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students, and talked to them about whether they used things like Wikipedia. And they would say things like – this is all in the JISC report – but they said things like, you know: "What we do, is go and do our research, mostly online. Then we pick up a few things in the library, or the archive, and then write our papers. And then, we go through the references, and if there are too many websites, or URLs, I just, you know, clean those out, because otherwise, my tutor will think I haven't done the real work of research." We found that so fascinating. We actually organised a couple of workshops, afterwards, where we brought fairly early-career researchers into contact with very senior researchers, very senior professors, who were using digital archives, to try to normalise it a little bit, and show that there are really rigorous, excellent ways to use digital archives. Because it was so prevalent, back then. That was back in 2009/2010, and I think the picture's changed enormously now. So, there are projects around here, like Cultures and Knowledge, that work really closely with- with our Wikimedian in residence, who've, you know, used the Wikimedian to model data that they've managed to share between Wikidata and their own platform. So, I think those sorts of connections are being built in more and more. Because, you know- and it works in both directions. I think there's a huge amount of good knowledge, now, in Wikipedia, fully referenced and quite, you know- people are starting to see that it is policed, and there is a, sort of, a formality around it. A formal structure, and a formal mode of editing. And there's a way of connecting data

sets, that make them more relevant, more findable, and build authority into Wikipedia. So, yeah, I think it's been a revolution, actually, and really well-managed and well-judged – personally, I think – by Wikipedia themselves.

HC: One of the, kind of, branches of interest I have, is that Wikipedia's actually doing what heritage professionals should have been doing since the year 2000. And it's almost replaced- because there- because it was brave, and 'Wild West', and it could do what it wanted to, and it didn't have the weight of, you know, professional curatorship, and heritage on it, it's actually become what heritage could have been if the organisations had thrown caution to the wind, and jumped right in. Anyway, that's...

KE: That's interesting...

HC: So, looking back, do you remember, when you were working, in those early days of: "Ooh, what can the Internet do for us?" Can you remember whether you- how you thought back then, and whether you could, sort of- were thinking in the same way, of: "Let's get everything online and share it between us, and, you know, have a worldwide sharing democratisation of heritage." Was that something you were aware of?

KE: I think I might have arrived a little bit too late for that particular party. I remember, as a DPhil student, here, so towards the end of 2006/7, I was finishing up. There was a real, sort of, attention to these archives, that were suddenly being put online. Because, I think, probably, we were at the end of our DPhils, we were desperate to finish, and we were looking for efficient means of finishing. And there was this sense of: "Oh, that's- such a person is so lucky, because they can now write an entire chapter based on the stuff that's in the British Library Newspapers, or in the Sound Archive," or wherever else it happened to have been. And so, I suppose, one thing I was really aware of, at that time, was a, sort of, new Apartheid in research. It was one of the things that drove me to look into it a little bit more, was this, sort of, notion that everyone would now go to the big resources. And, you know, Post-Doc projects, or research projects, would be costed out, on the basis of what you know, the dramatically amazing things you could achieve, in three years, if you were using a digital archive. Because it was so much faster, and more efficient, than actually going to some country house and sitting in a dusty basement, going through these things by hand. So, there was definitely, I think, a sense of: "Well, this is great for the people who're using these things, but what about the people who're using the other things?" So, I think, for me, in the middle of the 2000s, there was a sense of: "Not everything is out there, and not everything is going to be out there, so what do we do with the things that we're interested in?" So, I'm a 20th Centuryist, and nothing in the 2000s, from the 20th Century, really went online, because of copyright reasons. And much of it is still unavailable, still. So, if you're a 19th Century historian, there's absolutely masses now available, but, you know, there's still a huge, sort of, research gap, in the digital material available from the 20th Century. So, I think that sense of the gaps was more, sort of, prescient, at that time, than the sense of open deluges of data and material.

HC: And is it anti-democratic, because, even now, people are using these great resources because they're there, and why wouldn't you? But unfortunately, there's an awful lot of stuff not happening. Do you think research- this band of research, that happens around this time, is going to be unnaturally weighted, towards what's already there? And is that anti-democratic?

KE: I think it's been a bit better calibrated, recently. So, I think the research councils are now- I think they went through a stage of thinking: "Oh, we need the whizz-bang, amazing, digital, you know, forward thinking!" And so, there was a tranche of funding, sort of, four or five years ago, certainly, that was really focussed on, not just digital, but next-wave digital. You know: "We've got the things out there now, what else can you do? Show us, amaze us, dazzle us!" In a way that, I guess, you know, would create space for new projects, to think lo- longer term, you know. Not just putting things online, but once we put things online, we can have all of these techniques or affordances. Yeah. Slightly lost my track, now, but...

HC: Yeah, you were saying, five years ago, there were huge amounts of money-

KE: Yeah...

HC: -for whizz-bang things, but actually, they're taking a more measured approach now, in terms of-
KE: I think they are, yes, thanks. I think they are. So, I think there are some huge, transformational projects out there. Big link data projects, or projects that are visualising data in really interesting ways, that are really experimenting with computational, data-driven methods, in ways that, I think, the research councils really like. But there's an awful lot of- I mean- there's almost a, sort of, post-digital material turn going on now, isn't there? And I think we're, you know, where you can say: "All of these incredible things are happening with digitisation. Actually, what about the stuff that's been left behind? Or what- you know, how does this knowledge change our encounter with these objects? Or with these archives, and these questions?" So, I think there's a, sort of, almost a revaluing of Humanities research, and the artisanal in Humanities research, as a result of this, sort of, huge push forward in digital. I don't know. Maybe that's helping recalibrate things a little bit. I don't know.

HC: And looking forward, you said, given a magic wand, we'd digitise everything. But not everybody I've spoken to has said that. And I think what you're saying about the material turn is very interesting. Because the other thing to look at is, do we need everything online? Or do we just need to know what's available if we do want to go and see it? Or if we do want to request it? Now that we know the size of it, would you genuinely see that, one day, everything would be online, or not?

KE: I think it's really unlikely, that everything will go online. Really unlikely. But I think, the thing, you know, the, sort of, gradual advancement of digitisation is great, and instructive. And my own research has suggested that, once you put things online, you don't just generate interest in the digital object, you generate interest in the object. And in the collection, and the way it's been collected, and the decisions that are made around it. And I have terrific examples of people who have created, sort of, digital special collections, that have really allowed their students to grow, and be informed in different ways, and become interested in physical collections, and to go on and do book history research, or, you know, material culture work. I think that's really intriguing, and makes a really good case for increased digitisation, at whatever scale. I mean, I think there are so many things that you can see with a digital object, that you can't see any other way. And I think there are loads of- obviously, you know, probably a far larger number of things that you can see in the physical object that you can't see with the digital. And I think, you know, the future of great research is having both available, if possible. Because, I think, that gives you the best opportunity to know everything you can know about those objects, that you can gather from a, sort of, you know, from a handling point of view. I think digital handling is different, but it's not necessarily worse or better, I think it's just different. And it offers a whole landscape of different questions and encounters, that you don't get with the physical.

HC: Fantastic. Let me just check if there's any more things... So, where do you think – there's two questions, really, I've got to finish with. The first one is, where do you think technology will take heritage in- in the next twenty years? It's- I mean, it- answer that how- however you feel you want to. It's a very massive question.

KE: So, I think there's two things that I'm really excited about, for the future. One is the potential for data science to work with heritage, in more collaborative ways. So, you know, there's so much we know about our virtual visitors – to museum websites, to museum collections online – but we don't do a lot of joining the dots, I don't think. We don't have a great set of metrics for understanding those data points. I don't think we have a great, sort of, social science lens on all of that. And I don't think we do a lot of connecting the dots, between our physical visitors, and the physical encounter in the museum, and the virtual, and how those two things overlap, if they do. So, I think there's a real opportunity there, for really high-quality social science research, around the virtual and the physical, and joining the dots. And that's really exciting. And I think the sorts of questions that data scientists are trying to ask, about the world, from a very, sort of, contemporary point of view, could be really, really helpful, in trying to unpick data archives. So, I think there's a real opportunity there. And I think, the second thing I'm really excited about, is just the transformation in imaging of objects. I think that's the thing that I'm most excited about. With Cabinet, we've done some really, really fascinating work, with schoolkids, and people with visual impairments, people- you know, our- the

models that Jamie makes have been 3D-printed, and taken on all sorts of different journeys. And that has been fascinating, because it prompts you to think about objects, and value, in a very different way. And I think there's so much to learn, about the, sort of, the haptics of handling something in a digital environment, and how that- how that informs us. What does it inform us of? You know, what questions are we asking? And how does that bridge this gap, between the virtual encounter and the- and walking through the doors in the museum?

HC: What was my last one...? If you were an alien, and you came down, and you'd had a look at- all you could suck up was the Wifi, so all you could suck up was what is online now... How do you feel that heritage is represented, in terms of what has been chosen to be digitised?

KE: I mean, I think, you'd see, represented digitally, largely what's an accurate picture of who has large collections, who has the money to digitise large collections... I mean, I think you can pick up quite a lot from- about smaller institutions, simply from their web presence. I think they're really- you know, smaller institutions can give quite a lot of clues, as to what they have, without making the whole collection available online. So, I think, even if you only had, sort of, trace data about what they were talking about, you'd have quite a lot of information that you could use as a, sort of, history- you know, an alien historian of the future. To try and, you know, populate a fairly accurate picture, of what's there. Having said that, if you were just looking at Oxford, if you were able to scrape information from our web domain, there's so much that you'd miss. There's so much of our collections that isn't even mentioned, in any capacity, in any space, around our web presence. So, there's an awful lot you'd miss, about this institution, I think.

HC: Fantastic. Thank you ever so much!

KE: That's a very good answer!

HC: That's a fantastic answer.

Zoe Hendon
Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture
23rd February 2018

HC: Helen Casey

ZH: Zoe Hendon

HC: Okay, so, first of all, can you tell me your name and your position here, please?

ZH: Yeah. I'm Zoe Hendon, and I'm Head of Collections here at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, which is part of Middlesex University.

HC: That's great. Can you tell me a little bit about your own background in the heritage sector, and how you've come to be here?

ZH: Yeah. So, I did History originally, as an undergraduate degree, and then I did Museum Studies, as an MA. And then I worked in various, you know, heritage locations, and local authority museums, and at the William Morris Gallery. But I've been here at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture since 1999, and I started as an assistant curator. And gradually, over the years, I've, kind of, evolved, and the place has evolved. So, I've- yeah, majority of my career has been here, really.

HC: That's a really interesting time that you started, 1999, because quite a lot of my research is focussing around the year 2000-

ZH: Yeah...

HC: -because that was the point where the Internet suddenly became available, quite freely, to everybody. There was a lot going on before that, but for us in workplaces, that was the time where we really started to see the idea that we should, somehow, 'do the Web'. Can you remember what that time was like, and the sort of discussions that were going on, about how this museum should, perhaps, be transferred onto the Web?

ZH: Yeah, well, that was a time that was, kind of- I suppose I was appointed just before the museum was about to open a new building, at Cathill, the Middlesex University campus at Cathill. And we'd had Lottery money to build that building. And I was appointed, you know, as part of the preparation, for getting- for the move, and setting up the exhibitions in that building. And I think, it was always assumed that it would be a good idea that we had a website, as well. Almost that you couldn't have a museum- you couldn't be a publicly accessible museum if you didn't have a website. And I was, kind of, instrumental in getting that first website set up. And then it was- I don't remember a great deal of in-depth discussion about it, it was one of these things that just had to happen, and it was like: 'Go and do it. Make it happen.' You know, being the young person who'd just done a Museum Studies course, it was assumed that I should just get on with it. So, without a lot of, kind of, I suppose, more intellectual discussion, about what it would mean to put the collection online, if you see what I mean. So, I'd also persuaded everybody that that we needed a collections database, so we- within, you know, about a year or so, we'd got this collections database. Because previously, all documentation had been on paper. So, the idea was: "OK, well, we'll start to do things in a proper database, and then we'll put that whole database online." And there wasn't really a great deal of discussion or thought, because it was too- it was all too much of a rush. There wasn't a great deal of discussion or thought about how exactly one would do that. So, the first iteration of the online catalogue was basically a section of the website, where you could- you could search the collections by - I don't know - by date, by name of designer, by theme... But it was very clunky. And the reason it was clunky was because we- it was all done in a huge rush.

HC: So that I can understand the collection that you hold: I know you've already met me, and talked me through it a bit, for the purposes of this interview. Can you talk about when you arrived, and what the collection was at that time, and how, perhaps, that's changed, coming up to now?

ZH: So, I suppose, well, the collections haven't changed in their physical-ness. What's perhaps changed, is the degree to which they are catalogued and photographed, and then, as it were,

digitally curated. So, when we first made the collections database available online, it was simply: “OK, we’ve got certain- we’ve got certain records in our database” – which might be- well, any object that we hold, so it might be wallpaper, textile design, some books, some catalogues, and so on. And then we said: “OK, we’ll” – not all the fields in the database, but a certain selection of the fields in the database were- were made visible to the public. So, you know, if we had an image of it, the title, the date, a brief caption. But because the- in a sense, the database had been, had only just been developed, and was itself a, kind of... Based on people typing in things that had been written on paper before, some of that information wasn’t intended as: ‘This is what the public needs to know.’ It was more: ‘This is what we need to know, to keep track of this object,’ do you see what I mean? There’s a difference between a, kind of, internal ‘this is what the museum knows about a thing’ and an external ‘this is what we’d like to tell the public about the thing.’ And at that time, we hadn’t really understood that distinction, or there wasn’t time to understand that distinction, see what I mean?

HC: What was the point where you realised that what the public wanted to see was a much more front-facing, shiny, interpreted version of what you were using behind the scenes?

ZH: I think, over the course of the early 2000s. I mean, so, we got the online, you know, the facility to have our collections available online seemed like a big achievement at the time. So, we’ve got this shiny new museum building, and our collections are all available online. Everything that was in the database automatically was visible online. That was a bad mistake, because as I say, there wasn’t always a good quality of information. And I think, almost immediately, it was clear, well, this is not really working for anybody, because if you’ve got a general interest, there’s almost too much information, and you can’t navigate your way through it. But if you’ve got a very specific interest, you can’t find what it is that you’re after, either. Do you see what I mean? The search mechanisms were just too, kind of, crude. And there was no way to refine a search. If you’d got a certain: “Ah, OK, I’ve found a hundred things, now I need to search within that hundred things,” there was no way to do that. And I think it was- it was very frustrating, for a long time, that we- that we couldn’t- we didn’t have the resources to do it again. We didn’t, you know, there was- by that point, we were then running a public building, so we couldn’t then spend loads of time rethinking that. I think we almost felt: “Well, look, goodness’ sake, we’ve done that, like, you can’t- you can’t ask for more.” Do you see what I mean? It was almost like... Thinking back to those early 2000s, I think we felt like: “Oh, for goodness’ sake, it’s all online. And now, we’re busy running children’s workshops, and exhibitions, and keeping the building open, and making sure the toilets are clean, and for goodness’ sake, don’t bother me with a- questions about the databases there.”

HC: But something happened much more recently, because you actually moved, from having a physical building, to not having a physical building.

ZH: Yeah.

HC: How was the discussion, about the Web, changed, once that decision was made? How- was it understood that it was going to play a slightly different role?

ZH: Yes. So, I think, by about 2009 or 10, we had started having discussions with some colleagues, who actually are now next-door-but-one, in a thing called ‘Red Loop’, who are a, kind of, design consultancy part of the University. And we talked to them about redesigning the website. And, I suppose, we were talking to them about the limitations of our old building, in the way that it set up certain expectations for visitors, which were then not met. So, it was all about the visitor experience, more generally, both in the digital realm, and in the real world. So, we started talking to them about reconceiving the website. And what we said we wanted, was a website which put the collections much more front and centre. And then, it- kind of, in- at the same time as that, it became clear that we were going to have to move. And so, the website then took on an even greater importance, because, in moving here, we lost our public-facing aspect. So, then the – as it were – the second iteration of the website was much more about browsing the collections, making it much more visually appealing, and much less about: “This is a museum website which is telling you our opening

hours, and our- our..." You know, all the details about being a visitor attraction. All of that was much more- much- secondary to the collections being in the front.

HC: But at the same time, in your new situation, you are trying to get people in, to interact physically with what you have.

ZH: Yes.

HC: So, was making the, sort of, object-by-object visibility, was that part of getting people to get excited about the things themselves, and want to come to see them?

ZH: Yeah. So, I suppose- but now we're onto our third iteration, what you might call, like, the third main way in which the website looks different. And so, as I say, the second iteration was much more: "Here are loads of lovely objects." Third iteration was – or is, now, hopefully: "Here are some lovely objects..." We don't, any longer, make all of the object records available online. But what we're also trying to do, is to give an indication of the things that people do with those objects. So, the ways in which people research them, use them for inspiration, creative outputs and what have you. Because in the second version, the structure of the website was such that there was no way- nowhere to put any of that. You couldn't say: "Oh, so-and-so has just done an interesting thing with these objects." And then- so, between about 2011 and now, 2018, that was what was missing. We were constantly frustrated by doing lots of interesting things, but having no way to talk about them on the website, and link back to the objects. What we're trying to, kind of, achieve, is a, sort of, as it were, a virtuous circle, or what- I think what – what's his name – somebody refers to as a 'circle of culture'. So that, where the object is initiator of an idea, or somebody uses an object to initiate some ideas, they create something which then feeds back into the- our shared knowledge, which then helps someone else to develop some more ideas.

HC: Do you think that there's a place for a lot of creativity to happen just online? Or do you still feel that the object is at the heart of it, and should really be part of any interaction? Is that very strongly still your feeling, or has the Web evolved to be something that's useful in its own right, that you could work with at a distance, if that was the way you had to do it?

ZH: Yeah, I think that's a tricky one. I think that there is a lot to be said for people finding things online, and knowing where things are, and being inspired by what they find online. But I do think there is something about engaging with the actual object. So, I think our current version of our website is trying to walk a tricky tight rope, in the sense that, what we're trying to say is: "Here are loads of lovely objects, and here are lots of interesting things that people have done with them, and we want you to be inspired. We'd like you to come here, some of you, but we can't, probably, accommodate all of you. So, please be inspired in your own time and your own space, but also, maybe, come here." Do you see what I mean? That's a tricky one to navigate. And it's also a tricky one to measure, as to whether anyone is being inspired, separately to actually coming here.

HC: Let me just take a quick pause. Okay, part two. You came from a strongly heritage background. How do you define heritage, and what do you see as the heritage of this organisation?

ZH: Interesting question. Yes, I suppose I did come from a heritage background, and I think this – the museum – it, kind of, between... So, the main collection was given to Hornsey College of Art in the 19- the late 1960s. Then, I think that, over the 70s, 80s, 90s... It became understood that the collection was relevant to heritage, to British heritage, to part- you know, the wallpapers and textiles and so on, that we hold, were an important part of British heritage. Hence it then seemed like a sensible step to get a museum building to put it all in. But again, I think that what we're trying to do is something a little bit different to what other museums are doing. So, we've got that para- that's a strand of what we're doing, so, the importance of the collections, as part of the nation's history. But another strand is, because the collections were intended as a resource for students in Art and Design in particular, there's a, kind of, a strand of thought which has to be- it doesn't matter, what these objects are as historical objects, we've got to find a way to use them to inspire the student creativity in the now. I don't know if that answers your question. I suppose, what I'm saying, is there's two things going on, which we're trying to keep in balance.

HC: How do you describe – when you say it’s important for the heritage of Britain and the textile industry – what do you see heritage as being? Because it’s such an- a contested word, how do you understand ‘heritage’ as opposed to ‘history’?

ZH: Right. I suppose, what I mean by- when I say that in the, I don’t know, 70s, 80s, 90s, it became understood to be part of heritage, is that that was a time in which heritage became- the word ‘heritage’ came- became to be understood as more than, kind of, elite, aristocratic history, and much more a democratic history. About ordinary homes, the history of the everyday, all of that. And so, these collections really fed into that, or contributed to, and were supported by, ideas in- in the wider academic and, sort of, heritage discourses, about the importance of everyday homes, the idea of, you know, that it’s important to record non-elite material culture, blah blah blah. Yeah. And, kind of, crucially, I think, also, the- say, by the 90s, a lot of our material relates to the interwar period. So, by say, the 1980s, 90s, the sorts of people who would’ve been wanting to go to exhibitions remembered that stuff. It was part of their personal memory. So, in the 80s, 90s, the- the what was by then – it wasn’t called the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture by then, it was still just called the Silver Studio Collection – but the people who worked with the collection then produced various exhibitions, which toured to venues around North London and other places. But I think the audiences for those exhibitions were really happy to see 1930s wallpaper, or 1950s wallpaper, or what have you, because that was a reflection of their own lives. It was their heritage. Yeah? It was validating something about their history, and it was saying to them: “The history of your lives, in suburban homes, is now recognised as being part of national heritage.” See what I mean?

HC: Yeah.

ZH: Whereas, now, I think we’re a little bit beyond that point. And particularly for younger people, you show them some 1930s wallpaper, they’re like: “What the hell is that? I don’t understand what I’m looking at, why are you showing me this?” They don’t have a personal connection to it. Therefore, you’ve got to, kind of, come at them from a different angle. It’s not heritage. I’m not showing this because it’s important heritage, I’m showing you this because it might inspire your creative practice.

HC: Do you think that heritage, it’s something that still has a sense of belonging, on a personal level? So, you do have to feel connected to it in some way, for it to feel like heritage to you?

ZH: I think so, yeah.

HC: I think that’s an interesting way of looking at it, and it’s something that’s shared with quite a few people I’ve spoken to.

ZH: Yeah.

HC: So, you’ve changed the way that you put yourself online over the years. Do you remember- you said you were told to just get on with it, around the year 2000. Do you remember what was in your mind, as: “This is how it should be done, as-far as I’m aware?” You came out of education, and particularly, museum-specific education. What was in your mind, as: “This is what a website’s supposed to be for?”

ZH: I suppose, what was in my mind, was the idea of, kind of, democratising the collections, and the idea that the collections are for everybody, and therefore everybody should be able to see them. But I don’t think I’d got a very sophisticated understanding of that at the time. You know, I think I, you know, with- looking back, I think, with the arrogance of youth, I thought: “Oh, well, this is easy, or straightforward,” if you know what I mean. That: “Oh, it’s obvious that you just need to select some fields from the database and make them available, and then you’ve shown them to the public, and then everyone’ll be happy.”

HC: I think that’s interesting, because I don’t think that was necessarily a youth thing. I think it was something around the year 2000. I think it was an enthusiasm. A big idea about how this was going to be possible, we can put everything online, and democratise and share our heritage.

ZH: Yeah.

HC: I think, the truth is, it was much more complicated than that. Can you talk about some of- you’ve talked about how the database wasn’t reflecting what you wanted it to for visitors. In terms of

putting stuff into the database, was it all just harder, and slower, and more costly, than you imagined at the beginning?

ZH: Yeah, I suppose so, yeah. That- what hadn't really been understood was that... OK, so, even if you decide you're not going to put all of your records online, if you decide you're only going to put a selection of the records online, you still- you probably, really, need a decent image of everything, because it's frustrating for people, I think, if they find a record and there's no image. That's just, kind of, pointless, if you ask me. And I know, if you look at the V&A's website, they've got loads of things without images, but I find that annoying. So, there was no understanding of- that that takes time, that requires somebody to actually photograph things to an appropriate standard, and then save the file digitally, and then upload it to the right place. And that is all a big task in itself. And then, probably, you need to rethink what you've put in your captions, and make sure they're properly written, and that they're accurate, and then actually- sometimes, one object cross-refers to another object, so you need to make sure that's done. That's all a big task, which I don't think- yeah, I think you're right. There was a, sort of, naivete at the beginning: "We'll just bung it all online." And nobody really thought about what it meant, in terms of making it a quality experience for the user.

HC: What have you found, about the people that have used your online collections? How have they used them, and has that use surprised you?

ZH: Well, I think that's quite hard to say, because people use the collections in different ways. So, some people, probably more serious researchers, would like to be able to really, you know, get to the nitty-gritty of what we've got. And we can't- what we've got online doesn't let them do that, because they might have a very specific question, and they'd have to come here to look at a very specific thing to answer that. What we also try to do, is make the collections much more browsable, bearing in mind that some of our audience are Art and Design students, and they don't know- they don't know what- they're the opposite, they don't know what they're looking for. So, for them, we try to make it: "Ooh, just come and have a look at some lovely stuff, and then it may lead you into some deeper information." We try to, kind of, make it, kind of, layers of information, so that you might be attracted by something that catches your eye visually, but then you are then led on, potentially, to more information about it, or- you know, more background information, or what have you.

HC: That's great. Do you think, in the future, if you could wave a magic wand, you would actually want to have everything online? Or do you think that there is a turn away, now, from that original big idea? And if so, how do we- do we still want to democratise heritage, or not? Where's the thinking, around how we use 'online' now?

ZH: I suppose my thinking is that previously, putting everything online previously meant making individual object or catalogue records available to the public, so that what the public was seeing, was a database of stuff. Which, actually, the underlying architecture of that database had already, had usually been conceived as a mechanism for the staff managing that information, not as: "Here is something that the public can digest," if you see what I mean. I think, what people are thinking now is much more about curated content, is about digital stories, the - I don't know if you've looked at the Wellcome, which has some digital stories recently? Or just using digital in a more interesting and innovative way, as opposed to: "Here is a catalogue record of one object," which is actually, potentially, a bit boring. I think what we'd like to do next, with the next phase of our website, is to develop what we might call 'digital stories' or something or other, where it brings together themes from different parts of the collections. And includes some text, some images, some links to objects, some videos of people talking about things... That in looking at that, the visitor or user might get a much richer idea of both the objects and the, kind of, wider intellectual context in which they sit, rather than: "Here is one catalogue record of one object."

HC: Do you think, in a way, what you've done there is understood how to curate an exhibition online? And using the benefits of online in a much more user-friendly way, rather than just trying to say: "This is what we've got, here it is online." Do you think-

ZH: Yes, I think- I don't really like the term 'online exhibitions' because I don't find that very helpful. Because to me, that either implies some hideous virtual reality tour of an actual space... Well, what's the point of that? I don't- I'm never interested in that. Or it implies a, kind of, linear narrative through a series of objects. Whereas, actually, I think the online space has potential for much richer, kind of, interaction than that. That's what I'm hoping that we might be able to achieve in the next phase, with the- as I say- thinking point, digital stories, is that you wouldn't have to go through it step-by-step, but that, somehow, within a, kind of, digital space, you'd be able to explore more at your own will, as to what you would find interesting.

HC: And it's funny, that sounds exactly like the big idea that was described in the year 2000. Why do you think it's taken twenty years for us to really understand what that means?

ZH: I think, partly, it's the technologies on which these things can happen. I think the actual website technology, in the year 2000, was quite painful. You know, I think, what was that thing?

Dreamweaver, or whatever it was called. It wasn't very sophisticated. And you had to be a very sophisticated coder, to actually make it do anything sophisticated. I'm not quite sure which way round it was. But I think, these days, web technologies are- it's easier to achieve things that are- that look more engaging, and that you can embed video, and you can, I don't know, have parallel scrolling, and what have you. Whereas all of that was way beyond achievable twenty years ago, I think.

HC: Do you think social media has had any impact, as well? Because social media is much more about how people have adapted the existing technology to use it the way they want to- and suddenly, the technology side has had to go "Oh, is that how you're going to use that? Oh, well, OK then." Do you think people, and the way that they have used online, has affected, now, what you're offering?

ZH: I think so, yeah. We try to, you know, part of what we're trying to do is to say: "Here's interesting content," and then to engage people with it. There's no point, in a sense, just putting interesting content on the web for its own sake, we want people to interact with it. And that might be by retweeting, or liking, or what have you. So, yeah, I suppose we're much more aware of that- again, the year 2000, there wasn't even- there wasn't Twitter or Facebook, was there? It seems incredible, now.

HC: It does. But no, it was true. What have you learned from your digitisation experiences? If you were to speak to people now, about what you thought might come, in the next twenty years, and what they should be concentrating on? What have been your real learning experiences, from what you've done - tell me the kind of things that you've learned, through all those iterations that you described earlier.

ZH: I suppose, in an ideal world, you always want- what we try to do, is do something once, properly, and then build on that in the future. So, for example, you take a digital image, you save it properly, you don't have to take that image again. But what I've learnt is that, even with that best intention, that doesn't always happen. So, you have to, kind of, forgive yourself for the fact that sometimes you lose images, or you've not saved them properly, or actually, you've taken a load of digital images, and then it turns out that, ten years' time, people want higher resolution ones, so you have to go back and photograph them anyway. And I suppose that's, yeah, that actually, you think you're going future-proof things, but you can't, really.

HC: I remember buying a future-proof laptop, which sounds ridiculous, now, and it was a huge thing, and it- and it had a tiny memory. And I think, one thing that I've learnt, is there's no such thing as future-proof, as a concept. And maybe- I feel, in a way, that the heritage sector's been slow to respond, perhaps, in a way that other places maybe haven't. It may be because they've got a lot more resources. This is what I'm trying to find out. But I feel like, almost, the heritage sector should have created Wikipedia, and didn't. And I wonder if there was a caution, to do with: "Right, we're going to do this- we're going to do it properly," and that's really what's held them up. Whereas other organisations, without that rigour, have just gone ahead and tried things. And I wonder if that's-

ZH: Yeah, that's, yeah, I mean, I suppose that's potentially true, that a lots of museum people are naturally cautious, and kind of, methodical by nature, and would like to do things properly. But also, that they're aware that they haven't got infinite resources. So, they can't be- there isn't a culture of: "Oh, screw it, let's do it and see what happens," because you've only got, you know, you've got limited time, you've got limited space. You don't actually get any credit from your employers, for messing up something, albeit that you might have learned something important and useful from messing it up. That doesn't really win you anything, generally.

HC: And yet, to me, it seems that the process that you've been through here is so interesting, because you've actually ended up streets ahead in your thinking, about how you present your collections to people, because you've tried it lots of ways that didn't work. So, do you think a slight change, in the way that heritage professionals think, would help them to accept that you try things, they don't work, you try again, and you may end up further forward at the end of that?

ZH: Yeah, I suppose so. I suppose I'm in a fortunate position here, in that nobody, albeit I'm part of a large organisation - Middlesex University, no-one is actually monitoring me, or us, very closely. They do, to some extent, let us get on with it, and potentially mess it up. And so, that's potentially why we've developed a culture of: "Well, now we do think-" you know, with our current website, we are thinking: "OK, we'll try this, we'll monitor reactions, web hits, tweets, you know, engagement, and if that seems to be working, we'll do more of that. Or we'll do less of it, if it doesn't work." So, I think we- yeah, it's taken us a long time, but we've got to a, kind of, more, you know, an iterative process, where we're now not thinking: "Oh, the website is the finished thing." We're now thinking: "OK, how can we do something to change it a bit, but simultaneously check what effect that is having?"

HC: And how much do you think the technology's played a process in that? Because, as you've said, around the year 2000, there really only was so much you could do, and you had to be quite led by the IT professionals, because you couldn't do it yourself, unless you went through quite a process of learning how to code. Do you think, now, that the online tools available, that make the front end so easy to create, are helping you do what you actually originally wanted to do, but it's taken this long for the technology to catch up with our- your thinking?

ZH: Yeah, I think so, yeah. So, Wordpress, our current website is on Wordpress, and it's just much easier to be able to achieve what you want to achieve, at the front end, without huge expertise at the back end. Because I don't think of myself- I think of myself as reasonably digitally competent, but I'm in no sense a coder, or what have you. But I can make it do what I want it to do. And yeah, that wasn't possible, before. And either, in our first website, I think that was Dreamweaver, and it was terribly complicated... Our second website was some, like, that was impossible to change anything... But yeah, now, the technology does let you- make it easier to have an idea, and then be able to express it, without having to go through endless IT people to actually achieve it for you.

HC: I never asked you to go through this set of seven things. I should do it, because I've done it with everybody else. They're reasons not to digitise. So, reasons why you might decide to leave something out, or leave it until later. Can you tell me, just, how those considerations have played a part in what you've done over the years?

ZH: So, are these to do with digitising objects, or whole collections as a whole, or...?

HC: Objects or collections. It's basically, when you make decisions around what to digitise and when, how have these impacted on those decisions?

ZH: OK, yeah. Cost, obviously, is a big thing, but that- cost is- not exactly cost, it's more an understanding of cost benefit, as it were. So, for example, we have thousands and thousands of designs, Silver Studio designs... Hang on, this person wants to come in...

HC: OK, so, if we can go back to the list of reasons not to digitise, you were talking about cost being more about cost benefit...

ZH: Yes, I was just saying that, in thinking about which parts of our collections to digitise, by which I mean photograph and make available online, is- guess what I mean by that - there's a sort of mental checklist that we go through, about how many people we think might be interested in those records. And therefore, the benefit of putting our investment into those records. So, for example, we've got

umpteen thousand Silver Studio designs, I don't really see that it's a priority to put every single one of them online, because, you know, the world does not need that. Anyone who wants to come and look at them may do so, but just putting more and more of them online is- there's a, sort of, diminishing returns, after the first few, in terms of how many people are going to want to look through them all. Time is a big thing. We've only got limited staff resources, so we try to, kind of, prioritise what's important to- you know, what we think would be interesting to users, as to where to put our time. Expertise and IT skills... I don't think- that's not- it's not a reason not to do it. I suppose what you mean is lack of expertise or IT skills. I guess we... Yeah, if we totally lacked expertise and IT skills, that would be a reason not to digitise, but fortunately, generally, in our team, we've got people who are reasonably, kind of, competent. And I think we- this is something that we're thinking about in general, now, as to- the University's got a big push on for students, about digital literacy and digital competency, and we're thinking a lot about what it means to be digitally competent as a member of staff. And so, I think, in going forward, we're going to be even clearer about the digital skills that we expect of people when we recruit them. And a lot of these things- you know, part of- some of the skills that you need, to digitise collections, are general skills that you need as a digitally competent adult in the world. So, they're not necessarily very specialist skills, but it's just about being willing to learn, I suppose. Fear of obsolescence. I don't think- again, I don't think that's put us off, as such, because I think you just have to accept that things become obsolete, and...

HC: That's quite a big statement. I think, maybe, back in the early days, that would have been quite alarming to people. We just accept that things become obsolete very- you know, within five or ten years. I think that used to worry people a lot more than it does now. Would you agree?

ZH: I think so, yeah, I suppose so. I think, yeah, I think you have to get with the idea that we've just- it's taken us forever to get this new website, but actually, in two years' time, it will look dated. So, we'll have to do it again, or keep doing it again, you know. But if you let that stop you in the first place, you'd never do anything, I think. Lack of political will. Again, I don't think we quite have that problem here. I think lots of local authority museums have that problem more, because their councils are very anxious about letting people have permissions to put things on websites, or- do you know what I mean? That's a problem for local authority museums. But I think, here, being part of the University, we have a bit more freedom to get on with things. And perhaps that's part of the culture of- if we do something that we mess up, we'll just call it research, and say that it was a pilot project or something! Privacy and copyright issues that are a big deal, and we're increasingly worried about, or, kind of, aware of the copyright implications of putting our stuff online, because the legislation has changed recently. So, that's another reason why we probably can't put everything online ever, because we don't have permission to put some things online.

HC: Can you see that changing? Because, to me, that still seems, from the people I've spoken to, that still seems like a big problem. Especially when we're talking about quite recent heritage. That there's a time period, and it's OK if it's really old, and that, you know, everybody's dead. But that's increasingly not what people are thinking about. They are thinking about heritage within their own lifetime. Can you see that this copyright legal issue is something that's going to have to be looked at again, somehow?

ZH: Well, I don't know, I suppose it depends if there's the political will to do it. Nobody in the heritage industry was very happy, I think, with the new copyright changes, but that didn't make any difference, and... I don't know. I suppose, the only people who are harmed by this are people who would like to be able to see more stuff online, recent stuff, and actually, they don't have- that's not a terribly compelling argument for changing it, is it? In terms of the government's priorities. So...

HC: In terms of the big idea, is the big idea still there? Do we still want to democratise heritage, and what does it mean now, with twenty years of experience?

ZH: Yeah, I think we still do want to democratise heritage. But I think that what's become clearer is that there are no, as it were, big, supra, overarching ways of doing that. I think, a lot of people, in the past, maybe thought: 'Oh, OK, if everyone- if all museums have a database, then actually, they

can all feed into one massive database, and then that'll be a database of the whole of Britain's heritage.' That's never going to happen, for all sorts of technical and, kind of, intellectual reasons. And I think that actually, lots of people will have digital resources, online databases, that are very specific to a particular thing, that's fine. You know, as historians, or as members of the public, or as researchers, or whoever, you need to be able to navigate your way through all those different resources, but don't expect them to all come together, because that will just make a great big mess of stuff, which nobody can ever find anything in.

HC: Could it be Google? I mean, Google seems to be the one-

ZH: Well, in a sense-

HC: -trying to do this...

ZH: -well, yeah. Maybe Google is the only organisation which could do that. But they, in a sense, do that already, with Google Books, and you know, the...

HC: Will there be a push back in heritage? Because obviously, not everybody wants to surrender to Google...

ZH: Yeah. That's a good question, I think.

HC: How do you feel about a private organisation taking on that role of having everything?

ZH: I think it raises questions about who- like, if- if we're wanting to democratise heritage, but then we're giving all the power to a private company, that seems to raise certain ethical questions, about who owns that knowledge.

HC: Fantastic. Thank you very much indeed for your time.

ZH: Okay.

Kevin Bacon
Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove
6th July 2018

HC: Helen Casey
KB: Kevin Bacon

HC: Could you give me your name, your organisation, and just a little bit of background, as you just did, about where you've come from and how long you've been here?

KB: Okay. My name's Kevin Bacon, I'm the Digital Manager for the Royal Pavilion and Museums in Brighton and Hove. I've been working here for fifteen years now, in a variety of roles. I first started out on the Inquiry Desk of a sort of, small research centre, called the Brighton History Centre, in Brighton Museum. Alongside that, I worked as one of the assistants on the first wave of digitisation we undertook, from roundabout 2004 to 2007 or so. I was the curator of our photographic collection from 2007 to 2011, and since 2011, I've been the Digital Lead here, and currently, my job title is Digital Manager, and I also sit on the Senior Management Team here.

HC: Can you tell me a bit about the collection? What it is, and a bit about, maybe, how you define heritage? That's two separate things, but yeah, if you, first, tell me about the collection, what you hold.

KB: Okay. We have a number of collections here. In many respects, we're what I call a Victorian accident of a museum. So, the museum's origins go back to 1861, when it was first established, on the first floor of the Royal Pavilion. Because although the Royal Pavilion was a former royal palace, it was sold to the town in 1850, and because they never knew quite what to do with the building, one of its early functions was as a museum. Brighton Museum, as we see it today, was actually a purpose-built museum, which, I believe, is one of the first purpose-built civic museums in England. And that opened in 1873. And really, the museum service has evolved from there, under the wing of the, kind of, Local Authority. So, you have Brighton Museum, Hove Museum and Art Gallery, which is really like a smaller civic museum. Also, the Booth Museum of Natural History, which was formerly a, kind of, private museum, of British birds, and now holds our Natural History collections. We also have two historic houses: the Royal Pavilion and Preston Manor. So, aside from the buildings, we have, through those origins, a really eclectic range of collections, and I think it is very typical of those sort of Victorian civic museums, because... And particularly, actually, those that you get on the seaside, because what often happened was that, during the days of the Empire, people would go to various colonies, earn their fortunes, and often liked to retire to the South coast. So, all the, kind of, weird and wonderful things that they had collected, sometimes in ethically shaky circumstances, they often donated to the local museums. So that's why, you know, Brighton is, perhaps, an almost extreme example, but you see that in lots of museums on the South coast. You have these, kind of, surprisingly large museums, for the size of the town. So, of all of the collections we have, there are three which are designated 'of national importance', and that's the Natural History collection, the Decorative Art collection, and what we call our World Art collection, which is essentially an ethnographic collection. There are also a number of other collections, though. We have Local History, Archaeology, Fine Art... Costume collection, Fashion collection... Toys, Film and Media... and I've probably forgotten something. There're also other collections, supporting the buildings, like, for example, the, kind of, what we call the Royal Pavilion Archive. All those, kind of, works that support our knowledge and understanding of the history of the building. So, yes, that's essentially our collections, as far as someone could ever succinctly describe them, really. They're a, kind of, quite a, you know, eclectic mix. In terms of your other question- what was the question about heritage, again?

HC: How would you define 'heritage', as opposed to 'history'? Because it's something- it almost defies description, but I'm asking everybody that I'm interviewing to try anyway.

KB: I think, for me, heritage is, very broadly, object-focused. And I don't even mean, necessarily, material objects. I mean, history is essentially a means of ordering and understanding the past through narrative, in my view. Heritage, I think, is very much about locating, or articulating, a sense of history, and an understanding of the past, through definable and preserved objects. Now, that object could be something like an Eighteenth-Century pot. It could be part of the built environment, like, obviously, the Royal Pavilion, or even, say, in Brighton, the seafront arches, that's obviously part of our heritage. But, of course, there's intangible heritage, as well. But even intangible heritage does tend to be focused around at least a conceptual object. So, you know, intangible heritage, for example, could be- well, there's one very strange example I came across in a conference last year, where, I think, Dutch Student Life was apparently, I think, the World Heritage Organisation identified that as being an item of heritage that was worthy of preservation. So, that's it. But I think heritage is partly expressed through definable objects, at least conceptually. But, of course, I think heritage also has that relationship to identity, implicitly. And that's both powerful and problematic. I think it's powerful because it does give the past a relevance into people's lives. If you look at, certainly, the way that the Heritage Lottery Fund describe heritage, I think it's very much around that sort of idea. Equally, though, where it does get very difficult, and this is something we see, certainly, in museums trying to attract new audiences, there can be an idea that heritage- there's almost, like, the 'blood and soil' idea of heritage. The fact that it, kind of, it belongs to you, according to certain criteria, which can be very difficult, you know, that some people feel an aspect of heritage is their heritage, and it doesn't belong to other people. Others might feel that "I'm not allowed to- for this heritage to matter to me, because I might be from a migrant community." Those are difficult issues to address, but they are very much, I think, part of the language and the debates, I think, around heritage.

HC: Great. Thank you very much.

KB: That's alright.

HC: Moving on to the stories of digitisation, you've actually been in this institution at a key moment. I'm looking at the 2000 literature, looking at all the things that are possible through digitisation, and then looking at twenty years later, why some of those, kind of, promises of- of a utopian future of sharing, around the world, haven't really happened. So, can you tell me about the story of digitisation here? How it's come about, and what's motivated the things that you've done?

KB: OK. As I recall - and, sort of, back then, I was at a fairly junior level - I think our first programme of digitisation came through what was - and I think is still - called the 'Designation Challenge Fund'. So, it was specifically around, I think, our Decorative Art collection, if I recall. We actually were able to obtain funding, because it was a collection that's designated 'of national importance', to digitise and get those records online. And from there, when the Renaissance in the Regions scheme of funding came in, which has now effectively been absorbed into the Arts Council's National Portfolio Organisation programme... Some of that funding, because that really had to, at the time, really fund additionality, and wasn't there to actually support the, kind of, core purpose of the museum, was used to support wider digitisation programmes across the collections. So, that was really where that first wave actually came from. But, as a museum, digitisation has really had fits and starts. And, in fact, in recent years, it has very much fallen off the agenda here, actually. And it's only recently come back in, with our, sort of, current business plan. Because, like most Arts-Council-funded organisations, we, sort of, work according to their funding cycles, in effect, so we've just now entered into a, kind of, 2018 to 2022 programme, that has digitisation as a significant element of it. So, in terms of our experience, I think, digitisation, in terms of there being waves of programmes around it, really receded roundabout 2009. And it's not something we've dropped entirely, it's often happened for ad hoc reasons: say, for example, we need the images for a project we're working on; or we've had commercial requests to use things that we've digitised; and we've had smaller projects, where we've tended to digitise to support them. So, last few years, we've been digitising material relating to what I mentioned earlier, the Royal Pavilion Archive, which is to support some of the work that's going on, quite a long-term project, about improving the interpretation of the whole Royal Pavilion estate... But the idea of, sort of, digitising things for the sake of it, as it really, kind of,

was back then, had fallen off the agenda. Now, as you'll probably know, where that's really changed now, is with the culture-wide paper, that the government published, which I think was 2016? That's if I recall correctly? Early 2016? And that did establish, for museums, that one of the big prioritisations for digital transformation, was digitisation again. So, I think, as the result of that, certainly when the Arts Council released their expectations of digital by the organisations it funds, again, what they call 'capture digital content', which is really one of the obvious priority for all museums, is really, I think, largely coming back to digitisation. So, as a result of that, we have responded to that change in funders' expectations to reassess that. Now, at the moment, we're trying to really reboot the way we actually digitise. Actually, kind of, how we resource it, because resources are very slim at the moment, how we actually manage that internally. So, we're not actually very active, in terms of digitising things at the moment. There's a lot of infrastructural work we're doing around a, sort of, pipeline, by which we can document and then digitise things, so hopefully, by the autumn, that'll be complete, and we can start on that in earnest.

HC: So, it sounds as though your big drivers, in the past, have been available funding, and this almost, kind of, policy pressure. Is- was there an internal conversation, in the early days, about how to choose what was going to be done, and how it was going to be presented to people, and what it was for?

KB: Yes, actually, the other thing I've overlooked, that I do recall now, in those, sort of, early conversations, back around 2004 and 5, was the idea of earning income from these things. That, you know: "We'll put all these things online, lots of people'll want to use these things, and, you know, we'll start making lots of money from them." And, in fact, I was responsible, for many years - I still am, nominally - for earning income from them. And it just didn't make commercial sense. You know, at one point... Well, yeah... I think, even in the year where we had our highest level of income, it never actually covered the staff cost of digitising that. And I think public sector bodies are often very good at ignoring that. They're very good at looking at turnover, and not really at profit. So, that was definitely one key driver. And if it's relevant - I mean, this may be preempting a later question - the reason we actually, kind of, moved much more towards open licensing, was partly because there had been a Council decision to adopt it to some extent anyway, because of a partnership called 'the Keep'. And that's basically over in Fowler, just on the East of Brighton. It's a partnership between the East Sussex Record Office, the University of Sussex's Special Collections, and Royal Pavilion Museums, on behalf of the Council, to, kind of, run a combined service, where people can access some of our collections, but also archive material. And the actual IT infrastructure, of actually getting those collections together and amalgamated, did require open licensing, just simply so the data could be shared and moved around. So, that, kind of, effectively moved us to the point of open licensing being part of our language we use. And it was really in 2014, around the people marking the anniversary of the start of the First World War, we tested just the public reaction to releasing some of our material related to the First World War, under open, high-vis licenses. And we had a lot of good feedback from that. And then, in 2015, we were looking at staff, and at the time, had an Imagery Production Officer, whose job was really to digitise this material that's supposed to be self-funding. Basically, as we were coming into a new funding arrangement, at that point, we could move her to another job, so we actually deleted the post. And part of the rationale for deleting the post was: "OK, well, we'll cover the work by making the images available for free." So, since then, we've taken the, kind of, the open licensing route. Which is an interesting one, because, as I say, looking back now, a big part of the argument that people made around digitising was the idea that it would be a revenue stream. And I think we would struggle to do that now. And in fact, even the Arts Council - well, at least, a couple of briefings I've been to, led by the Space, who are, kind of, leading a lot of the digital advice on behalf of the Arts Council - certainly, what they are advising people, is not to expect large amounts of revenue from digital activity. It is very, very hard to, kind of, monetise that type of behaviour. So, that was the other big factor, and that's, kind of, something we've moved away from. Sorry, I feel like I'm digressing from the question a little bit...

HC: Not at all, this is very interesting...

KB: But you're right, actually, in terms of, at the moment, I think a lot of it is really pressure from policy makers. And I think it's a good pressure, as well. Because, particularly from the perspective of a Local Authority museum, where - you know, all museums, of any shape and size, are struggling - but we really are looking at increased demand versus rapidly diminishing resources. To take something on, like digitisation, which can seem very additional, very other, to the core purpose of the museum, it's hard to make that case, sometimes, without that kind of pressure from policy makers. So, I think it's very good, in that respect. I mean, the other aspect of it is that we, for some time actually, in our full plans and our Mission, we do build digital quite carefully into it, and particularly the idea, roughly, that our online visitors are as important as the people who actually come into our buildings. Now, from a business perspective, you know, arguably, they are less of a priority, because there is little in the way of direct monetisation, which there is if someone is paying to come into the Pavilion, or Brighton Museum, or, you know, spend in the gift shop, etcetera. But in terms of our Mission, they are still an important audience. And we've had that really wired into our strategy for quite some time. I mean, our Director, Janita, refers to digital as being the 'sixth museum' in our portfolio, which is, you know, one perspective of looking at that. But that certainly is quite important. But even when you have something wired into the strategy of the organisation, it can be quite difficult to persuade people, internally, that it is a priority. And in fact, that's one of those things that we're really wrestling with at the moment.

HC: Why do you think that is, in terms of staff attitudes, generally? That digitisation is seen as a 'nice to have', but not as a vital thing that needs to be done?

KB: I think there's two reasons. Well, I think, actually, there's several reasons. One, I think... One of the problems with digital, very often, is that it's harder for people to actually see the results. So, by the nature of my job, I spend a lot of time looking at things like Google Analytics, and I can see where these things are working, who is actually looking at there, what the, kind of, real benefit is. I can make that case. But that's a particular skill, or literacy, that I have. And I can communicate that to people, which I, sort of, try to, but it can be quite abstract to people. And I think, particularly when people are time-poor, and they tend to focus on the immediate priorities, and the things that are often more pressing are things like getting exhibitions ready. You know, making sure the building is clean, and running OK, you know. It's harder, I think, to understand the benefit of some data, basically. It's harder to make the case just with that alone, no matter how compelling it is. The second issue is that, if you're being brutally honest about it, generally, the uptake of digitised collections, in the sense of the classic database of: "Here are things in their collections," is really low. And, you know, we - I can't remember, I'd have to look it up, to get a sense of exactly how many people are really, kind of, using our collections, and our, sort of, online presence of collections is a bit fragmented - but it is quite low. And online, we have a particular problem, because it's very hard for us to tap into specialist audiences. You know, I often joke that I wish, sometimes, we were a museum of spanners, so I could just concentrate on spanners, reaching out to spanner communities, telling lots of stories about spanners, and actually gain that kind of identity. With the, kind of, variety of collections we have, that is really, really hard. You know, the Victorian accident museum is a lovely thing, a lovely treasure box, but you take the bricks and mortars away, and you put it online, it's a really hard thing to keep together. So, we always have a problem, that, you know, if you have something like the Mae West lip sofa, one of our most popular items, you're not going to think to come to- to look in Brighton Museum's website to find it, unless, of course, you happen to know it's there already. There's a big problem we have. But even when you look at big projects, like Europeana, the figures there have been notoriously terrible, in terms of the uptake of that. And there is a real problem there. Because, you know, as I always put it, the search box on your collections interface is a barrier for more people. You know, it's great if you're a researcher, that one particular type of person who is looking for something. But if you're not a researcher, that whole mechanic does not work. So, if you're thinking about broader digital engagement with the collections, you know, what I tend to prioritise are things like blogging, where you can tap into Google traffic, and that is much, much, much more successful. I mean, for training sessions, you

know, I've argued to people that, if you represent your object on a blog, as opposed to simply having it sitting on your online collections, it gets about sixty times the amount of traffic, just simply because it's there, and people can Google and find that sort of thing. So, again, even though you actually need things digitised for that, it doesn't make sense as an obvious workflow at the moment. And that's something I'm thinking about internally: how to actually adjust that. So, that's the second reason: that actually, the, kind of, data around uptake of digitised collections is not very persuasive, actually. And I suspect that's one reason why, you know, in the early, sort of, 2010s, it, sort of, fell off the agenda for a few years, is my suspicion. I think, also, thirdly, where - and we do this, as well - where museums often get split, around that particular workflow, is that, obviously, digitisation is often seen as an extension of documentation activity. And then documentation has very hard pressures in terms of accreditation, in actually, kind of, managing your museum, that you really need to deliver on documentation. If you have the same management, or the same team managing those processes, and very often they do go together in museums - I mean, that's traditionally how we've digitised - if you're already thinking about accreditation targets, you will always prioritise the documentation, over the digitisation. Because the opportunity cost just makes a lot more sense, I think, to actually, kind of, focus on that. So, I think, even within those smaller teams, unless you've got higher targets being set up, to, kind of, say: "Actually, we've got to do this," it's very easy for people not to prioritise digitisation, actually.

HC: That's very interesting, thank you. When you have put things online, for online visitors, other than just to have the database so that people know what you have, has there been a discussion around interpretation? How you have described and who has that job, and... Is that something that's happened, in terms of- or have you just, sort of, copied text labels onto the web, to go alongside the photographs?

KB: It's been very chaotic, as you can imagine, with a programme where the, kind of, focus has shifted in different management over the time. I certainly remember that first wave of digitisation we conducted, from the, sort of, from about 2004 onwards. We did used to have regular meetings, thinking about web text. How to make it much more accessible, writing in a way that was a lot more friendly than the traditional curatorial label. But I think they were fairly short-lived, as I recall. I mean, mechanically, the way we do it, in terms of the information we output, is that, when something's posted online, obviously the data is fed out from our collection management system. In terms of the text, so if we're thinking about the basic description, we tend to have... If all you have in that is the standard, kind of, curatorial description, which could be quite thin, that's what's outputted. But if we have something that's more carefully written, then that is an additional piece of text which gets fed out instead of it. So, to some extent, that's still built into our workflows, such as they are, to actually have that facility. It's really a question of how far we actually prioritise that, in terms of what we do. But of course, the other thing that really overlooks is subject- or thematic metadata, which is a really interesting one, because our collection management system just doesn't cope with it very well. You know, if you want to take a bunch of stuff and tag it up as 'Victorian', which is a really useful thing if you're a teacher or something like that, our collection management system can't really adequately cope with it. So, what's increasingly becoming our most used portal, for our online collections, is something called the 'Digital Media Bank', which is basically a digital asset management system that we've made. Some assets are available publicly, for people who actually download under a Creative Commons licence. That does allow us to tag, kind of, subject metadata to it, but again, you've got that problem, where part of your dataset is being split out into another system, which is always a bit awkward. I mean, you can do it as long as you, kind of, know that your data model is sitting across different systems. But again, it's also not really quite built into the, kind of, workflow, to actually do that. So, we've experimented with it. I mean we have things in place, but it's not very rigorous at the moment, actually. So, yes, we're aware of it. And this is one of the things we need to look at and to really, kind of, reboot, because, you know, especially thematic metadata does give you those browsable pathways. And that is one way of getting past the, you know: "You can only access this if you know the right thing to put into the search box" problem. And

that's one potential solution. But again, that's a big piece of work that can look very unproductive. Because again, even if you're doing digitisation, if you've got a higher target than you need, such as we have - five thousand new objects online at the end of the year - you work towards getting five thousand objects online. If you decide: "Well, actually, I want to, kind of, enrich this data so it's a lot more accessible," it's harder to articulate and drive that. How do you measure that? It's actually very easy to cheat, unless you've got a very good measurement. You just make a minor change to lots of records, and suddenly you've ticked it off. So, yeah. That's a tricky one to justify and build in.

HC: OK. Let me take a quick break. So, I've written, in this box, reasons not to digitise, to try and get to the bottom of what's holding back the, kind of, mass digitisation for everybody, and the utopia. Can you talk me through how you'd order them, and go into a little bit about your experience with them, relating to this institution?

KB: OK. Yep. You recording again, or...?

HC: I am recording, yeah.

KB: Right, okay, let me see... Biggest barrier, I think, is time. I think, with all museum projects, time is the biggest one, simply as opportunities increase and resources diminish. I think that's always the biggest factor. Privacy and copyright issues are potentially quite a big headache. They are manageable, but they do complicate the process, and they can make people very skittish about what they're doing, and I think with GDPR it's been quite interesting, because much as I welcome it as a piece of legislation, we've just had this, kind of, big wave of paranoia. It was starting to feel a little bit like they- as one of my colleagues mentioned, it felt a little bit like the Y2K bug, where people thought their world was going to fall in on twenty-fifth of May. And it hasn't, but of course, this is still live legislation. So, those are complications. Cost of it, I think there is definitely a cost to having the basic infrastructure ready, and that is more expensive than people realise, because I think... OK, on a really simple level, you could take your images and data and bung it up on Flickr fairly easily, cost-free. Well, yeah, I mean, it is cost-free, isn't it? I mean, you can pay for the Pro package. But of course, if you really want to build it into your online presence, in a more branded and consistent way, and more control over it, that does come at a cost. So, for us, for example, you've got, obviously... Well, our setup's slightly unusual. So, that arrangement I mentioned, the Keep, that has basically an information infrastructure, whereby we can publish information from a collection management system. It's handled by a service called 'Collections Base', which makes it available as open data, and then that feeds, say, our main website, the Keep catalogue, anyone else who wants to plug into the API, and it also feeds our digital asset management system, the Digital Media Bank. And, you know, that costs, to have that service running. So, aside from the actual cost of equipment, cost of staff time, there's a basic cost to that infrastructure, and of course maintaining it. It's a very fiddly thing, you know. Collection management systems, at least the ones I have any experience of, really aren't built for publication. And it's one of those areas where there's very little competition. So, there's one company, Axia, that's bought up those systems now. There's no real driver to actually innovate those products, particularly. You know, most of them are not cloud-based. There's still a solid thing that you have to install on a workstation, which seems increasingly antiquated. So, yeah. To, kind of, move beyond that is certainly the big additional cost. Lack of political will, I've already mentioned. I think, yes, that happens at different levels, and I think, even if senior management buy into the idea that digitisation is important, getting colleagues in the middle to, kind of, come along with that idea as well, and to actually prioritise it, is a challenge. Expertise, I think, is not- well, it depends exactly what you're doing. I think the barriers to expertise are often not where people expect. So, an interesting one is photography, because, you know, I can teach anyone about data and how to catalogue something, and how to, kind of, write a coherent description, but training people in photography is really hard. And as someone, you know, who used to look after a photographic collection, and is a terrible photographer, I'm not entirely convinced that it can actually be taught. You know, anyone can take a snap, but to take really good photographs is a skill that I think we often, kind of, overlook. It also comes up, something we've experimented with, is 3D digitisation. So, the University of Brighton have done some work with us,

we've got a few models up on SketchFab. We've tried doing that internally, with photogrammetry, which is often billed as being the easiest way to do that. It is really difficult. I don't think we've yet managed to come up with a 3D model of one of our objects that we really felt was good enough to actually use. So, that's definitely an area where expertise is a big problem. But I think that's less of an issue than people think. Fear of obsolescence... I personally wouldn't worry about it that much. I mean, yes, there is... In a sense, your digital assets shrink as things like screen densities increase. Yes, that's always been there, and the things we digitised back in 2004 to 5 are, kind of, less valuable than they were back then, because of the demand. But that's part and parcel of technology, I think. As a museum, that's one reason why you keep the originals, and why we don't just, kind of, scan a watercolour and then trash the original. I mean, obviously, many other reasons for that, but it's partly because digitisation is not replacing the original. It really is a temporary surrogate.

HC: In terms of copyright, one of the reasons I'm interested to talk to you is because you have looked at it in quite a lot of detail, pertaining to photographs and I think copyright, for me, is turning out to be just as big as- as some of the, sort of, fear mongers of the 2000s thought it was going to be and I think, sometimes, you're right, when you say there's a certain paranoia around giving things away for free. Can you talk about how copyright- what sort of copyright issues have come up, and how you've managed to, kind of, deal with those and actually get stuff online despite them?

KB: Okay. Well, with copyright there's still really two issues. There's the, kind of, copyright in the original works, and how much that is a barrier to what we can and cannot do. But then, of course, there is our understanding and expectations in the copyright of what we actually produce. So, in terms of the first issue, yes, copyright is tricky and complex, in terms of the collections that we often have. So, it's lovely with things like the archaeology collection, or the natural sciences collection, because apart from a few exceptions - where you might have something that was stuffed relatively recently, and it's considered an artistic work - for the most part, those things are not a problem to digitise. But when you look at things like photographs, it becomes really, really complicated. I mean, we've got some lovely things, like negatives of the, kind of, mods and rockers fights in 1964. We'd love to use them, but they're in limbo, because we've got the negatives, but we certainly don't have the copyright. We, sort of, think we know who probably does have the copyright, but having spent five years trying to negotiate them, and then getting absolutely nowhere, took the view: "Well, we're a museum, we assume we're around forever, let's just wait till they come out of copyright." But what that does mean, of course, is the actual digitised presence, or the online presence, of the museum, it does become quite legally skewed. Because you do start to prioritise older objects, that you can safely digitise, rather than more current works, where there is a risk, or you simply cannot do it. Of course, around that, there is the whole problem that's never been resolved, around orphan works. So, I know this came up for discussion an awful lot in the early 2000s, and I know the government looked at this, and you have the Orphan Works Licensing Scheme, but it's not really a practical solution for digitisation where you're doing it en-masse. And I think it's something like about £60 per item, to actually go through the government Orphan Works Licensing Scheme. So, we use it, when third parties want to use an image of something from our collections, where we don't have any copyright in it. So, we'll pass the buck onto them, to actually get that licence. To date, nobody has. I'd be quite interested if there's any figures around how much that scheme is actually used. So, of course, it was in 2014, wasn't it? And museums finally got the right, like archives and libraries, to digitise for preservation purposes, which helps. And of course, there are, sort of, very limited circumstances in which you can make that material available to people on a dedicated terminal on site, which we haven't done yet, but we, kind of, have it vaguely in our plans around some newspapers that have been digitised at the Keep, how we may eventually do that. And we're using that there. But again, it's not particularly practical to what we want to do. In particular, most of our infrastructure, it's online, actually, anyway. That's another... So, again, there's a whole bundle of issues that substantially hasn't really changed, or got any easier, around how you actually manage a collection with quite complex and ambiguous copyright in the works. The other one that's quite interesting is the expectation and understanding of copyright in those digital assets that we produce,

as a result of digitisation. And, yeah. One of the things that I think has been really interesting, I think it was 2015, when the Intellectual Property Office published its guidance that the old practice, whereby a museum takes something like a photograph of a Seventeenth-Century painting and then claims copyright in the photograph, that this probably doesn't have any legal basis whatsoever, is a really interesting one. So, at the moment, for example, we have, you know, like a 2D work of, sort of, a painting from the 1860s, that we're still issuing under a Creative Commons licence. Well, actually, we shouldn't have a Creative Commons licence on it, it is in the public domain. And I think, at some point soon, we will move forward to recognising that. And that's a really interesting one, because what limited commercial potential there is, in those digitised collections, is usually those older photographs of 2D works. There's not a lot of demand actually, in my experience, for photographs of 3D objects. It is about reproductions of paintings. And if there is no copyright in that work, and you can't claim copyright in the digitised asset, yeah, licensing is actually out the window. But I think a lot of museums haven't really recognised that. And I think, what some places, like Bridgeman, because we still have images on Bridgeman, and the National Portrait Gallery, do, is effectively, they don't rely on copyright, but have a very complicated contract around the supply of the data, in effect. That's one way round it. But that is a really complex thing to try and set up as a museum. I think it counters the opportunity cost of damaging you in many other ways. So, yeah, something I, kind of, learnt - it was back in 2010, 2011, when I worked on the small Indian Hospital gallery that we opened in the Royal Pavilion - was that, particularly working with black and minority ethnic groups around that story, you know, what has emerged is that, very much, we help tell the story of India's role in the First World War, as part of a long network of many community groups of other people. And what would be catastrophic would be to try to put a lid on those assets. So, for me, seeing, actually, the greater value, in terms of making these things available for other people to openly re-use, was far greater than any kind of commercial benefit we could have got from that. Especially, also, because if we make the story of that more well-known, actually, paying visitors come through the door of the Pavilion. So, that's really how you monetise it, even if it's in an indirect fashion. So, I think there is a huge amount of naivety about how copyright really works. This is confidential, isn't it?

HC: Confidential in that I will publish in 2020-

KB: OK, well that's fine...

HC: -but I will check, if you're going to...

KB: OK, no, well, actually, no, what I can say - I just have to be quite careful - but, because - you may not be aware of this - but for the last couple of years, we've been looking at Royal Pavilion museums moving away from the Council and becoming an independent Trust. And one of the things we've been looking at, of various legal agreements, is how to manage intellectual property. Because that causes a huge headache, if suddenly a new organisation can't use the information about the collections from the old organisation. And it was quite striking, that very few people in the Council really understood intellectual property at all, you know. We have lots of lawyers, and very good lawyers, but IP is not something that normally comes up for them. And I had to spend an awful lot of time - even as a layman who makes no claim to being a lawyer, for training on it, I've got a fairly good idea of how copyright works in heritage organisations - spending a lot of time trying to explain to people what this really means. And that issue still has yet to be resolved, actually. On the one hand, it's not understanding the legal complexities of what this really means. It's also, I think, a lot of people don't want to drop the belief that you can still, somehow, make money out of licensing these things when there is no copyright, actually. You know, we all need income generation, but, you know, it is very expensive to start chasing income streams that, frankly, aren't there, really.

HC: One of the institutions I'm using as a case study is the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which I'm - as you've been around the conferences I'm sure you've seen them speak about it. And their conclusion was that opening everything up, completely freely has given them a huge, measurable boost, in terms of reputational value. But it seems that, still, I think you're right, there's still a fear of letting things go, which could, at some point, bring in money. There seems to be a, sort of, a blindness,

about how actual reputational value is big, and huge, and they now claim they've brought in all sorts of sponsorship opportunities, because everyone thinks they're great. And do you think there's a little bit of scepticism, that that route is actually of genuine value to an organisation?

KB: I think it's more complicated to make the case. I think, the advantage the Rijksmuseum had - and I, sort of, got this from, I think it was at Culture Geek, many years ago, someone from the Rijksmuseum, I think, Peter Goebbels or something [Peter Gorgels], was talking about this - that their overall ethic, in a sense, around their, kind of, redevelopment, was this idea of 'closer'. Everything they did was to bring people closer to the work. And you can see that throughout their marketing and what they did. And I think, online, that made a lot of sense. You know, if you can give the assets to people, and you can encourage them to re-use it, so you can make yourself a pair of shoes with the Night Watch on there or something like that... It is a way of delivering people to become much closer. And I think, what the Rijksmuseum had done very, very well, is to really build that into their mission and being absolutely true to that, which I think is very good. Of course, they've also had the advantage where, unlike big national museums, they- most of their revenue, I imagine, is coming from paid admissions. And of course, they had a huge amount of sponsorship from, sort of, various big financial institutions, as well, so they could do that at scale. But equally, I know from some of the figures I saw, they probably did lose out on, actually, a genuine income stream, I think, that probably would've made sense for the scale of organisation, the type of collections they had. I think the problem is how to convince people that this really does boost your reputation, without very tangible evidence. Because the problem is, you could be making something like £1,500 a year from very occasionally licensing and selling images. And that can look okay. At least it's money coming in. And you start to talk about- articulating a change of policy, or arguing for a change of policy, what a lot of people will see is the loss of £1,500 that you would be getting. Now, public institutions, and particularly Local Authorities, as I've said, are terrible for, kind of, understanding the difference, I think, between turnover and profit. But I think it's also, even if you don't look at the actual costs of generating that revenue, the counter-argument: "Well, this will improve, you know, our reputation, we'll build better community relations with people, etcetera..." It's very easy to dismiss that argument, because it is very, very hard to evidence it. I mean, anecdotally, I could say: "Absolutely, yes." I can point to very specific examples. I can mention particularly where it- with BME communities, around the Indian Hospital story... Absolutely. I could point to the value that that has. But for a lot of people, that won't fit with their priorities, or it won't be a compelling enough argument. Because of course, it needs a, kind of, more complex understanding of the kind of museum in more, sort of, holistic entity, I think, actually. And I think particularly, you know, in a Local Authority, that a lot of people don't probably entirely understand what the museum does, sometimes. That's very hard, to make that argument, actually. You know, if someone just suddenly said: "But we lose fifteen hundred quid if we do this," you know, that will be more compelling to many people.

HC: Let me just take another break. Back for Part Three. I'd like to look back a little bit, if you can, kind of, dredge your memory banks. Can you remember, at the time, when the Internet was brand new, and we all just started using it at work. What was your idea about what was possible, and what you'd want to happen, in an ideal world, where you had endless money and time to do this?

KB: Yeah, it's interesting. So, I started here in 2003. So, by that time, I guess the Internet was fairly well-established as a thing we did. So, we had a website at that point. We had email, which I think had come in just about two years beforehand. And there was a lot of thinking- you still had things like the New Opportunity Fund, that came from that, and there was this sense about this, that these are the new things we had to do. It seems quite halcyon, looking back on it, because I think, increasingly, we got to a point with digital as increasingly becoming a, sort of, anxiety at the, kind of, public funding level. Everyone knows that you have to do it, but quite how you do it is more problematic. And yeah, one of the things I- puzzles me a little bit... And I was talking at the Westminster Briefing event, about the 'Culture is Digital' policy or guidance framework. And there were two other speakers talking about case studies with me, and - you know, one from the Natural

History Museum, talking about the VR project with David Attenborough, and someone else from Historic Royal Palaces, talking about their Lost Palace project, you know, really great projects, but they're not typical to what any museum is likely to ever do. I mean, the Natural History Museum project is funded by Sky, who are clearly doing it for a PR work. That is an exception. You know, the Lost Palaces project was a brilliant idea, and brilliantly executed, but of course, Historic Royal Palaces have a huge operating surplus, you know. Most other museums don't. So, you know, great pieces of work, and I wouldn't, sort of, damn them or criticise them at all, but the problem is, they are not examples of what museums are really, actually, capable of doing, you know. The, kind of, understanding how, within your core capabilities, you can actually use digital technology better, is still something that people are really, kind of, struggling to get to grips with, I think. And I think it's almost anxieties beginning to, kind of, replace the, kind of, practical solution of problems, I think, sometimes. Sorry, I've drifted away from your question now, actually, which was, thinking back to the early 2000s...?

HC: To the early 2000s. What did you think was possible, and where was your mind, kind of, going, in terms of: "This is what the future's going to look like"?

KB: Okay. Yeah, I think, for me, a lot of it was really about the potential of the Web. Digitisation, in a sense, seemed like the obvious way for the museum to get online. You know, we have things in the museum that you can see when you come into the museum, therefore we can take those things and stick them on the Web, people on the Web can find them as well. It's a way of increasing access. That just seemed like a very obvious and, sort of, simple thing to do. It was quite interesting, in terms of thinking about... Because what has been quite interesting is, compared to other knowledge institutions, I think museums have actually been fundamentally less challenged by them. Because if you look at libraries and archives, they've really had to, kind of, shift their operations in many ways, because, you know, libraries always were a place to, kind of, find out information. Obviously, the Web has taken a lot of that, so you see how they've shifted, certainly locally. Part of their remit now is about supplying or providing access to other civic services, it's often about helping people use online services, providing that, kind of, human framework, aside from the books. Archives are an interesting one, because what people are normally looking for in archival collections is information. So, if you digitise your material and put it online, you very quickly lose footfall, and sometimes even paid access to that type of material. I think, with museums, because so much of it is about the materiality of the object and its physical presence, digitisation hasn't really coherently replaced the museum offer. I mean, I still occasionally have conversations with colleagues who think that it does, that if people can see something online, they won't come into the museum to see it, but there's absolutely no evidence for that whatsoever. And with that, if you look at the period when lots of digitisation work was happening and collections were going online, it did coincide with an increase in museum visitors, you know, thinking back to the, kind of, prior to 2010, and even going beyond that a little bit. So, yes, it was certainly very optimistic, but of course, we hadn't really, kind of, looked into those questions, about: "Well, exactly what is it, that people want to know? You know, what does it mean?" Because, in a sense, digitising an object, I think, is bad terminology, because you're not. You're just, actually, posting some data about it and illustrating it. That's all you are doing. You know, the idea of digitising it, that somehow we take the physical thing and create a virtual version of it, we've not really been doing. I think, even a 3D model doesn't necessarily cut that, because - and this was really brought home to me... Sorry, I really know I'm digressing wildly here... It was about four or five years ago, University of Brighton, in some of their work in experimenting with 3D digitisation, had digitised one of our hand-axes. And although I wasn't that involved in it, I think I was the only person willing to speak on camera, and was just filmed as a part of a promotional film for them. And the model was lovely, you could see it, you could turn it round, and it was really nice. But what struck me, not being an archaeologist - I was always more of a modern social historian, as a curator - was, it was the first time I actually got a chance to pick up the hand-axe and hold it. And I'd always been a little bit puzzled by why these flints were called hand-axes. I'd never really looked at it. But it was only when I held it that I suddenly thought: "Ah, yeah, I can understand how you would

hold that, and then start whacking something with it.” It suddenly did make a lot more sense, that very- that haptic relationship with it. But again, what’s quite interesting is, if that’s the real learning value of that object, that you are trying to recreate when you digitise it, that’s an aspect we can’t quite do yet. And I know there’re certain experimental things around, sort of, haptic responses and things. But, you know, how you practically deliver that is a whole set of challenges in some way ahead of us. But that’s the interesting thing. When you digitise something, you are just creating a very partial view of it. You know, usually what it looked like. And it’s not the whole of the object. It’s not capturing all the, kind of, context of the object. So, I think, now, you know, sort of, fifteen, twenty years on from that, kind of, early first wave of digitisation, there are a whole host of questions coming up. That, given that it’s now back on the government agenda, we do need to have a serious conversation about it. And I think one of those questions is: “What is it we’re trying to capture?” Actually.

HC: And in terms of: “Who is it for?” I listened to Tonya Nelson speaking about her work on Culture is Digital, and she speaks about the ‘field of dreams’ fallacy. She says, if you build it, they will not come.

KB: Yeah.

HC: Is there a conversation that needs to be had - I mean, I think there are assumptions in a lot of early documents, that if you put things online, people will access them. Do you think we’re now finding that that’s not actually the case? And do we need to have a conversation about: “Who are we doing this for, and what do we think they’re going to do with it?”

KB: Yeah. Completely. I’ve never met Tonya, or even seen her speak, but I completely agree with that idea. It is an absolute fallacy, that you put those things... I mean, a small number of people do, but they really are the researcher. And you could argue that they’ve been, not perfectly, but actually disproportionately enabled by museums over time anyway, because curators and people who work in museums, kind of, understand researchers, because we’re quite passionate specialists, and we tend to, kind of, cope with them very well. So, you’re quite right, there is that whole problem about, you know, if we digitise things in a very classic way, and you make it under a searchable database, yes, that’s very good, but the audience will always be very, very, very small. I think, the flip side of the argument, in terms of digitisation, is to think, well, actually, if we want to do really exciting projects - like VR, or you want to develop a new app or something, experience a new type of taught museum - you often need those digital assets to make it viable in the first place. So, there is a really entirely coherent argument that digitisation is really just about your core infrastructure. You know, I think you could make that argument that you’d do that, because that is part of actually turning your collection into, not just a documented collection that you hold, but something that can be transformed and repurposed into other things. Even if you’re not necessarily committing to publishing or thinking about audience, you can take that line of it. But yes, definitely, more work needs to be done, in terms of thinking about how you make this type of material really meaningful to people. And there is no one, simple answer to that. I mean, that’s something... In a slightly scatter-shot way, we have been experimenting with a few things, and not always working, actually. So, around the Royal Pavilion Archive, something that I experimented with online is... In the history pages of the Pavilion, there’s a section called ‘Tales from the Pavilion Archive’, and what I was trying to do there was to actually present the works around a narrative hook, rather than actually saying what the thing is. So, one example, is something called ‘Nash Views’, which is a series of aquatints, I think, showing the completed Royal Pavilion under John Nash’s model from 1823. And what’s quite interesting, or one interesting aspect of the book, is that it doesn’t have any text in it. And the reason for that is because it was quite an expensive book to produce, and if there were text in it, they had to give two copies to the British Library, which they didn’t want to do. So, we tried presenting it, and I think it’s still online like this actually, as a book without words. So, a way to try and get people to, kind of, browse through. I haven’t looked at the figures for a while. I don’t think it was really working. Where that approach does work, is if you have something like a gallery interactive, because where people are just- you know, obviously, the Web behaviour is typically

people looking for things. So, you can sometimes distract a small number of people, and tilt people around, but they tend to be quite goal-driven. In a gallery environment, where some people - probably only a small proportion of your audience - are a lot more curious and, kind of, open about what's there, that type of approach does work. So, that's, kind of, just one example of ways in which you can start to, kind of, crack that problem, about: how do you take this digitised stuff and make it more meaningful? But again, you need a whole range, I think, of different tools and solutions for very different circumstances. Again, if you're looking at, you know, purely online, teachers, for example, are an audience we would love to crack. Very, very hard to reach. One of the, kind of, basic things we do know about teachers, is that they will tend to primarily Google first. So, most teachers, if they're looking for something like a photograph of Brighton seafront in Edwardian times, won't think: "Ooh, I'll go and have a look at Brighton Museum's website to see what's on there," they go on a Google Image search. And actually, that, no online collections database is going to service very well, on Google Images. So, again, that's one reason why I've always tried to prioritise things like blogging, or actually finding, kind of, static, SEO-friendly, kind of, Web content, that can actually deliver some of that. And that can work very well, but again, that's a different workflow, and a process, from digitisation. So, yeah, I don't have an answer to that, but I think that's where a lot of work, and serious work, needs to be done, thinking about who those audiences are. Because, you know, it's great that there is pressure from policy makers, now, to think about digitisation more. I think it is a sensible move. But if we're still facing the problem that we realise that nobody else is still using this, and in five years' time we can, sort of, crash back to where we were before... And I think, also, there is a bit of a problem with the Arts Council on this, actually. Because they always seem to be aspiring towards some sort of cultural singularity, where they will see a museum as being almost like a different art form to the performing arts. And I think, very often, when you look at the performing arts, they've had a lot of success in taking something like a play, and effectively filming it and transmitting it elsewhere. So, like the NT Live, that worked in cinemas, been very, very successful. But I think that works because the audience relationship with a theatre- or theatrical performance can translate quite well into another medium, because essentially, you go to a space, you sit, and you watch the performance. It's actually, even crudely, moved to a cinema screen, or your TV, or even your phone... I think the museum object, and the museum visit, is a really different experience. And I think a lot of people still naively assume people come into museums to see the objects. On one crude level it's true, but it's no more than saying people go into a pub to drink alcohol. You know, there's a whole bundle of, sort of, social reasons and needs. You know, I'm a big fan of John Falk, and his work around identity-related motivations, and that much more oblique relationship that the collections might have to the museum visit, which, again, is where that becomes a lot, lot more difficult to translate. And I think the Arts Council, because they don't like framing a lot of their digital policy specifically for museums, compared to other arts organisations, are quite in danger of actually missing this, in my view.

HC: That's very interesting, thank you. Looking back, again, to the optimism around the year- the 2000s, where did you think we would've been now? Did- and why is the reality different? We've been through quite a lot of the reasons, but what do you think caused that, sort of, falling-off in 2009? I mean, was it just too difficult? Did it just not work?

KB: I think it probably varies in different organisations. I think, with us, it was really just a shift in priorities and how we were using the funding. Certainly, with us, because a lot of that funding had come from Renaissance in the Regions, and you couldn't just simply keep doing the same thing year after year, you had to show some sort of movement and progression... So, certainly, when... So, when I became Digital Lead here, and I worked on the, kind of, digital element of the application for the 2012 to 15, what was then major partner museum funding, there was a lot going in there about digital, but nothing at all about digitisation. It was really- well, a little bit about that, around open data, but it was a lot more about things like, we were working with young people to create online games, and we created a couple of experimental apps, and actually ended up spending a lot of money on things that really weren't worthwhile. I mean, some things worked. You know, even the

failures, we learnt a lot from them. But digitisation was not a key part of what we were doing there. It was very much the feeling that digital is all about the new experience we could create with these technologies. I think other organisations will have varied, I suspect. Other, better-funded organisations, that had set up regular departments, probably just carried on digitising. But, yeah, I think we very much fell off the radar. I mean, as I say, it's only now that we're beginning to gradually, kind of, pull it together a lot more coherently.

HC: Do you think the government and the policy makers are actually a little bit behind on this? Because where Culture is Digital is making the same assumptions, it seems to me, that we had back then, that putting things online is a virtue in itself - do you think that's going a little bit unchallenged? And do you think it's important for, maybe, institutions to say: "Yes, we think things need to be online, but we need to talk about why we're doing it, and what we're doing it for"?

KB: Yeah, I totally agree with you. I think there is a problem, that we are doing this and not entirely understanding why. Because the other aspect, of course, around the open data movement in the early 2010s, and this certainly came from a lot of European Union policy thinking, was around creating these assets that other commercial companies could then re-use, and actually be an economic driver. And I remember seeing some daft things about open data. It was going to create a new Industrial Revolution, stuff like that. And, yeah, again, it hit the same problem: who is really going to use this? And, you know, our stuff is available as open data, I very much like the principles of it, but I've found, you know, locally, it's really hard to get people very interested in that. Now, as a series of questions why that might be, I think it's partly because the actual data models that we use, the, sort of, very classic spectrum units of information maps the doubling core type thing, is a very limited way of describing things. It's quite problematic, it means it's quite useful from a, sort of, an information professional's perspective, in terms of finding what the stuff is and knowing what it is. In terms of re-usable data, it's not that helpful. But I think it's partly because... I don't think there's that many great projects, that have initiated from the private sector, that have really looked at re-using heritage. You know, I know, certainly, the thinking about the Smart City, I always felt that, for a truly Smart City would be one that also recognises its past. But I never really saw anything coming out of those conversations where I felt anyone from the private sector had really, kind of, grasped that. You know, occasionally I had conversations with local technologists about that, and a few little things that have been experimented with, but it doesn't seem to be the thing that are really getting people very excited, actually. And I think, for a lot of people, there are probably lots of imaginative barriers around what heritage can mean, in terms of being used with other contemporary assets. And maybe that comes down to one of the great difficulties, that people see the past as being in the past, and no more. And I think, although, you know, Heritage Lottery Fund are quite good on this, in terms of thinking about heritage as something that, kind of, reinvigorates some kind of- well, the present, through our understanding, most people don't get that. And I think there's still a long way to go, to get people to think about heritage more in that way.

HC: In terms of engaging with the local community, one of the questions that is really coming up for me, at the moment, is: what if the community that you're trying to engage is not interested in what you're trying to show them? And it seems to me, that digitisation doesn't necessarily solve that problem.

KB: Yep. Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, digitisation only works, really, if you have an existing need for those assets, essentially. And you were saying, one of the problems is that often people, locally, just aren't interested in that type of thing. I mean, it is interesting. I know from my perspective, particularly, of managing the photo collection, it was quite an interesting one, because when, occasionally, people would find photographs, and we'd find out about it, so then made a request to re-use it, or they had something... It was often because it met a very particular need. And often, it'd be things like their own family history, somewhere where they used to live, which was fine. But that's quite interesting, because that's a very personal and unique perspective on that, which few people are really likely to share. So, it does mean that you can create real value that way, but you have to digitise an enormous number of things for that to make sense. And, you know, that depends

how you want to pitch the figures, because you could always make the argument that you have something like, I don't know, two thousand views of your online collection a month - and I'm not sure if that's a figure of ours, I think it's more than that, but I'd have to check, actually. But say it was like two thousand views a month, and you could say: "Well, every view is a serious researcher, who, this is going to, you know, change their understanding of the past," whatever, but that's probably over-egging it a bit. Of course, what you know is a lot of those views will be people thinking: "Is that the thing I want? No, it's not." Exactly. You really don't know. I mean, there's a, sort of, a vacuum there, that you can, kind of, interpret in one way or the other. But, yes, I think relevance - and this is, sort of, kind of, some of the stuff that Nina Simon's been, sort of, writing and talking about in the museum environment - is a tricky one. And I think that is definitely something that Culture is Digital hasn't addressed in its report. And I think that does need to be, how much you make those digitised collections relevant. First thing, I suspect, is to get them out the database. What that means, there are lots of answers to that. But definitely, relevance is one of those.

HC: Great. I'd like to look forward. We've, sort of, looked back at what we thought would happen, it clearly hasn't happened. What have you learned from your digitisation experiences?

KB: I think, a lot of this, we've, sort of, said before. I think, it is the fact that the audience is disappointingly small, if left by the, sort of, conventional mechanics. It's more time-consuming, to do well, than people think. I suppose, a third one, that I haven't mentioned yet, is that people's expectations of the availability of digital data way outstrip the reality. So, I even remember, back when I was still curator at that photo collection, so it would've been back about 2009, 2010, I once had someone phone me up, who was asking for a very particular view of the clock tower, something like that. And he said: "But I thought you would have all views digitised." And then, you know, I didn't really get into the, kind of, long discussion with him, but I actually did spend some time, kind of, mapping out: well, how long does it take to, kind of, document, and just do a basic photograph of something? Across the whole of our collections. And I worked out that it would take sixty years to do the entirety of it. So, I think, even now, the only museums that can probably say they've actually digitised all of their collections are art galleries. Because I think, the level of funding per object probably works quite well. If you've got something like a huge archaeology collection, or, you know, a natural science collection's maybe got, kind of, old drawers in a cabinet just full of bird skulls, and things like that... Yeah, those enormous collections are, kind of, you know, unlikely to be, kind of, wholly digitised. Let alone thinking about the, kind of, real refinement of the data, and the addition of metadata to go and make it much more meaningful. It is a long, long process. And I think, increasingly, as, you know, people forget very quickly about the analogue, you know. I mean, I'm aware myself, as being someone who has, kind of, grown up over this period of great technological change. I can't remember what it was like not to have a mobile phone, but, you know, twenty-five years ago, I didn't have one. And I think, increasingly, the fact that museums have stuff, and there is potentially no digital presence of that stuff, is going to be seen by a lot of people as increasingly odd. Now, that could be quite good, if you could make that translate into the actual resources to do that, but I suspect that won't happen. That is a struggle.

HC: If you did have a magic wand, and you could digitise everything, do you think- do you think it would be a complete waste of time to do it, or is there still a point to having the accessibility of entire collections online?

KB: Yeah, there is always a point of it. And I think, again, there is that question about time scales. Because, I think, often, with projects, people have an expectation, and this really is because of the way they're funded, that you should be able to see the results in one or two years, or at the time the project actually happens. But, especially for a museum, where we work in longer time frames because of what we do, there is a very good argument, that you could actually invest to do something which has a very low uptake and use, but that uptake and use continues year after year after year, for a very long time. And when you start to look at it in wider time scales, about, actually, what value does this create over twenty-five years, or fifty years... Because, you know, even though, you know, technologies change, having a basic description and even just a basic image to see what

something is, is still valuable. And, you know, that can still be as valuable now as it is in twenty-five years. It may not be adequate for what people want to do, but the very fact that people can see what it is, and know it's there, and then go back to it, is still really valuable. So, I think, at the level of infrastructure, and actually just being able to pick up very small amounts of attention over a longer period, yes, it would be worthwhile. I'm also reminded of something that a guy called Seb Chan, who was at the Cooper Hewitt Museum, he's just gone back to Australia now, I'm not quite sure where he is, but I think he wrote a blog post some time ago. So, talking about the problem with digitisation is that, you know, doing your first hundred objects or so is a big thing, because suddenly you have collections online. Having all your collections digitised is another big thing in itself. The bit in the middle is quite harder to get excited about, because you're, kind of, still in the middle somewhere, and it's a very, very long middle, in terms of time and resources and presence, you know. What does it mean, to say: "I've got 60% of our collections online"? Well, you know, unless it's a part of a, sort of, progress report, it probably doesn't mean a lot. And there's an interesting aspect in that. I mean, if all your collections were reliably online, with data, would that substantially change some of the things you could do with that? I don't know. Possibly.

HC: Looking ahead, without a magic wand, do you see there being another sort of, falling-off, such as the one we, kind of, saw at the end of the 2000s? Just because we've tried a few things, they haven't necessarily worked, and without a real clear idea of what we're doing it for, there are always going to be more pressing concerns for time and money?

KB: Yeah. Completely.

HC: The idea of putting things online... A lot of people have associated putting collections online with the democratisation of heritage, giving access to more people, who maybe aren't in the local area, to see things they might be interested in. But looking at what has gone online, it's tended to be, in my view, what's easy, what's out of copyright and what has had funding. So, it will depend on what size of organisation you are, and your funding structure. Looking at what you have online, how does it represent you as an organisation? And do you feel that's democratising in any way?

KB: I think what we have online is too driven by individual perceptions. So, if you look at what we have online, it doesn't give you a very broad sense of the collections at all. Now, it's something I hope we can address over the next four years. But, for example, we put a lot more resources into digitising photographs, because we were hoping to make money out of them. But even aside from that, if we look at the figures of what people use, it is the 2D works attract the most attention. So, you know, at that level, if you're just thinking about what the audience wants, you would start to prioritise your 2D works. But of course, that's not really representing the organisation very well. And that doesn't mean that there isn't meaning or value in having other items digitised. I think, the idea of it democratising your collections, is tricky inasmuch as democracy itself is a far from simple concept. I mean, I studied politics years ago, so I'm, kind of, a bit skewed by that. Because, in a sense, it is democratic. But like most democracies, it's privileging certain people rather than everyone. And effectively, what happens with digitisation at the moment, it's great for researchers online. You know, those people who want to sit down, and have the time, and can actually formulate a research question to find the stuff. Yeah, it's great, it's democratising for them. If you look at things like digital repatriation projects, for example, you know, particularly having collections from, say, somewhere like Burma, how do we get those collections back to those people? I'm not saying we have done this, but it's very easy to fall into a trap where we think: "Well, we've digitised it," so the, sort of, middle-class, educated people can access it. But that's not always going to be your source communities, very often. So, that is very, very problematic, if you're not really solving that audience problem. And again, it's very easy to be quite complacent, by assuming that access- that because it's open to everyone, that everyone is using this. So, I think, more widely, this is something that museums are beginning to recognise. The fact that all these years of free admission did not change the social makeup of the audience at all. In fact, even if they said move to charging, I think we have seen this, it does not change. So, the whole argument that free admission meant that people of any, kind of, class or background could come in... Well, they didn't. And I think, until you

solve that problem, and again, it's the audience problem again, exactly the same thing is true of digitisation. How do you really engage people with that? You know, how do you work out what their needs are, what their preconceptions are, what barriers are? Who really wants to know about this stuff? You know, you also have to cut off at a certain point, and just think: "Well, a lot of people simply won't care about this." You know, because at the moment, I think, we've got the people who find museums, and use them and their digitised objects, and then there's a lot of people who don't. Now, of those people who don't, there are some who probably would in the right circumstances, if they could. But of course, there's an awful lot who never will. And it's not relevant to them, you know, any more than you could persuade me to go and watch a game of cricket, as someone who can't stand it. It just would never happen. But of course, what we don't know, is who is in that 'they might do if they could' category. We can easily, widely overestimate of what that is, actually.

HC: Do you think - this is my, kind of, overall-arching argument, that I'm trying to make - that heritage organisations are inherently selfish, because they have to be? It sounds like a very stark thing to say, but is survival, and the numbers that they are forced to work to, more important than putting things online for an audience they don't necessarily understand, and that their experience shows isn't really engaging anyway? So, does the survival win over democratisation, and is democratisation really, in reality, not something that takes a lot of time, because there's so much else going on at the other end? It's a kind of: "We have to do what we can with what we have and anything else beyond that, if it's not instantly working and making success, in terms of visitor numbers through the door, or data that we can show to, you know, the people who fund us... Does it mean you have to work within the structure that you're in? And you can't really break out?"

KB: I think, to some extent - and this will vary, organisation by organisation - I think, the Arts Council, to be fair to them, are increasingly moving around, looking for the delivery of social outcomes, much as, actually, the HLF used to, although they, sort of, tended to do it in a very, sort of, stat-heavy way, which didn't always work. But even then, there's arguments around how that's actually measured. So, for example, if you look at, say, the diversity policy of the Arts Council, it's very good in identifying or supporting those with protected characteristics, like BME audiences, looking at LGBTQ histories... They still shy away from really looking at class, which, for me, is still the biggest issue in British society. Most people know it, but it doesn't seem that any public authority can really admit that. So, in terms of that democratisation argument. So, I think organisations can do that. I mean, for us, for example, whether you think we deliver it or not, we do have a Manifesto that really has social outcomes written into that. And a lot of our projects are actually motivated by that. And of course, there were always those internal tensions, because there are commercial realities we have to have. And it's why not for profit organisations are so complex compared to, kind of, commercial ones, because you have a variety of different goals that you need to meet. So, I think, you know, museums can control their destiny, to some extent. But, yes, it is always about senior managers deciding their priorities, and how they actually negotiate those pressures. So, for example, it's an interesting one from a Local Authority perspective, because I think most of the value they see from the museum is actually economic, you know, in terms of how it drives people into the city, in terms of its, sort of, tourism profile. Particularly the Royal Pavilion. Which is fine, but it does mean, if you're trying to have the argument about social outcome, you find you're not sitting in the right bit of the Council to necessarily have that discussion, or it can seem quite complicated. And I think, from a management perspective, trying to, sort of, juggle those different needs is very, very problematic. So, I think museums, for their own survival, have to be selfish. I think, if you are looking at a position, which we are, where you need paying visitors to come in, and that is your priority in order to survive, then you may have to actually, kind of, take on those programmes, or those activities, where you know there's likely to be genuine income made, at the expense of those things that could create social value, but won't necessarily come back in financial value. And I think that just really varies on the organisation, actually, the priorities you set. But I think it is tricky, with digitisation, how you make the case.

HC: Great. Thank you very much.

John Benson
National Waterways Museum
6th August 2018

HC: Helen Casey

JB: John Benson

HC: First of all, could you give me your name and the name of this establishment, and talk me a little bit through your background, which I know we've already done off-recording, but if you could just tell me a little bit about where you've come from.

JB: Yeah. So, I'm John Benson, and I'm the archivist responsible for the Waterways Archive here at the National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port. And the Waterways Archive is the single biggest gathering of historic records relating to the UK's inland waterways in the world. So, it's a collection of international significance, and it includes the records of some canal companies, it includes thousands of engineering drawings, hundreds of thousands of historic photographs, the records of canal historians and enthusiasts - and I leave it to you to judge at what point an enthusiast becomes a historian and vice versa. And it's a collection that covers the whole country, so it's a national thing. The fact we're here in Ellesmere Port is incidental, because there's material in the Archive Store from the Regent's Canal, for example, in London. So, that's what I currently do here. Before I was here, I was responsible for a big Heritage volunteering project in Shropshire. Before I did that, I was the archivist for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Before I did that, I did various things at Cheshire Record Office. Before I did that, I managed a big Heritage Lottery funded project, working with gay and lesbian people in Manchester. And before I did that I did various things at Lancashire Record Office. So, although I'm an archivist, it's true to say, I think, that, in recent years, I've worked as much with museums as I have with archives. So, that's me.

HC: Great, thank you very much. You've gone through the first couple... Tell me how you define 'heritage', as opposed to 'history'.

JB: That's an interesting one. I suppose I think about heritage as being - if this isn't too grandiose a way of putting it - I suppose I think of heritage as being anything which contributes to the story of how we've come to be where we are today, really. How would I make that distinct from history? I don't know, really. I mean, I suppose I think of - I do training for groups in oral history gathering, and I suppose one of the things I always say to them, is that, I suppose, they'll come to believe that history is whatever we believe it to be, really. So, I suppose, I would define history like that, as whatever we perceive it to be. And I suppose I would define heritage as being a tangible thing, which tells us something about how we've come to be where we are today, if that makes any kind of sense.

HC: it's really hard to define, which is why I'm asking, because I think it is actually impossible to define, and the harder you try, the more it slips away from you-

JB: Yes-

HC: What do you see as the heritage of this organisation? What is it that it's holding which somehow defines something?

JB: I suppose it's building boats- buildings, boats, objects, and paper. So, the one interesting feature of this site is the buildings. And, in fact, one of the things which brought the museum about was the big wind warehouse, which you can see on the painting on the wall up there, to your right, in the, sort of, historic image. That was a warehouse that was designed by Thomas Telford, and in 1970 it burned down. And it's partly, I think, that event which brought the museum about, because I think people realised that, unless something was done, that the whole complex would go. So, the buildings are important. And in fact, Graham Boxer, that's the Head of Museums - who isn't here today, but - certainly, one thing which is part of his grand plan, which would be great if it were to happen, is that this site becomes a big, sort of, living history museum, rather a bit like Beamish, and the museum in Dudley, whose name I've now forgotten, which is slightly embarrassing. But the advantage which this site would have is, unlike the- the museum in- in Dudley, for instance - oh,

what's it called? Oh, ok, anyway...! Unlike the museum in Dudley, which, what they've done there is, they've basically moved buildings in - literally, taken them down and moved- moved them to the museum - here, the buildings are original. So, the buildings, sort of, speak for themselves. And in fact, looking over at the window there, you'll see a little hatch, which I think is where people would've collected their pay, in years gone by. So, it's the buildings that are important. The boats are important as well, and there is a significant collection of historic boats here, with more in a storage unit, in Ellesmere Port. And I think- I think the museum has fifty-six boats- historic boats, of all different shapes and sizes, everything from 'Starvationer', for instance - so called because you can see its ribs - and the Starvationer would have plied its trade in the- the coal mines on the Bridgewater Canal in Worsley... Everything from there to pleasure craft, which we also have. So, the boats are significant. I would say this, wouldn't I, because I'm the archivist, but the Waterways Archive, as well, is a very significant collection. And it's largely artificial - which makes it sound as if I'm being derogatory about it - I'm not - it's just to say that it's basically the product of people going and collecting stuff. So, it's a very large artificial collection, basically. But it's a nice collection to work with. And I suppose - you know, I've talked about the buildings, and the boats, and the paper - I suppose the other thing which is of significance here is the site, as well. And in fact, I think that this site is historically so significant that it could- it should actually be a World Heritage site. So, what would have happened, in this location, is boats would have come over the River Mersey, and up the Ship Canal, after it was built in the 1890s. And they would have brought raw materials that had come in from all over the world into Liverpool, and those materials would then be distributed throughout the canal network. The materials would be turned into products, such as ceramics, and so on and so forth, and would then go back up the canal network, here, and would go back over the Mersey, and would be shipped from Liverpool, all over the world. So, it's historically - in terms of industrial history - it's a really significant site. So, they're the four things that I would say. I think the buildings, and the boats, the archive, and the physical site.

HC: Fantastic, thank you. So, this is part two of the recording. I want to talk a bit about putting collections online, and by that, I don't just mean necessarily a catalogue, but something so that people who are not physically here can see what it is you hold, and what it's all about. Can you talk a bit about your time here, and what you've decided to digitise or not, and what kind of things you've decided to do, and the motivations behind those decisions?

JB: Yeah. I mean, in terms of digitisation, I mean, one of the interesting developments, I suppose, in the sort of work that I've done for many years now, is it used to be the case that, you know, twenty years ago, that you would accession something and catalogue it, and then, at some indeterminate point in the future you might digitise it. What we try to discipline ourselves to do here, now, is when we accession something and catalogue it, to digitise it at that point. And one of the really powerful things about that is we, kind of, people like me, kind of, no longer need to, sort of, tell people what something could be useful for, for want of a better phrase. So, because I digitise stuff all the time, once it's digitised, you just send it out there, and people can make of it what they- what they will, so that's really useful. And in fact, you know, I think we are, sort of, almost at the point where people like me almost don't need to catalogue anything anymore, you just digitise it, and send it out there. So, in terms of the archive here, we're doing that on an ongoing basis. However, there was quite a lot of digitisation done, on an industrial scale, just before I arrived here. And in fact, there is, last time I looked, forty-six thousand images which you can browse on our website, including lots and lots and lots of historic photographs. In terms of the motivation for that, I, sort of, feel as if it's, sort of, transmogrified into, sort of, something which it wasn't intended to be. I think that the original idea was to make money out of it. We haven't made any money out of it. And the reason we haven't made any money out of it is that the documentation regarding copyright here is very patchy, with regards to the photographic collections. And on legal advice, we decided that trying to make money out of something, which we weren't sure we had the right to do in the first place, put us on something of a sticky wicket. So, we haven't made any money out of it. However, I think that, even if the copyright thing wasn't as it is, that I think it was always pretty optimistic, really, to think we

could make huge amounts of money out of it. And I think I probably subscribe to the view that you get as much back from people by giving stuff away as you do by charging them. So, I mean, we have a donation box, which is over there, which people frequently contribute to. And also, I mean, I deal almost on a weekly basis - in fact, not almost, I do deal on a weekly basis - with television production companies, and you may have noticed, that almost every programme that's made on television these days seems to be about canals. So, I've given away hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of images to television production companies. And whilst it's true to say that I don't make money out of that, either - I just get them to sign a legal disclaimer, and they can have as many as-images as they want - but it has raised our profile and made us a lot more visible. So, I suppose that I would say that, in terms of digitisation, that what we're looking to do is, basically, just increase access to the collections. And if you go on our website, you will see that each individual image has a comment thread attached to it, so people can go on and tell us more about a particular feature, or someone that's on the photograph. Or they can, you know, give us reflective information, which- which they do all the time, so somebody - it isn't me that deals with it, it's one of my volunteers - but somebody put a comment against one of the- the photographs, not long ago, that just said: "That's my dad," so it, you know, so it's that sort of thing. So, does that answer your question?

HC: Yes, definitely. I mean, you've actually mentioned quite a lot of things that I'd like to go into more detail. I mean, particularly, copyright comes up again and again, as a much bigger issue than I think people thought it was going to be to start with.

JB: Yeah.

HC: You've decided that you can't sell the images, but you're OK giving them away... You've made that decision, and do you think that's paid off? In terms of, are you getting physical people through the door, having given them access, for free, to what you have?

JB: I wouldn't say it's resulted in people physically coming in, but it's certainly spread the word. I think, up until four years ago, we were a bit, sort of, invisible, and because we've dealt- because, basically, the stuff from the collection has now appeared in so many television programmes and publications, that it's definitely raised our profile. No, I wouldn't say that it's resulted in people coming in. And in fact, if anything, probably the reverse, in the sense that, you know, if someone's coming from- if someone lives in London, for instance - and quite a lot of our enquirers live in London - then what I try and do, is digitise it for them, and send them the image, basically. And we have a WeTransfer channel that we use, which is useful for that. In terms of our visitors, I wouldn't say digitisation has resulted in more physical visitors, but it's certainly resulted in more enquiries, remote enquiries, and I think it's definitely brought us into contact with more people, but not necessarily physically.

HC: In terms of measuring that success, do you do so by number of enquiries, or there are other- other ways that you report out the success that you get from the raised awareness?

JB: Yeah, so, there's certainly numbers of enquiries that we count, and they have certainly gone up. And if you wanted me to put a figure on it, I would say, probably as much as 25% in the time that I've been here. So, we certainly count those, and we try and discipline ourselves to count as many things as enquiries as we possibly can. So, we're probably getting something in the region of best part of a thousand enquiries a year, I would say, now, which doesn't sound very many, but when there's only, sort of, one and a half of us to deal with that, that's quite a number. In terms of other performance indicators, we do measure the number of people that come in this room. It's a bit quiet because it's Monday, but one of the really pleasing things is that, it used to be the case, before we had this room, we used to operate out of the room next door. And you'd see a museum visitor with their, sort of, nose pressed against the glass, and you'd, sort of, run out, and drag them in, kicking and screaming. What happens now, is the majority of people, I think, who visit the museum, just tend to incorporate a visit in here as part of their tour of the museum, which is exactly what we wanted to happen. And we measure those numbers as well, so...

HC: In terms of... you've said one of the original influences behind digitisation was making money, and now it's turned more into raising profile, and sharing...

JB: Yeah.

HC: Have any of those conversations, about sharing, actually been about engaging with more people? And is that part of what you do, and what you need to do, to raise those numbers, and grow the number of people you engage with?

JB: Yeah, absolutely. The museum in which we're talking had its zenith in the 1980s, and again, the painting on the left, there, is a painting as it was in the 1980s, to the point, I gather, that if you talk to the right person, they will actually pick out real people on the painting... But anyway, when that painting was done, the museum was getting a hundred thousand visitors a year. And we- at one stage, we were down to, I think, twenty thousand. And I think we're heading up, back to thirty thousand, now. So, absolutely part of the aim is about, sort of, being in contact with more people, raising the profile. And, in terms of the museum as a whole, part of that is obviously about income generation. But it's also, you know, engaging with more people, is also, you know, an end in itself. And, I suppose, in terms of my particular part of the museum, I suppose, I would like to think we've got away a little bit from, sort of, fortress archives. I think, when I arrived, it was- it felt a bit, sort of, fortress-like, and perhaps even - like some other archive services - perhaps even a little bit intimidating, to come and visit. And hopefully we've opened that up a lot. But yeah, absolutely, the aim is about engaging with more people.

HC: Have you made any decisions not to digitise? Are there things that cannot be put online?

JB: No, I wouldn't say so. I mean, we have a limited range of equipment here, although we are just buying some new scanners, which, in fact, could come as quickly as this week, actually. So, we have got some new scanners. But even the... So, example, we've got very, very large plans, and at the moment, the only means I have of digitising those, in here, is to photograph them, which I do. But we do have a relationship, as well, with the Record Office in Chester, who have a substantial bit of reprographic kit, which I actually bought for them when I was working there. So, there really isn't- I mean, working in cahoots with them, there actually isn't really anything that we can't digitise. I would suppose the biggest challenge that we've got, is we have a vast quantity of slide transparencies and glass lantern slides, which we are always chipping away at. But there's, sort of, years' worth of work in digitising that. And I suppose I'm a little bit reluctant to get many volunteers to do that, simply because it's a deeply boring thing to do, and obviously, if you give a volunteer something that's deeply boring, they'll probably want to, course, swiftly going to cease to be a volunteer...

HC: Do you think there's a benefit to having everything online? If you could wave a magic wand, would you put absolutely everything online? Do you think that's a worthwhile ambition?

JB: It's a worthwhile ambition, yeah... I would think there will always be a place for the hard copy, I have to say. But yeah, I mean, I think digitisation is a terribly powerful tool. Somebody reminded me, at a training course I ran, somewhere, a few weeks ago - forgotten where I was, now but they made the point that there is always a place for face-to-face communication, there's always a place for human interaction. And so, I mean, I think there will always be a need for, you know, a reading room, and, I'm sure, you know, Local Authority archivists would say the same thing. But yeah, I mean, digitisation is incredibly powerful. Not least because you find yourself with all sorts of new audiences, which you didn't expect. So, the National Maritime Museum, for instance, when they digitised some of their collection, and put it up on Flickr, they found themselves with a whole new audience of cable knitwear enthusiasts, which they simply didn't- wasn't an audience they believed they had. And in the same way, I think, one of the really powerful things that digitisation has done for the collection here, is it's made the audience a lot less homogenous. So, we always knew that we would have an audience, say, of people interested in engineering, in marine engineering, of people interested in industrial history, and so on. But we've found that we've also developed an audience of people with an interest in natural history, and ecology, and so on and so forth. So, yeah, I think it's definitely important to get as much of it online as possible. Without, you know, beating ourselves up about it or anything.

HC: Let me just take a pause. So, I've created a list of reasons why you might not digitise. Would you be able to have a look at them, and tell me- kind of, put them in order of importance, and tell me how they either have or haven't impacted you with the projects that you've tried to do?

JB: Yeah. I mean, I think, the... I mean, certainly, in the past, the top of my list would have been fear of obsolescence. I think, even a grumpy old so-and-so like me, I think, has now, I think, got a degree of confidence that you can digitise things without there being a fear of obsolescence. So, that would've been- if you'd asked me that question twenty years ago, I would've put that at the top of the list, but I think it's probably bottom of the list now, I think. Cost is certainly an issue. I think, looking at the list, I think, probably, the main reason not to digitise, I would say, is probably time, I think, in our case. There's certainly the will to do it. I've already talked about it being quite a boring thing to do, and therefore not wanting to get volunteers to do it. Copyright issues... I don't- maybe I should, but I don't worry too much about copyright issues. I have a takedown policy. So, basically, there's some text on the website, and it's never happened in the time I've been here, but... So, if somebody basically says: "That's my copyright, and take it down," I'll take it down, but again, it wouldn't be top of my list, that would be fairly near the bottom, I think. Sorry, I suspect I'm rambling. I don't think lack of political will, no, I think we've got the will to do it, and we've got the track record of doing it. So, I would say, ranking those, I would say, the main reason not to digitise would be, I think, time, and then cost. But I would- all of the others, I would... I'm not sure about 'other', but certainly, the other four, I would probably say... Probably lack of political will, fear of obsolescence, copyright issues right at the bottom, I think. And in terms of IT skills, I think most people, these days, can get their head round it quite quickly.

HC: I think that's something that has changed. I think we now understand that this is just a tool, and actually, it can be taught.

JB: Yeah.

HC: It's interesting that you say that volunteers would find something like that boring, whereas, I would've always assumed that you wouldn't give it to them because there's a certain amount of knowledge needed, in terms of how you're putting it on, and how you're tagging it, and...

JB: I think the reason it's so boring is that, if you're going to do it, then you've got to do it at sufficiently high resolution, and it's that which makes it boring. But it's something- I've always- I've always found digitisation really interesting, and I've liked doing it, but I'm - with the exception of one volunteer I can think of... Some of the other volunteers tend to turn their nose up at it a bit, maybe because it is repetitive. And in fact, I had my stepdaughter working with me for a day, who wanted to come and volunteer as part of her Duke of Edinburgh scheme. And I got her to do digitisation, and she was bored rigid! Sorry...

HC: Fair enough. You have been involved in heritage for twenty-five years-

JB: Yeah.

HC: -so, you will remember, at the turn of the century, when it was all very exciting, the Internet was brand new-

JB: Yeah.

HC: -can you remember, at the time, thinking: "Ooh, this is what we could do. These are the possibilities and opportunities that could happen with heritage, now that we have this online space"?

JB: Yeah, I mean, I could see the potential. I mean, the fear of obsolescence thing, I mean... I suppose I'm aware of the fact that there have been quite a number of projects, including one or two that I've been involved with myself, which have involved digitisation, and which are now dead in the water. So, I suppose, that was a concern. And I spent quite a lot of - like a lot of people, I think, that do my job - I spent a little while, I remember, sort of, having a, sort of, gloomy fatalism about it. I don't think I do feel like that anymore. I think I do, now, believe that- that it's possible to do it, and for it to be sustainable. But yeah, I mean, I remember in about 1994, 1995, it might've been, when we first got the Internet, and it was clear, I think, from that, that the potential for digitisation, to allot collections, and to get them out to audiences that it wouldn't have got to before, was there. I

suppose the truth is, I don't remember being particularly excited by it. Mainly because, I think, at the time, I was very sceptical as to how sustainable it would be, but sustainable it is, I think, so...

HC: And that is surprising, because one of the first things everyone tried to do, as you said, was monetise it. And very few people have been able to make that happen, yet, it's still sustainable. So, what's happened, since 2000, to allow it to be sustainable without monetisation?

JB: I think a lot of it, of course, has been external funding. So, Heritage Lottery Fund has been a source of revolution, really, for places like this. So, there's been the external funding. But as well as that, I think, there's- the organisations have grasped the fact that, as a marketing tool, that digitisation is great, you know. And the thing with organisations like this, is - and it's, I suspect, fairly typical - is, you will get the finance people, who will be jumping up and down, trying to monetise it, but you'll get the marketing people, that will be wanting to do it for nothing, and it's, sort of, it's managing those twin demands. But I don't think it was ever going to be the case that the material here was going to be, you know, very commercially successful. I don't think that's what it's about. I think it's about using it to raise the profile, and basically, as a marketing tool. And most organisations, frankly - and I think this is one reason why it has been so sustainable - most organisations, frankly, have become utterly obsessed with marketing, and this one's no different. I mean, Canal and River Trust are- you know, a very big thing for the organisation is its branding, and, you know, the digitisation is a key tool in that branding, basically.

HC: Do you see cultural heritage organisations- have you seen a move almost towards a more business-like way of behaving? And do you think the marketing has been part of that?

JB: Definitely, yeah, definitely. I mean, twenty years ago, marketing was seen as a, sort of, black arts, almost, I think, by heritage. But yeah, I mean, certainly, you know, and here, again, is a case in point, the marketing is, kind of- marketing and communications, in fact, are seen as absolutely a key means of delivering what the organisation wants to deliver. And... It's a very grand statement, I suppose, but I suppose, one of the things- one of the, sort of, slight conflicts which you come up against, working with archival stuff, is that- I mean, archives, I think, tell the truth, or the nearest thing to the truth that you're going to get, and sometimes, that conflicts a little bit with marketing. So, I mean, one project that I was- I was working on, not all that long ago - which is a job I didn't mention, actually - when I first came here, I was working three days a week here and spending two days a week working with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, over the history there. And one of the things I did, is curate an exhibition for their 175th anniversary, from the archives. And they - that was working with their marketing people - and they didn't want me to use, in the exhibition, material relating to a conductor, who was more connected with one of their competitors. So, you have to, sort of, explain to people: "Well, actually, that's the truth." The archives tell the truth. So, marketing does sometimes come up against- come up against that. But yeah, marketing is absolutely core to everything Canal and River Trust does.

HC: Did you think, back in the year 2000 - it sounds like you were slightly sceptical about digitisation - but did you think, at the time, we would be further forward than we are? Or are you not surprised at the slowness of getting collections online?

JB: Actually, I'm surprised that we've made, as a sector, I'm surprised that we've got- we've come as far as we did. Because yes, I was sceptical about it. And, you know, I remember how many times people have walked up to me in an archive service, and have said, you know: "When are you going to digitise everything?" Well, you know, never. But I am surprised at the steps that we've made. So, I mean, if you'd told me, ten years ago, that, you know, it would be possible to have just a percentage of the collection digitised and available on the website, yes, I would've been very pleasantly surprised that we're in the position we are. So, yeah, I'm pleasantly surprised that we've made as many gains as we have.

HC: What percentage would you say you do have, at the moment?

JB: At the moment, I'd say, probably 5%, which doesn't sound very much, but it's- yeah, there's lots of stuff. And we're probably - I don't know, this doesn't sound very much - but I would say there's probably another twenty images going up every week.

HC: And do you prioritise your, sort of, star items? Or do you tend to prioritise based on what you can get funding for? How do you decide what to do next?

JB: In terms of material which is coming in new, then I don't really prioritise it, I just digitise everything that we accession. In terms of other material, it would be a question of prioritising - to be blunt, it would be a question of prioritising things for which I suspect we can get funding. And we have- we're basically always chasing pots of funding. So, it's basically things which fit into that slot. It's also done on an on-demand basis, so if an enquirer wants us to digitise something, if we possibly can, we'll do it, basically

HC: If an alien was to come down and couldn't come to the physical space, and they could just suck up the wifi, how would what you've put online represent the collection that you have, do you think?

JB: I think it probably represents it pretty well. I mean, one of the- we had a company in Scotland that digitised thirty thousand photographs that we've got. And so, the photographs are a big thing. It's also the case that we also work with Canal and River Trust as an organisation, so we service their needs as well. So, I've- just this morning, for example, I had an email from an engineer, who wanted something digitising, so I think, what I would say, is we do it on an on-demand basis, but we also do it where we think we can get some money to do it, basically, as part of a project.

HC: What have you learned from your digitisation experiences over the years?

JB: I think I've learnt that, if you're going to do it, you've got to do it properly. So, you've got to do it at the appropriate resolution, and you've got to make it sustainable, so there's no point just creating a load of digital images which are then obsolete in ten years' time. Don't use jpgs, because they deteriorate, and it's a proprietary bit of software. And organise what you're digitising, identify it properly, and structure it properly, so that you can find it again, basically. I think we've all, you know- some of the early digitisation - and the same thing happened much longer ago, with microfilm, and so on - there was this, sort of, belief, that just because something's digitised, it is, in some way, more easily findable. Well, it's not more easily findable if it's not structured properly, and identified and described properly. So- and, also, avoid duplication. That's one of the things I do find slightly dispiriting, is in the world today, is people go around photographing everything, without any clear thought as to what they're going to do with it, whether it's worth doing in the first place, and if they are going to do it, then, how they're then going to organise it. You see, we live in a world where, you see all the time, you see it here, people going around, photographing everything in sight, without actually, sort of, necessarily, experiencing that which they're photographing, and without thinking what they're going to do with it subsequently. And it's not a happy subject, but that's why, for example, when somebody dies, these days, one of the things they typically leave behind are thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of photographs, which are largely unidentified. So, yeah, that's one of- trying to distill what I've just said, that, I think, is one I would say. I would say: digitise it to the right standard. Organise it, structure it, and identify it properly. And be clear that there is a purpose to doing it, before you do it.

HC: Just take a quick break. You've had very positive experiences with digitisation, you're very enthusiastic at this time. Do you think there's something about the size of your organisation - you're not huge, and there seems to be a sweet spot, somewhere between people who are so small they don't have the funding to do it, and huge places that just have collections that are so vast it just blows their mind - do you think you're in that sweet spot in the middle?

JB: Yes, to a degree, I think we are. I mean, everything's relative, isn't it? But I think we do have resources to get stuff done. And in fact, as an example of that, the scanners I mentioned, which may land as recently as this week, I got clearance to spend £12,000 on those, in the current financial year. So, yeah, we do have resources to do it. And in a sense, whilst the collections are big, they're not so vast that you can't actually, you know, make sizeable inroads into them with a bit of funding. So, yeah, I think we are- I think we're it, in that sense. I think we're probably a nice size, you know. You don't- I don't, sort of, stand there scratching my head, and thinking: "Oh, this is going to take years and years and years and years to do." But as I say, I'm pleasantly surprised at the progress that we have made. So, yeah, I think we are a bit of a sweet spot, yeah.

HC: In terms of democratising heritage, it sounds like it's something you want to do, looking for new audiences.

JB: Yeah, yeah...

HC: To what extent do you feel that you have to keep your enthusiasts happy? Because, presumably, they're the ones who have all the energy, and will travel to see you, and- and really put a lot of time and effort into this...

JB: Yeah.

HC: How do you balance looking after them with, perhaps, drawing in somebody you've never thought of before, who might have a-

JB: Yeah, that is a bit of a challenge, and there is, it has to be said, I think, quite a lot of politics involved with the canals. And whilst it's true to say that we have, I think, broadened the audience that we've got, the core audience we've got is people like boaters, and people with enthusiasm for historic boats and for marine engineering. And whilst it's true to say that we have connected, as well, with, for example, people interested in leisure studies, people interested in natural history, people interested in ecology, people interested in the canals as a wildlife habitat, we've connected with all of those people. But yeah, we have to- we're aware of the fact that, at the same time, we have a core, sort of, traditional audience, which is, sort of, Railway and Canal Historical Society. And yeah, we absolutely have to keep them sweet, as well. And what makes that a bit of a challenge, sometimes, is the fact that, as I say, there is an element of politics in it. I was talking to my wife not long ago, about an episode of Midsomer Murders, in which she said that she thought it was far-fetched, to which I responded that she'd obviously never met the Railway and Canal Historical Society. So, yeah, I mean, that's certainly been the core audience. And I think it's quite hard to get over to the experts- and, I mean, all of the volunteers here have vast quantities of specialist knowledge - far, far more so than I ever will have about the canals. And it's quite hard to get over to experts, sometimes, that not everybody wants to be an expert. So, a museum visitor, you know, typically, is just going to want a flavour of what this site would've been like, for example. They don't actually need to know everything. So, I think it's about managing the different audiences. It's important that, though, we keep the, sort of, the core people on board- and, in fact, those core people have, in many cases, been here ever since the museum was founded in the 1970s. So, yeah, so, I think, managing those different audiences can be a bit of a challenge.

HC: One of the things I'm hearing, now, going to conferences, is the need to be more diverse, and bring in more different communities. But my problem with that is, what about if they're not that interested in what you have? So, do you have any conversations about how to broaden your appeal? When actually, you are quite a niche interest, even though you have a nice café, people might come for that, people come to be by the water and take nice pictures of canal boats... How do you- how do you go about being diverse, when actually, there are certain groups of people that might not be interested at all in what you have?

JB: I think we probably try and offer up a- I mean, as a museum, I think we probably try and offer up as broad an experience as we possibly can. We were talking earlier, when we walked down from the station, about the museum being cut off from the town. And certainly, one barrier that we have, to diversity, is very much that: that Ellesmere Port is an industrial town, with some very significant social problems, and quite a lot of poverty. And the museum fails to connect, almost entirely, I'm inclined to say, to people from that- that sort of socio-economic group. So, we have tried, in the time that I've been here, a variety of different things, one of which involved having a massively reduced entrance/admission price, for anybody from a particular postcode. So, we do that, we've done that, but that didn't work terribly well. We do work a lot with local schools, and I- in fact, I do a monthly session with a local care home, working with people with dementia, and so on. So, we're trying. I think, for me, one of the biggest barriers that museums have, to diversity, is museums just do have a bit of an image problem, I think, still, as indeed do archives, even more so. And for a lot of people, 'museum', sort of, conjures up, sort of, you know, images of the British Museum, or the Victoria and Albert, and, sort of, you know, highfalutin, sort of... art, basically. But I think, one thing which

industrial museums - the Black Country Living Museum, which, the title's just come to me - I think, one thing which industrial museums have done, and this is certainly one example, is it does attract people who wouldn't normally consider going to, for example, the V&A. So, there are, certainly, barriers in that way. It has to be said, as well, that there is- almost all of the faces, that I see here, are- tend to be white, and... I'm trying to think how many... in the time I've been here, I have seen very few Black and Minority Ethnic people. And... Yeah. I mean, I think there is a, kind of, a problem there, in that, by- almost by definition, the things which we are peddling and promoting, here, tend to be, sort of, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant things, really. So, that's certainly a barrier, I think.

HC: Do you think it matters? Do you think we- do you think the cultural heritage sector has a responsibility to be more diverse? Or do you think there is a disconnect, in that, as you say, what you have might not be what they're interested in seeing?

JB: I think there is a bit of a disconnect, yeah. And I don't really know what the answer is to that. But you know, the heritage which we are promoting is of a certain type, and some people aren't really going to get that, because it isn't their background. So, there are some people who are interested in history in the abstract. In other words, if it's not their history, they're still interested in it. But it's equally the case that there are some who- that, for some people, they are, you know, not really going to be interested in a historic boat, for example. But the example I quoted from the National Maritime Museum is one which, sort of, springs to mind, that once something is digitised, you do find audiences which previously, you didn't. So, for example, we fairly regularly get a trickle of cinefilm coming in, Super 8 and so on, and we digitise some of that. And one of the really interesting things with some of that cinefilm, with it going- when it goes back into the 1950s and 1960s, is- I sometimes put some on the machine, over there, and people will walk in here. And you will find, for example, that women, that come into this room, will be interested in that cinefilm, not because of the boats that are on it, but because of the clothes which people were wearing, and the hairstyles that they had. And so... Sorry, I think I'm rambling again, but... Yeah, I mean, I think there are, inevitably, barriers. But I think there are- I think, certainly with digitisation, I think, it does- it definitely does broaden out the audience, I think.

HC: Great. In terms of looking forward, do you think there will come a point where everything is online? Or, how do you see the next twenty years panning out, having looked back twenty years?

JB: I think there will certainly be a great many more things online, and I suspect that a lot of people are, sort of, doing what we tend to do here, which is to digitise everything new that we get, basically. And of course, it's the actual techniques for digitisation, as well, are becoming more and more sophisticated. So, for example, some of the boats are now 3D-modelled, and those things are also online. So, it will become more sophisticated, inevitably. And yeah, I think more and more stuff will carry on going online. There's no sign of Heritage Lottery Funds drying up anytime soon, so there'll be more of that. There is also increased funding streams, as well, through people like the Arts Council. So, yeah, I mean, I think, the sky is the limit. I think, that, having said that, I mean, I'm very much aware, in myself, for example, that one of the things I like to do, on a Sunday morning, is go and buy the Observer in hard copy. And I think, as a sector, but also as a society, I think we've got to keep hold of how important it is for things to be tangible, as well. So, I see digitisation, I suppose, as a supplement, as a means of increasing access, as a fabulous means of promoting stuff, on- of increasing your audiences. But the hard copy is really important, as well, and we mustn't lose sight of that, you know. And that's true, not just of museum objects, but it's true of books and paper, as well. So, for example, if- you know, everybody knows that a vast quantity of data, relevant for family history, is now available online. But it nevertheless remains the case that, if you put somebody in front of a parish register, let's say, that has the details relating to their ancestor in it, actually holding that is a really powerful thing. So, digitisation supplements hard copy, but it does not replace it.

HC: And does that mean that digital visitors, or virtual visitors, are not as important as real visitors? Or do- are they dealt with the same, in terms of...

JB: No, I think they're just as important. I think, we are in danger, a little bit, I think, of losing something, with everything being online. Again, family history, I think, is a case in point. That, I think,

there's been an element of de-skilling, a little bit, in recent years. And, you know, you see, sort of, "Who do you think you are?" on the telly, and you see somebody, some schleb sitting on the train, doing his or her family history, sort of, on, you know, on the laptop. I think, digitisation is absolutely core in, sort of, reaching out to people who, perhaps, can't come to the museum, or can't come to the archive, and they- I think, in that sense, those people are every bit as important as the physical visitor. But I also think that it's the case that there is a great deal to be had from, for example, coming to a place like this, and, sort of, dealing with the books and the paper. And not everybody can do that. But I think that's very important. And I think that one of the things which the pre-digital era, if I can put it that way, did for people coming to places like this, is it gave people lots and lots and lots of research skills. And I think those research skills are very important, and we need to keep hold of those. But no, I wouldn't say that the- even so, that the personal visitor is more important than the remote visitor.

HC: Great, thank you. So, just finally: when you do put things online, how do you make decisions around what information goes around it? Presumably you have certain information about what you hold. Do you put a lot of energy into researching, or are you letting that happen?

JB: I try not to worry about it too much. It's true that I haven't migrated absolutely all of the data onto the website from the collections management system. And the reason for that is that some of that data is a little bit idiosyncratic, for want of a less charitable phrase. But I, sort of, take the view, really, that it's more important that it's- that the stuff is actually out there, you know. So, in some ways, I try not to obsess about it. And when we launched the so-called "digital archive" as- what we called it at the time, one of the things I was at pains to point out to people, was that, you know, this wasn't us posing as experts. That actually, what we were saying, was quite the reverse to that. We were actually saying: "You know far more about this stuff than I do. So, we're putting it out there, and you can tell me more about it." Now, despite the fact that I tried- I spoke at various events, to try and make that point, it was, nevertheless, the case that, when we did launch it, that the- almost the- exactly the first thing that happened, was we got a bit of a slagging-off from some of the boating community, about some of the inaccuracies on the catalogue. But again, that was the point I was trying to make. That, you know, when it's out there, then you can tell us more about it. So, if that's not Bridge 59A on the Regents Canal, it is in fact Bridge 16C on the Leeds and Liverpool, then this is your opportunity to tell us that. So- and I've now forgotten what the question was, I'm sorry.

HC: So, have you actually found, that you know more about what you have, as a result of digitising?

JB: Yes, definitely. I wouldn't say we get that many comments, on the comment thread, but my volunteer goes through them once a week, and there's probably about twenty come in a week. And that's really, really valuable, because some of the knowledge which they contribute is very specialist. So, in some cases, they will actually know the people on a photograph, and will tell us about that. So, yeah. Having it digitised has definitely increased our knowledge of the collection, and has increased our understanding, as well, in some cases, of, for example, individual canals, and so on. So, yeah, that's been- I think that's probably one of the most powerful things about it, actually.

HC: And do you think that's partly to do with the kind of collection you have? That it inspires that sort of enthusiasm, and those kind of people, that are so detail-orientated, that actually, that's-

JB: Yeah...

HC: -whereas, perhaps, if you had something more general, it wouldn't be the case?

JB: Yeah. No, it does, we deal a lot with what I would term of- as experts. And I- to be perfectly blunt, I don't know that it's that important, to me, that that particular bridge is accurately described. But it is clearly important for some people, absolute sticklers for accuracy. Which, in a sense, is fair enough, because, I mean, it should, you know, it should be right. So, yeah, I mean, it's- certainly, a lot of our audience are people who care very much that the information, about a particular waterway, for example, is accurate, and... And, yeah, I mean, obviously, accuracy does matter. I'm somewhat pragmatic about things like that, but certainly a lot- a core part of our audience is not pragmatic about it, so...

HC: Great. I think that's everything, thank you very much indeed for your time.

Jen Ross
Edinburgh University
29th August 2018

JR: Jen Ross

HC: Helen Casey

HC: First of all, if I could ask you to introduce yourself for me and give me your position here?

JR: My name is Jen Ross, I am a senior lecturer in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh.

HC: Fantastic. Okay, so... My first questions are normally about what kind of collection you hold. You don't have collections because you're here from a university basis-

JR: We do, at the university, but yeah, that's not something that I'm involved with.

HC: So, really, I'm just looking for a bit of background, in terms of your experiences of digitisation, and how you've come to be involved with NGS, and looking at their digitisation projects.

JR: So, I have been working in the general area of digital engagement, evaluation, and, I guess, interpretation, with colleagues at the National Galleries for quite a number of years. So, my research interests are in how people learn with and from digital collections and also how the digital is impacting on engagement and learning within the gallery and beyond the gallery. So, that's where I'm coming from. Also, as a secondary strand of research, I've been doing a lot of work around openness in higher education. But of course, these things are always quite leaky, and so, some of those interests around openness have, kind of, shifted into thinking about openness in the museum and gallery cultural heritage sector. So, my work, that you heard me talk about at the 'Museums and the Web' conference, was a small pilot study with colleagues at the National Galleries of Scotland, which was about their experiences of thinking about digitisation and openness within the Galleries. So, that paper came out of a set of interviews that myself and a colleague, Glen Davis, did here, based under the University, but with colleagues at NGS. Basically, what we were really interested in was: what do they think is going on, and what are the different, kind of, narratives that are happening within the institution, about what's going on in the process of digitising, and the process of thinking about openness, and open access, and what is the future likely to be like, within the Galleries? So, we talked to people from digital departments, curatorial education... Yeah, just, we talked to people from a range of places, marketing, to try to get a feel for how different people in the institution were thinking about openness. And the idea is that that will lead into a bigger research project, that will look at those kinds of issues, kind of, more generally, around the UK, and maybe internationally as well.

HC: What was interesting to you, about how people responded to that?

JR: I think, what's interesting to me, mostly, is that there's really- I mean, 'open' is one of those words like 'digital', like 'access', that mean so many different things depending on who you're talking to. And so, we've had that experience a lot, within the work that we've been doing in higher education, that you use a word like 'access' or 'openness', and immediately, people think that's a good thing, you know. That whatever that is, whatever that means, that must be good, we can all get behind this. And then, the complexities of what that actually means, in practice, and what it looks like. And, I guess, primarily, the way that we were theorising that was, where the boundaries of that are get, kind of, left to people to grapple with, as they're, kind of, encountering problems, rather than something that gets discussed at an organisational level, sometimes.

HC: Would you say that there was resistance? And was that resistance from a practical point of view, in that it was a lot of extra work, or did you feel that there was some resistance to actually putting things online in the first place.

JR: So, I should say a couple things. One is, I'm not really speaking for the Galleries at this moment in time, I'm really just reflecting on the small amount of data that we have from that pilot project, plus my thinking, generally, about what's going on in the sector as a whole. So, yeah, don't cite me as speaking, you know, answering on behalf of the Gallery, because there's a lot of stuff I don't know about what's going on there, and they haven't really authorised me to speak on their behalf. So, I would say that, at this stage, that that institution is at- they're really quite far along the path of thinking about how to use their out-of-copyright works in a way that's more open and accessible for people. So, it wasn't- we weren't expecting to encounter people saying, you know, there's- you know: "We shouldn't be doing this, we should be spending our time doing other things," and we didn't. But then, we were trying to speak to the people who were actually- had a reason to be thinking about these issues. So, it's possible there are parts of any institution – and you'll know better than me, because you've been talking to people – where the, sort of, principle of openness is not valued, but I certainly didn't encounter that. And I think that, generally speaking, people seem to be pretty much on board with the idea that it is a good idea to try to make things more accessible to people, to be able to do more a range of things with. And everyone, kind of, agrees with that, kind of, top-level assessment of the situation. It's the implications, and the nitty-gritty of it, that tend to get complicated.

HC: Where were those complexities, and what was that 'nitty-gritty'? What kinds of things were holding up the idea of being completely open and sharing everything?

JR: Yeah, I mean, there was quite a lot of interesting conversation about how the- about the implications for, for example, a duty of care to the collections. So, what does it mean, for example, to have a duty of care towards an artwork, or a collection? And also, to encourage people to play with, expand on, mess around with those same objects in digital form, is there a tension there? And I think that, to some extent – and this is, again, not just speaking about NGS, but generally – I think that this is something that has been under-discussed. You know, the idea that you make everything open and everyone can use it, and then everything is wonderful, kind of, papers over some of the issues around what the institution's obligations are to the- well, as somebody put it, to the past, right? To the idea of these things as particular sorts of objects, or, with context, with history, with meaning, with value... And so, those kinds of- yeah, those kinds of conversations came up. People were quite interested in the extent to which some of these things were seen as financial- either threats or opportunities. But then, there was – and I don't know whether you've found this, in talking to other people – there was also a sense that, actually, there was not so much information about that, and that nobody seems to be really sharing that information, about what the implications for their bottom line have been, from making some of these decisions around openness. You know, people- I think, to some extent, that seems to be – and the reading that I've done would suggest that it seems to be – that, actually, depending on how you slice it, the way that, for example, you know, people purchasing image rights, actually works, I'm not sure there are that many institutions in the world that are making a lot of money from that. Because by the time you've actually factored in the staff time, and all of the things that are involved in doing that, it's not necessarily a big money-spinner for people. That's my impression, anyway. I might be quite wrong about that, but I get the impression there aren't that many institutions that are making a heap of money from their licensing fees.

HC: So, I, kind of, heard two sides of things. The Rijksmuseum basically what everybody cites as the, kind of, model for openness and it claims to have done very well in terms of brand value.

JR: Mm-hm. Yeah, but that's very- I mean, they're- I appreciate that, and I believe them, it's just, what does that actually- what does that mean? Yeah?

HC: And then, yes, I spoke to- in Brighton, somebody at the Pavilion, and associated places, and museums in Brighton. And he said it's nice to say 'brand value' but when you go to the Council and they say: "You want to cut off this £2,000-a-year income stream and you say: "Well, it's not really worth it," and they'll still say: "That's a £2,000-a-year income stream." So, I think, there's definitely a question about whether brand value is measurable, in a meaningful way.

JR: Yeah, and I think the answer is: it definitely isn't! It's not measurable. But then, a lot of really important things aren't measurable, so, you know, it's a question of how institutions are going to grapple with that particular un-measurable- or, we don't yet have a really good set of metrics for... And I'm interested in that. I think that's actually a really interesting research question, is how do you measure things like- and, you know, people do try and do things like sentiment analysis, and all the, you know, the kinds of emerging, automated processes that are meant to, sort of, deliver back something about- that would give us insight into that. But I still think there's a lot that we could be doing, to be thinking about that question, or that issue, a bit more.

HC: Let me actually go to my questions, because... Although we can't really talk about your collection, as you don't have a collection...

JR: Well, I have books.

HC: Yes, and very well-looked-after they are. In terms of openness, why do you think there's been a slowness to open up? Apart from the complexity, do you think there's something bigger than the, kind of, the nitty-gritty? Do you think there's an overarching, kind of, unwillingness to give away something of value that might be able to bring in money? Is there a pressure?

JR: I mean, I personally think – again, this isn't specifically about NGS, but at the sector as a whole – that this is less about the financial implications of making these decisions, although that is a factor, but much more about a, kind of, an urgent rethinking of what the museum is for, right? What its role is, its position as an authority, its position as a gatekeeper. And, of course, I mean, we know that those tensions have been, sort of, becoming more and more pronounced over the last, what, thirty years? As the nature of the public's engagement with cultural heritage has, kind of, shifted, and there's been more emphasis on the visitor, and what they need, and what they're bringing, and their interpretations, and all that kind of stuff. But I would see this as actually related to that, which is: what- yeah, I guess it, kind of, relates to the thing that I just said. It's like, if there's a duty of care, and beside that, a, kind of, duty to share stuff, how do those things come into relationship with each other? And I should think it's like a really huge question, and it's just taking institutions a very long time to arrive at their own configuration of an answer for what they want to be seen as doing, going forward. And I can see, you know, some institutions have just really embraced the, kind of, most radical vision of themselves, as a, kind of, a conduit, almost. It's like, you know, we have the stuff, and we're holding it, and we're keeping it safe, but we're also just being completely transparent, and passing it through to you. And then other institutions, that have much more concern around their role, as curators, as gatekeepers, as whatever... Which, you know, that stuff just doesn't disappear, and it needs to be rethought, but it takes a lot of time, and it's also not something that just one part of the institution can make a decision about. So, the kinds of things that have to be grappled with have to be grappled with by, like, a group of people that wouldn't necessarily be having

conversations about making these kinds of big decisions. You know, like, one of the things that we noticed, just from our small study, was that a lot of really important decisions were seen to be decisions for the digital teams, but actually, the implications of what they were doing were going to have a massive influence on what was going to happen with the rest of the institution, and all kinds of things. And that often happens. It's like things are, sort of, thought to be technical problems or issues, and one of the things that came up quite strongly in this small study was around open data. And the idea of the, you know, museum, gallery, website, as the, sort of, central location for people to access material, or objects, or collections, is, to some extent, giving way to the idea that that stuff might be out in the wild much more, and that people may be accessing bits of the collections in different kinds of ways. And so, that, you know, those decisions about open data and, you know, standardisation, and, you know, things like the emergence of IIF, and all of that kind of stuff, is all technical stuff, but the decisions that get made will have more than technical implications. And so, I think- I just think it's complicate- I mean, I know you're saying beyond the complexity of doing it, but I think there's also a whole bunch of, like, conceptual complexities, that institutions are grappling with, to one degree or another.

HC: I think the argument I'm trying to make at the moment, tortuously, is that-

JR: All the best ones are!

HC: -the emergence of social media particularly, and the Internet generally is almost creating an existential crisis, as you said, grappling with: what are we actually for?

JR: Yeah.

HC: And is that something that you feel you're seeing?

JR: Yeah... Yes, I do think so, but I also think there's something else going on, which is about trying to understand... And, like, I'm kind of working through some of these ideas myself at the moment, so this might not be as coherent coming out as it is in my mind. But there's also a very important role, that is not replicated by a search engine, or a social network, or a digital network, that is about context, is about framing, is about storytelling, is about the past... And these are the kinds of things that I think, particularly, people in curatorial roles feel really passionately committed to. That's why they do the jobs that they do. And they can see, and I think we can see, that the way that things get, kind of, un-moored from their context, is not particularly helpful for society at large. You know, if we don't understand the history of an image, or an object, then it is open to the kinds of interpretations that might be, like, really problematic, or might, you know, might create more divisions in our social world than we want. And so, you know, there's all just huge- I mean, I guess it comes down to issues- fundamentally, issues around trust, right? Because who is seen to have trustworthy knowledge and have the ability to interpret the past in ways that are trusted, is an open question. And I think museums are being hit with that, as much as, you know, as much as universities, and other, kind of, sort of, experts. You know, we've had enough of experts, right? So, where does that leave the cultural heritage sector, and what should they be doing? And that is just not a sustainable position. You know, we have to find ways of having a, kind of, cultural, social basis of trusting stuff people are saying, and trusting that people are, you know, are sharing their knowledge in, sort of, open ways that are not overly biased, or not trying to trick people, or whatever, you know, no... And I just think it's a crisis, it's right, like, it's a crisis of knowledge, it's an epistemological moment of high drama in the world. And it's kind of, I mean, as researchers, it's interesting. As people who will have to do something about it, it's, like, fiendish, right? So, I think- I can't remember what the question was, now! But I think that these really huge social, and political, and cultural issues are being grappled with in the museum, in a way that is going to take more time to resolve, before we know how different institutions are going to land on what they think is the appropriate way to share what they have, and make it open, and make it accessible, and invite people to do stuff with it.

HC: Let me just take a quick break... So, one of the things I'm asking people to do – and I know you're coming from a slightly different direction is look at reasons not to digitise. So, I've been asking people in museums and archives what might be the issues, and the reasons why you'd choose not to digitise. The barriers to digitisation. So, I've got seven and if you could have a look, and comment on any that you felt came up, or that you felt were issues around digitisation, that'd be great.

JR: Yeah, I mean, the issue of copyright did come up quite a lot, actually, in discussions. And it wasn't so much a reason not to, as a reason why it was so difficult. Because, particularly in galleries that hold collections of a lot of contemporary art, they're just- like, every time you want to do something, you have to deal with not only one copyright-holding organisation, but, like, many many many. And they all have different ideas, all the different artists' estates and stuff have different policies, and the negotiations that were put in place when the stuff was acquired is different, because it's all happened over time. And so, it sounds like it's just hugely complicated. And a lot of times, one thing I heard is that, sometimes, things don't happen, you know, for example, like, audience engagement activities or things that people, kind of, want to do, they hit these copyright barriers, and they're just like: "Well, that's just, you know, we can't resolve that in the time we have," or whatever. So, there is, I think, alongside a lot of work that's going on around out-of-copyright collections, which are the much easier ones to deal with, there is a lot of thinking about how to deal with those in-copyright collections. Anyway, it is a massive issue. I mean, the institutions that I am familiar with, and do the most work with, tend to be relatively rich, in terms of the expertise that they have, and have some access to the kinds of funding that you need to do a good job of this kind of thing. So, those things I see as really variable, depending on what kind of institution it is. But it obviously is a huge issue for smaller organisations. I don't know about the fear of obsolescence. I guess that comes out in terms of how people are thinking about standardisation, and the fact that that also shifts. So, you know, it is obviously an issue, and people are trying to think about the best, you know, the best platforms to use for things, and the best mechanisms for storing the metadata, and all that kind of stuff, primarily. Well, because they don't want to have to redo it again in a couple of years, but also so that stuff inter-operates with other collections, in the ways that are increasingly seen to be important. Yeah. How was that?

HC: Good.

JR: Okay!

HC: So, early on, when the Internet was a brand new thing... I'm looking at literature, particularly around the year 2000, because that seemed to be a time when there was huge optimism. And there was a report, called "A Netful of Jewels"-

JR: Oh yeah, I remember that...

HC: -I was trying to-

JR: It's by David Anderson.

HC: -I was trying to get hold of- can't remember the name- the guy's name. I was trying to get hold of him, but he's away, but he is in Edinburgh. So, if you read that, they optimistically, and quite confidently predict that all heritage organisations will have their collections online by the year 2007. Do you remember that time, and do you remember thinking what might be possible?

JR: I came into doing work with museums and galleries in about 2007, and I would say, what was happening at that time, was a recognition that digitisation, on its own, was not enough, right? So, the first project, that I was involved with, was a big project that involved a lot of national museums and galleries, mostly London-based. And what they were trying to do, was make use of the existing digital collections that had already been digitised, but actually get people, new audiences, to use them. And so, I think, my, kind of, emerging consciousness of this space, came about at a time when that digitisation was being understood to be about more than just literally photographing and storing collections. And so, I think, maybe, I didn't get that first wave of, like, super-excited enthusiasm, that it was just going to be, you know, the biggest revolution since sliced bread. Which, actually, it has been, right? It's just happening unevenly and over a really long period of time, and in

some unexpected ways. But anyway, that's another issue. But that's how the future always arrives, right? Was it William Gibson who said the thing about the future being already here, just unevenly distributed? It probably wasn't. I can't remember who it was. But anyway, you know what I'm saying. And so, I do remember that, sort of, wave of excitement and optimism from the early 2000s, when I started working in higher education. And actually, some of those claims are still, really, very much in circulation. So, although there is some sense that people are, you know, disheartened by the speed of progress, there is definitely, like, always, in higher education, in the cultural heritage sector, a group of people who are saying, you know: "You just do this, and then everything else is fine." And those, kind of, techno-centric arguments, a, sort of, technological determinism, I guess, of those arguments, is actually a really big problem for institutions that are actually trying to do stuff. Because it just implies that it's a technical problem that can be solved through technology, rather than a social problem, or a cultural problem, or not a problem, just a process. Yeah.

HC: Did you find, around the year 2007, that – obviously we had a big financial crash around that time - was that something that surfaced, in these places where you were working, and did it have an effect on the projects that were already underway?

JR: I didn't have a good sense of that, at the time. I think it was one of those ones where that project, had it been put forward a couple of years later, might not have been funded, because it wouldn't've been considered a high priority. But then, on the other hand, actually, what it was trying to do, was reuse existing materials in a way that was, you know, going to be good for- good value for the taxpayer, or whatever. So, maybe it would've happened anyway. Yeah.

HC: I feel like, looking back, that suddenly, museums and galleries had a lot more to deal with.

JR: Yeah, I mean, the landscape for- you know, this isn't really my area, but the landscape of cultural heritage policy has changed so much. And the sense that- I suppose, the thing I do know a fair bit about, is, the sense in which publicly-funded institutions are being asked to evidence value for money, has created a whole set of interesting issues around evaluation, particularly. And so, this would, I suspect, explain some of the concern that people have about, you know, for example, cutting off even a small income stream, if you can't then evidence that it's either being replaced in another way or that it was never that important to begin with. I mean, you'd never want to argue that it wasn't important to begin with, right? Because that is just asking for your budget to get cut. So, yeah, there's, like, a kind of, much more insistence on, you know, on being able to somehow prove that the cultural heritage delivers value for society, delivers economic value, delivers educational value, delivers whatever. And nobody can do anything anymore, unless they can find a way to tick those boxes. And I think, you know, to some extent, it is good to know something more about what it is that what you do makes happen in the world. I mean, I guess it's the same, kind of, set of arguments around the REF. It's like, it's quite good to know, it's interesting to know, that your research has had some kind of impact on the world, and we should, maybe, be interested in that, and I am quite interested in that. But then, there are so few things we can actually measure, when it comes to, like, the complicated realities of... So then, people just get really obsessed with the things they can measure, and one of the problems that comes around digital cultural heritage, around that, is that, this obsession with the idea of footfall, which comes from, you know, wanting people to come to the museum, has just carried over directly to digital life, and the digital life of the museum. And so, digital footfall, like the number of visitors to the website, is, like, the best metric most people have for trying to say why it's worthwhile digitising, or making this stuff available online. And it's terrible, I mean, it doesn't tell you anything. And it certainly doesn't tell you anything about what is happening outside the boundaries of the museum website. And so, yeah, that's what I'm really, really interested in right now.

HC: In terms of what- what is online, do you think it was underestimated, how much work was going to have to go into interpretation? Because there was a big pressure to put catalogues online, but

catalogues are not necessarily very useful from a visitor's point of view, if they want to know a little bit about something. Because curation is a lot more about telling a story about something, and giving some interesting context. And a catalogue's – unless you're really specialist – is not really going to give you that.

JR: Yeah.

HC: Do you think that there was an underestimation of the work involved in making this publicly available in a way that was understandable to people?

JR: Yeah, I think so. For the reasons that you've said, really. It's that when you put something online and contextualise it in the way that is useful for other people in the museum, or that is understandable to curators, or is useful, in terms of how it interacts and integrates with existing systems, that, if you're very lucky, has some relationship to what kind of usability it has for people outside the institution. But I think, very often, it doesn't have any correspondence with how people want to find information. And, like, I remember, this was probably around that same kind of time, 2006/2007, people were very excited about- about social tagging, and crowdsourcing interpretations of descriptions of artworks. And, you know, a lot of those projects are no longer to be found, because actually, there were just issues with social tagging, as well, you know. It's like, everything you try to do runs up about- around the same problems about context, about the base of knowledge that you need in order to be able to make sense of what's going on, even in something that's, sort of, designed to be public-facing. And, yeah, I mean, this is why there's such a job as a curator, and why there are learning and engagement departments in museums and galleries, is because this stuff is, like, complicated. And, you know, every institution has to figure out how to make their collections make sense in different kinds of ways, and... Glad it's not my job!

HC: What I've started to notice, going to conferences, is people are talking a lot more about engagement, in terms of things coming directly from the visitor, being driven by the visitor, described by the visitor, and what slightly worries me, about that is the curator's being a little bit lost in that. Because it- yes, you can say something's blue and the man looks like he's dancing but unless you know where that's coming from, is it really meaningful? And what I've really noticed, from reading that book, just the first couple of chapters, is, there's a lot of engagement, but not much of it is actually incorporated into the project itself, unless it's really high quality. So, how do you, as somebody who's worked around museum professionals, and looked at engagement how do you, kind of, square the need to give people interactivity, involvement, and yet they don't actually know what's interesting and important about this, and that's what the curator is for?

JR: Yeah, I mean, we did a project a couple of years ago that was about trying to surface, a bit more, the meanings that people were making of artworks, by asking them to relocate those artworks in space and time. So, basically, we just said, instead of evaluating by, like, asking people what artworks they liked at the end of the exhibition, let's ask them which artwork they would like to choose, and where they want to send it, and when, and why. And so, we were just doing this whole project that was about just trying to not only surface those alternative interpretations, but show to what extent they actually relate to, or don't, diverge from the, sort of, official interpretations that people are also encountering in the gallery. So, this was just based on people going through a physical exhibition, and it's nothing to- like, you would have way more things to talk about if you were talking about people encountering stuff online, especially encountering it out of, you know, out of context. But I think, what you've asked there, is going to be the next big set of research projects, and questions, and issues, for the cultural heritage sector, about how to value individual and groups of people's engagements with cultural heritage. How objects get turned into people's heritage, how heritage is made and remade, all of those kinds of questions about who owns these interpretations. And maybe this is why, there's a, sort of, real dilemma here. Because, for all that I really think, you know, I really loved doing that project, and I really loved hearing the weird and idiosyncratic connections people

were making with artworks, that bore little or no resemblance to what they were, you know, officially being- what was being said about them, I also really do worry about the atomisation or fragmentation of culture. So that, you know, if you don't have ways in to a shared set of meanings, or understandings, then where does that leave us, in terms of being able to have, you know, conversations about the future, and where we want to be, going forward, and all of that kind of stuff. So, I don't really have answers to any of that. But I do think that it really does connect up with all of the questions that you're asking in your research, about openness. Because the more stuff is made available, and made possible for people to take it, and decontextualise it, and put it in different places, and find it in different places, and play around with it, the more people may engage with it, but the more issues we have around, you know, how do we deliver any of that back in a way that is actually accessible to other people, or, you know, help us build a, kind of, shared meaning around our pasts.

HC: Let me just take another break. So, another thing I'm wrestling with at the moment, when I'm listening to people talking about public engagement and engagement, particularly, of audiences who are new, and perhaps diverse, and haven't really engaged in the past... My problem is, really, what if this stuff is of no interest to them, and how do you then go about- is it still worth reaching them? Or do you want to say, actually, this maybe isn't for you? Or maybe we're not telling a good enough story about it, and it should be interesting to everybody? But, if your collection's, you know, not reaching the people, maybe the people don't want it?

JR: I think that's entirely possible, and I don't think, you know, I don't think everything is for everybody. But I don't think we know that, yet. I don't actually think there's been enough progress made towards making this stuff accessible to people who wouldn't ordinarily access this for us to be sure who those people are and aren't. So, yeah, I, kind of agree, but I also think there's still quite a long way we can go with trying, before we would say, as a community of researchers and practitioners: "Oh, well, I guess, this just isn't going to work out," you know? You know? Because I think that there's so much more to think about, still, in that area.

HC: Have you heard of the project 'Of + By = For'?

JR: No.

HC: It's a project where the local community was brought in, as staff, and as visitors and they were very much asked what they wanted done with this space. And it was very successful, in terms of, the visitor numbers were huge, the income was huge, and that was shown to be a marker of success but what I didn't hear anything about was a collection. I heard about community engagement in a space. To what extent do you think that's a question to wrestle with, and where does that leave the actual collection that you hold?

JR: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I think it's, again, a really good question, but I don't think that I know the answer to that one, because... Surely, making spaces that people feel good about being in, and feel happy to be in, and want to be in, and want to do their own thing in, is a really critical step in engaging people, confronting people with stuff that maybe isn't in their idea of what they want. And as an educator, I really believe that. I think that, you know, you really want- you want to get to a point – and maybe, again, this is just coming back to that issue of trust – you want to get to a point where people will trust you to show them stuff that is, like, not what they thought they came for. So, again, I think that some of the way that the funding landscape works, in the cultural heritage sector at the moment, mitigates against people being able to do the kinds of projects that are, longer-term. Where you start by, you know, opening up your spaces, and making people at home, and thinking about, you know, how to invite people in, and doing co-creation projects, and whatever, and then you get to do more. But usually, it's the project, and then the project is over. And sometimes, the people who are involved have moved on, because they don't have a job anymore. And, you know, I think this happens all the time. And so, I think there's a, kind of, rethinking of how those kinds of

projects – engagement projects – happen, that maybe it is needed, before we can really move forward in that respect.

HC: In terms of looking forward, what have you learned from your experience on digitisation projects?

JR: I think I keep learning the same thing over and over again, in different contexts, which is: when something isn't happening, or doesn't seem to be happening, or is not happening very quickly, people who want it to happen more quickly are very often explaining the lack of progress by calling people, you know, Luddites, or saying people are stuck in the past. Or, you know, talking about resistance in a way that suggests that resistance is just people, you know, is fear, or is ignorance, or whatever. I think we need much more attention to, and respect for, resistance. Because it isn't usually recognised as what I think it very often is, which is, people who know a lot of things about this- whatever this space is that we, you know, people who are excited about technology, have parachuted into, and know that it's complicated, and have a lot of, you know, a lot of questions, and concerns, and issues, and stuff they want to, kind of, that they have to... And lots of times, that comes out as, like: "Oh, I don't do technology," or: "This is just a bit of technology, and I don't care about that." But it isn't about that. It's never about that. It's always about people's anxieties around the lack of attention to the, kind of, bigger questions that come along with it. Almost always. So, I feel like that's actually one of the big lessons of working in digital projects and digital spaces in this field. Especially Ed Tech, which is a different thing from what you're looking at. But, you know, where those visions of the future are being put forward with great regularity, and great insistence, and relatively little nuance. And I think it's that complexity and nuance that actually makes things worth doing and more interesting, but a lot of it just gets swept aside as, you know: "This is resistance, why are people resisting?" And I wish we had better ways of talking about technology, that took into account that it doesn't come by itself, or it doesn't leave things untouched. Yeah. That's what I've learnt.

HC: Fantastic. Where do you think technology will take heritage, in the next twenty years? I'm looking twenty years back, but if you could go twenty years into the future.

JR: Well, the projects bid that I'm trying to write right now is based on the assumption that, in twenty years, the museum website is not going to be a primary place where people come to get access to cultural heritage objects or information. So, I think what we're going to see, is a really much more distributed, perhaps fragmented cultural heritage landscape, where the notion of the collection is, possibly, harder for people to access, and get their heads around, than it is now. And so, from my point of view, what interests me about that, is how do museums and galleries continue to, make a case for their value, and their relevance, when they've let go of all of the gatekeeper function, in terms of people being able to get at the stuff? And when they're no longer the, if nobody's thinking, in twenty years: "Ah, I think the Tate has that, I'll go and check out the Tate website," but instead, which, I think we're seeing happen now, you know, Googling, or doing whatever, and finding stuff through other- which may or may not lead back to the Tate website, and people may or may not be aware of that... Then, what are we looking at? How do we talk about the value of cultural heritage institutions? Do we just forget about the digital, and just focus on what they do for, you know, the place where they are, and the communities that come there, and the people who come through the doors? Or is there a more generative way of thinking about digital impact, or influence, or engagement, or whatever, that doesn't- isn't obsessed with footfall onto the website? And so, it's quite a small piece of, like, a, kind of, digital, you know, a digital future landscape, but I think it might be quite an important one. And I think there probably are really interesting ways of thinking about the role of the museum, the gallery, as the storytellers. As the people who can give you not just access to the image, but the story of the work, and how it came to be, and all the contested, you know, curatorial bun-fights that have happened over it, over hundreds

of years, and all of that kind of stuff which is there in the institutional memory, and gives things their- some of their value.

HC: Great. Looking at what's online now, how do you see he- heritage is represented, sort of, at this time? If you came as an alien from outer space and you couldn't access the physical, where do you think- if you just looked at heritage online, what would you think was the state of heritage right now?

JR: Can you ask me that again?

HC: If you could only see heritage online, how would you feel it represents heritage overall? In terms of what we have digitised, and what is there, and who's doing it well-

JR: Oh, I see...

HC: -versus what doesn't even appear?

JR: Yeah, ok. I think that the things that make the biggest impression are coming from places that have managed to position themselves as, kind of, first movers in particular areas. And there's still a lot of space for that. I mean, you know, there's still time to be a first mover. But I wonder what happens when more and more and more institutions are doing the same kinds of things, to try to make their stuff more accessible, and to rise to the top of, you know, of search engines, or whatever. Somebody said something really interesting in one of those interviews, about, you know: "We don't necessarily need people to- we don't need to be the only people who have, you know, who have this. But we would like, when people are referring to this artwork online, or linking to it," or whatever, "that they link to ours, because it's the best quality, and it's, you know, it's the one that has the, kind of, mark of authenticity," or whatever. And I thought that was interesting, because that becomes much more about, again, about who's seen as- as the, kind of, trusted source for things, and... Yeah. I don't know. Run out of ideas about that!

HC: Do you think there will ever be a time when everything is online? And if so, when would that time be?

JR: Everything, like, every object in every collection?

HC: I guess...

JR: I mean, I hear that, sometimes, people are anxious about digitising stuff that may not have been photographed when it was in really great condition. So, like, I've heard, or read – I don't know, I'm sure I have the reference somewhere – people talking about, you know, if stuff has degraded over time, if it's no longer like it was when it was made, for whatever reason, and some of those reasons are just to do with the passage of time, what is the museum or gallery's position in relation to that object? It's like, it's obviously catalogued, they know they have it, probably it's on the website somewhere as a line of text. But is the image of that thing something that should be in public, when the thing is no longer the thing that it was? And I think that, possibly, there's actually a lot more of those kinds of issues around stuff that's been damaged, or is just really old and fragile, or, you know, if things have happened to it, that mean that there's always going to be a, kind of, strange netherworld of stuff that is more conceptual than real. At least in terms of the digital world. I would think so. I'm not an expert in this area, though. But I do think, it is my impression that museums and galleries worry about making visible the status of some things.

HC: If you could wave a magic wand, would you have everything online?

JR: So, one of my PhD students is doing work around place and identity and how people learn in their own places, if they're at a distance from the University. And she's been interested in indigenous methods. So, she's been reading books and articles about methodologies that are more attuned to place. And I think it's possible that some stuff should only be seen if you are in some place. Like, I think there may be ways of knowing that require you to go somewhere, or be somewhere, or be someone, in order to engage with it. So, I think, I possibly would defer the answer to that question to communities, and, kind of, traditions of cultural heritage, that have thought

about those issues a lot more. Like, I think that our, kind of, Western perception of access is that the more there is, the better it is, and that everybody should be able to get at everything, and that, you know, it's a failure of the process if something is left un-accessed, or un-digitised. And I'm not sure that that thinking about access is actually the richest, or the most generative. And maybe that links back to some of the stuff we were talking about earlier, about- about context, and about the meanings that things carry, and their pasts, and stuff. So, no?! Or, provisionally, or, like, sometimes, but maybe only if you're logging in from, you know, this building, should you be able to access something. You know, I just think there might be some more thinking to be done, around the absolute value of having absolutely everything, all the time, everywhere.

HC: Fantastic, thank you very much.

Gavin Willshaw
Edinburgh University Library
29th August 2018

HC: Helen Casey

GW: Gavin Willshaw

HC: Okay, so, could you give me your name and your position?

GW: Yeah. So, my name's Gavin Willshaw, and I'm the Digital Curator and Digitisation Project Manager at University of Edinburgh.

HC: Thank you. Okay, so, first of all, can you tell me a bit about the collection that you have and the digitisation projects that you've done in the past?

GW: Yeah. Okay, so, well, because I work at the University, so the library's got quite a broad collection of stuff. It's a combined archives/museums library service, so we're not just talking about books; there's a huge amount of other material as well, which is potentially available to digitise. So, the University has been digitising stuff since the, sort of, mid-2000s. But up until two or three years ago, it was mainly, sort of, bespoke digitisation. So, it was done, generally, in response to requests from readers. So, somebody would usually pay for us to create the digital image, and this tended to be for high-quality stuff, often for publications. So, people would pay money for that, to do, which meant that our digitised collections were quite a, sort of, an odd mix of random bits and bobs, which also, sort of, presented challenges for how we then put that stuff online. And so, as well as that, there's also been some projects where external funding's come in. So, we might have had- there was the Thompson-Walker collection, for example, which is a collection which was, kind of, done in its entirety. So, it's always been a combination of random bits and bobs, plus the odd bit of small project funding to allow us to digitise stuff. But in the last three years, we got funding – quite a lot of funding – to digitise the PhD Thesis collection, so that's been quite a different approach to digitisation. So, there's something like 27,000 PhD volumes in total, in the University collection, dating back to 1599, is the oldest one. So, there's over 400 years' worth of research – unique research – that's been created by people, through the University. And about 10,000 of them were already in digital format, because of their projects, or because we've had requirements that students submit a digital copy from about 2006/2007 onwards, so there are about 17,000 remaining ones that were not in digital format. So, I was the project manager for that project, to do that, and that's been completely different. So, rather than focussing primarily on, sort of, quality, it's been – obviously, we have certain standards that have to be adhered to – but the priority has been about getting through the stuff, and getting as much of it done as possible, to put it online.

HC: What was the impetus to do it? What did you think was the value of this collection, and why did you want to share it?

GW: So, there are quite a few reasons. I think, primarily, we have statistics showing that the theses that are in digital format already get a lot of downloads. And I think we've had- prior to the project starting, we had approximately 2,000,000 downloads, I think, of theses that were already in digital format. So, there's a lot of demand, I think, in the research community, for that stuff. It's often where, I think, researchers go, when you're first starting on a topic, you might go see what's been done already. I think the PhDs are a really good source of initial research, and reading on a topic. So, that was one of the big drivers. We knew there was a lot of demand for it. Also, it's relatively straightforward. I mean, there's- as I say, there's a 400-year-old collection, so there's lots of odd bits and bobs in there, a few random things, like, we've found a bullet inside one of the theses, and we've found some slices of human lung that had been, kind of, laminated, and... So, there were- it's a straightforward collection, but there are still, kind of- there's variety within that. So, I think it's a

relatively straightforward one to do. Also, a lot of the PhDs were in duplicate format, so we were able to scan those destructively, so we removed the spines of one of the copies, and then we could feed the pages through a document scanner. And the scanner that we have can do 120 pages per minute. So, I always had to stress that we were never destroying anything that was unique, so we've always got one copy of everything, so that's a physical copy. But where there were two copies, which was about half of the collection, we took one of them and cut them up, and then fed them through the scanner, so it was quite a straightforward collection to do. So, yeah, a lot of demand for the stuff, relatively straightforward... Doing it destructively also freed up quite a lot of storage shelf space, I think about 500 metres of space. So, there's constant demands on storage, so that was, kind of, one of the, I suppose, the side benefits, was that we could start to move other collections into the space that had been used. There is a trend, really, of universities doing this. I think we've realised that this is all completely unique stuff, that nobody else has, and it's really quite important stuff, and it makes sense. I think that's one of our strategic priorities, is to try and- like, what is Edinburgh's unique offer, as a university? What can we offer that nobody else can? So, this collection is definitely a collection that we know nobody else has, so it made sense to do it that way. Also, I think, they're quite keen to see what you can start to do, once you've got a huge body of searchable stuff. So, all the books are OCRd, so we use optical character recognition software, so that you can keyword-search them. Although that's only for the typed ones; there's a lot of handwritten ones, which, obviously, the technology's not quite there yet, for being able to read handwritten text. But we've not really done a lot with it yet, but we want to be able to start to run software on this collection, and pick out names and dates, and start to see trends that are appearing across it. So, it's quite an interesting collection, that can be used for, sort of, digital scholarship, and other more advanced areas of research. Once you put something in digital format, you can start to manipulate it, in ways that you can't with the analogue collection. So, I think those were the, kind of, the main drivers behind it. I think we also- just, digitisation is growing; I think students, more and more, demand that they can- can access things online. So, I think there is quite a big shift towards digitisation, more generally. So, I think that's, kind of, part of that movement. And the National Library of Scotland has got a strategic aim to digitise a third of its collections by 2025. So, that's- I think, we're just, kind of, we've just fit into that that broader movement, I suppose, of digitisation, and... Yeah, I suppose, were, sort of, the main factors behind it.

HC: So, do you see your clients, then, as your students? Do you feel like they're your audience? You talk about wider research, obviously. That's all on the academic side, is there a public-facing idea, as well?

GW: It's not been the priority, I suppose. I think the priority has been about, yeah, research, and making stuff available to students, as well. I mean, I think we've tried to, kind of, we've picked out some of the more interesting stories, so that there has been a, sort of, an angle where we've tried to see what's- yeah, the stories that are underneath the collection, and do- with some blog posts, and tweets about it, and that sort of thing. But I think that's been more, just, kind of, a part of the, sort of, general publicity. We haven't really engaged particularly with the, sort of, general public, around it yet. So, yeah, I think, it'll be the students, and academics that are, kind of, the core audiences for it.

HC: Great. How, as a librarian, you're slightly different, I guess, from a museum, which is very heritage-based, I guess, a library's slightly different. But how would you define 'heritage'? What do you see as what 'heritage' actually is? It's not an easy question to answer.

GW: I suppose... Well, it's such a broad thing, that can encompass, obviously, museums, libraries, archives... A record, I suppose, it- kind of, the record of the past, really. It's the clues that we have, that let you try to recreate what life was like in the past. Yeah, that's...

HC: It's not an easy one...

GW: I'm not sure! That's probably how I would see it.

HC: Greater minds than ours have still not agreed on that one.

GW: No...

HC: What were your challenges in digitisation? Right from the idea forward. Did you have to get a buy-in from certain people? How did you go about getting funding? What have been the challenges, right from the start?

GW: Well, I mean, I'll talk mostly about the Thesis project, if that's ok because the previous digitisation that we've done, I have, sort of, been involved in it, but I've not really been the project manager, as such. So, for the Thesis project, we didn't really have challenges round about funding, so much, because, I think, there was already awareness, at senior management level, that this was a good thing to do, so they, sort of, prioritised that for funding. So, there still had to be a, kind of, an internal bid, and a business case, and all that kind of stuff, but it wasn't the same, necessarily, as having to go to, like, a funding council, or something, and really, sort of, compete with lots of others. It was more, there was a clear interest in it, and it was, kind of, a case of just making sure that it ticked all the boxes. So, I suppose there was, kind of, issues round about copyright, which'd be the big challenge. Particularly because, technically, we were infringing copyright by putting all this stuff online, because the copyright resides with the authors, and that's, kind of, meant... Yeah, so, technically we were infringing copyright by putting this stuff online, but we deemed it to be such a low risk. And again, that's the other in- some of the other institutions have done as well: we put the stuff online, then we have a takedown policy, so if anybody is unhappy about their work being online, then contact us and we'll take it down. And I think, the alternative would've been to not do the project at all, because we would have had to contact every single author – some of whom are no longer alive, many of whom, who've published in the 70s, we won't have an up-to-date email address for them. So, we just contacted all the, kind of, the alumni communication channels. So, we con- like, alumni newsletters, emails... Where- everywhere we could, we said: "We're doing this, let us know if you have any concerns," and the feedback's been, kind of, overwhelmingly positive about all that. So, communicating with the authors, and the copyright, a little bit of an issue, but we did find a way to resolve that. And it has been a bit frustrating, because this stuff's all in copyright, it means that we can't re-license it, which is a really frustrating thing. Because, obviously, there's the big, kind of, open agenda, where you- we want to make our stuff Creative Commons licensed, so that people can do interesting stuff with it: get it onto Wikipedia, get people, I don't know, making T-shirts... Just doing whatever they want, being creative with the collections. And we're doing a lot of that with other stuff. With the thesis collection, because it's all still in copyright, we can't put a Creative Commons license on it, so that's really frustrating. We've had lots of people asking us if they could do stuff with this- with the material, and it's like: "From our perspective, yes, but you'd need to contact the copyright holder if you wanted to do it." So, yeah, copyright is a big challenge. I think, just going, sort of, ramping up the activity, because we've started the project without- without much experience of doing this sort of level of work. So, we had to create all the workflows from scratch, and get used to new scanning equipment, and new post-processing equipment. We created a new team of five digitisation assistants to come in to do it. And they were all big, sort of- a couple of them already worked at the University, where they- and some of them were external. So, it was, kind of, building a new team, doing the workflows, trying to get all that set up, all at the same time. And there wasn't really much, sort of, lead time, for that. So, I think, just, kind of, getting it to the stage where you've got a fully functioning workflow, where everyone knows what's required of them, so that standards are adhered to, everyone knows what they're doing... That's the, sort of, a big thing. And I think, also, kind of, motivating staff, as well. Quite a big challenge, because obviously they've not- it's not the most exciting job. It is a lot of repetitive work. We were really lucky with the staff that we got, though, because I think a lot of them could, kind of, see the bigger picture. It

wasn't just this, sort of, mindless scanning job. They were actually contributing something a lot bigger and tried to mix things up a bit by breaking the tasks down into different types of activity, and moving people around so they weren't just sitting and scanning for the whole day. We've got the project blog, which, sort of, encouraged staff to write blog posts on that. And I think, just trying to, kind of, identify areas that people found interesting. So, one guy was really interested in conservation, so we, sort of, made him the conservation champion, so he would be the, sort of, person who would liaise with the conservation team if there were any issues. So, things like that. But yeah, I suppose, yeah, lots of different challenges. Standardisation would be a big one, about how we make sure that the stuff, kind of, complies to standards, that the file formats that we use are not going to degrade in 50 years' time, so that this is actually going to have digital preservation in mind while we do it. So, yeah, lots of stuff, and a lot of it is the particular challenges you're interested in discussing-

HC: It's more about the motivations to digitise or not digitise, where...I'll just take a quick break-Good. So, in terms of this project, but also others- either past or future – I've written a list of possible reasons not to digitise. You've talked, already, a little bit about copyright- could you go through those, and just talk about how they've impacted on the decisions you make, about what you're going to do, maybe next?

GW: Yeah. So, yeah, I think, I mean, cost is always an issue. I think we were lucky with the Thesis project, that we had this, sort of, buy-in from the start. We essentially had all the funding, we didn't have to apply for anything beyond, internally. But certainly, nowadays, it's- you're looking at, sort of, prioritisation. It costs a lot of money to digitise something. There's the staff costs, the equipment costs, the cost of keeping the files on servers and things, so we certainly have to take cost into account, in terms of what we want to digitise. Yeah... I think, we had... I think, yeah, time is probably less of an issue, because we don't really have- there's obviously- people want to access stuff online, but we're probably not having, kind of, intense pressure to get everything done by next year, or whatever. Like, there's certainly targets that we want to reach, but I think we've only got about half a percent of our collections in digital format right now, so I think we're so far away from anything, that it's certainly not getting- maybe people higher up are getting more pressure than I am, but it certainly doesn't feel like such an issue. And we're really fortunate, because we have a team of developers, who actually work in the library. So, a lot of place- a lot of institutions have a completely separate developer and IT team, but we have four or five developers, who all have a complete range of expertise, different programming languages, digital preservation, and they work very closely with us, when we're doing digitisation, to make sure that the back end, and also the front end of stuff is up to scratch. So, again, we've got that stuff in-house, and there's, kind of, resource that's allocated to projects. So, I suppose the expertise side of things is, maybe, in terms of- because digitisation is- it's not the best-paid role in the library, so we do have- we, sort of, tend to have quite a high turnover of staff. So, you have people, might come in for a year or so, because it's, sort of, like a foot on the ladder, to get their first full-time job in a heritage organisation, but then we do find that people tend to, sort of, leave. Which is, kind of, fair enough. You wouldn't really want people to be staying on for years and years. It's quite nice if people are moving on to something else, on the back of the experience they've gained from the project. But certainly, bringing new people in does require you to, sort of- there is that upskilling. And, as far as the fear of obsolescence, you mean around about the- the file formats, and things, or the equipment?

HC: It's actually something that I've really found has not been an issue, because, at the beginning, I thought, well, the technology moves so fast, maybe you feel like, anytime you start something, it's already out of date. So, investing, I guess, in expensive machinery, that you think is going to be out of date very quickly... But you, obviously, have in-house technology. You've got scanners.

GW: We've got the scanners, yes. We did buy the scanners for this project, and we've, kind of, found that they tend to find other uses. So, there's other teams that use scanners, who are currently using the old, out-of-date models, so we can start to, kind of, pass things on to them, if we don't need the scanners that we're using for this project, maybe we don't need them for our own projects anymore, where they can- people find somewhere in the library that might need them. So, there's, sort of, scans for disabilities, so there's a scanning service for those, there's inter-library loan scanning service, which is a, sort of, separate part of the library, but we can still, kind of, pass this stuff on. We've been very fortunate. We've found that the equipment that we've bought has tended to be pretty good. So, there's quite a rigorous, sort of, procurement project at the start, when you're looking into different options. And I suppose you are looking, like, will this stuff still be working in five years' time? So, I suppose you need to have- for the scanners that we had, we got testimonials from other people that used them. I mean, I think there was a guy down in maybe Southampton, I think, they'd had this- they'd had one of these scanners for, like, eight years, and they'd had barely any problems with it at all, and they'd just, kind of... The ones that we bought are quite known for reliability, and just getting on with it, really. I think, with scanners, they seem to bring out new versions a lot of the time, but, sort of, fundamentally, as long as it can, kind of, capture a good quality image, and not do any damage to the book, as long as that can still be done, then a lot of the other stuff's a bit more, kind of, a luxury. So, yeah, not such a big issue for this project. But yeah, of course there's a lot of money, having to spend a lot of money upgrading cameras and stuff every year, but I suppose that's just in budgets. It's just assumed that that's going to be something to have to deal with. I suppose something we've- one of the other issues we had, around about privacy, so particularly with the, sort of, the GDPR stuff coming in, quite a lot of the theses have obviously been written in a time when the authors didn't realise it was going to be put online and made available to anybody. So, there's some quite, sort of, gruesome content in some of the images in some of the theses, like, sort of, like, quite graphic pictures of, sort of, car crashes, and things like that, which were just, sort of, photographed, and then the photographs have been stuck into the thesis. So, we've had to be- I suppose, like, research ethics would probably have been all a bit different back then. There's quite a lot of stuff which is quite, sort of, I suppose, like, racist. We would see it racist now, but back when it was written in the, sort of, late Nineteenth Century, it wasn't really deemed to be. So, we've had to do things around about how do we- what do we do with that content? So, as far as the project's concerned, we just scan them, but then we flag it so that the team that puts it online – the scholarly communications team – they, kind of, have to make the judgment call. They tend to- they'll put the metadata up, but then they'll embargo the thesis, and then somebody'll have to write in and give a reason why they need to view that thing. So, hopefully, there's not anything disturbing like that, that's just, kind of, floating around on the Internet. But then, that's a, kind of, another question, is like, do we have the right to censor that sort of stuff? But I think you, kind of, need to make a judgement call. But yeah, obviously, the theses have people's signatures on them, so we have to redact signatures; quite often the abstracts will have the person's address on it, so we have to redact those. So, there's quite a- part of the post-processing stuff is just trying to make sure that we don't put anyone's personal information online. So, yeah, that's a, sort of, I suppose a, kind of, related to the copyright side of things, but that's built into what we do.

HC: So, in order to know whether something's racist, have you read every thesis?

GW: No! No, I mean, I suppose it's more, it, sort of, tends to be the images. So, it might be just, kind of, the way that things are- the way that Africans might be portrayed in an image, it's quite, sort of, subjective. And maybe it's my interpretation. I don't think that- maybe it's not technically racist. I mean, it's not- those sort of things are minor, to be honest. But if we see something that we think is potentially a bit controversial, we'll at least flag it, and then it's, kind of, shunted down the line to the next person, to actually deal with whether a decision needs to be made about that.

HC: You said that 0.5% of the-

GW: I think it's about that-

HC: -library's collection has been digitised. What's the ambition?

GW: So, we have a digitisation strategy for the first time, which is really encouraging. I think the short-term ambition is to get that up to 3% in the next – I can't remember, I think it's 3% in the next, sort of, two to three years. So, the Thesis collection is obviously a big part of that, and there's a project right now to digitise the Scottish Court of Session papers, as well, so that's more. So, I think it was- it- kind of, increasingly looking at these, kind of, these bigger projects, as a way of doing that. I suppose, the ultimate ambition is to basically have everything that's – I mean I don't want to speak on behalf of the senior management, because I don't have the authority to make those strategic decisions – but my understanding is that the ultimate ambition is to be able to have everything that's unique to the University available in digital format. It might not necessarily be in, sort of, high quality, high resolution TIFF files, but some sort of a digital version of everything that's unique to us. But that, kind of, does require quite a lot of activity, a lot of surveying to work out what do other universities have, what do other libraries have, how can we make sure we're not duplicating efforts? So, I think, for the short term, we're just, kind of, focusing on things that we know are definitely our own. Our own things we have are- about a hundred items have been flagged as being iconic items for the University, so we're in a process, now, of digitising those. So, yeah, we know that they are all unique, so Arthur Conan Doyle's thesis is one of them – things like, there's bits of penicillin mould from Fleming, and just, all sorts of, sort of, random things like that. So, I think we're still at the stage where we're trying to, sort of, prioritise stuff, because a lot of those iconics have all been nominated by the curators, which is a little bit dubious in itself, because that's the professionals working with the collections who've said: "These are our iconic items." But that's not to say that researchers might not have the same ideas, and the students might have different ideas about what our iconic items are. So, I think there's been a big consultation, that happened last year, where people were asked: "What do you do with our collections, what would you like to do with it, what would you like to be done, how can we prioritise things?" So, I think, quite a lot- based on that feedback, there has been work to, sort of, establish what we do after this. So, yeah. I think 3% in the short term is the, kind of, the goal. Which seems quite low, but we don't have unlimited resources.

HC: I don't think that's particularly low, comparatively.

GW: Mm, yeah...

HC: What is the value of sharing this material? What- what are you digitising it for, ultimately?

GW: I think the fundamental reason is about improving access, really. We've got the research support reading room in the sixth floor of the library, but that's only got limited space, it's limited opening hours, there's a lot of staff time needed to run it, and to do all that side of things. So, I think, fundamentally, we are digitising to make stuff available for anybody to access, anywhere in the world with an Internet connection. As I said before, I think, as well, there's a lot of stuff, sort of, digital scholarship stuff, round about, sort of, text mining, and data mining, and what you can... You can do stuff with digital material that you can't do with the analogue stuff, which helps you, then, to, sort of, understand more about the past, or to see trends that you can't really see from looking at the physical items. So, yeah, I suppose it's, kind of, just, how do we do that and then engage with... I suppose, we do a lot of digitisation, but we still have something a little bit missing around about how we actually makes sure everyone knows it's there, and using it, and, yeah. Opening up access, I think, opening up the collections, I think, improving access, has got to be the fundamental reason, really.

HC: Yeah...

GW: There's a preservation element to it. But I think studies show that the more you digitise something, that people become more aware of it, and they want to see the originals, so... But I think, if we digitise something, we're in a stronger position to decline requests to see a physical item, particularly if it's in poor condition. And we can say: "Look, we do have a digital copy," which is what we're starting to do with the Thesis collection, going forward now, is people now really have to have a good reason why they need to see the physical copy. But now that we've got the digital versions online... So, I suppose, yeah, there is a preservation angle to it, but I think it is all, primarily, about access.

HC: Great. Hold on, another quick break. You're quite young to be talking to about the 2000s but that's where the literature is, that I've been looking at, and that was really when the Internet first took off, and became available to everybody, and everyone started looking forward to what might happen. It was a very confident time, and people thought that everything would be online by now. Which, it really isn't. Can you remember how you first felt, when the Internet was, sort of, first coming out, and what you thought the future was going to hold, in terms of heritage, when you first got involved in it?

GW: So, when the Internet first came around, I was a teenager, so, yeah... So, initially, my initial thoughts about the Internet was about, kind of, like, gaming and, sort of, chat rooms, and all that kind of stuff. So, I suppose I didn't- I've been working in heritage since 2012, I was an English teacher abroad before that, and stuff, so I suppose I've only really been working in this sector for six years or so. So, I'm not really sure if I can answer, to be honest. I've not really- I suppose, as a, sort of, professional in this area, I've always been as I am now, really, which is thinking about digitisation as great for access, improving access to stuff, like that. I didn't really have any, sort of, other thoughts, sort of, prior to that, unfortunately, sorry!

HC: That's fair enough!

GW: Yeah...

HC: Looking forward, because I'm looking at a, kind-of, twenty-year span between, sort of, the millennium and, sort of, 2020, there hasn't been the progress that was originally predicted, for whatever reason.

GW: Yeah.

HC: Where do you see us being in twenty years' time?

GW: So, well, a lot of it depends on things like Brexit, and, like, what's the realities round about funding, because I think everyone beginning to understand that digitisation is not just about capturing an image, there's all the conservation, the cataloguing elements to it, as well. There's how you, sort of, manage the information, going forward in digital preservation, and all that kind of stuff. And I think, we're probably- there's a realisation that it costs a lot of money. So, I'm probably not massively optimistic that there's going to be huge strides done in the next twenty years. But having said that, you never really know. Developments in technology might be able to get fully automated book scanners. Because right now, there's still a requirement for a human element, aside from the absolutely- I mean, these books, here, were probably done by a robot, because they're just utterly standard published things, there's no fold-outs or anything weird, but... We're- yeah, we're not at that stage where there's equipment that doesn't require operators, so I think you're going to always need staff, and equipment, and... I don't know, probably having things, like, storage cost gets cheaper all the time, equipment gets better, I mean, twenty years ago, like you were saying, twenty years ago, we didn't- the Internet, the Web was only really in its infancy. We didn't have social media, iPhones and stuff were still miles away, so I think, twenty years from now, you can't even begin to imagine what technology is like. So, I would hope that, in terms of the sector, that there's a lot more, kind of, joined-up working, around about standards. I mean, you've got things like IIF, if you're familiar with that, the International Image Interoperability Framework, so we are beginning

to get tools developed so that people can view and manipulate images from different sites. Because, I think, currently, if you want to access something from Edinburgh Uni, you'll access something from the Bodleian Library; you've got to, kind of, navigate two completely different image systems, but there are steps that make that a lot more consistent, now. So, I think, hopefully, in twenty years' time, we might not have taken big strides, in terms of amount of stuff digitised, but I think we will hopefully have a much more, sort of, joined-up way of doing things. And, yeah, I suppose, just greater, sort of conformity to standards, so people are, kind of, generally doing stuff in the same way. I think there's, now, probably, anecdotally, it seems like there's quite a lot of overlap, as well. I think people are digitising stuff that other people are- have already done, so hopefully, there'll be some kind of, like, some sort of database or register of- some way of knowing what other institutions have done, so you won't do the same sort of thing. But I just think, twenty years, it's such a- I just don't think you can look that far ahead. Twenty years' time, like, education's going to be utterly transformed, I mean, in terms of, will we have physical libraries at all? Will people even come to physical universities anymore? I mean, because I think distance learning's a growing area, so you could easily just have, everyone does their studies from home, or attends remotely. So, I think, I suppose as that increases, then there's going to be more demand for digitised stuff, so, yeah. I don't know. I just think the fact that, ten years ago, we didn't even have iPads, I just can't see twenty years into the future, really. That's mad!

HC: What have you learned from your digitisation experiences?

GW: Well, that probably, like we've touched on already, that just the main thing being that it's such a vast- a project like this is such a vast operation, it's touched on every element of the library, so... I was, kind of, looking through it, and just thinking, pretty much every single team – we've got quite a big library, and pretty much every team has had some involvement in the project. Whether it's the techy guys working out the systems side of things, whether it's the guys in the servitor- the sort of, janitor guys, who help us lug the books from A to B, to get them to the room for scanning, the special collections staff who've helped us identify the books... So, like, this really has, sort of, touched on every- pretty much every part of the library, and beyond that as well. So, I suppose I hadn't really appreciated how much there is to it, beyond just the capturing of the images and storing those. There's all the preparation that goes into it, there's the aftercare, and then just things like how you, sort of, how you communicate what you're doing to people. I suppose, it's the scale of everything's- that's, kind of, the biggest thing that I've taken from it. Yeah, that's probably the main thing.

HC: If you could wave a magic wand and put everything online, would you do it?

GW: Do you mean for the library's collections, or just...?

HC: I guess, because you know what you have. But heritage, generally, should the aspiration be for everything to be online?

GW: I think you need to have, kind of, a reason, I suppose, in the same way that archivists and librarians have, kind of, collection policies, and they'll have selections criteria, so you'll say: "These are the sorts of things that we collect." You probably want to have something similar for what you put in digital format. Currently, there's certain things that probably – look, what do you mean by digitisation? Do you mean 3D as well? Because there's a certain- like, 3D objects, there's not really that much value in taking a photograph of them, but if you have the time to really create a, sort of, 3D object, then there's more value in that. So, I'd imagine there probably should be some kind of, like, an assessment beforehand, about, like, what's the value of doing this? Who's going to get something out of it? But again, that's, kind of, done when you're prioritising resources. If you're saying there's a magic wand, and it can always be done, then go for it. But I think you'd still need to make sure that you're not putting anything online which is breaking copyright, or intellectual property. So, if there's unlimited resources, I'd say, absolutely, bearing those things in mind.

HC: Do you think there's a brand value, in terms of what you choose to put online? Do you have half an eye on the PR, publicity-

GW: That's true, yeah...

HC: -department, on how these things reflect on you, what you choose to put out there?

GW: I don't know if it's such an issue, because a maybe because we've already done that pre-selection bit. So, the stuff that we're going to digitise has already passed- has already, sort of, made the grade, in terms of something that we think is valuable enough to hold in our collections. So, maybe- yeah, we're essentially putting something online that we're already happy to publicise, that we have the physical copy of it. So, maybe that step comes before digitisation, in many ways. So, the sort of things that we collect, as- I mean, we might have an eye to, sort of, our image, or our identity. Because, I suppose, yeah, the library has certain priorities that it collects, and certain things it doesn't collect, if that makes sense? Yeah.

HC: If you were an alien, and you came down from space, and you couldn't look at anything physically because you were hovering above the Earth, so all you could do was tap into what is online, how do you feel that heritage is represented, in terms of what is there, and perhaps more importantly, what isn't there?

GW: Yeah... I suppose it's, like I said already, it's quite, sort of, it's quite inconsistent, in terms of the experience, as an alien experience of- accessing this stuff would be quite frustrating and, sort of, confusing. But... Yeah, I suppose there probably is a, sort of- out of the stuff that's online, there probably is a bit of a bias towards existing research interests. So, you're not going to get a completely objective understanding of all the collections. You're probably going to see- I suppose, a bit like Wikipedia, that you've got a lot more information about successful men on Wikipedia than women, because authors are male. So, there's, kind of, like, a small amount has been selected. And maybe stuff is, like I mentioned about some of the stuff that we don't exactly censor, but stuff that we, kind of, we don't want to put online because of disturbing images, and that kind of thing. So, maybe it's a little bit of a, sort of, slightly sanitised- or it could appear to be slightly sanitised, if that sort of stuff is kept away from- from the public. And I suppose it doesn't really- maybe it's not the sorts of things that we have are not so much about, sort of, everyday life. It's more, kind of, high-profile names, so we digitise stuff by, sort of, famous people. That's, kind of, deemed to be our, kind of, priority. People who've achieved something. So, you probably don't get, like, an understanding of everyday life through the collections that exist, currently.

HC: You can go on social media for that, presumably. You can get a really good idea of...

GW: -yeah. If you want to...

HC: Do you think there'll be a time when everything's online? Like, there was a very confident prediction in a document called "A Netful of Jewels" in 1997. And they predicted that, by 2007, all museums would have their collections online.

GW: Yeah...

HC: It wasn't specific about entire collections including what's in the dark, dank vaults but do you think there will be a time when what people think of as everything that's worth sharing will be shared? And if so, how far in the future is that?

GW: Well, I think- I suppose, increasingly, we're getting stuff that's created digitally. So, I think the main thing is about whether we have the resources to deal with the backlog. Because I think, if we look into the twenty years' time scenario, we'll probably find that 95% of the collections that we receive are digital, so they're easy enough to display, or whatever. But yeah, I think maybe it's just about how we, sort of, how we deal with those hundreds of years of stuff that needs to be created from analogue. What was the second part of the question?

HC: By when, do you think? Or will it ever come to that?

GW: Probably not, because we were constantly- collections are constantly growing. And again, it's whether it's, sort of, desirable, as far as- I don't know whether... Maybe there are certain things that are better to be kept- you get- certainly get more value out of the physical item, rather than the digital. I certainly don't think it'll be in our lifetime, if it ever happens. I just think that there's just with- can't see the cost's really- even if it does become fully automated, I think those machines are going to be super expensive. And there's just, I think, just, kind of- libraries and heritage, I'm thinking generally, are- probably are seen as a bit less of a priority, when you've got, sort of, funding cuts, and limited funding, limited resources. I just don't know whether there's- it's gonna be seen as a priority, unfortunately.

HC: Great. Thank you very much.

Adam Koszary and Caroline Gould
Museum of English Rural Life
10th December 2018

AK: Adam Koszary

CG: Caroline Gould

HC: Helen Casey

HC: If you could both introduce yourself to me and give me your titles here at MERL.

AK: Ok. I'm Programme Manager and Digital Leader, but it's for the MERL and Reading Museum, because we're a National Portfolio Organisation partnership. So, I manage the programme as well as lead on, mainly, public engagement digital stuff. So, social media strategy and content, but also public engagement projects using digital technologies and promoting digital ways of working in the institution, and all the rest. Is that, kind of, what I do?

CG: Yeah.

AK: Yeah.

CG: And I'm Caroline Gould. I'm the Principal Archivist here, and I work for the Museum of English Rural Life and the University of Reading's Special Collections. So, we have the Museum's Collections, but we also have, I think, collections like Samuel Beckett's collection, and Nancy Astor, who was the first female MP to take up a seat in the House of Commons, so she's quite topical at the moment, and also Publishers' Archives as well.

HC: Lovely, thank you. Right, let's get started. So, could you talk to me a bit about what collection you have, and your own backgrounds in heritage? So, if you take first: what does the MERL hold, specifically?

AK: Shall I cover objects and you cover archives? So, the object collection is mainly 17th to 19th century objects which relate to the countryside and farming and rural life. So, there's everything from farming implements, like ploughs and agricultural hand tools, to more domestic items, like what you'd use in the home, cooking, etcetera. But as the collections developed we've also collected things like stuff from popular culture, so The Wurzels records, things like that, and also... Let me think... Clothing and textiles and...

HC: You've got some stuff from Glastonbury-

AK: Glastonbury, yes, some of Michael Eavis's wellies-

HC: -'cause I watched your soil video.

AK: -Land Rover.

CG: They're all English!

AK: They are... to French! So, we're trying to update the collection as we can, but it's still mainly in 17th to 19th century, with a bit of 20th century. And we're, kind of, struggling at the moment, with how to collect more of the digital, online, ephemeral stuff. We don't really have a plan of how to collect that properly, and it might actually be more of, like, an archive challenge than an object challenge, because everything's becoming so virtual that 'objects' is not really an object anymore. It's more like a record.

CG: And in the archives, we've also got a big library, as well. So, we have lots of periodicals relating to the countryside, and books, I think, as well. But I work mainly with the archives, and we have a huge collection of archives that support the museum. So, not only archives of national organisations, which I mentioned earlier – so CPRE, National Farmers' Union, National Union of Agricultural Workers, those kinds of national food- collections that relate to the countryside and food – but also lots of photographs, as well. So, we've got the Farmers' Weekly and Farm and Stock Breeder press photographic collections, and also commercial photographers, as well. So, we have the John Tuckton

collection, who's a commercial photographer who worked with all- all different farming journals, like, not just the Farmers' Weekly, but also the – it's gone right out my head! – Country Life, things like that. So, we have those kind of collections, we also have farm records, as well, for the whole of England. So, diaries of farmers, but also their accounts and things for the farms, so business records of farms, as well, personal records of the people working on the farm... Co-operative records, so there are lots of agricultural co-operatives, work together to market their produce, and we collect that kind of record as well... And lots of other, smaller collections, so collections of people's research, and things like that.

AK: I forgot to mention craft.

CG: Oh yes, lots of craft.

HC: Do you want to mention craft?

AK: Yeah, definitely. Well, regard... just, a lot of the tools relating to how you make things. So, carpenters, blacksmithing, all the rest of it. But also, then, craft from anonymous to – what are they called – arts?

CG: Yeah...

AK: Artists? Like-

CG: Artistic.

AK: That's- that's a stupid name for them. But yeah, just, artists, crafters- craftspeople, and then-

HC: Artisans...

AK: Oh yeah, something like that...

HC: Craft- craftspersons...

AK: Yeah. But that's a big part of the collection.

HC: Fantastic. Can you talk- both talk a little bit about your own backgrounds in heritage, so that I know where you're both coming from, in terms of your views?

AK: Christ, background! I've actually- my first proper job in museums was here at the Museum of English Rural Life, after doing a Masters in Museum Studies. Classic. Re-developing the galleries here. And then, falling into social media, because it was the only way we were communicating with the public. So, that got me a job at the Bodleian, doing social media there, half-time. Then I came back here to manage a project, which was, kind of, around digital transformation, and try and get a lot of new digital things. And now I've moved into this programme management role. So, it's been a mixture of project management and digital.

CG: I've been around a lot longer! I was- I've worked in archives all my profession. So, I worked for various university museums, including University of Swansea and LSE, on various projects that they were- they were involved in. LSE was the- was an interesting project on Charles Booth, who did maps of London, so some of the streets were black, 'cause they were criminal, and some were-

AK: That's very cool...

CG: -red, because they were – you didn't know that?

AK: I didn't know you worked on that...

CG: Some- because they were really rich. So, they were- they were all digitised, these maps, and then the notebooks were digitised, as well, and I was the archivist working on it. And there was a team of three of us, so there was an IT professional, and then there was a project manager, who communicate- did a lot of conferences around it, so... So, that was one of the things I worked on. But I've worked in county record offices as well. I've worked at Dorset Record Office, which was my first main job, and East Sussex Record Office, in- when the reorganisations of local government were happening, and I did a survey there, and then Hampshire Record Office. And then I came here, to MERL, just before we moved to this site. And then Special Collections came down slightly later, so my job expanded into Special Collections as well as Museum of English Rural Life. But the job's constantly changed. So, I- but I've been here since 2002! So, it's been a long time.

HC: That's great. That's good, th-

CG: Well, it fits with your survey, doesn't it?

HC: -exactly! It fits perfectly. So, tell me a little bit about how you both define 'heritage'. It's- it's impossible to do, because we've all tried on the DHeritage, and it's not possible, but we ask nonetheless. So, could you both talk through how you see it, and how- if- if there is any definition?

AK: Haven't really thought too much about it, actually. But I guess it's anything which has meaning to people, which has happened in the past, I would say, whatever form that comes in.

HC: And how's that different from 'history'? Is it the 'meaning' part?

AK: Well, I'd say 'history' is what's written down. 'Heritage' usually is something tangible, or at least, something- 'cause I guess a book of Shakespeare is also 'heritage' as well as history-

CG: But a lot of the archives are written down, but the- it is- is tangible-

AK: -yeah...

CG: -but we've been doing an intangible project, recently-

AK: We have.

CG: -so, it's challenging, as- folk music...

AK: I think it's intangible heritage

CG: -and dance, and things like that, so... It is very hard to define 'heritage'. It is different to 'history'.

AK: What is the difference between 'heritage' and 'history'? 'Cause 'history' is the story. But 'heritage' is story too.

CG: I don't know. 'History', to me, you look at a lot of secondary sources? Whereas 'heritage' is more the primary, for me. But I've never really had to think about it before, so it's a good question.

AK: Can see why you're struggling!

CG: It's hard, isn't it?

HC: It's all we think about, and we still haven't come to a very-

CG: Very hard, isn't it?

HC: It is. To me, 'heritage' has something to do with a belonging, to either a group or an individual.

CG: Yeah.

HC: And it tends to need to reflect out something about them, which is why people get very het up about national heritage and national heritage values and things, and they don't like you taking things down, or putting them away, because they reflect our glorious country. But anyway, this isn't about me! So, what do you see as the heritage of the MERL? What's its belonging? Who does it belong to, and what's it for?

CG: Well, we want to make it as accessible as possible, don't we? And that's a lot of the social media side of things. I mean, we always wanted that, in terms of the reading room- coming into the reading room, and looking at research and- on all the galleries. But I think the social media has allowed us to expand out our audience.

AK: Yeah. Because we've always had the- the collection's always the core.

CG: Mm...

AK: But then we see, it's making the connection between the collections and people, is the most important thing. Which, you might say, would just be people who care about the English countryside, but we see it as relevant to almost everyone, as long as you come at it the right way. Because it's getting into animals, and food nutrition, and 'Englishness', which is always fun-

CG: Yeah.

AK: -to explore.

CG: There's all sorts of angles, isn't there?

AK: Yeah.

HC: So, can you maybe talk through both of your experiences of digitisation? Obviously, yours are going to be quite lengthy. Do you want to kick off? Because you've been doing this for a long time.

CG: Mm...

HC: So, yeah, just talk- I mean, if you can give me, just an idea of what it was you were trying to do, and how it went?

CG: Ok.

HC: In each one.

CG: So, yeah, basically, before we had this chat, I had a look through the projects we'd done, since I started at MERL, and it's quite amazing, when I look through, I was, kind of, quite surprised. When I first started, the first day I was here, I shortlisted for a job, for a digitisation project, which was with the New Opportunities Fund. We got some money, with the Berkshire Record Office, so that was all done before I got here. And it was to digitise – it was the NOF project, we call it – digitise fifty thousand pages of Victorian trade literature. And it was a brilliant project, and it did an awful lot of digitisation. It wouldn't have been the first thing I'd pick to digitise, when I first came here. For me, they're lovely, trade literature, they've got lots of pictures, lots of images, quite colourful in some places. But there were so many more vulnerable archives, and photographs, that I would have chosen, if I was putting a project together at that stage. But it was a great project. And it was with the Berkshire Record Office, and they digitised their enclosure maps at that point, and we had a joint front end. And it was money that came from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and I think they'd matched the two organisations, because they were both in Reading, to do this project together, and it was, kind of a forced match. But we- I mean, not that we didn't get on, but it doesn't really gel as a project, but we did it! And it was our first real experience of digitisation. And then we did various other projects. So, in 2004, we did a glass negatives project. It was more about preservation, but we did do some digitisation. In 2005, we had an Esme Fairbairn project, but it was more about digitisation of film, I don't know whether that was your remit. I know that's changed such a lot over the period of time that I've worked with film, because the media has completely changed since- obviously, it's now digital, but when I was first doing that project, it was VHS we were- was the access copy, and a Betacam SP was the preservation copy. And now, I'm actually at a stage where I'm trying to transfer those to digital. So, it's like film just changed the format so much. We've catalogued other things. A heavy metal project we had with Heritage Lottery Fund, and we catalogued- we digitised production registers from a production Wallace and Stevens, which, they were steam engine manufacturers. And also glass negs, which... The production registers are really important to steam enthusiasts, they're really important stakeholders of MERL. And glass negs are the format's fragile, so it's another reason why we've done a lot of digitisation of glass negs. Other collections we've done are: Rural Images Discovered was funded by Foyle, and that was digitising fifteen thousand images, and that was in 2011. So, it has gone on and on, and I would say that the... Arts Council came along, we had some funding from Arts Council. We did digitisation of World War I commemorative book, but also glass negs of local photographers, of this local area, and that was really important. So, we've had a lot of project funding, to do digitisation, and I think that's because the funders have been very happy to do that. And we could pick a collection that we thought would be- warrant being digitised, and we could go and get the funding for it, and we've been really successful at MERL, to do that. And the Arts Council has helped that. But I'd say, what's changed now is, we were able to buy the equipment with that first round of Arts Council funding. So, we've got a camera, and we can do digitisation more in-house, as part of our processes, rather than having to go out and get that funding. So, for instance, we've had two projects over the last year, and they've gone out to conservators. We haven't got a paper conservator here. And we've done that digitisation here, before it's gone to the conservator, as part of our workflow. Not necessarily, now- it's not the prime reason for project funding, now. We don't go out and get that project funding, so that we can digitise. It's changed a lot. And, in fact, I think we're moving away, a little bit, from doing

it! We've got an awful lot of images, and we've now got a digital asset management system that's made a huge difference in your work, Adam...

AK: Yep.

CG: So, we're able to tag images, to say that they can be used in social media, because that was a real barrier, before. We had all these wonderful images, but you had to go through one person to find out whether the copyright was ok, and-

AK: Yeah...

CG: -that's not quick. You know, if you want to, well, just, send some- put something on Twitter, if you've got to find someone who- and they've got to work- into their workflow, which is what we did-

AK: Yeah. It's 'cause I flippantly said: "What if CB (name removed) was under a bus one day?" Didn't I? Sorry, sh-

CG: Yeah-

AK: -probably shouldn't even be naming her- but then I found out, recently, that's actually a name for a phenomenon? Which you'll find, a lot of heritage institutions, that-

CG: Yeah...

AK: -if there's someone with all the skills and experience and knowledge-

CG: Yeah...

AK: -and if they go it's, almost, gone. Which, I think, is why we digitise in the first place, sometimes. Particularly for catalogue information. Not necessarily just the act of doing it, but the knowledge on top of it.

CG: Possibly. There's a lot of reasons you'd digitise! But I do think it's changed. When we first – this is probably jumping ahead in your questions – but when we first did it, it was this great new thing you could do, and we didn't have money for that before, and we just did as much as we can. But now, we really think about whether we want to digitise it, because we've got all these images, and we have to manage them, and we know how much time that takes. And it's not just stored on a separate drive, which we did have for a long time, but it's actually- you've got to then processes it, and put some tags on it, and, you know, put the time into that, as well, and...

AK: And then use it.

CG: Yeah, that- absolutely. So- and you've got to pay for the storage of it, and- and all those things, so we, kind of, really, think about- I think we're more focused, on digitisation, and, sort of, don't just do it and worry about that later.

AK: Yeah.

HC: And how about you, Adam? How- what's your, sort of, digitisation experience, before here and here?

AK: I haven't had a lot, to be honest. I've been involved in some of those projects Caroline just went over, particularly the Arts Council ones, but it was more like the person just helping do it. But I wasn't necessarily taking pictures of things, a lot. Sometimes it was just, I was the person who would then upload it to the catalogue, or to the website. So I didn't have that much agency. I was just that person who uploaded it. From a personal point of view, I found that really dull work! Which is why, I think, you've got much more automated systems now, I think.

CG: It's still quite-

AK: But also, I wasn't r- I think-

CG: -it's still quite mundane!

AK: -it was at Reading Museum, as well, and they-

CG: Oh yeah...

AK: -they're even more slow about it.

CG: Yeah...

AK: Because they have an older catalogue, and all the rest of it. So, I haven't got that much experience of actually deciding what to digitise and how to do it, or which collections to use. I'm more at the other end, of then figuring out how to use what's been digitised and how to, kind of, lock the database from people.

HC: So, in terms of how you do use it, obviously you've made a name for yourself, using it on Twitter, but have you also tried a lot of other things? Is there an object-by-object collection on the website? I believe there is, I think I went and had a look. And to what extent have those worked or not worked?

AK: Well, we did some training with JISC a little while ago, which is all about these different digital pathways into the collections. And it is always about that spread, because social media is only going to be one route into the collections for people. And it's a route that may not work for many people, those who don't use social media, or who don't particularly enjoy the way we pitch things. So, we do have the A-Z on the website, and that's still an absolutely essential way, particularly for researchers, just to figure out what we have and how to get to it. So, it's trying to-

CG: And the database, that's got the images on, so we've moved to AdLib...

AK: A while ago.

CG: Yeah. From 2010, I want to say? But I'd have to check that. So, we had another system before, but it was a library system, and it catalogued all the archives objects and library material, but it didn't really do any of them any good. So, we chose AdLib for objects and archive, and then the libraries use the same system that the main library do.

HC: It sounds to me like trying to put the stuff out is very important to you, because quite often there's a tension, between wanting to hold it and keep it all safe, and just saying: "This is for everyone, every time, but not necessarily now," and saying: "This has got to be used. Otherwise, why are we holding onto it?"

CG: Yeah.

HC: Do you think that's changed over time, or do you think it's always been something that...

CG: I think, if you're going to digitise something, you're doing it for access purposes. Sometimes for preservation, as I've insinuated. But often, if you're going to do it for preservation, you might as well allow people to see it. We do cope with a lot of copyright issues here, for various of the collections, so...

AK: Yeah, and we sometimes struggle with: we want people to use the collections, but we don't want people to misuse them. So, it's how to get them out in an appropriate way.

CG: Yeah.

AK: So if, like, how we use social media now didn't come out of a vacuum. We've had years of tinkering around the edges of how far we could use them in different ways online. And it was only when it really- all of that helped us, in the end, so that when we did something stupid, like we do now, on social media, it's all supported by: "And here's how to get into the catalogue. Here's where the collections are from. Here's more information if you want to go deeper." So, it's, again, just trying to get that spread, rather than just: "This is the only way to get into the collections." If that makes sense.

HC: -tell me about the other ways that you tried, briefly.

CG: I'll just get some-

HC: Yeah, absolutely. Let me just have a pause.

HC: So, this is part two. So, yeah, I was just asking... You said you'd done a lot of different things to get to this one point, where you did what, on the surface of it, looks quite a flippant tweet about a sheep, but actually, behind that, was a lot of work. Can you, kind of, roll through that work, and how that went?

AK: Well, we've been trying to tell stories about our collections in a very straight-faced way for a long time, because we have different ways that people- a lot of what we do is trying to make the

database easier for people to, not get into, but it's so hard to find stuff in the database. It's more like collecting it together, the interesting bits or themes, and then saying: "Here's the stuff, get interested in it. And if you want to, go into the database." But we do that for our collections A-Z pages, which is a very: "These are the collections we have, this is what's in them, here's how to get into the database." On our website, we have something called 'Explore', which is the idea of almost having another database. It's a bit of a funny thing, which, we're trying to work on it, soon... Yeah, next year. Which is, trying to make a friendly object record. So, something which isn't very focused on, you know, like – is it Sconul? That have the rights?

CG: Yeah.

AK: Yeah. More like blog formats. And that's another way we did a lot of things: a lot of blogs. And we've gradually been experimenting more and more with social media, which has involved making little animations of the collections, trying to push the tone a little bit, but sometimes we did go too far. So, the first thing that stuck in my head was 'Archive Selfie Day', a few years ago, where we had a photograph of a woman who was waving a handkerchief in the air, and I photoshopped a phone in her hand, taking a selfie. And that hit up against, I think it was a copyright issue, but as well as that, there was this idea of ethics, around: was it the intention of the photographer, or the sitter, to be used in that way in the future? And even if it wasn't, is it ok for us to reuse collections in that way? And ever since then, I think we've, kind of, settled on this way where we, whenever a person is pictured, we try and treat that person with respect. So, we never try and alter what that person is doing or trying to do. Which is why, yeah, animals has been good, because everyone just likes animals. But we've only come onto that after internally, almost...

CG: Yeah...

AK: I wouldn't even say officially, it's almost like we've established our own conventions, where it's almost in staff's heads, where they know what the lines are. And I'm only just starting to write those down after adapting to it over the years. Because we've never had a social media manager. I'm from a collections background, so it's me more trying to tell the stories of the collections in new ways, but it's always been on the side of my main job. But I think that's helped, because knowing the collections means I already know the history and context of them, so it shouldn't say the wrong thing.

CG: I think it's helped, having there down, that this- the fact that we know... You feel confident- it- the fact that they're social media-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -you know, -ok. I think that-

AK: That's the essential bit.

CG: -yeah, 'cause that- we did have a few situations where we were like: "Adam! Hold back!" Yeah, and I think we did try various things, and you did- we were quite forthright sometimes, saying we didn't like that, or-

AK: But that's the only way we change, isn't it?

CG: -yeah.

AK: If I was just left to do everything I wanted to do, I would've eventually just burnt all my bridges, and you'd never have been happy with what's happening now.

CG: Yeah, and I think what you do, with the social media, is, you might do something with it, but then you always put the original, now. And so, it's having that comparison, so it- we are pleased, we're happy!

AK: Yeah!

CG: And you know, we've been true to what the collections are, aren't we? Even when you do something different with it, that's fine, but there's always the background, or you always come back and put the message across that we want, so...

AK: Yeah.

CG: I think.

AK: My point is, I couldn't be able to do that if there hadn't been good digitisation practice beforehand.

CG: Yeah. But also because you've come from a collections background. That's really helped, I think.

AK: Yeah. I, kind of, know what people are trying to do.

CG: Yeah. If you were just a social me- you know – 'just a social media'! But if you'd come in just from the social media into a museum, and you hadn't got that background, I think it would have been harder.

AK: Yeah. You'd have to learn to- a whole new set of conventions and ways of working-

CG: Yeah.

AK: -and, almost, the point of what museums are trying to do, whereas a social media person just wants engagement or clicks-

CG: Yeah.

AK: -or whatever. Whereas, actually, the point: I want those, but it's for the museum's purposes, rather than just in and of themselves, if that makes sense.

HC: You have said, before, that people are surprised, when they come into the actual museum, that that tone doesn't carry across. It's obviously just a thing you do on social media to get the original engagement. How hard, do you think, is it, when you digitise something – and this is the 'interpretation' question – to get your descriptions right, so that you're interpreting it for a broad audience? Because you've got enthusiasts, you've got farmers and researchers and historians, as well as the people who really like pictures of enormous sheep. So, how do you get your language right online, and how much do you think about what- how you do that?

CG: We thought about- a lot about the interpretation in the galleries, actually, didn't we?

AK: Mm...

CG: About how we were aiming at people. And it's different.

AK: A painful amount!

CG: I think, the social media audience, you're – you couldn't say what you think, but – it is- it was an audience we didn't have, or it was a very small audience we had.

AK: Yep.

CG: And it's expanded, and it's a different audience, and you wouldn't engage that amount of people with the same kind of voice that we have in the galleries. You- they just wouldn't- it's completely different.

AK: Yeah.

CG: And so, you have to have that chatty, jokey... Well, it works-

AK: Yeah, it's...

CG: -that chatty, jokey persona, on social media, isn't it?

AK: It's worked, but then, it's a curious thing. It's just because it's a different context.

CG: Yeah.

AK: So, we wouldn't write the way we do in the galleries on Twitter, because it's a different context, for different audiences.

CG: Yeah.

AK: But it means we need to know Twitter's context, to be able to write to it. So, it's almost re-learning interpretation, in a way, and adapting it to how people talk online, rather than just doing what we do in the galleries-

CG: I think-

AK: -if that makes sense.

CG: -and I think, even in the galleries, we were always conscious that we're a university museum, so we want to come across with that kind of voice, but we also want to engage families. So, we- we had to go through lots of discussion-

AK: Yeah...

CG: -didn't we? About how we pitch it. And in fact, we had so much interpretation for those galleries that was cut right back, and there's a lot in there, isn't there?

AK: Yeah. And I'm still of the opinion that we cut a lot of the personality out of it-

CG: Yeah, we did.

AK: -because we were trying to be, like it ended up being a neutral voice, because that's the thing that appeals across the most amount of people-

CG: Yeah.

AK: -which I think is good for a gallery. But when you're talking on social media, where people are much more reactive, and in a conversation and in a dialogue, you can't overthink it too much, and you have to be a bit more open to being – what's the word I'm looking for? – it's, almost, open to... I use this analogy of, like, going out on first dates, or something, where you're, kind of, opening yourself up to potentially awful situations, but it's the only way of engaging online properly, because you don't know until you've tried it. You don't have that kind of freedom in-gallery, which is why it can't be changed. We just try and get the friendliness out through our staff, who are out in the galleries, and our events and our programming, and everything else.

HC: Great.

AK: Does that answer your question?

HC: I think so. Let me just have a quick break again, while I s...

HC: ...Start. So, this is part three-

AK: Part three!

HC: -and... I think... You've talked a lot about how you interpret in the galleries. How do you choose to interpret online, in the web presence, perhaps, rather than social media? I mean, it- that's another different voice. And who's that voice for?

AK: It depends on the audience, because each of our blogs usually has a target audiences- a target audience, based on what the writer's trying to achieve, and who they're trying to attract. So, each of our blogs is pitched at a different person, and we use empathy maps and personas to try and figure that out. But the rest of our website is more on those kind of, you know, like the gov.uk principles, of just trying to be clear and simple and concise. And just, we see the website mostly as a tool, for people to find out the information of the thing they need. So, it's just trying to do that, it's just: get you from A to B. Whereas, the other bits of the websites, where it's trying to- where it's a bit more, you're dwelling, and you're trying to find out more, that's where we try and get a bit more... A bit more of a tone. But it's a tone which is pitched at particular people we've identified, rather than just everyone. Because at some point, we know we're not going to get everyone interested in a wagon page, it'll be aimed at keeping people who like wagons entertained as they read it, but still aimed at that kind of specialist audience. Whereas, on Twitter, we try and work harder at making people interested in wagons, because no-one has that prime interest in wagons.

HC: I'm now interested in hayricks, and who knew that that would be a thing that I would ever be interested in, and I read the whole thread and was interested to find out more about hayricks. And I think, if you tell good stories about things, it doesn't matter what those things are-

AK: Yeah.

HC: -even, you know, even ploughs, which is what you don't like, is that right?

AK: Oh, I don't like ploughs. But it's easy to get interested in ploughs. It's- I feel like, what we try and do in social media is just-

CG: We did so much work on ploughs-

AK: -try and get the enthusiasm...

CG: -I can't believe he said that.

AK: I hate them, so much!

CG: Hate it... Because there's a gallery, and Adam, you spent loads of your time on it-

AK: So much of my life on it...

CG: -is that why?

AK: Yeah, totally against ploughs for the rest of my life!

CG: Do you want me to say that on social media?

AK: I'm happy to... but yeah, no, I haven't said it on social media.

HC: That's how I know! Or was it in your talk? It was in your talk.

AK: I think it was in my talk.

HC: Yeah.

AK: But we're just trying to get that- the way we use social media, I think, is trying to get the enthusiasm of staff across. Because everyone looks at our collections and thinks they're boring, but as soon as they talk to a member of staff, they immediately make it interesting. It's trying to take that approach, rather than just say: "Here's a plough"-

HC: Unless-

AK: -which is what most of my labels say.

HC: -unless you're a plough enthusiast, in which case, the plough is enough-

CG: Well that is the thing-

HC: -and you want to know everything about it.

CG: -and we also have specialist audiences, who are, you know, if it's their specialism, they are very excited about parts of our collection. And so, we have to interpret for them, as well as interpret for a schoolchild.

AK: -which is, kind of, what I see on- the website doing.

CG: Yeah.

AK: The website has the information for those people if they need it.

CG: Yeah.

HC: I'm going to skip ahead, 'cause we are chatting, which is marvellous, but I feel like we need to make some progress down the list. So, talk to me about virtual visitors versus physical visitors. How do you measure how well you're doing, and- and how does that filter up? I know that you told the story that your CEO, or whoever - the guy in charge - only knew about how well you were doing when he read it in the Times, because he wasn't on Twitter. So, he probably wasn't aware of this incredible phenomenon, and... How do you show the people in charge what value digitisation, and putting your collection online, has? How do you measure it?

AK: That's the chair of our board for Museums Partnership Reading, yeah. He did just read it in the Times. But... It's a mixture of data and storytelling. Or, more like insights into the data. But it's almost always the data, of just saying: "This is the sheer amount of people who've followed us, engaged with our content." And if they want, we do go deeper into how, then, people go onto the website. So, we meet four times a year, with as many people from the museum as possible, where I tell them: "This is what happened over the last three months in social media, and this is what worked well, and this is what didn't work well, and this is what I achieved, in terms of your objectives and the website." Which, I think, is a- we've only really just started doing that. Like, trying to tell people- tell more people why it's important. But that's pretty much it.

CG: But we have lots of different funders, that we have to report to, and-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -and lots of those ask for digitisation statistics. So, we've just... We get some funding from what used to be HEFCE, but it's Research England, and so, we tell them how many items we've digitised in

that year, and- because they see that as allowing more people to look at the collections, so... And we have lots of different funders. We have Arts Council, etcetera- so ...

AK: And they just ask for our broad followers/engagement impressions-

CG: Yeah.

AK: -which is probably too broad, I think. But that's the level we're at. The funders are- feel like they're still just catching up with-

CG: With the social media stuff.

AK: -what we could report.

CG: Yeah. But they've all got their own, individual... Everyone asks for different things, slightly, so...

AK: Yeah.

CG: But they are important to us.

HC: Do you think the value of online engagement has changed, in terms of what people in charge are expecting to see, or what they see as the value of sharing online? Do you think that's a recent development, that people actually realise that that is as important as footsteps through the door?

CG: I think, over time, people have accepted that a lot more. So, definitely, now, people are quite happy to accept Twitter's okay. The amount of Twitter followers we have, I mean, it- yeah, I think... I don't think, two years ago, people would have even cared.

AK: No. It's just- it did take us going viral for that argument to be finished, almost.

CG: Yeah.

AK: I think, up until that happened, our director still didn't take it very seriously. I think she was only really doing it because we were being funded to do it by Arts Council, that kind of thing.

CG: Yeah.

AK: I think, really, what she'd like to have seen, was more people through the doors.

CG: Yeah.

AK: But now that we've got this presence online, she now sees that as important, because- mainly because she hears other people talking about how important it is, actually, more than what-

CG: And we...

AK: -she never really asks: "How much engagement is there on the website, in which collections?" and all the rest.

CG: No.

AK: She just likes to see that it's doing well.

CG: Yeah.

AK: Sounds too harsh, but she's a busy woman, so, she just likes to see it's doing well.

CG: And- but we have put a lot of time into it over the years, haven't we? We've- and tried lots of different things, and, yeah. So, if you look back, at how much time we've put into it-

AK: Yeah... And it's-

CG: -it's good, that-

AK: -and it's a massive team effort, too.

CG: Mm. Yeah. And we've learnt a lot along the way, and we've had troughs, and good times and not-so-good times, and...

AK: Yeah.

CG: You know. And I think there has been – from my side – there has been, sometimes, where people have thought: "Collections- no-one's interested in collections. We don't want to put them online," you know. "We don't want to..." And you're like: "Well, we are a collections- we're a museum, we- this is what we're about, and-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -if we don't stick to what we are about, then that's-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -going too far.” So, it’s really nice, now, that it’s come back, and it’s the collections that are the focus-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -really, even though there’s a lot of engagement, and... But it’s still-

AK: But then, it’s-

CG: -collections.

AK: -it’s another thing we can say: “People are looking at collections online on social media, but they’re ending up on ‘how to get here’ on the website-

CG: Yeah...

AK: -and the real museum page on the website.” So, you can definitely say all that attention translates into some people-

CG: Yeah.

AK: -at least, ending up coming here, and using the collections, or visiting the museum.

CG: We’ve just done a crowdfunding project, actually, which, it’s the first time we’ve done it, and it-most of that has been through... We thought: “We’ll just see if we can raise £1,000 to do some preservation of some of the photographic negatives we have, to rehouse them,” and we’ve got nearly £2,000. And it’s all been through the social media, so... And people were saying: “We’re happy to do it, because the arts salute you in it,” or whatever, which is fabulous, isn’t it?

AK: Mm, yeah.

CG: Yeah. And we didn’t actually have to do that much.

AK: We could have pushed it a lot more.

CG: But we d- yeah.

AK: Yeah.

CG: It was just us putting our feet in the water, wasn’t it? And just seeing if we could do it, and-

AK: Plus-

CG: -and it was a need we had, and we just thought we’d try it.

AK: Yeah.. And my frustration with the galleries, and with everything we have, that we know we have, that’s not in the galleries, is, there are so many different stories to tell, and we usually only tell one story. And it’s impossible to, kind of, get across the complexity behind it- each of our objects and themes. But on social media, that’s our opportunity to, finally, get all these stories out properly, so that people can actually discuss them and learn from them, which you can’t do in the gallery unless you have truly changing displays, like, all the time. So, I see that as achieving the mission of the museum, and just helping us, to be online, rather than in person.

HC: Which brings me neatly onto reasons not to digitise, because the starting point, for my research, was looking at literature from around the year 2000, when everybody was like: “Online means we can do multiple interpretations of the same object, and tell all the stories, and people can know as much, or as little, or whatever level they want to, about the same thing,” and then none of it happened. Or at least, it happened in small places in a big way, and then not at all in other places. And I just wondered, from both of your perspectives, looking at the list of seven reasons not to digitise, in your experience, which ones of them have been important? You don’t necessarily have to do them all, not everybody has. But which ones of them really come out as being good reasons not to digitise, and which ones of them do you not really think are that important?

CG: Cost is a big barrier. Most of the funding we’ve had has been external funding. We wouldn’t have done any digitisation if we didn’t have that project funding, to be honest. And, you know, it still takes a lot of time. You have to- you know, we have a massive store. A lot of it’s correspondence. Some of that correspondence is fascinating, but if you just digitised all of it, it’s just a big headache, really, and no-one would go through all of it, so that, you know, it’s not cost-effective to digitise that. So, you have to pick the kind of things that would benefit from greater access. So, we’ve found, on

our side, photographs and glass negs, and that kind of thing, are things that people would look- I suppose they're colourful, they're interesting, they're quick to look at-

AK: Yeah.

CG: If you've got a dense file from the CPRE, from the 1950s, you know, no-one's going to sit online and read every page of that. But you know, important that we keep them, for- but not, perhaps, digitise them. The fear of obsolescence, even – with film, that was a barrier at one point during the last twenty years, but I think we're over that now, and we're going to go with digital, and hope that that's it! But not with images, so much. That hasn't been a problem. We don't digitise anything that have got copyright complications, because you can- as we've discovered, you know, it's easier to use if it's digitised. And so, we try not to allow access to those. So, perhaps, not digitise them, is the easiest way to stop it being used! I don't - it doesn't affect me, I don't know what- you say: "Lack of political will..."

AK: I would add another, which is just not having a plan for what to do with it.

CG: Yeah. I mean, we have had a lot of training on IT, but have been helped by the projects that we've worked on, and that's external funding, again. I think, if we hadn't had all those projects, it would have been more difficult for us to do the kind of digitisation at the level we've done. So, they're my thoughts.

HC: I think, what I'm- what you're talking about: "Not knowing what you want to do with it," I think I've called that: "Lack of political will," which is: "Why would we do that? What's it for?"

CG: Yes, I see.

AK: Ok-

HC: But that's, kind of- it's an idea higher- high up, that: "This is a waste of time- and I think you've been very lucky, in that, you've said you've had a fairly free rein, to do what you've wanted to do, and- and, maybe, a lot of organisations don't have that. I don't know if, with your experiences, you've found different types of management having different views on whether it's worth sharing online or not.

AK: No, I think we've been quite lucky- I mean, I can only talk from here and the Bodleian – actually, I can also talk about Reading Museum – they've been very free in saying: "The collections are here for people to use, so they need to be out in the world for people to see them, so they can enjoy them." Reading Museum is a Local Authority, and much, much more careful about what they put out, because they see even their tiny image licensing scheme as something to protect. So, putting the collections just out, willy-nilly, is something that is not politically good for them, which means you can be much less creative around what you put out online. So, they have done a lot of digitisation, but it's, kind of, just sitting there.

CG: Yeah. I mean, we don't put out very high-quality stuff.

AK: No, we never go above a certain pixel length.

CG: Yeah. We, sort of, worked that out, quite early on, because we do get funding from people licensing images, for instance. So, yeah, we have, sort of, gone 'round that loop a little bit.

AK: Yeah.

CG: But, yeah.

AK: Kind of, which digitisation projects came alongside something like a public programming activity around it, or something like that, which we do fairly often, here-

CG: Mm...

AK: -I think. But it's- it's not just digitising for digitising's sake.

CG: Yeah.

AK: It's like, whether you start from the audience need or the collections need. Ideally it would be both.

CG: And I think HLF were quite good at, when you were putting projects together, to make sure that there was engagement part of it, and that you weren't just doing the cataloguing and digitisation- they were the, sort of, the rea- you had to do those in order to engage-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -and that was- you had to be quite clear of that, when you were putting an application in, so...

AK: Has there been a shift in how funders ask for things?

CG: I just think we've shifted away from HLF, really. Just 'cause Arts Council was- became a more important funder to us-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -because we started this relationship with them, and- and yeah, and there, sort of- and there's only so much capacity you've got. There comes a point where you think: "We can't do another project on, you know-

AK: Yeah...

CG: we're already doing enough." Yeah, so...

AK: Yeah, we've got too many projects!

CG: I've got too many projects...

HC: It's interesting, because I have discovered that the project mentality, I believe, is one of the things that's holding back digitisation-

CG: Yeah...

HC: -because HLF wouldn't simply fund to digitise the catalogue-

CG: Mm...

HC: -the catalogue never ended up being fully and properly digitised-

CG: Yeah...

HC: -and everything, kind of, got stopped behind that gate. So, there was a project over this side, and there was a project over that side, and they all had their own shiny websites floating around, untethered, in space but actually, this was the investment that needed to be made. But because HLF weren't investing in that, that starting point never really came about. That's one of my pet theories, anyway.

CG: I think we always put in those costs, but...! Yeah, we may not have been as explicit about it. You know, we'd just- you just needed to catalogue and digitise these things if you're going to do something with them. And so, yeah, we always, sort of, had that core of funding for that kind of thing, and then we did lots of other things with it, so...

HC: Great.

CG: But, yeah...

HC: Let me just do a pause.

HC: Ok. So, I think this number four. I'll try and whizz on to the end. So, looking back – obviously, Adam, you're a young person, and may think about the late 90s as, you know, not even being alive – but...!

AK: I was born in 1990, I can remember as far back as '95!

HC: Alright, fair enough. Well, that's good. That's perfect. So, around the turn of the millennium was really where the seed of this has come from. There were lots of ideas about what the internet was going to do. And I guess, from your point of view, you may have been working-

CG: Yeah.

HC: -and thinking about that at the time. And you were existing, so that's good! So, can you talk about what you thought were the great things that were going to be possible and that were going to happen, and what did you think it- the future was going to be?

CG: I think, we did think about- I mean, it was great, in those early days, when I first started, and we had fifty thousand images we were going to digitise, and you're just like: "Hah, massive project!"

and... But we have done big projects, but less than that! We've done ten thousand and fifteen thousand. But I wouldn't think we'd envisage doing another fifty thousand images as part of a project, these days, such a big investment of everyone's time, and, you know, storing those images, and things like that. I think we've learnt a lot about that side of things. So, yeah. It was a different thought- a different perspective, because we'd never done it before. So, we didn't know any of that. And they were all on CDs, they were stored on CDs, and we had to keep checking that you could open them, and that kind of thing. And then, we got to the stage where it was all on a shared drive, but then, the security of that's not great either. Someone can delete it, and you don't really realise until three years later. And we're a fairly big organisation, you know and by the time you need about fifteen, twenty people, looking at one drive, you know, it's easy for something to go missing. So, yeah, I think, it's only in the last couple of years, when we've been able to manage those properly, that we've really got to grips with what it is to digitise. And the future of that, for us – we're not even through that – we want people to be able to buy those images online and things, which is the next step for us. So, we're not even there, so you can't look at that digital asset management system as a customer and buy those images. Not all of them, we want people to have access to, but there should be an easier way than the way we deal with purchasing images. Yeah, so that's kind of, where we're going.

AK: Yeah. It's the biggest change I've seen internally. Where we're just, slightly, getting more focused, and making it easier to access the pictures and records. Whereas, before, you still, kind of, needed those 'dark arts' of collections people, of how to find things in the database, and going into AdLib, and all the rest of it-

CG: Yeah...

AK: -whereas, now, our marketing manager can find the images she needs, through a system that makes sense. So, it's just getting better and better, rather than doing more and more...

CG: Yes.

HC: And it- were you surprised – obviously, being- you probably think of a computer as a thing that's always existed – but, it- as-

AK: I had DOS. I remember DOS.

HC: Very good...! So- so you were there right at the birth of the internet, and- and it's come- it's changed-

AK: Yeah...

HC: -so incredibly fast. Can you remember what you thought was going to be possible, and- and are you surprised at, actually, how slow it's been?

AK: I think museums are stupidly slow at taking advantage of things. But because we have checks and balances, I think. Because... You look at places like Wikipedia, where even social media sites, and sites like reddit.com, where people are discussing history, and exploring stories, every single day, without museums even having to get involved. But the museums should be involved. They could be adding to the conversation. They could be contributing much more to Wikipedia, because more people use it than they use our sites. We have all these collections which could be illustrating history on the internet, but which are not there, because we're gatekeeping them, when they should belong to everyone. But then it gets into stories of finance, and checks and balances, and crediting sources, and all the rest of it. So, I think there's a reason museums are being slow. But I think we're slowly getting to the point where we've figured it out, and we can start opening up a bit more. And I feel like what MERL's done on Twitter is just a symptom of that. Whereas if you see people like the Rijksmuseum just letting it all out, and Wikimedians in residence... We're slowly on-trend of doing what the internet does well. Rather than trying to make the internet do what we want it to do, we're slowly getting into what they want, what works for the internet.

HC: I do think that the heritage world and the internet are almost two- they can't get on. Because museums should have created Wikipedia. That should have been what they were involved with, because they are interested in getting it right, and double-sourcing, and referencing things properly. But those are the very reasons why they couldn't do it. Because Wikipedia was fast and dirty. And people in research didn't want anything to do with that, because it might be wrong, because somebody can update it. So, I think, it's taken a really long time for the trust to grow. And actually, now, most organisations will be linking and updating their own Wikipedia page, which is a brand new thing that's only just happened. That's another one of my little pet theories. There you go. So...!

CG: But I think copyright is a problem. A real problem. It always has been for us. And often, with archives, as well, you don't- it's not just photos, it's letters, it's, you know, it's organisations assets, in a museum world, someone gives you an object, and they donate it. In archives, that doesn't happen, all the time. And so, we're always the gatekeeper. We are holding collections for organisations, but we haven't got complete control of them. And so, we can't just upload- like, we've got the Ladybird artwork for Penguin Random House. We haven't got the copyright for it. We couldn't just automatically put it all up there, which, we would like to do, at various times-

AK: But we'd get sued!

CG: -but it's not our copyright, so we are- so, you're constantly saying: "No, we can't use that," or "We need to get permission," or...

AK: Yeah.

CG: So, it is very difficult. So, I think museums find it hard, but-

AK: Mm...

CG: -I think archives-

AK: Even harder!

CG: -find it even harder.

AK: It's why I hate sites like- do you know Medieval Reacts? It's like, reaction images, using images from art galleries and museums, and they're using it in the kind of way I use Twitter. You know, they're just trying to be humorous and tie it into popular culture, but I absolutely hate it, because they never cite the sources. They never tell you where the picture's from. It's just become a meme, without any way of finding out where it came from, what it used to be, which I think is... We need to find a halfway house, somehow, but we're not meeting it halfway yet.

CG: Mm...

HC: Is that the "Can't even right now..." person? Yeah. I know them.

AK: Yeah.

HC: If- do you- tell me if you need to go, and we'll do a pause.

CG: If we could do five, ten minutes...

AK: Ok.

HC: Ok.

CG: Is that alright?

HC: Yeah, absolutely. Let's just go straight to the end. So, the big question is: if you could wave a magic wand and digitise everything – I think you've indicated that you would not digitise anything with copyright issues, and I think that's fair enough – but, if money was no object, would you digitise everything that was open? And- and if not, why not?

CG: I still wouldn't, because you need enough people to want to look at those records. And you're not doing it – I think you said – you're not doing it just for the sake of it. You've got to make sure that there is a demand for it. So, no, I wouldn't, even if I had all the resources in the world.

AK: I think I would if we could find a platform where people could actually meaningfully search through it, without just getting overwhelmed by it. And I don't know how. No-one seems to have figured out a way of doing it yet, apart from Google, I think. Google is the only search engine that

works, and museum databases are not as good as Google. So, until we find a way of making things easily searchable like that, there's not much point digitising it all.

HC: Do you think there's an experience gap? In terms of, people who've been doing it for longer tend to say: "Do you know what, now, I actually wouldn't," and people who are in their, perhaps, earlier careers, are like: "Yes, we're still all gung-ho, let's do everything."

CG: I don't know...

AK: I don't know. Because I don't actually get much power in what to digitise!

CG: I think, when it's objects, it's really important to have that digitised image, isn't it?

AK: 3D scanning.

CG: 3D scanning, it'll be great.

AK: That's the next one to...

CG: And most of the objects in the collection have got some kind of photo, even if it's an old photo, that was done twenty years ago. We've scanned those, so there is something. But when it's an organisation's correspondence, I just- I can't see it. I really can't see it.

AK: Yeah.

CG: Selected highlights, brilliant. A nice online exhibition, or-

AK: It does get tricky, with archives, 'cause so much of it is just... Crap?

CG: No! It's not!

AK: But it can be quite, like, dry minutes-

CG: Yeah

AK: -and meetings-

CG: -really dry-

AK: -and that kind of thing...

CG: -and, you know, it- for a researcher, going through, finding out, have- got a research question, they're very happy to go through all that. But-

AK: Yeah.

CG: -who else is going to do that, if they've not got a research question that they're...? Yeah. So, I just don't see- why do it? Even the- all of the Farmers' Weekly negs, we haven't...

AK: Oh, yes. Well, a lot of those are just pictures of fields. Sometimes.

CG: Even- yeah. Probably selected, for those. So, even things that are- we potentially do digitise, we'd still select. But some collections, we'd want to digitise everything.

AK: Yeah.

HC: So, if you were an alien in a spaceship, and all that you could find out about Earth was what you could suck off the WiFi, what would be your impression of the MERL, in terms of what's available, for somebody going in and just having a look online, and never having any physical contact with it at all? And what about heritage, generally? Do you think it- do you think only certain things are going online? Is it- is that giving a skewed idea of what exists?

AK: It's skewed, but I think we're actually quite good.

CG: Mm...

AK: Particularly on the objects side. We're quite rare, in that, everything is actually catalogued and is on the online database.

CG: For objects.

AK: For objects. It doesn't have absolutely everything, but it definitely gives you enough. So, I'd be quite happy with that. It's more- it's why I'd quite like to see more 3D scanning, because you can't get a proper idea of the objects-

CG: Yeah.

AK: -with a photograph. You need something a bit more manipulative.

CG: Pushing that frontier.

AK: But that's a whole other area, which gets into a lot of the same issues you've been talking about.

CG: And I think-

AK: Again.

CG: -I think, for me, it's, you know, making sure everything's catalogued is still that first priority. And in the archives, that everything isn't catalogued. So, I'd rather have access to everything, and then think about digitisation. It's still the first thing, for me.

HC: So, if we look – we've looked back twenty years, to the turn of the millennium – if we look forward twenty years, where do you think we're going to be, in that time? How much more will we have done, or will something new have popped up, or...?

CG: I hope it'll just be more accessible! Because it's still quite clunky. I think that's what we, we're at the stage we are at.

AK: I think, the way machine learning is going, with describing things and images, and hopefully...

What's that law? About processors getting more efficient but smaller every year, or something?

Technology is just getting better and better. I do have faith, that there should be an easy, cheap way of searching across databases, which isn't as clunky as it is now.

CG: Yeah. And perhaps more joined-up. That'd be good.

AK: That'd be really nice.

HC: That's another thing that we should have done, that we don't seem to be doing very well. And I think part of that, again, is a copyright, privacy, and ownership issue, is that, it's- everybody, back in 2000, was saying: "We're going to have to collaborate and share."

CG: Mm...

HC: Which is easily said-

CG: Yeah.

HC: -but not necessarily easily done-

CG: Yeah.

HC: -if you've got to justify your own organisation as a unit. So...

CG: We do do that, with archives. So, IBAN – the national archives – have got- you can look across all archives. But-

AK: Mm...

CG: -museum world? Do they do that, quite as much?

AK: The Collections Trust has a list, I think. I can't remember.

CG: It's not all their databases-

AK: No.

CG: -combined.

HC: And the danger is, if you let it out in the world, you can't measure who's using it, and what they're using it for, I guess.

CG: Mm...

HC: So, that's another reason why you'd, perhaps, want to keep a tether to it, and have it tethered to your own-

CG: Mm...

HC: -social media, or...

AK: Yeah. Well, there's Google Arts and Culture, I guess, which aggregates, and then links through, back to other people's catalogues, which is slowly building up, but... What are their motivations, and what is it for?

CG: I know...

AK: It's all a bit iffy, with Google. And it does seem to be very heritage-, and built-heritage-, and object-focused. It's not, actually, really getting into archives and library, unless there's a particularly

nice-looking book. It's almost all about the visual, in Google Arts and Culture, I think. I still want to be on it.

HC: I will ask one more question. So, what have you learned, from your digitisation experiences?

CG: Lots of things, actually. I think we've probably mentioned them, during the time we've chatted. I think we were all about quantity to begin with, we're more about quality now, and... Yeah. So, I think that's the main thing. And obviously, digitisation has got easier. I think we used to send everything out, someone used to do it! It was very expensive. We try and do that ourselves, now. Yeah, so, it has been a journey, I'd say. And especially films, were really tricky, but we still send that out, we don't deal with it, so...

HC: And what have you learnt from your different ways of trying to get collections to people, which has included social media?

AK: I think, for, like, all the problems we've had, and all the faults, digitisation is the bedrock of how we interact with the public, in the future, on the internet. Without digitised collections, there is literally nothing to talk about except what we can take photographs of, ourselves. So, if it's not done well, from a collections side, it's impossible to use on the communications side. But it's more than just having it available. The institution really needs to look at itself, and what it's trying to communicate, and the different staff need to come together. So, it's more than just a technical issue. It's more of a cultural issue.

HC: Great.

AK: Yeah.

HC: Thank you both very much.

Peter Elliott
RAF Museum
12th December 2018

PE: Peter Elliott

HC: Helen Casey

HC: So, first of all, just so that I can identify you, could you introduce yourself for me, and explain to me your position, as it was at the museum?

PE: Right, well, my name's Peter Elliott, and I worked at the Royal Air Force Museum from 1984 to 2016, and my final post was Head of Archives, and when I retired, I became their first Curator Emeritus.

HC: Fantastic. And can you give me a little bit of background about the collection that- that was held there?

PE: Ok, well, the museum has a very broad collection, both two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Three-dimensional - all the way from buttons to large aircraft. Two-dimensional: fine art, film, photographs, a library, and my particular responsibility was for archives. So, personal papers, some official documents, and material like that.

HC: Can you give me an idea of the size, the number of objects, the number of bits of paper, the number of...

PE: That is difficult. When we were building an electronic catalogue for a lot of my time there, and when I retired, we'd got somewhere in the region of three hundred thousand items in the catalogue, from across the collections, but there is plenty more left to do. And that may be, perhaps, five percent?

HC: That's pretty good.

PE: So, quite possibly over a million pieces of- well, a million objects, and maybe, if you go down to individual pages of documents, perhaps getting on for fifty thousand? But that's a guess.

HC: So, that's a good size.

PE: Yes.

HC: What was your background in heritage, before you were at the RAF Museum? What did you do before that?

PE: Well, when I couldn't join the Air Force, I had some very useful careers guidance, and became a technical librarian, and I worked for the Ministry of Defence for six years before I got the job at Hendon. And my particular interest in the Air Force goes back as far as I can remember. There was never any doubt that I was going to get involved, in some way, with aviation. When I was training as a technical librarian, one of my tutors got some money from the British Library, which gave us access to a very early online database, and that was something of a revelation: the fact that you didn't need to wade through abstracts in journals or card catalogues, you could do it all online. And so, my first job involved an electronic catalogue, and - with a bit of a gap, because the museum was somewhat behind that curve - I've been involved in that sort of thing ever since.

HC: Ok. So, can you tell me a bit about what you see as the heritage of the RAF Museum? What is it that it's trying to collect and retain?

PE: Heritage, in my view, relates to the past of an organisation, or a group of people, like a family. And it has been difficult to quantify what the museum was looking for. In many ways, it turned into an aeroplane museum, rather than an Air Force museum. In the last few years of my time there, and since, it has become much more of an Air Force museum, in my view. There is much more about the stories of the people, whether they are the great and good or the ordinary men and women,

certainly in the public side of the museum. We were collecting that sort of material anyway, but it was difficult to make it accessible.

HC: So, talk to me through your experiences of digitisation. You've obviously got a long history, from the beginning.

PE: Yes!

HC: So, tell me the stories of what went well, what didn't go well...

PE: Ah, well... We started building the electronic catalogue in the late 90s. And part of the vision for that was to have digitised images of the material in the collection, so that from, really, any office in the organisation, you could find pictures of: works of art, at the far end of the building from where I sat; and things like uniforms that were in store at our Stafford site, so, you know, probably a couple hundred miles away; and also, things on display at our Cosford site. So, obviously, the idea was partly to make them much easier for people to see, but also as a security issue, in case something got damaged, or – perish the thought – something was stolen. Or went missing. It's very easy to mis-file things!

HC: And so, was the intention always to share that with people, and show them what you have? Or was it a more internal process?

PE: I think, at that stage, it was intended to be internal. That was partly because the suppliers of the system, that we used, hadn't quite developed an online interface. That has happened. To my mind, it doesn't work desperately well. But there was, I think, something of a vision along those lines, in the early days. But it had to take a back seat in comparison to getting everything that we had into the database.

HC: And in terms of where you were, do you consider that the museum was an early adopter of the technology? Or do you think it took a while to, kind of, catch up?

PE: We had a director who was very much an early adopter – and adaptor! The difficulty was getting the funding. There was an element of waiting for the technology to mature enough to do what he would really like it to do. We ended up with a specification for the system which was about two inches thick. Very detailed, and obviously, there was mention of digital images in there, but not so much – as I remember, anyway – on a public interface.

HC: So, at what point did all of that digitised material get put in front of the public? At what point could they look at it?

PE: They could see it in, for example, the reading room, which was, you know, sort of, my domain, where people came to do research. And I think we got the system to a reasonable level in around about '99, 2000. I'm not quite sure when we launched the public interface, which was called 'Navigator'. That's- gosh, that's twenty years ago, nearly! But it was always more of an online exhibition than an online catalogue. And I think we got some of the, yeah, minor details, like how people would search, not particularly right. We had a very specific indexing vocabulary, which was great for us, because we used it day-in, day-out; not easily understood by other people.

HC: So, was there an extra piece of work, that had to be done, in order to make it public-facing? Did you have to go back?

PE: We didn't go back to the cataloguing. We were still trying to build the database, and they are still not complete, in that regard. Primarily because other things, like exhibitions, have got in the way. There was a major revamp, over the Hendon site, which opened this year. They're now working on a revamp of the Cosford site. And so, the human resource, to go into that, hasn't really been enough to complete the cataloguing.

HC: You said that what went online was more of an online exhibition than an online catalogue. Can you explain what the motivation was, and who made those decisions, and why?

PE: The decisions were made by a project board, which I sat on, and was chaired by the director who is the early adopter that we've talked about. I think, the overall vision of the system was that it

would be a catalogue for internal use, so we could be accountable for what we'd got. You know, we could tell you what was in a particular box on a particular shelf, for example. And we had to do stock checks, and so on. I've a feeling that using it as a public research catalogue was less of a priority, really, than just giving people the ability to see some of what we had.

HC: Did that change, over time? Did showing people examples of what you had become more important, once you had the security of knowing you had it all in the catalogue?

PE: I think, in a sense, it was overtaken by events. That director retired in 2010. His successor was very focused on preparations for the First World War centenary in 2014, and he left in 2014. And his successor had to focus very much on getting ready for the RAF centenary this year, and that was quite a major project, both in terms of fundraising, but also actually deciding what stories we were going to tell, how we were going to do it, getting staff to do the exhibitions scripts, and so on.

HC: So, it's a shame, in a way, that that online story couldn't've been told at the same time, if you'd been ready to do so.

PE: Yes. Although the actual curatorial side of the museum is relatively low in numbers. Less than twenty, I think. And so, there was a lot of work to be done, by not a very large group.

HC: Were there funding or policy influences on what you decided to digitise and what you didn't?

PE: The funding, in a sense, initially, was not a question, because we were doing it using internal resources. We didn't need to go out to a contractor to digitise things, or to create an online catalogue, because that was part of the overall development of the catalogue. In terms of policy, it was very much aimed, as we've said, at accountability. Where we did have funding issues is with the casualty records project that I developed. And the original idea was in the middle of '98, and that was when, coming up to the millennium, the New Opportunities Fund became available. We put in a bid to that, which was unsuccessful. And at that sort of time, we had bids going in to HLF, but that was for, effectively, a new building, and a new exhibition. So, mine was very much back of the queue, and it, sort of, remained that way for quite a long time, until... Ooh, let me think... It might have been the change of director in 2010. Because the project related, primarily, to First World War, and our new director was a First War historian. So, obviously, it appealed to him. I had something else in mind then... I can't think what it was. That's right: we were also discussing, round about that time, with Ancestry, the idea of getting them involved, to do the digitisation and host the data. But it was eventually decided, after our collections management team said they could do it, that we would do it in-house.

HC: And is that what happened? And how did that go?

PE: They did the digitisation; they did a lot of transcription, to index what were, mostly, manuscript records. We did bring in an IT firm to produce the database. And the missing link, in this, is that in about 2003, I offered it, as a project, to a computer studies student at UH, who just happened to be my wife, for her to do a final year project. And, you know, she gave it a good go, but it wasn't at a state where it could be taken forward. So, in a sense, I was, sort of, scrabbling around for some way to make it work, but- it took a few- well, it's talking, maybe, about ten years. It finally went live in 2014, and seems to be, you know, reasonably- it seems to work, it seems to be getting a lot of usage, which is the important bit.

HC: Great. I'm also asking about reasons not to digitise. Are there parts of the collection that you discussed about being not suitable for digitisation? And tell me how those decisions were made.

PE: I think the main issue is that some of these things were – and are – quite bulky documents. There are things that we would like to digitise, not just for access, but also for security: log books for, you know, the great and good, you know, we have various- for example, Battle of Britain pilots, and they are at risk from potential theft. I've never been burgled, but I have had pages ripped out of books. But then, at that stage, we didn't really see how we could digitise something that might be half an inch to an inch thick. You know, now, we would do it as a PDF, but we didn't quite have that

understanding of the technology, and I think the technology was still developing at that stage, as well. So, I think, in a sense, that boils down to effort, with a bit of technology, in terms of, a lot of digitisation, perhaps, for not a great deal of gain.

HC: I've written a list of seven reasons not to digitise. Not everybody's mentioned all of them, but if you can talk to me about which of them have been important, or perhaps not important at all, during your projects?

PE: Yes, I've tried to rank those, and failed! The cost thing, we effectively absorbed much of it in-house. In later years, we've managed to get some money from, primarily, HLF. The second phase of the digitisation project required a lot of conservation work before we could even think of scanning things, and that was supported by HLF. The original casualty database had funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. Yes, it takes a lot of time. We did decide to do what we did do mostly in-house, with some volunteer input. There was a lack of understanding of IT, and particularly some skills, which was a bit of a problem. Yes, the fear of obsolescence, you know, when IT was developing, particularly digitisation. So, all the artwork was scanned at low resolution, because that was all we could do. You know, it was done with a – ah, gosh – a camera which, now, would be getting on for twenty years old, which, you know, didn't produce high-res photos. Yes, political will... There was- I suppose, in that sense, it was the focus on other things: that we needed to curate these exhibitions, we needed to populate the database. And work for something that might be seen as an off-shoot was a relatively low priority. Privacy and copyright was relatively straightforward. Firstly, because in the casualty records, virtually everybody would have been dead, and therefore data protection doesn't apply. Copyright: the records were crown copyright, and we had a licence for that, so that was straightforward. I think, the biggest issue, in not digitising, was finding the resource, in the organisation, to do it. And that was partly curatorial staff to do the work, but also, you know, the one IT person was, you know, frantically busy with other aspects of the IT network, and it was difficult to get time and server space. To use Tim's time, primarily, to advise us on how to go. But also, you know, we would be filling the servers with images, and so on.

HC: What strikes me, about a museum like the RAF Museum, is you attract a lot of enthusiasts. People who are really excited about what you have. Do you think part of this reason not to digitise is that those people will come to you anyway? You're not going out to find people to come and visit, because you've got that enthusiastic core base, who's desperate to see what you have.

PE: There is as you say, a core of enthusiasts, who will come, although they do have, perhaps, greater expectations than some of the people who will just come for an afternoon's... You know, my boss- my final boss talks about paddlers, swimmers, and divers. The paddlers will come for an hour or so, to keep the children amused. The swimmers will stay longer. And the divers will spend all day, whether it's walking round the exhibitions, or in the reading room, doing their own research. Not just the enthusiasts, but some of the more interested visitors, are desperate to get into aircraft. So, I think we did do some trials with 360° photography, in aircraft. And I was at the museum a fortnight ago, to help with testing the Virtual Reality Experience, based on the Dams Raid. And I've very little experience of virtual reality, but gosh! You know, to actually have this headset on, and be able to, you know, look out of the window, and see the spray going down the side, or... I was actually sitting on basically, a plank. But you turn your head round, and there's a famous thing in the Lancaster, which is the main spar of the wing, which goes all the way through, and is about *that* high. And, you know, you hear about people struggling to get over the spar, and so on. And suddenly, there it was, behind me. That sort of thing, I think, is going to be more and more in demand. Whether people will really want to spend time reading, you know, Douglas Bader's log book, or the manual for the Spitfire, or something, you know, it's not going to be everybody who wants to do that. There will be people who do, but I don't think... And that's where you get the problem, you know: how much

usage will it get? If you don't do it, nobody's going to use it, but, you know, whether supply creates enough demand is another question.

HC: I think you've really put your finger on a really important point, when you talk about virtual reality. I've got a feeling that the technology gallops forward so fast that nothing can get finished before the next thing overtakes it. Do you feel that that's happened in your experience?

PE: Well, I think, in that sense, the 360 photography was a great idea. And I've seen it in the Smithsonian in Washington, or rather, at their out-station that's at Dulles airport, where there is a screen for every aircraft, and you can, you know, look round the cockpit from that. Yes, technology is still developing at an amazing rate, and it becomes old hat: "Oh, gosh, 360° photography. What I really want is virtual reality."

HC: And what on Earth happened to object-by-object digitisation in all that? I mean, will that ever get done, when everything else is expensive, and new, and exciting?

PE: I don't think it would be done to create – for a better expression – an experience for people. When we photographed uniform, we took, I think, four photographs, you know: front, left side, back, right side. Whether we would ever combine those, in some way, to produce the 360 thing, that you could... You know... If you can walk round a uniform, or, I don't know, sort of, turn it round to look at it, I don't think we would bother. Yes, there is always something more exciting on its way, I think.

HC: Okay, so, moving onto the next section: looking back, you obviously were involved in heritage in the very early years of the internet.

PE: Yes.

HC: So, what were your thoughts, if you can remember, at the time, about this new internet, connecting everybody in the world, what did you think it could do?

PE: Can we go back before the internet?

HC: Absolutely.

PE: In 19- I think it was 1982, I did an evening class in family history. It's one of the ways in which I got into history. And I'd done a bit already. And in those days, you had to go to St Catherine's House, and pull these big ledgers off the shelf, plonk them on the table, and search through for the, you know, the birth, marriage, or death you were looking for. And this was explained to us, and I remember a chap saying: "Oh, I thought it would all be on computer," and I laughed my socks off, because, yeah, would the government ever invest in digitising all of that information? Then there was Ancestry! And all the other commercial firms who did that sort of thing. And, you know, of course, the crowdsourcing thing of Free BMD. So, yeah, one day I must eat those words. But, yeah. So, I think, I was introduced to the internet when I was doing my Archives MA at UCL, and that was probably '93 or '94, and gosh, you know, what a resource! You know, having been a librarian, it was like having an enormous library, some of the contents of which were not entirely reliable, and some of which you really didn't want to go and see. But did I really think, at that stage – because I didn't understand about- we weren't told about digitisation; I'm not sure we ever really got, at that stage, anything about, you know, digital formats, like JPEGs and PDFs – so, a very interesting resource to have, but, in a sense, would I ever use it? And, over time, we started to use- you know, because every museum had to have a website, and I think we'd launched ours in '97, so that was twenty-five years since the museum opened. And the patron, Prince Philip, came, and pressed a button, and a pair of curtains opened. All very sad. But that's the sort of thing that people were keen to do, on the internet, in those days. We started using it to, obviously, explain more about the collections, and to try and answer a lot of the questions that we were asked, which, in many ways, we couldn't answer. We'd already produced leaflets about how to find your relative's RAF service record, so that was a, you know, an obvious thing, to put those on the web, and try and stem some of the flood of enquiries that we used to get. But it was only in '98, so that's not long after. I used to run the trade

fair for the Society of Archivists conference, and one of the exhibitors, in '98, was Hackney Archives, who had produced a thing called 'Hackney Online' – I don't know if it's still online – but it was a mixture of maps, photographs... I'm not sure whether they had documents in there, but they may well have done. And again, that was one of these revelations, where I saw that we could bring together various related documents – the casualty records, the Air Force list, and the muster roll – and make those available as a sort of one stop shop. And, you know, it only took sixteen years to get it online, but we got there in the end!

HC: I actually think getting anything online is a massive triumph. Why do you think it has been so slow, for object-by-object collections to go online? Because I think I went online in 2014, when I began this doctorate, with an assumption. And because I came from outside heritage, my assumption was, I would be able to go online, and see what everybody had. And this turned out to be not at all the case. There were a few who were doing it well and in bulk but many were doing nothing at all, which really surprised me. Why do you think it took so long for this kind of sharing: "This is what we have," to happen?

PE: I think, in a lot of museums, the resource, perhaps, isn't there, for the work to do the digitisation. Even if you're not photographing or scanning, yourself, quite often you need somebody to, you know, get the object off the shelf, put it on whatever equipment you're going to use to scan it, or digitise it, you know, you may well have a professional photographer doing it, but they may not be trained in object handling, and so on. And the vast number of museums seem, to me, to be thinly staffed, certainly in terms of local museums. Whether they have the resources to involve volunteers in that work, I don't know, and obviously it will vary from one to another. And, you know, when you have the other priorities, of keeping the museum open, creating new displays to get new visitor- or at least, perhaps, old visitors back in, digitisation, perhaps, has to take that lower priority.

HC: For you, have virtual visitors been considered less important, as feet through the door, then?

PE: In the early stages, we were keen to include website visits to the visitor figures that go in the annual report. I'm not sure whether that happens now, and certainly not sure, in terms of reporting, whether some of the online resources are measured in that way. I would hope that looking at how those resources are being used is part of the management information that's gathered regularly. Yes, so, whether it's important to develop virtual visitors perhaps depends on the way the museum is looking. Certainly, the RAF Museum, recently, launched another online thing – you know, is it an online site? An online resource, that'll do – called 'My RAF Story', which involves video interviews of people who may, themselves, have served. I was looking at one at lunchtime, with a lady talking about her mother's time in the WAAF. And those are a variety of stories, from people who served – obviously, time is limiting how far back you can go – but certainly people who served in the Second World War, up to people who are serving at the moment. Short video interviews, but useful to gather some of the information that doesn't actually come out in the documents. There is a potential issue, with modern technology, in that, whereas people in the- well, from the start- most of the Twentieth Century, people would write diaries, or letters home... Nowadays, they send emails, they might blog, their digital photographs don't sit in a box in the loft... And how we gather the experience of today's – in my case – service people, is something which is having to change, through video interviews. I don't think there's any thought of archiving, you know, people's Facebook- no, Twitter posts. We talked about gathering websites from organisations that were having to close down, veterans' organisations, but it was pointed out, by somebody at the meeting from the National Archives, that, you know, the web archive is being preserved anyway. But then you have the difficulty of finding it.

HC: So, we'll move on to the last section: looking forward. We've gone back, to think about what were the opportunities around the millennium. With twenty years of experience, can you look forward another twenty years? Where do you think the online heritage world is going?

PE: I think, the thing I've learned most, is that it's very dangerous to even think about what it might be like in twenty years' time, you know, as with all the genealogy databases that I never thought would happen. There is the issue of born digital material, and that's partly, I think, because of the quantity involved. Whereas, you know, we used to take twenty-four or thirty-six photos on a reel of film, we've had days on holiday where my wife's taken a hundred photographs. Not all of them have been suitable, but that issue makes life a lot worse, because you can't easily flick through them, either. Where will technology take heritage? Gosh... I wonder whether we will ever get round to putting collections fully online, in terms of producing, you know, a digital image, or a digital file, of, say, Douglas Bader's log book, or will we skip ahead to the next exciting thing, whatever that might be? And- because, I think, personally, and in terms of the way the museum has worked, we're very poor at finishing projects. There's always a little something left to do, which might be quite a big something. Other people might do it better. But yes, will we be looking at something- some tool which is, you know, totally different? You know, whether virtual reality becomes more widespread, or... trouble is, it's that, sort of, thinking-outside-the-box thing, that I'm, personally, not very good at. And, you know, when you have to think outside the box, it's very hard to predict, you know, how far outside the box somebody will go.

HC: How much, do you think, this is about personality? So, you've talked about your director, who was very forward-thinking. Do you think what goes online, and when, has very much to do with who's in charge at the time, and what they see as important?

PE: I think, what they see as important, yes. Because you can have a brilliant idea, but if it doesn't strike the right chord with, you know, the guy in charge of the organisation – 'guy' is an ambidextrous term, of course; our museum currently has a wonderful CEO, called Maggie – yes, if it doesn't strike a chord with them, and their priorities, then that can be difficult. If it doesn't tick the boxes that funders want, that really makes you struggle, as well. So, in a sense, you do need to be aware of, sort of, individual and corporate personalities, which you should be doing anyway, if you're writing a funding brief. But you- you do need to be a little bit careful in how you spin it.

HC: In terms of how funding has been available, in your experience, what bias has that given to what's been chosen to put online?

PE: A little bit difficult to say, because I think a lot of the stuff we have put online has been funded in-house, but I...

HC: You did have a funding application turned down. What was their reason?

PE: Lots of other people putting in funding applications, and I think we were not really, you know, ticking enough of the boxes.

HC: And what were those boxes you weren't ticking? That's what I'm trying to get at.

PE: That I can't remember. This is, you know, nearly twenty years ago. The success we had was, firstly, with Esmee Fairbairn, for the initial projects. And then we had a very good case for the conservation work on the casualty forms. And they turned down most of the funding application for a new- again, a major overhaul, of part of the museum, but they did like the idea of conserving these forms, before- I think the phrase I used was: "Before they are reported missing, believed lost."

HC: So, there was a risk element to what was successful, in that, they might actually be stolen or destroyed or...

PE: In that case, they would have fallen apart. And even if we'd done it carefully, getting them into the scanners, and so on, they would have crumbled. Twentieth Century paper is very acidic. Wartime paper is even worse, because it was, well, what we now call 'recycled' they called 'salvage'. And, right, it's almost as bad as newsprint, and very brittle, and whenever we took one of these binders off the shelf, there was always a little shower of paper dust, and you could see them crumbling away at the edges.

HC: Looking at what is online, how would you say your organisation is represented? If you were an alien, and you could only see what was sucked up through the WiFi, how would you feel that heritage was represented?

PE: There is, certainly, how the searchable side of things, whether it's the casualty records, does show that there is a great deal of human involvement, and a certain amount of tragedy, in the Air Force's history. The material in Navigator, which is a broad selection, but not a complete list, of what's in the catalogue, shows that there are visual records, and written records, and three-dimensional material. Some of it has been grouped into, I suppose, mini exhibitions. Things like the gadgets that were smuggled into prisoner-of-war camps to help people escape. But a lot of the material will come up, from a fairly broad search, and give you a selection of material from the collection, which, I suppose, if nothing else, proves that it is a wide-ranging collection, and that the Air Force now has a hundred years of history and heritage.

HC: If you could wave a magic wand, and have ultimate funding and time, would you put everything online? And if not, why not?

PE: There will be some things which might cause distress to people. Possibly, some material which might not put the Air Force in a good light, although I'm struggling to think of something. And I think some things might be just so boring that they will- well, you might say 'boring', you might say 'have a very limited audience'. You know, servicing schedules for aeroplanes are not, sort of, bedtime reading, but they will send you to sleep quickly. But, you know, the audience out there is quite diverse, and various things will appeal to various sub-groups. So, potentially, almost everything might find an interest- might spark somebody's interest. But I'm conscious that there would be, you know, a bell curve, where, yeah, the vast amount of the collection is of interest, but there are certainly things at either end, in terms of, you know, limited interest, to most people.

HC: In terms of whether that matters or not, do you think it's important for artefacts that normally, in a way, belong to all of us, because they are the history and heritage of our country, of our different kinds of people... Do you think there's a democratising effect of sharing that, so that anyone in the world can see it? And do you think that's important to do?

PE: Yes, and I think it does get you into, potentially, more of a- into looking more at online exhibitions, where you actually interpret objects. But yes, you can produce something which – in terms of exhibitions – which tells a story which people may not understand. And there was originally a physical exhibition, in the museum, on African-Caribbean people in the Air Force; my main contribution was the name: "Pilots of the Caribbean." But that told a large- well, say, two dozen stories of individuals, from the First World War up to the 80s, who had come from that sort of background, and explained that, you know, these people not only contributed to the Air Force in various different ways, but a lot of them also had an effect, after their time in the Air Force, on society as a whole. And this grew out of a discussion that one of my chaps had, with some young African-Caribbean men, explaining some of these stories. And one of them said something like, you know: "Gosh, I thought-" – he certainly didn't say 'gosh' – "I didn't- I thought we only peeled potatoes and dug trenches." And, you know, there was a photograph of two Spitfire pilots from the West Indies. And it was only later on that Peter discovered that these two chaps were gang members. So, he'd totally changed their perception of the Air Force. And, you know, it was quite a remarkable change. And it got a lot of response. And that is now an online exhibition, so it's going out to a wider audience. We've done that with Poles and Czechs, as well. And any exhibition, I think, that gets a complaint from the English Defence League, has got to be a good thing.

HC: Fantastic. Thank you so much for your time.

PE: My pleasure, nice to talk to you.

Christopher Streek
York Museums Trust
17th January 2019

CS: Christopher Streek

HC: Helen Casey

HC: OK. So, this is recording one. So, first of all, would you just be able to introduce yourself for me, and tell me about your role and the organisation you work in?

CS: Yeah, not a problem at all. So, my name is Chris Streek, and I'm the Digitisation Officer here at York Museums Trust. The Trust actually operates a number of sites across York. We operate the Castle Museum, which, kind of, caters for, kind of, social history, and the objects and accoutrements that are, kind of, relevant to that. We also operate York Art Gallery, which, obviously, as is clear in its name, is an art gallery, so we have fine art and works on paper, and also, it's also the Centre of Ceramic Art, which has a massive, kind of, pot and ceramic art collection, as well. And we also operate the Yorkshire Museum, which is based in York Museum gardens, and that is, primarily, focused towards Medieval and Roman collections, and natural science and archaeology collections, as well. So, we have quite a diverse mix of objects and artefacts and archives. I'll be completely honest: we don't know exactly how many objects we've got, but it's numbering in about two to two-point-five million, at the moment. At the moment, we're going through quite a large documentation drive, where a lot of these objects are being documented through volunteers, and through full-time or temporary position documentation assistants, assisting the curators and assistant curators. As I mentioned before, we're currently in the early stages of stores consolidation projects. So, as well as the sites, the museum sites, which are open to the public in York, we have a number of off-site storage locations dotted around York, where we have, obviously, the stores of things not currently on display. So, everything in the galleries isn't everything we have. We do have some on-site stores locations in the museums, as well. So, in the early 2020s, we're looking at consolidating all of these, kind of, distant satellite storage locations to one primary location, where everything is in one place, hopefully. And I'll probably mention, a bit later on, that we are looking at putting a digital footprint into that stores, as well. So, that'll be not, primarily, a photographic or digitisation studio, but it'll be more of a general content creation studio, with digitisation elements added into it. So, things such as film, content creation for social media channels, as well as your, kind of, your more, kind of, well-known, kind of, just pure digitisation: images of objects, photogrammetry, spectral analysis, things like that. So, yeah. That's the organisation: York Museums Trust.

HC: Great. Just, while I'm thinking about it, why is this happening now, as far as you know? This is a big project. What's the, kind of, push to do this at this point?

CS: So, the drive for the documentation is about- so, we're in 2019, so, around about 2010/11, it was deemed that some of the systems in place at the Trust were not fit for purpose. So, obviously, to support getting our collections online, and becoming more visible, it was deemed that a new digital team was to be set up. As part of that digital theme, it was identified that there was a massive gap regarding imaging and digitisation of the collections. Obviously, we have our core object records, that, some were in a good state, up to certain standards, and some were in quite a poor state, and some not actually visible at all. So, again, the ball started rolling, regarding documentation, and obviously, in line with that, there was digitisation, as well. Whereas, they made a post, in about 2013, when the digital team was set up, for a full-time Digitisation Officer, to start here at the Trust. Prior to that, it was very ad-hoc, where it was, usually, either external photographers, or collections staff taking images of collections objects on their phones or on point-and-shoot cameras. There was

no standardisation. And then, mixed into that, you had consultants coming in, who were photographing things, supplying the low-res JPEGs, not the high-res master TIFs. Things weren't colour-calibrated correctly. The licensing documentation wasn't in check, so obviously, the rights weren't assigned over to the museum. And then, prior to that, you had legacy images that, really, only existed on colour transparencies and black-and-white negatives, and so on and so forth. So, you had this massive hotchpotch of different photography and images that had been- I think it's the same, really, in any institution: you have that legacy of images that have, kind of, existed, but no-one's, kind of, really, managed it. And again, my prior experience, I actually managed an image library. So, when I first started in, kind of, collections and so on, it was- I inherited what- I think, the gentleman that I, kind of, replaced, or he'd moved on to another position, and we had the handover, and he just handed me over, one day, a box of about a thousand unsorted black-and-white negatives. And he was like: "Don't open that box. Never open the box, because once you open the box, you have to then sort through them all and, obviously, catalogue them, and so on." So, here at the Trust, there has never been any, sort of, official image library, or a licensing department, to actually manage that backlog of assets. So, it was a difficult thing. You've got all this old photography that no-one's really looked at, that's in a completely random hotchpotch state, and then it was deemed that there should be some sort of standardisation. Some sort of standards in place, where somebody that- we have- you know, the digital team either images it themselves – and I'll go on to talk about this a bit more later – but we have a very, very healthy volunteers programme here at the Trust. So, again, they're a fantastic resource. So, it was deemed that we, kind of, democratise digitisation. We give staff and volunteers the tools, the training, and the know-how, for them to image things themselves. And again, there- it's, kind of, a touchy subject, with regards to digitisation, and in digitisation circles, because digitisation is in some regards, deemed as a 'black art', or a, kind of, mystery science, or something like that. And we wanted to just, kind of, become more transparent, and basically look at the processes of why people are imaging things, and how they're imaging things, and what they're trying to do with those images, and make the processes simple, and as clean, and as quick as possible, while maintaining minimum standards. That, you know, there's no-one's thumb in that photo, or it's got a scale in it, or it's, you know, got a colour-checker card in there, or, you know, we keep the raw files, or we, you know, we have a master TIF to archive, and so on. So, going back to your original question – going on a tangent – around 2013, the digital team was created here at the Trust to take ownership and manage that, kind of, ongoing digitisation programme. I mean, in my experience, by about 2013, I would consider that quite late in the day in, kind of, heritage circles, to start an official digitisation programme. But in the six years since it started, it has, kind of, snowballed, really, and it's been an immense success. Again, I always think the Trust- I've worked in Nationals before, and I always think that the Trust does punch above its weight, with regards to what we need to achieve and what we do. Again, we're not funded by DCMS, it's all from ticketing through the doors and so on. So, yeah, the stores consolidation project, and the, kind of, digitisation, and just, basically, we have to acknowledge that there is a massive documentation backlog. There's a massive digitisation backlog. I don't think even a full, kind of, team of photographers would even make much of a dent in a number of years. So, it's deemed that we try to make- as I said, we try to make the processes as quick and easy as possible, and we digitally up-skill people to image stuff themselves. Doesn't mean that there isn't a place for, kind of, that premium, high-end photography, for whatever purpose, whatever- you know, servicing whatever request comes in. But it just gives collections staff, and volunteers, and the teams of collections, the ability to image things to a professional standard themselves. The stores consolidation project, again, is an off-shoot, where the existing storage locations- it's not- the collections are not static in any way. So, we can't- you know, we have new acquisitions coming in all of the time, obviously, according to our acquisitions policy. So, there's only so much space in stores, and we've got lots of

objects, so again, it was deemed as a risk, obviously, particularly for, you know, conditions and, obviously, preservation of these objects, and so on. Though, obviously, the money has, obviously, been secured to, obviously, build a new, kind of, bespoke stores, according to, you know, whatever specification we want. But hopefully going to be available in 2021, I believe, off the top of my head. So, yeah, that's, kind of, the overall view, at the moment. So...

HC: And what about yourself? Do you have a collections background, as well as that technical background? How have you come into this?

CS: So, my background, I, kind of, fell into national heritage, or, kind of, the heritage industry. I studied at Leeds, where I did a history degree. And as most, kind of, graduates, I didn't have any money, and my loan had run out, obviously, when the results came in, so I was applying for jobs. And I was based in Leeds at the time. So, after a number of really bad call centre jobs, looking for a, kind of, career path, I, kind of, fell into working in Visitor Services at the Royal Armouries in Leeds, because I've done history, and museums are about history, so it was, kind of, a natural fit. And then that was in around 2004. And then, from about 2004 till 2008, I'd moved up to the, kind of, Visitor Services manager, and then I'd moved into the Commercial Retail arm, where I was doing buying, and doing some web stuff. And then, I moved over, across, to working for Education Department and Bookings, and working with schools and schoolteachers and things. And then, in around 2008, I then moved over to Collections – into the rock'n'roll world of collections – and the Curators Department, where I became an image- well, I was a junior image librarian, so to speak. So, I moved into, kind of, being responsible for managing, cataloguing, data entry, scanning, limited digitisation of, kind of, negatives and transparencies and glass plates and things. There was also an element of sales with that, and obviously, kind of, licensing, and sale of IP, and so on. And then, from about 2009 to about 2016, I, kind of, became Senior Licensing Officer and Image Librarian, which is, obviously, I'm getting old. So, I was then responsible for running the Royal Armouries' Image Library. And from 2008, when I first started, it was very much more reactive, in the sense that you'd be getting- you'd be mainly dealing with incoming requests, either internally, servicing internal requests from staff, or you'd be dealing with external commercial enquiries. So: "I'd like to license a picture of a sword for my book on swords," and obviously, we'd deal with the licence and paperwork and sort it out and, obviously, do picture research and so on. What we found, was it was actually quite a healthy income stream. So, again, we moved into more of a, kind of, proactive commercial, kind of, direction, where we, you know, started going to fairs, image fairs, you know, marketing materials and so on. And it was quite a healthy, kind of, income that was coming in, actually. So, in 2016, a position opened up here at the Trust, for Digitisation Officer. Obviously, after doing all the research and things, I, kind of, felt that I was not doing as much hands-on digitisation, I was more in, kind of, meetings, in senior level meetings, most of the time. So, maybe it was an early mid-life crisis or something, I don't know. But I decided to move into more a, kind of, hands-on, kind of, role, where I'm actually doing pure photography. While I was working at the Armouries as an image librarian, they didn't have a digitisation officer on staff. So, they dealt with a lot of external photographers coming in, who either were just standard, kind of, photographers, that photographed places and spaces and people, and weren't used to photographing that nature of item, or they weren't aware of some of the conditions of the object, as in, how you're supposed to handle it, how you're supposed to mount it, how you're supposed to light it... And obviously, the procedures with, you know, conservation and curators and so on. So, sometimes that was a bit, kind of, that did slow the process down. And then, obviously, when I started managing the, kind of, image library, we kept photographers on the books which we knew were more geared, or they were aware of these issues. But obviously, due to costs and so on, photographers came in a couple of times a year, and in those gaps, there was periods where a curator would say: "I need this for a book," and then there was no-one around to, obviously, photograph it. And obviously, because they didn't have a photographic

studio, we had the remnants of a photographic studio that they had in the past, I, kind of, inherited a hotchpotch of equipment. I had a really- I mean, I used to photograph people and bands and things, in Leeds, so I had an interest in photography outside of the, kind of, heritage industry. But I think a lot of image librarians have that, kind of, photography side to them, as well. They're looking at images all day. They're working and post-processing them. They're working with the photographers on the shoots, so you have that natural- or you pick up a lot of information about how to photograph things. So, it's, kind of, a natural step, really, into, kind of, doing it professionally. So, obviously, I then was actually – while I was at the Armouries, before I moved to the Trust – I found myself photographing more stuff than I was actually selling it, so... It, kind of, was a natural jump. And again, it was, kind of, I personally felt, I don't know, I think, it was more rewarding to actually image the objects and work around the objects, rather than being in, kind of, as I said before, being in business meetings and so on. And it was always really good, that you'd get an enquiry coming in via, you know, the enquiries inbox, and someone would say: "I'm writing a book on-" whatever, on, you know, swords or whatever. The brief would be, oh: "How much would it cost to get this- this object imaged?" We'd say: "You're not actually paying to get it imaged; you're paying to get it fast-tracked to the top of the queue, because everything should eventually be imaged..." So, yeah. We, obviously, commissioned it, and obviously, I photographed it, and then, obviously, I then catalogued it onto the system, and keyworded it, gave it all the metadata, and they, obviously, licensed that to the, you know, the relevant person who'd requested it. And then, nine months later, you'd get a comp copy of the book through the post with your image on the front cover. So, it was a really rewarding, kind of, experience, to see, you know, from the initial point of contact, to the final, kind of, delivery of the product and things. And again, that went in line with lots of different things, such as, you know, publications, ware marketing, those sorts of things, as well. So, I thought: "As I'm, kind of, doing this more than the, kind of, sales thing..." I'd obviously... You know, positions in the digitisation trade are, kind of, they're either temporary contracts, or it is very difficult to, kind of- if you're going to be working for an institution, obviously, you have to be, you know, South-based, down in London, where most of the nationals are. And again, competition is quite fierce, really, to do that. It always seems, kind of, you're a digitisation officer, or you're a photographer. It's always, how do you describe yourself, really? But, obviously, based in the North, I'd decided to, obviously, stay up here, and as luck would have it, a position opened here. So, yeah, since then, I've been working- well, there's three members of the digital team, and our digital team here at the Trust comprises the Manager, Digitisation Officer, and also the IT Manager. So, it's quite a, kind of, multidisciplinary team. So, when I'm working on projects, it's not strictly digitisation. We might be content creation, or we might be designing and installing, kind of, interactives in the galleries. There's things such as – I'm trying to think of some of the things we've been working on, at the moment – been working with DC Labs, from the University of York, which is their, kind of, games, kind of, studio, and we've been working on collaborative projects, such as that. So, not only is it taking pictures of things and uploading to a DAMS and keywording it, there is other, kind of, digital aspects, as well. Again, the key thing, that I find at the moment, is not to be- because we don't have unlimited resource, here – I mean, no-one really does – we have to be multidisciplinary and we have to be able to adapt our skill set to other things. So – and you might have heard this in other interviews with people – whereas traditional digitisation departments are now being asked to, kind of, do more varied content creation. So, things such as film production, and- small film production, and sound recordings, stuff like that, really. The big thing we get requests for now, at the moment, is: "You've got a camera and you photograph things, so can you photograph some curators holding things, and looking at things, with white gloves?" That's always the classic. So, we're doing quite a lot of editorial work, and a lot of places and spaces. So, again, and I've still got my image librarian hat on, all the time. And I think it's very important to have a visual organisational history on record, on file, of what we've done, and

what we did in the past. Because again, that's really useful for, you know, steering what we decide to do in the future. So, again, things like exhibitions and so on, they used to hire external photographers to come in and do that, but again, there's the whole licensing, you know, having to get all the paperwork done and, obviously, file it and manage it. Whereas, if someone in-house does it, it's so much simpler. And we also know how to work and operate in the galleries, as well. So, you know, we can come at, like, half-seven in the morning when none of the public are in and, kind of, do whatever we need to do, basically, and then we're out by ten, by opening. So, I think, from a, kind of, impact point of view, we're, kind of, minimal impact of going in, doing what we need to do. We know how everything works, and what the lighting conditions and so are in there. So, it's quite nice. It's not just photographing pictures of coins all day. It's a varied, kind of, mix of editorial content creation, and also working on other digital projects, as well. So, yeah. That's it for the background!

HC: Ok. Let me just take a pause. I'm just going to skip over the next couple of questions and go straight to your experiences of digitisation, because you were working in the early 2000s, which is-

CS: So, I was working in visitor services, and for the commercial arm of the museum in the early 2000s, so it wasn't till the late 2000s where I, kind of, went into the wondrous world of collections and curatorial and how it all works. So, as an image librarian, I, kind of, inherited some of those early photography, kind of, collections, or digital photography collections. And even looking at the raw assets and how they were numbered and dated, it was literally, you saw a period of a couple of months where, obviously, the camera systems had moved from, obviously, analogue, over to digital. And in those days, they were using, I think, they were using Canon systems at the Armouries, I think they were old 1Ds or whatever, and I think they were popping out twelve-megapixel images, or something like that. And again, it was interesting to see, things were photographed, but they were photographed in a very old-school style. Not just as in stylistically, as in there's lots of blue and green and purple backgrounds, a la 1980s, early 1990s, but as in the nature of how things were documented. So, you'd find a lot of objects – again, you've probably interviewed a lot of people before, and you've probably understood about the, kind of, planning and understanding to scope and start a digitisation project – a lot of the photography that I was managing at the time, you got the sense that it was very last-minute, and very ad-hoc. It's not that it was not professional, it's that an object would be photographed from one side. So, the conservation has been done on the object, it's been moved from a location to a studio, which they had at the Armouries at the time, and they've, obviously, mounted it, done the lighting checks, photographed it, and then a photographer's done the processing, but they've only photographed one side of the object. And as an image librarian, my heart always sank when you'd have an enquiry saying: "Oh, thank you very much for sending that picture of the gun that I want to put in my book about guns. Do you have a picture of the other side?" And then you'd have to say: "No, because they didn't photograph the other side." So, it's things like that that you build up over time, while you're managing images, and you're getting requests for images, so: "I'd like an image of this from this view and from this angle, because I want to do this with it." And the other thing I was going to mention is: never be surprised about some of the requests that you will get for imaging. Again, it does- now I'm, kind of, responsible for managing and rolling out the digitisation programme here, in an actual practical sense of doing it, but also managing teams of volunteers and, obviously, staff and training and up-skilling... Never underestimate what, potentially, people may want in the future from these things. Again, it's always that time versus... It's that time versus, not quality, but the, kind of, quantity there. Whereas, you know, if you've got two hours, and an object you, you know, deemed as a star object, or you know it's going to be of significant importance, then it might be best, while it's out, and it's in, and we've spent the time removing it from the storage location, to get it comprehensively digitised, or image all angles, you know, as much as you can do. So, yeah, it was- from the early Noughties, it was very haphazard. Again, even in the late Noughties, I was still licensing out quite a lot of

analogue, kind of, images. I think, it wasn't till about- I think, the Armouries, it wasn't till about 2004/5, they were still actually loaning out transparencies for people to scan, physically scan. And the, kind of, librarian in me, kind of, thinks: "You shouldn't be sending out your one or your second copy of your original transparency, because that technically is archive material, so it was, kind of, photographed in the 1980s." But that was still going on. So, you'd still find a lot of digitisation of analogue formats. And then, I think it was when I, kind of, started, and I was doing more of this scanning pictures from the 1980s and 1990s, to be, then, licensed for people to use, we deemed it that they're not using the images, we're not scanning it in a, kind of, historical archive- for a historical archival point of view, for digital preservation. We're doing it for a commercial reason, and that's because we don't have any modern digital imagery of it available, which is what the client wanted. So, the time, sometimes, it takes to scan an analogue film format, and then, obviously, if it needs- if there's scratches or damage to it, and it needs spotting, and it needs, you know, colour correcting and all those sorts of things, sometimes it's just quicker and easier to actually photograph the thing again. And obviously, you can get exactly what you want. It's then in a modern digital format, it's then being archived correctly, it's got all the keywording and metadata on there. And that's the way it was moving towards, at the Armouries, where I was fulfilling quite a lot more of the requests. Rather than scanning the original stuff, we would just get it out and would photograph it from scratch again.

HC: Were you surprised, when you moved into collections, about how little was online? Because, I think, my surprise came, and my question came from looking at an idea of starting an online museum, and thinking: "Oh, I wonder what online museums look like?" And not being able to find any. Were you surprised at how little had been done, when you came over to the collections side?

CS: It was, really. I mean, again, I think it's in a lot of heritage organisations, the tech sector, and, obviously, private industry and private company in particular, the tech companies, they're moving way ahead much quicker. And it always seems, obviously, the museum and heritage industry is much further- well, not ridiculously far behind, but we are always playing catch-up. And again, it wasn't surprising, because, I think, in heritage organisations, it can become very – I mean, it- I suppose it's the same anywhere – but it can become very institutionalised. That we've done things in a certain way for the last thirty years, there is no reason to change the way we do things, because we've always done it like this. But again, when I moved in, I obviously, because I'd worked for a, kind of, a more commercial-focused side of a museum, I, kind of, was asking these questions, such as: "Why are we doing it in these ways?" And, you know, if a client wants an image in twenty-four hours, because it's going out on the One Show, or it's going out to the BBC or something, they're not going to wait six weeks for it to be imaged, and then – what's it called? – and then, obviously, colour corrected and archived, and then sent through. I think, when I started, when we were dealing with image licensing, we were actually posting out image reproduction licensing forms to people through the mail, which was just astounding. Because it was just, you know, if I was- if, then, you know, even in that period of, you know, this is, obviously, post-iPhone-launch, you know, you can do things on the phone. You were expecting, you know: "I need this image now," and you've got to wait, you know, a week and then physically fill the form in and then post it back again. It was just crazy. And again, the general feeling I had was that, we have to, kind of, photograph stuff, because we have to put things in books and on the web, but there didn't seem to be any sort of cohesive strategy towards: "Why are we doing this? Is it for digital preservation purposes? Is it for commercial purposes? Is it for our publications arm?" It was a very unusual, kind of, mixture. And I found it- in a way, because as an image librarian in the late Noughties, I was being asked for things that didn't exist. They didn't yet exist. And, obviously, we had a certain budget to hire external photographers in. So that's, again, why I started picking up some of the extra, kind of, requests that were coming in, because, you know, we had our financial targets to hit every year. A person asks for an image, and

they're literally throwing their money at the screen to, kind of, say: "Ooh, we want to buy an image of this thing," and it didn't exist. You know. But we'd, obviously, charge a new photography fee, and then, obviously, the licensing fee, on top of that. That was a, kind of, justified reason, obviously, to get it imaged. Whereas, it was less of a, kind of, cohesive strategy. There were, kind of, sporadic digitisation projects, but they were usually very small in scope. It wasn't an ongoing digitisation project. As I said, you'd usually have a photographer coming in externally, and he'd be, maybe, four times a year. And if there was quite- if there was more requests, or- for, say, they would- had more publications on the go, he may be coming in more frequently. But again, there wasn't an ongoing, kind of, digitisation programme. So, when I moved to the Trust here, obviously, doing the background and research, there was an ongoing digitisation programme. So, the remit for me, when I started here, was to basically take it to the next level, which was to professionalise it, and to also wrap up all the- well, obviously, be aware and manage the, kind of, IP. The licensing issues. All the copyright stuff, as well. As well as the, kind of, digital archiving and so on. I mean, I think, it's the same in any organisation, where everyone always has a staff drive somewhere, where there's just a million rubbish res JPEGs, with weird file names, that are just hanging around. And it was just trying to, kind of, accept that that exists, but we do have an official digitisation programme. So, what we try to do, is we try to move people away from the, kind of: "Oh, we're going to take pictures of things on our phones and cameras and so on," and then try to move them into the official digitisation stream, where we know there is going to be minimum standards of equipment. There's going to be minimum, kind of, imaging standards, or acceptable imaging standards. And, most importantly, the quality assurance is there, that someone from the digital team will have an eye on that material that's being produced. So, that's where we are. I mean, the setup here we have, with the digitisation programme, is we basically have three streams. There's the 'stuff that doesn't go through digitisation stream', which means we're not responsible for it. I mean, we accept that people sometimes have to image stuff there and then, and it has to be done. So, I don't go round hitting people with sticks if we find them using non-approved digitisation, kind of, equipment. We have a thing called our 'self-led sessions', and our self-led sessions are... the new staff come in, or volunteers come in to do organisation. We give them an introduction to what Team Digital do, and what the digital- kind of, component of digital team, what we can offer you. So, what we give them, is as much training as they need, really, for- we do 2D setups, so we teach them how to, kind of, digitise- we've tried to move them away from using loads of random office scanners, and other bits and bobs. So, we use official cameras to do 2D type photography, where it's all correctly lit and so on. And we also give them 3D tabletop training, so they can do smaller objects that can fit on a background swoop. And we made that decision because we didn't want to give them too much choice. Because those two, kind of, mop up most of the objects. You are going to get really weird requests, like: "There's a massive bear that needs photographing, so do you have a digitisation setup for a bear?" And obviously, we don't have something as, kind of, niche as that. But we do apply the 2D and the 3D training as part of the self-led sessions. So, a member of staff, or a volunteer team, or if it's a larger project, approach the digital team, and then they ask: "We've got some volunteers in, or some interns in, or some placement students. We want to digitise everything in our collection." And, obviously, you're managing the digitisation programme. We say: "You won't be able to digitise everything in the collection with, say, six placement students in two months." So, we, kind of, look at what they're trying to do, manage that expectation, and, kind of, realistically advise what you can and can't do. So, once it's been agreed upon, we, kind of, we give all the training, regarding the equipment. We've only got so much resource. So, we don't have- as I mentioned before, we don't have a permanent studio yet. So, all our equipment has to be portable. It has to be able to be set up, packed down, in a relatively quick time. So, they request a session, or they book it into a digitisation diary, and the digital team do all the heavy lifting. So, we do all the setups for them. So, all they

have- and then we all do- also do all the pack down equipment. And, obviously, as you've seen, as well, space is limited. So, one room, that might be a photographic studio for a couple of days, might become a meeting room at the end of the week. So, we facilitate all the heavy lifting for them. They just have to come in for the digitisation script. That script, we've, kind of, lured people into using the digitisation setups, the self-led sessions, much more. Because, again, we try to, kind of, champion: "The fact is, if you took a photo with a camera, a random camera you have laying round the office, and you plug it in and, you know, take your photos, they'll look rubbish. They're all blurry. They're all on, you know, all on- all massive colour casts on it, and so on. You've got to plug in your computer, you've got to rename all the files, they just get sat on your hard drive, no one can get access to them," and so on and so forth. That, with the training, we've, kind of, lured them away from that. That, although it looks like there's a lot of work involved, they are actually doing less than they would be doing anyway. They're doing all the hard work, which is removing it. They know the collection – and, you know, it's collections teams, most likely, who are working with volunteers – they know the collection better than the digital team do. So, they've done the hard work by removing it from stores, or prepping it, or whatever. We just give them the tools to be able to image it up to a certain standard. We use different bits of software. But they've- they re-number the assets, and then the images get whisked away. We have a thing called Python Scripts, and all they have to do at the end of their session, is basically hit a button, and it's called 'Backup', and then all the images get deposited on our image repository automatically, and they just have to turn the equipment off, and then we take the equipment away. So we're not actually doing any of the digitisation, anyway. We're managing it. And as- like I said before, it sounds a bit cheesy, but it is, kind of, democratising digitisation. Because we've found that a lot of people – particularly when I was working in my previous institution – when the photographer did come, one of his four times a year, you would just be having suits of armour wheeled into the room. There was no prep. And I remember, one day I actually had, you know, a blazing row with the curator, and I had to, kind of, put my foot down, and say: "You've got a photographer in for, like, eight hours today. We're not going to be able to photograph twenty-five suits of armour, and all the other things, as well." So, we, obviously prioritised what was going to be digitised, and how we were going to do it. And it was always that, kind of, push back, you know, for: "We're not going to get everything in the collection digitised today." But that's the general feeling I had, when we were managing shoots, and we had external photographers coming in, where you had this- it was almost like a panic. That: "We've all got our separate projects we're working on, and we've all got our deadlines to work to, because we need to get this publication out, or we need to get this blog out, or I've got to give a presentation, or this enquiries keeps annoying me all the time, we need to, you know, need to deal with that enquiry..." That it'd be just absolute chaos when the photographer came. So, moving to here, you still had that element. People felt that the self-led digitisations were really, really positive. And I think, at that point, we – here at the Trust – we were producing I think, tens of thousands of images a year. But there was that, still, kind of, there, that if you did- if I was doing practical digitisation instead of ac- I was actually on-site, doing it, you still have that wheeling- I mean, it's inevitable. You always get more objects wheeled into a shoot. So, over time, moving people to the self-led sessions, and actually providing that support and up-skilling for people... I mean, the- usually, what we do after the session, is we don't just leave the equipment with them, and then, kind of, just go: "I'm going to, you know, you deal with it now." If they need any refresher sessions, or if they need a shadowing, or anything, again, we're more than happy to do that. So, that element of, kind of, support, what we're trying to provide here at the Trust, from the digital team, it's, kind of, removed that element of panic. Because they know that, at any point afterwards, there is going to be another digitisation session next week, or they just need to book it in, or: "Oh, I've forgotten how to work it, it's been six months since I last did it," we'll give them a refresher training. So, again, some people

take to it very, very easily. But we have, you know, we have everything from eighty-five-year-old retirees using professional photographic equipment, and really making, you know, great images, to some of, you know, to some of our young, kind of, university volunteers and placements and things, and they- they take to the technology much, much quicker, obviously. But, again, it's that, kind of, democratising the digitisation by giving people the tools to do, you know, work through the self-led sessions. And then, the third stream we have, going back to my real point, was we have the, kind of, more traditional digitisation, kind of, pipelines, so to speak. So, that's more... We call them 'premium images'. So, if you want some more high-end images, or we know that it's not going to be typical collections-type images... I mean, most collections-type images... Again, when I started here, we set up a style guide, which was very important. So, everything was locked down, and it was standardised. Because we did have- when I was at my previous organisation, I was part of a working team group for- basically working on their new collections management system that was going to go online. It's up and online now, at the Armouries. And again, I was involved very early in the project, where a lot of choices were, kind of, being, kind of, hammered out, regarding what we want to do with this. At the moment, the Trust is working on its Version 2 of Collections Online. So, if you look at our Collections Online now, it's a snapshot from 2013, when the digital team first was, kind of, formed. And it's basically a snapshot. So, none of the content has been updated since 2013. So, the images are very old images. It's that hotchpotch of legacy images that's up there at the moment. And at the moment, we are working on what the decision-making process is behind what we want our Collections Online to do. So, although we are, kind of, late to the game, with regards to, obviously, everyone's got their bright, you know, sparkly new Collections Onlines and DAMS and so on, up and visible, we're, kind of, in a, kind of, positive place, because we can see what works and what doesn't work. And, obviously, looking again to, kind of, you know, leapfrog ahead and offer something that no-one else does. Again, if you have a look, it's a very bare-bones online collection. It's, you know, limited fields. The key thing that the Trust does, though, is we operate an open licensing policy. So, our open licensing policy is usually under PD, so Public Domain, or a CC BY-SA 4.0 licence, and that's even with high-res assets. So, that's not just limited pixel dimensions on the JPEGs. We give it all away, basically. So, again, when I started here, it was a very- it, kind of, made the commercial image librarian and licensing executive in me twitch a bit, that we're, kind of, giving this away. Because, obviously, for a number of years, I was actually having to, you know, license this stuff out and make money. But again, in my previous role, I looked at the costs of- obviously, I saw the costs of what it was like to manage an image library, and, obviously, the overheads. The licensing for the, you know, for the software that's being used. The staff time, for just doing the reproduction enquiries and licensing enquiries. So, it was very refreshing just to be able to, you know, offer our content, that we produce, out there. And again, that's ingrained into the digital team, kind of, doctrine, which is: "We're transparent and we're open about what we do." And it's not just imagery. It's film, editorial images, data, as well. And again, I think one of your later questions is, obviously, talking about online collections. So, I've, kind of, covered that, as well. So, apologies if I've gone completely off...!

HC: That's fine. That's actually really interesting, that... So, at the moment, you're working on something that you will release. I'm thinking as somebody who wants to visit the museum remotely. How have decisions been made, as to who you are? Who are you showing yourself as? Have decisions been made, over: "Who are we as a brand, and how do we want to present ourselves online?" Along with the quality that you're obviously putting into the process itself.

CS: So, at the moment, we're kind of, in the early, well, not the early stages. Obviously, discussions were made around- prior to 2013, when the first iteration of it went up. And again, it was before my time, but I believe that it was: "We need a Collections Online. We need something. We need to show

that we've got objects in the collection and we've got some information about them." And, I think, from an organisational point of view, when you make your data visible, it is a, kind of, kick up the behind to, kind of, get your house in order. So, that, in a way, kind of, stimulated: "Oh God, when you look at all of our images together, they don't look amazing, do they? It's this hotchpotch of different styles," and, you know, so on and so forth. That that, kind of, drove the digitisation project, particularly at the Trust, quite well. And then, a knock-on effect is, with the data, when you know you only have five or six fields being completed, and some of them are very bare-bones, that gives a stimulus. I mean, in a way, it's, kind of, an embarrassment, and a, kind of, you know, it's, kind of, a prestige matter, isn't it? That, you know, if you're pointing traffic, or people, to your website, you want your collections to look, you know, to appear in their best light, and so on. So, the decision-making was made about what the bare-bones system would be. And then, again, over the years, it's, obviously- I think, it's being realistic about what's available, regarding resource, and what we can and can't do. And it's one of my- I think, if we just released something that we weren't comfortable with, and it, kind of, just did a very traditional, conservative: "Here's some stuff that's in the collection, with a bit of data, and a couple of fancy images..." Is that really doing anything? Is it actually engaging with people? So, we wanted to make it right, and we wanted to make it - sounds very cheesy, but make it the best it could be. But really, kind of, zero in on a core purpose for what this Collections Online would be. And what it's been decided, at the moment, is the core purpose is our collection. It's our collection. That's the, kind of, the driving thing behind it. The other thing we have, that's going to be feeding into that, will be things such as, well, I think, being very proud that we do pursue an openly licensed, kind of, doctrine. And, obviously, my background in working in image libraries was always- I think I remember talking to- we were working on a project, or something, and I think, one of the senior management team was asking for some images for, like, because one of their friends was writing a book - as is always the way - and they needed the image pack. And we, obviously, copied them in, so they were visible. They could see the process and how it worked, from- some of the things needed to be digitised from scratch. And I remember them having a chat to me, and they said: "The logistics of moving, like, high-res assets around..." And, obviously, you know, you're uploading, say, sixty images, because in the, you know, late Noughties, when, obviously, internet connections weren't as fast. But it's like: "Moving all that content onto an FTP site, and then sorting through everything, and then sending through all the metadata, and it's... All the logistics of all the things someone wants, to be able to do whatever they want to do with it, with that content... It's a lot of work, isn't it?" And I'm there going: "Yeah, it's not just, like, you know, you get your memory card and just chuck it in and it's done. And yeah, it's nothing... Obviously, it's part of a whole chain." So, since starting here, you're really looking at the open licensing thing, and also, maybe, mirroring how we do the self-led digitisation sessions, which is making it as streamlined and as quick and as easy and as... I think, we all take the path of least resistance, really. And again, if I was using- if I was buying something online, and I have a form posted out to me, and I had to fill in the form, and then they sent through a confirmation letter, you just wouldn't do it- we wouldn't do that, would we? So, the thing for us is, obviously, the direction we're taking with the Collection Online is, obviously, to make it about our collection, about York Museums Trust collection, but enabling people to access not just the assets but the data. And quickly and easily. Again, you'll find, a lot of commercial picture libraries, they'll have online carts, and you can, you know, choose your licence, and you can go: "I want that one, I'm going to use it on a magazine, and I work in the fishing industry," or something, you know. All the random choices you can make. But even then, sometimes, you know, you'll get an email through with your high-res download link, and you'll get your credits, and you'll get your licence confirmation all automated. But that's using it, I think, for, obviously, using it in a book, or using it in a TV show, or something like that. What if you wanted all of our images? How would someone get all of our images that were openly licensed? They can have

all of it, and download it. So, we're looking at ways in which people either can link to our data, or our data can be integrated into other systems, to make it open and accessible to all. Or we're just making it very easy and quick to enable people to scoop that data, and they can use it for whatever they want. So, if you wanted all the images of all of our coins, you could get all of our coins, and you could download them quickly and easily. So, that's how we're, kind of, thinking at the moment. So, it'll be about the collection, but it'll also be in line with the open licensing policy, where people can not just access the images, they can access the data and the metadata. Again, at my previous organisation, we went through the whole process of how people access things online, and I remember it being many heated debates about: "Do we want all the data up and visible, or do we want it, kind of, in a certain order, or do we want it image-led, or do we want a tiny image, or do we want a...?" You know, all the different UI designs, and so on. And the decision to make, it was, I would say, a decision was made. And again, was it really changing anything, or was it just a, kind of, window into what is in the collections? Is it actually doing anything? Whereas, I think, with the input on the decisions making here at the Trust, now, it's more about: "We want to do something that no-one else, kind of, does." The York Museums Trust was a very early- very quick to start open licensing their content. This place was, like- I think Birmingham Museums Trust, actually, put out a blog the other day, about what their reasoning behind going the open- or, moving towards open licensing, and the, kind of, journey to do that, was. And we're, kind of, I think we need to, kind of, maybe publicise it a bit more. But we didn't really want to. I think the decision was made not to do that until we had an acceptable Collections Online, so that people can... You know, we have thousands of images that are sat, waiting to, kind of, just at- publish online button, basically, so... We estimate it'll be sometime next year, really, when that goes live. Again, I think, one of your questions was: what was the reasoning and the choices behind, you know, actually putting that Collections Online together? We've, obviously, looked at all the, kind of, audience segmentation data, and so on, and all the demographics, and we've looked at all the, kind of, analytics about what people are looking at, how they're using it, and so on. It was one of the first things I was really interested in, here. Because, obviously, for me, setting digitisation priorities at the Trust, I want to know what people are looking at, what they're using, and so on. So, again, it was, you know, kind of, doing the research, doing the scoping and stuff. And, kind of, that's going to, obviously, formulate who it's going to be targeted at. I mean, I think, my personal opinion, I think, you just need it to do one good thing. It's got to have a direction. It's not just some stuff online and with a bit of data, which I just find it very dull. It's really important to look at the way in which people outside of the heritage industry view the museum, or online collections. They don't see it as a website with: "Here's your bit about exhibitions, here's your bit about objects, here's your bit about ticketing, here's your bit about, you know, volunteering." They just want to go onto a website, and usually they want to know what time the museum opens, how much it is, if it costs money. But they want to search for something and all the supporting information. So, again, there's people such as the IWM, if we can- am I OK showing you some samples? Is that alright?

HC: Yeah.

CS: Or... So, IWM, again, we're, obviously, we use similar suppliers for certain things. And, obviously, during our, kind of, annual meet-ups for people that use certain services, obviously, people discuss new ideas and, you know, what they're working on, and so on. But again, I think it's the current trend, where... And Imperial War Museums do this really well, which is, they classify their online collections... You can search everything. So, it's not: you're just in the collections bit of the website, that just searches for objects of a type; you can search everything. So, again, they've been very good with regards to- you can call it 'stories', or 'narratives', or whatever you want to call it, where you've got the, kind of, engaging content, that isn't just: "Here's ten pictures of guns," it's: "These are the

people and the stories and the engagement behind that.” And they have a cross-site search, which I think is really interesting. You can go in and search for pictures of swords, or object records of swords, on their collection, but you can also search everything with swords, so all their talks, all their exhibitions, whatever, about swords. Which is, I think, from an external user, or external – what’s it called? – person outside the heritage industry. We get very, kind of, siloed, and we just think, people just know that we’ve got a collection, and they want to go in, and they want to look at pictures of certain things. Where, you know, I’ve done a lot of picture research in my day, so I know I’ll go straight onto the Collections Online, I’ll type in the object number if I’ve got it, I’ll find it. But most people don’t do that. Most people want to just go on the- I mean, it’s the classic Google search, and what’s the first thing- you bring up Google and you just type the term in, don’t you? And you want it to come up. So, I think, again, it’s integrating all of the – let’s just see if they’ve got it on here. I think they’ve got their ‘stories’ on here... But again, they’ve got- it’s more like a social media feed, on the Imperial War Museums. But again, their search integrates all of the websites. But you can focus on just certain things. I mean, the key thing about that is that you can push either, you know, the commercial aspect, or the ticketing aspect, or the exhibitions aspect, as well as the, obviously, the core, kind of, collections, as well. So, it’s quite an ingenious idea. I think I’m quite old-school, because, obviously, I know I’m just going to go straight onto the Collections and I know what I’m looking for. Whereas, I think, from a general user point of view... But, obviously, they’ve looked at their audience demographics, and they’ve said: “Is it hardcore researchers that are using this? Or is it everyone, kind of, across the board?” Who they’re trying to appeal to. So, again, it’s an interesting idea. And again, we’ve done research into- you know, the amount of online collections I’ve looked at over the last ten years. I mean, when I was working at the Armouries, we were having to look at online DAMS, and how people are selling their content, and how they do it, and, you know, what’s the quickest checkout process? And you have people like Getty and – what’s it called? – Bridgeman and Son, which are really slick, I mean, that’s their bread and butter of what they do. But we wanted something that, again, core of the collection, openly licensed, but people can Hoover up as much as they want, and use it. I did find it quite amazing, we have all our T&Cs on our website, and it just says: “This image is-” you know, it says it all, and you download it, just do what you want with it. But we still have emails coming in, that say: “I’m just checking: Is it free?” And then we- yeah, it’s completely free. So, those are usually the sort of emails we get. You get new digitisation requests, where, obviously, we then- you either get slotted into a digitisation session, or we say: “Yes, you can use it for free,” or whatever. So, I think, yeah, compared to what I did in the past, it’s quite refreshing, actually, I think. It feels quite wholesome, that we can give away things for free. So... I’ve completely forgotten your first question-

HC: Okay, so onto part three. Let’s look at these reasons not to digitise, from the experience that you’ve had. I, really, have come up with what I think might stop people from digitising, but what’s been your experience?

CS: I mean, in order of your list, I think quite a lot of them are, kind of, interdependent. It’s, kind of, they do merge into one. So, it’s not: this one’s more than this one. Usually, it’s time. And I think, if you speak to anyone, kind of, in the heritage industry, I mean, probably in any industry, it’s: “We don’t have enough time in the day to do what we need to do.” And again, when we are servicing requests from clients, both internally and externally, it’s, again, maybe it’s not an understanding about exactly what the process involves, with digitisation. Again, in your questions, you mention- or, sorry, in your original blurb that was sent through, you’re not talking about the mechanism, technology of digitisation, but it’s, obviously, the reasoning behind it. And again, a curator might say: “I want everything in my collection digitised.” And again, what we try to do here at the Trust, with the digitisation sessions, obviously, that I mentioned before, it enables a window into how it works, and, obviously, they can see the process. So, when we do give the self-led digitisation training, we

don't just go: "Here's some equipment. You just do what you need to do, and then we'll sort out the rest." We do do that, but we also offer, if you want extra training on how to set it up – because that means we don't have to set it up, so it's less work in the long run for us, it's great – we will do that. But as part of that digitisation training, we also explain and show, obviously, the relevant members of staff, or volunteers, where it fits into the pipeline. So, it, kind of, opens that lid, and it, kind of, gives a window into actually what is involved in digitisation. I mean, you know, people see the logistics of stuff being moved around, and they see, obviously, the equipment being set up, and they know things get sent off to the magic processing fairies or whatever, and then they come back and they're all: "Images are great." But we do go through, obviously, the process. So, a lot of those requests, where people would say: "I want everything in my collection digitised," we still sometimes have to say: "You're not going to get all those things done on a day." So, we will be realistic. But we gently, kind of, steer people into: "You- there are future digitis- it's an ongoing digitisation programme, so we can do it the next week, or the week after that. So, it'll be done as it's done." So- but usually, it's time. Usually, it's time. The blockers, I've felt, are time. It's time. There's not enough time. You've got too many concurrent projects running, you know, phones are ringing, not caught up with your emails, etcetera, etcetera. It's, you know, we don't have time, there's all these objects in this store, we don't have any documentation on them, we haven't looked at them, they've not been conserved, let's just forget about it and put our heads in the sand. And you know, classic digitisation- or, managing digitisation projects is, it's really disheartening and really, kind of, yeah, sad to, kind of, see the amount that, obviously, has to be done. But it is being realistic and divvying it up into, kind of, bite-size chunks that, you know... I mean, the classic thing is going for the quick wins, really, isn't it? And then, kind of, moving on from there. I mean, I think, with the priorities here, for digitisation, it's a mixture of different factors. So, we have everything from, you know, we have: what feeds into business planning? What are the operational needs? What, you know, if we're marketing a massive exhibition, or we're working on a new exhibition that needs loads of images for the panels, then, obviously, that is deemed as a business priority. Because, obviously, we need the people to pay for the tickets, to keep us all in jobs, and the museum open, and the lights on, and so on. So, there's lots of, kind of, lots of reasons for, obviously, digitisation going ahead. I mean, there's the classic list: the pride, you know, the, kind of, reputational thing; there's the technology; you know, obviously, some museums, obviously, do it from licensing and copyright, that's a stimulus for digitisation. But, obviously, here, I would mainly say it's for programming, and it's for business plan objectives, for- why we're doing it. And again, the time links into that. So, the digital team here is only, as I've mentioned, three people strong. So, we have far more requests than we can actually service. So, the key thing, from our point of view is, we're moving from basically a service provider to, kind of, more of a platform. So, we've used the digitisation model to model how we work, in a way, as a business. So, we're going- so, rather than the digital team doing everything for you, we're going to digitally up-skill you, provide support and training and the tools for what you need to do, and then you can go and do it yourself to quite a degree. There're always going to be elements where we will need to go and roll our sleeves up and get involved. But, I think, being realistic and saying: "The time, which we don't have-" because, again, you know, we may have requests to make, you know, digitise a hundred objects for marketing, and then someone wants a film being made, and then we've got to go and do an install in an exhibition regarding digital. So, it's this very, very high demand that we're in. And, obviously, we're going to be up-scaling the team in the next couple of years. But again, I think it's that change in ideas in the organisation and how we work, that we're just not going to do it for you. We're going to show you how to do it, and we're going to provide the support. And then, obviously, sometimes, there are things that, you know, you will need a specialist to do. You will need a specialist to do certain things. We completely admit that. But for the bread and butter, you know, say, with regards to digitisation, which is mass collections-type photography and digitisation, as

we've said before, the volunteers or the curators or the collections teams, they're working around these objects. They're doing the hard work. They know what they want. They know the views they want. You know. We have a style guide for them to follow. We provide all the equipment, and heavy lifting, and do all the processing. They just need to image it, and then they just need to re-number it, and then the images get whisked away and they get processed and, obviously, the quality assurance takes place, and so on. So, yeah, it's a really effective mechanism, and we know we've got a limited time, limited resource, so that goes into the, kind of, the cost. But it's trying to get best value out of that, so, you know, people can- so that business just doesn't stop, because three members of the digital team don't have time to, you know, service those requests. In a way, it's a bit weird, because in the initial point, it's quite time-intensive. Because, you know, if I spend an hour or two hours with someone, showing, you know, going through how it all works... And usually, it's an hour of just me ranting on- well, not ranting on, but me boring someone senseless about imagery. People find it really interesting. They find it- sometimes, it's really odd things that- what- refuse to touch the cameras, which: "It's too expensive. I'm not allowed to touch that." And it's like: "No, it's- this equipment, it's here for you to use." And then people become more comfortable. And it's really rewarding to see people going through that process. And then, I come and, you know, it will be someone from the digital team, or I go and pick the equipment up, and then look at the images, and it's like: "Wow, they've produced those." And I think, the key thing- and I think some images appeared in some book, or something like that, and I remember one of the curators, like, ran around to the office, and was just like: "The pictures are in a book," and it's like: "Yeah, you produced them," you know. It's all part of the thing. So, it's building that, kind of, support and that, kind of, enthusiasm to it. Again, I don't know how it sounds- it sounds quite negative, I don't have really the enthusiasm when- sometimes where I look into some of the storage locations, and there's so many objects! And you just think: "Oh, God," you know, "are we ever going to do this?" But like I said, it's rolling that back, and just being realistic, that we can only do so much, with so much resource. But, yeah, again, second thing: cost. It's the big thing. It's either in staff time, or it's either in equipment. So, for instance, here at the Trust, we don't have a permanent photo studio. And again, there's organisations out there that we've, obviously, been in contact with, and we've put the feelers out to, kind of, say: "How did you go through the process of, you know, building a new studio?" Because, you know, in a perfect world, someone would just give you a blank cheque and we'd just go and buy everything, you know, the best equipment you can buy, and so on. So, we've got to be realistic. But it's usually staff time and equipment. But what we've tried to do, is we've tried to move from early digitisation, kind of, things on a table with two constant hot lamps, to studio lighting, colour calibration... Everything is now becoming more professionalised. The equipment we buy is all standardised, off the shelf, so we can swap it in and out and stuff. We, obviously, look at low failure rates, and so on. So, it's managing that programme, as well. We try to, I mean, you know, one part of my core job is to minimise downtime of the temporary studios, and so on. But again, if I went to a member of our senior management team with a business plan, saying: "It'll cost you this hundred-thousand-plus pounds to outfit a studio," they will tell me to get out, most likely! So, what we've been doing, is gradually upgrading the equipment and upgrading the gear we have and, obviously, I think, we went from one permanent- one temporary studio- well, it's actually a permanent setup, actually. It's like- it's some copy stands, that are based in our Yorkshire museum. We've gone from that, and then the demand has, kind of, snowballed, really, where we've now got semi-permanent setups all around the organisation. The key, I mean, again, I suppose it's a natural thing, in organisations, that always moving equipment to sites was viewed with a bit of, kind of, distrust, in a way, I think. That it was: "This is our location, why are you moving your things in, and why are you setting things up?" And we had to be very careful, in that, you know, everything went in, everything was packed down and then moved away again, because people were very protective over their

collection, and protective over their space. But again, when people, kind of, bought into the self-led digitisation sessions, they could see the benefit of... So, now, they're like: "Yeah, leave all your stuff here, it's OK, you can use it as a storage location." So, it's been really, really successful. But yeah, going back to it, it's, I'd say, the two main things, it's time and cost. And, like I said, that's in staff time, or is in, you know, that's in, kind of money, or budget, and so on. I'd say, probably, the next things are, I'd probably link- put them on the same level, and that'd be expertise or IT skills, and then I'd probably put privacy or copyright issues. Again, it's all regarding the thinking behind why you're digitising this stuff. Are you digitising this stuff for digital preservation reasons? Then it doesn't really matter about copyright, because you're just going to keep it on a terminal, or you're going to keep it on a repository in your organisation, and only your internal staff are going to see it, so it doesn't really matter. Obviously, if you're wanting to put that content out, that might be a mass- you know, you may have a really time-intensive upcoming digitisation project that's been requested, but you know you can't do anything with that content, without a ridiculous amount of copyright and rights clearance. You know, if you're talking about an archive, and there's personal information, and... I mean, one of our archives compromises personal information, correspondence from the late Twentieth Century, so that's living memory, and then there's also third party magazines and publications that have imagery in there. So, there's no way that would ever- that is on the list of priorities, that is. It'd be nice to do, if we had a massive team, and all the resource, and time, and you know, and budget available. But again, it's looking at what's realistic, what we're going to be using. Going, really, for the quick wins. I mean, there are going to be things that are requested. I mean, we have ongoing projects that we, obviously, that we've had requested, or we have identified, and said: "That is a gap in our collection." I mean, particularly, looking at our 2013 Online Collections was really useful, actually, because it gave us a, kind of, a window into it. And it gave us the analytics for what people are looking at, what they're interested in. Our works on paper are really, really popular, so that's, kind of, traditional views of York. I mean, again, I've seen so many late Nineteenth Century, kind of, you know, works on paper views of York, you know, I've seen thousands of them. When I was at the Armouries, all I used to see was views of the White Tower from the South Bank. That was all I used to catalogue. There was thousands of them, you know, and we digitised them. But people love those sorts of views. So, again, the works on paper are very, very popular. So are the York Museum collection- Yorkshire Museum collection, such as the Roman collections. The coins and numismatics are really popular. But the majority of the numismatics have been digitised in the space of, say, four, five years, and that's primarily through volunteers doing it, which is amazing. So, the copyright and- issues, I could understand. For the Trust, it's not really a big deal, because we've actually- as part of our Collections Online Version 2 that's upcoming, we've actually produced a script, and one of the companies we've been working with has asked if they can use that script. And what we've done, is we've looked at the dates of birth, and dates of death, of the population statistics from the mid Nineteenth Century up to the present day. And we've basically put together a script, whereas we focus on certain sections of the collection. So, we have dec-arts, and we have, obviously, ceramics, and so on. And some of those collections are going to be very, very high-risk, kind of, copyright collections as such. So, we've deemed a, kind of, risk-managed approach, where we've decided we'll produce a script, where we say- if- something produced before that date, with a bit of buffer, a bit of wiggle-room in between, looking at the date of births and the deaths- kind of, average death age, and we're going to put a bit on there, and we're going to risk-manage, and we're going to take that risk, and we're going to say: "We're going to publish that." If something comes back, we do have a take-down procedure in place. We can immediately remove it, and so on. But we know we don't- well, I mean, we don't have a dedicated rights department and image library. We will never have the time to do this. Whereas with high-risk items, such as, you know, it might be a ceramic produced by an artist in the 1940s, 50s, that we'll probably, using the

automated script will go: "No." So, that will not be published online. It will be visible internally, obviously, for, you know, kind of, record and documentation purposes, but it will not be published online. So, we're doing this- we're trying to make the system as automated as possible. Not just with how people hoover up the content, but how we get that content online. So, we're looking at the collections refresh being same-day, basically. So, if an alteration's made, it's online, and people can see a current window into the collections and what's available. And, yeah, I mean, it's a weird thing, with the copyright, because again, it does stop elements of museums and heritage collections being digitised, because again, there is that fear of copyright, and: "I'm going to be sued," and so on and so forth. And I think, as long as you follow an agreed due diligence policy regarding what the procedure is, what risk you're taking... Again, I think it was NPG that has decided to publish their low-res online, with stuff that's in copyright, and that's a risk. That's a risk, isn't it? Because, obviously, an artist may say: "I don't want to see that online. I'm going to..." You know, and so on and so forth. But I think, from a heritage point of view, I mean, I've done rights clearance with estates and artists, and the general consensus is that they're happy that their works are on display in a museum, most of the time, but I think it's part and parcel that they're happy for it to appear online. So, as long as it's not used commercially, by third parties, you can still see that image online, that pads out the record. And again, I think that's a balanced risk to take, really. So, with our script, again, once a digital asset's been created through a you know, kind of, an assigned digitisation programme, there's no rights management. It's been done. Because the logic's already on the system, and that's deciding: does it go online, or doesn't it go online? So, there are going to be, we do accept, there are going to be elements where someone will have to sit down and, kind of, go: "That needs turning off, that needs turning on." But that system is going to be in place, where we can do that. The other thing, where we try to, kind of, stop the licensing and copyright backlog building up, is that we have built into the new acquisition forms that it's trying to mop up the copyright in the first instance. So, there's no having to come back four years later, and go: "Can we...?" And so on and so forth. It's mainly with the art gallery collections, because again, it's the nature of- they're currently acquiring modern or recent, kind of, objects and works, and so on. So, usually, it's direct from the artist, anyway, so they're already in contact with the artist. There's no having to track someone down, there's no, kind of, orphan works, sort of, you know, headache-inducing having to try and find who owns the rights to this. So, again, with our digitisation programme, the rights and – what's it called? – the script that we've produced, it's trying to just cut all of that stuff out of the way. I mean, if you, well, obviously, if you were working in an organisation, which, obviously, I have done, that, obviously, you know, kind of, exploits its intellectual property, you couldn't do that. You'd want to lock it down, you'd want to watermark it, and you'd want to go: "We need to-" you know: "We're not going to release the high-res TIFs, we're not going to release the high-res JPEGs. We're locking it all down. It has to be run under the eyes of someone who knows about licensing. Official paperwork has to be done." You know: "It's all locked, it's all done." We just cut all of that out, because it's staff time, and it's wasting our... And again, we've made the choice at the Trust to, kind of, say: "We want to give away our cont-" well, we don't want to give our- away; "We want to make our content accessible for all." I think that's the best way of putting it. Again, it even slips out sometimes, but giving it away for free? It's terrible, it's terrible. And again, I don't know if you've spoken to other people about the copyright and IP situation, but there are usually, in organisations, there's a lot of- it's very hard to get that signed off at a senior level. Because again, it's seen as: "We're losing money," or: "We're giving things away that should be seen as benefit." But again, as I've said, if you look at the costs for running an image library or licensing department, with all the software and licenses and staff time, and all that sort of stuff, are you actually making a benefit? And I don't know if you had- I mean, I could probably send it to you, but the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, last year, did a really good blog, and they had all the metrics up there about when they went open licensed for

some of their content, and bump on visitor figures, and all that sort of thing. So, it's always a good thing. And then, we're onto four and five, which is 'fear of obsolescence' and 'lack of political will'. Usually, you don't find these as, kind of, blockers, really, to be honest. Not as much. Usually, it's all positive, with digitisation. Again, in my experience, digitisation- the word 'digitisation', I think it's very old-fashioned to call it 'digitisation', to be honest. It's not really digitisation. It is what it is: digitisation. But it was a nice buzzword in the late Noughties, I think. And I there were a lot of the museum conferences that were going on, and people used to just say: "Digitisation," and shout: "Digitisation," or whisper: "Digitisation," and there was no real understanding about what it was, or what it is, or what it involves. And then, you probably have the, you know, the old-school photographic departments, kind of, just [sighs] sighing, in a collective sigh. And a lot of it was- I mean, in my experience, it was bandied around, and it was everything from: "Here's fifty grand, set up a studio," to: "I've bought you a scanner from Argos and a laptop, go and do some digitisation." And it was just: "Let's do digitisation," but there wasn't any, kind of, understanding about: what are you doing, why are you doing it? Also, future-proofing. And then, obviously, then there's all the, kind of, concurrent, kind of, streams that, kind of, feed into it. So, you've got things such as your documentation, so do you do your documentation of the objects before you do the imaging, or do you do them together, or you do them after? And how it all, kind of, fits together in a pipeline. And here- obviously, in my previous role I was, kind of, working from start of- conception of, you know, a project, up to delivery and sale of the asset to the person, and working on large projects, as well. So, you got a really good overview of how it all, kind of, fits together, you know, what designers would most likely want, what your marketing team would want. And what it was really instilled in me was that, I think, it's how much of that content you can flip. So, your style guide, or your remit, might be basically to say: "I'm going to take a picture of the front and the back of an object, up to a certain standard, so you get a certain, you know, pixel density, on a certain camera format, with certain even lighting." But the thing's out, and you're- obviously, got an overview of the project, and you know that is a star object, so you will spend a bit more time on it. And obviously, from an image licensing point of view, again, you know the things people will be requesting. So, that's shaped a lot of our style guides, really. Which is, like I said, the key thing, for me, was always: someone had taken the time to take an object, as part of a digitisation project. They've unboxed it, they've conserved it, they've put it in the studio, and they only photograph one side of it, which I find- just- you literally just have to turn it over, that's all you have to do. It's like, literally, the minimum amount of extra work to do it. And it's just having that foresight about... Obviously, in the late Noughties, it was bandied around, but there was no real understanding about: "Why are you doing it, what's the reason behind it is, how does it fit into the, you know, the big picture sort of stuff, where's it going? What you do with the data. How are you going to store it, how are you going to keyword it, how are you going to put the metadata and cataloguing and stuff? You need a DAMS system. Do you need a department to manage it, or are you just going to...?" You know, whatever, so on and so forth. So, it was a buzzword. And, I think, now, it's become- it's day-to-day. It's day-to-day business, business as usual, that's the way it is. And what I'm finding from colleagues in the digitisation industry is that this stuff ticks over. It ticks over. Unless there's a massive, you know, influx of requests, it ticks over really nicely. Particularly at the Trust. Digitisation is always going on. We will have quick sprints on certain projects. We know we're going to blitz that and we're going to do that. But the, you know, like, new acquisitions, or there's going to be an exhibition in a year. So, for instance, we've just had the Vivienne Westwood exhibition's currently running at the Castle Museum. So, in the run-up to that, we knew that there was going to be a lot of requests for shoes. So, in the space of about nine months, all of the entire shoe collections have been imaged by staff and volunteers. Which is crazy, because that's a whole section of a collection. I mean, we've got lots of other bits of- items of clothing in the collection, but all the shoes have pretty much been done. And they've all been up to a

certain standard, in the same style, and they're all on there, and they're all ready to go, basically. So, the designers find it amazing, because they've just got all these beautiful, you know, images sent through to them, and they use them. What was deemed, originally, collections record images, ended up being all chucked on the panels, so- because then they went, just like *[inaudible whisper]* "...pictures," they were, like, really, really happy. So, I think it's just having that overview. And again, with the lack of political will and fear of obsolescence, I think from a senior management point of view, it's: "Get some digitisation done." But again, it's pushing back, and saying: "It needs to be resourced correctly. And we also can't just have- digitise everything in the collection in ten years, because we don't know exactly how much of the collection there is at the moment." So, it's being realistic. And again, it's- I suppose, it's going back to it, that some people still see it as a 'black art'. And I think, people in digitisation departments like to, kind of, have that air of mystery, as such? I don't know. But again, when we, you know, open the box, and people can see what we do and how we do it, it kind of, breaks a lot of those barriers down, and the understanding is there, you know. I have, sometimes, curators talking to other curators, and they say: "Oh, we can't ask the digital team to do that, because, obviously, this takes this amount of time." So, we don't really have to push back anymore, because people involved in the digitisation are, kind of, talking with the other people, and they're fighting all the battles for us. So, it's quite useful. It's really, really useful. Again, I think I was making the point that a lot of people are in the digitisation trade now. They're, kind of, diversifying what they do. So, it's not just core, photographing stuff. It's filming, and it's editorial type work, as well. So, there'll be, like I said, places and spaces, people holding things, you know. We're really, kind of, we're really good at- usually, it's for training purposes, but we document what we do, because that makes a really interesting story. Like the story of getting a massive bear out of stores, and how we photograph it, is just as interesting as the bear. So, we're really aware of how the digitisation programme is viewed, both internally and externally. And again, we are aware of what the public perception is of what we do. And again, it's trying to say: "We will service your request, but you do have to understand that we do get a lot of requests coming in." I mean, at the moment, we're getting quite a lot of editorial requests, so it's photographing the spaces and places. And we get a lot of film requests, as well. Again, with the nature of the technology, you can use the camera technology for doing film, as well. So, we get a lot of film requests, as well. So, it's good. A really diverse portfolio. But again, I think, it's just being realistic about what's achievable, with certain resource and time and so on. But yeah, that's your list of- and I didn't know, really, what to put for 'other', did I put anything for 'other'? I'll just have a look... The other thing, usually, I'd put on there, is probably 'condition'.

HC: Right.

CS: So, again, we don't have a full-time conservation staff here at the Trust. So, again, it's that decision regarding- I mean, the core thing is, as much as departments or external requests or internal parties may request something to be imaged, I think, to be honest, the priority of the condition- it's the object. If the object is in no condition to be photographed, then it's in no condition to be photographed. We were at a conference last year, and I think it was members of the Clarks shoe museum, and they were discussing the nature of some of their late Twentieth Century, kind of, man-made trainers, and they're actually degrading at such a fast rate that once they've removed these from the box, they're just going to crumble, basically. So, I suppose, it's that balance between digital preservation and conditions. But in my opinion, if a conservator or a conservation department say: "No," that means 'no'. That's a no-no. So, that'd be the other thing to say- to, basically, push back against digitisation. That'd be: "Conservator says no." That means 'no'. It ain't being moved. I think the worst thing we ever had was some large paper brass rubbings, that had been rolled up into, kind of, tubes. And, obviously, with the temperate conditions, they'd, kind of, solidified. So,

obviously, they had to be unrolled in a temperature-controlled environment, and it was obviously, really time-intensive. But the curators, for many years, were always asking me: “Can we get these digitised?” And I was, like, thinking: “You’re going to have to run this past the conservator.” Obviously, the conservator was like: “Once this is digitised...” And it’s that trade-off, isn’t it? It’s that: can’t be unrolled, because it’ll be destroyed. But you probably might be able to get it unrolled once, and then it’ll, kind of, you know, kind of, self-destruct, so to speak. But I think that is a key thing, for why things aren’t digitised. That’s, you know, conservation and preservation, and so on. So...

HC: Okay. Let me just take another pause. It was interesting to me that you put the lack of political will low down, because that suggests to me that you’ve been given a lot of freedom to do things the way you want them, and also that you have a very strong understanding of what this brand is, and this openness is part of that. Do you feel that this organisation is unusual in having such a strong, open, sharing, trusting approach? How have you seen other organisations working?

CS: So, as I mentioned before, the Trust, kind of, went towards the open licensing, I think it was around 2014, 15, I believe. And again, I think, in any organisation, you’ll always find resistance at certain levels. You know, everything from: “Our funding’s been reduced, can we benefit and exploit our intellectual property, why are we giving stuff away for free?” But again, I think, now it’s become more prevalent, and there are stats out there that we can chuck back, it, kind of, justifies why it’s being done. In a way, it’s- again, working within the licensing industry, I think it’s that view, that intellectual property- well, particularly, maybe, regarding imagery, it is being devalued. And there’s a lot of different combinations of factors. You have, kind of, stock image libraries, that are really low-balling on the licensing, and that devalues the whole, kind of, industry. And then, I think it’s the current, kind of, thought, that: “If I want to download something, I download that now, and I use it.” And it’s, kind of, we all do it. You go up and you right-click and ‘save as’ and think about copyright and where I can and can’t use it. And I’ve looked at software so that, you know- we’ve looked at software, you know, other organisations, looked at software solutions, where it comes up with a pop-up if you ‘save as’ and right-click, it’s ingrained in the metadata, for where, it’s saying, obviously: “Image originated from,” and: “Do you want to license it correctly?” And I suppose it’s very similar to, you know, kind of, music licensing, and so on, that, you know, you- you could just buy an MP3 in a day, and obviously, you know or rip it off from a CD and give it to your friends and things, and no-one thought twice about that. And I think it’s that’s the understanding. That’s the general view, it sounds a bit depressing, really, but I think that’s the general view, regarding imagery. That people will just download it and not think twice about copyright – unless you’re going to be putting it in a film or- the people that do have to follow, kind of, due diligence procedures and official procedures – that, in a way, it’s a very, kind of, archaic way of doing things. And, like I said, in the old days, when I used to have to deal with copyright issues, was, you know: send out a form, they’d fill the form in and send it back, and it’d be- can you imagine? Can you imagine doing that? You know, it’s like: “I want to make a playlist on Spotify, and I want to put a lead image on there,” and it’s like: “Do I have to fill a form in?” And it’s all that sorts of crazy stuff. So, I think, it was very important to, obviously, adhere to copyright restrictions and, obviously, respect, you know, copyright, and the work involved with artists, and so on. But I think, current trends, the way it’s going, and also the devaluation with, you know, kind of, stock image libraries are really low-balling with some of the pricing- that, is it worth it anymore? I mean, if it was your main business model for income, then I could understand what would be the protectionist, kind of, view, that you’re going to be taking on it. But for a museum, and in the big scheme of things, I don’t think the heritage industry, and the content it’s producing, is going to be up there with, say, you know, kind of, Warner Brothers or Disney, or anything with protection of its IP. That- and also, that we are deemed as a charitable, kind of, organisation, and with those, kind of, stats coming in from other organisations that are, kind of,

moving to open licensing... I think it's going the other way, where, I think, open licensing will become very- it'll be, just routine. This is an expected thing. I mean, the usual comeback is that, you know- particularly for working within a national museum, is that it is a public collection. It is a public- you know, it's a museum collection. It's owned by us. It's owned by all of us. And I think it's that accessibility, and, you know, people being able to, obviously, access that content, and use it however they wish, and so on. And I think- I mean, maybe it's, maybe, a bit of a naive view, but again, it always didn't ring true with me, when I had to- obviously, when some of the regs kicked in, regarding licensing, and you had to be fair and consistent regarding your rates, and how you charged people for licensing things... You'd have Mr Smith, who'd be writing a really niche book about something really random, that you know was a labour of love, and will never sell more than ten, twenty copies, and you would have to charge the same as you would charge, say, a large, you know, well-known publisher. And it always didn't ring true, and it always didn't feel right at all, that you would be... Yeah, I mean, that's the thing, isn't it? I think, really, in the remit, it's that we provide the content, and then- as well as, obviously, engage with people, with the knowledge and the specialisation of people that work within a heritage organisation, but also, people can use that content however they wish. It's, kind of, it's there and it's accessible. And I don't know. It just, kind of, feels right. It feels that's the right thing to do. And, you know, if you ask a picture editor, working on- for the BBC or whatever, and you said they've got a choice between two images, one's seven hundred and fifty quid to license and the other one's free, but that one's slightly better in quality than that one, we know which one they're going to go for. So, that's what's- it's the path of least resistance, I think, that people are going to take, which is: "I can use that now, it's available, I don't have to do any paperwork, it's copyright-clear, and the quality's acceptable." And that drives traffic back to the YMT, as you say, brand, and the sites, and then... Then, you know, then you can, obviously, have it- use it however- as a platform, for whatever you want, for ticketing, advertisements, marketing, whatever. We worked- the digital team here at the Trust actually worked with- I think it was, like, around 2014, 15, as well, and they worked with some of the Wikipedians on making our openly licensed imagery available on Wikipedia. So, they did an early trial, and there, I think, they uploaded about three hundred and fifty to four hundred images, and since then, we've had over a hundred million page hits, on pages on Wikipedia containing our content. And it's just very much a no-brainer, to be honest. That, you know, these stats, if you spoke to a web manager, and they were having these hits on their own website, they would be, you know- you're talking that, yeah, like, a hundred million views- page views. And these were for very low-quality images, like, very old, traditional, legacy images, and people were using them. People were looking at them, downloading them, you know. The analytics don't lie. It was showing exactly, you know, the number of hits. Weirdly, one month, it jumped- we had, like, I think it was over three million views, in Poland, for one of the paintings in the art gallery collection. And we were trying to figure out why there was so many views on it, and we believe there was a documentary that was shown on television then, about- I can't think which English artist it was... But, obviously, that just shows, the spike in views, on that page, when something in- we would never have foreseen that. That, you know, there's going to be a documentary in Poland or somewhere, on this artist. But, obviously, everyone goes – as it naturally does – hits- first thing you hit, straight to Wikipedia: "Who is this? What do they do? What's their background?" And from there, you have: "Lead image provided by York Museums Trust, public domain." There you go. So, regarding engagement and directing traffic, it's such a usefu- it's crazy, really. I mean, people'd be chomping at the bit to try and get those figures on the page views, and so on, so... So, yeah. I can't remember what the original question was, sorry!

HC: No, that's good. Can we look forward, to where you think- you've had a fair amount of experience of the realities of digitisation, it's fair to say, and you realise how much stuff there is.

How far are we going to go? Are we going to digitise everything, eventually? Or is that just never going to happen?

CS: I think I mentioned it before, that when we used to- from the licensing perspective, and when we charged new photography fees, for clients, or servicing requests, and so on, we would never say: "You're paying for photography." You're jumping the queue, or it's bumping that object to the top of the queue. I suppose, for certain collections, that, obviously, if they are static – I mean, certain collections are - I believe the Wallace Collection, I believe, is static, and they don't acquire new stuff – so, you know, you've got a start and an end point. You know how many objects you've got to work with. Whereas, here, it's constantly collecting. So, I'll say hopefully everything'll be digitised, but again, it's being realistic about the nature that... Particularly with this far-reaching collection. It's not just all coins. There's coins, there's massive carriages, there's works of art, there's works on paper, ceramics, and everything- there's buildings and things, you know, stones out in the wilderness, and so on. It's everything under the sun. And I think, we can make a good dent into it. And we can prioritise, you know, what needs to be digitised, by looking at the figures, and looking at the analytics of what people are looking at, what people are requesting, and also, what we're working on, with regards to our programming and our, kind of, business plan objectives, and those getting jumped to the top of the list. So, those are the, kind of- that's one stream of what's driving it. And then, the other one is, obviously, we have a rolling programme of digitisation. So, new acquisitions, they get done. So, if anything doesn't fit on a tabletop, or within a certain size studio, we'll have to then say: "That gets bumped. That'll have to wait. We'll shelve that until that is deemed as a business plan objective, where, then, that gets priority." So, in a way, I imagine, the majority of things should eventually get digitised, because stuff eventually always rotates around. But there will always be things that'll miss, that will never go on display, for whatever reason, and it will just slip through the gaps. And again, I think it goes in line with the documentation side of things, that until an organisation knows exactly what it's got, we can't- you know, there might be another million objects stashed away somewhere, you don't know. So, you can't really say: "Yes, it will be done." And again, if you look at it, with regards to technology, by the time you've made a big dent out of it, you're going to have to re-photograph it with the latest technology, because you can only future-proof it so far. You can only future-proof it so far. Again, the images, now, from the early Noughties, you, kind of, you know, you can maybe use them in books, and so on. But again, if you were wanting to put that on the side of a building, then there's no way you're going to get a twelve-megap-megapixel sensor, you know, Canon 1D camera, what's popping out of there, and put it on the side of a building or a bus or whatever. Or if you want a really beautiful, kind of – what's it called? – high-end, you know, coffee-table photography type book. And that's the nature of it, as well, that, you know, sometimes the photography will- the nature of when things are being digitised, if you've done it in the most basic fashion, to do an accurate digital representation of the analogue form, marketing may go: "I don't want that. That needs to be photographed..." I mean, yeah, I don't know if you've heard this before, marketing seems of- everything on black, or really low-key, lowly-lit. They love it. But obviously, if you speak to a curator, it's like, that's what they hate, because they want to see what the object looks like, and it's got to be evenly lit, and you want to see all the, you know, condition reporting, and all that sort of thing. So, you're always going to be having to re-photograph stuff. There's always going to be that, you know, there's always going to be that demand. And again, it's, with the priorities of where that fits into the overall digitisation programme. So...

HC: What do you think has been holding back digitisation? Because it sounds as though York has now got a really great plan in action, and it's really thought it through. But why has it taken so long for that plan to even begin? It feels like you're doing it really well, but quite late to the game.

CS: I don't know, to be honest. That's the honest answer. What I understand, is, I think that the Trust, as it existed, operated at a certain level. And then, I think, it viewed itself, of what it could do. So, it's meeting that demand, whereas programming ramped up and, obviously, our offer ramped up. And again, in line with that, you're then going to have to be providing professionalised services, which people expect- it's like, meeting that expectation, really, isn't it? And I think, maybe, it's a change, really, that it's not just a little museum- it's not, like, a museum, it's, kind of, punching in a way, above its weight. And I think that's a good thing. That's a very good thing. Because, although it means we're busy, very busy, it means that you get the best out of people. It's constantly having to be at your best and, kind of, striving to- yeah, exactly. I mean... I would love to be able to, you know, if we are doing digitisation in the studio, I would love to be able to go in and, kind of, look at an object for two hours and, kind of, go: "Ooh, how are we going to light it?" And so on. But sometimes we just have to make that call, and say: "We've got this amount of objects, and we need to do it in this amount of time, and, obviously, to deliver that to the client, or to the request." And again, it's that demand. I think, that's it, really. It's professionalising it. And I think it's the offer we're providing. We are, kind of, punching above our weight, in a, kind of, good way. It's not in a, kind of, negative way at all. But again, I think it was just- I mean, a lot of institutions have digital teams, or they have a digital team and they have a digitisation department, or, you know, however it's split, and they have a separate IT department. I think, when the digital team actually started, it was setting a precedent, and setting an example of what could be done. And it's, kind of, part of our doctrine, now, which is- again, as I said before, it's moving from that service platform, and we're showing people what you can do. And it's, kind of, inspiring what people- what they can do. But it's providing the support for them to do it, but it's not doing it all- it's not always doing all the heavy lifting, all the time. Because that's being unrealistic. And then you're basically setting yourself up to fail. Because if we've got ten concurrent projects running, there's no way we can deliver if we do all of those ten at the same time. So, again, it's giving those skills and that technology and the, kind of, you know- particularly with digitisation, that people can do it themselves. For instance, with the Vivienne Westwood, again, going back to it, the digital team didn't photograph any of it. So, we didn't do any imaging. I didn't do any imaging of any shoes. And all of the stuff that was produced, all the content that was produced, obviously- the documentation assistants- documentation and curatorial staff love it. Because, you know, they run a search on- on our collections management system, and they run a search for shoes, and they've got all these lovely pictures of shoes, all in the same angle, all shot in the same way, and then, they can then show it to the designers, and so on, and then the designers used it. So, although it took an initial amount of work in the early stages, the pay-off, in the long run, has really benefited. Because we've, you know- they've done it. That's all the shoes. And the flip side of that is that, when that goes live on Collections Online, you've got a nice section of the collection that's now been covered comprehensively. And again, that was- we deemed it: "We'll do shoes. We'll do shoes. How many shoes have we got in the collection, and what is the state of the records?" And so on. And, kind of, go from there, really.

HC: When you look at what is online, to an external viewer, who's just come to see what- what has- you know, what's in the York collections, how do you think what's there represents the collection as a whole?

CS: It depends what site you're looking at, really. As I mentioned before, you've got three different sites that- that are currently managed by the Trust. And again, the programming schedule here is very, very healthy. It's very- we're constantly providing a new offer for visitors to the museum. But again, we know the number of objects that are in our storage locations, and so on. So, it is quite a diverse collection that's on show. And again, it's that, kind of, constant updates of the galleries to make them relevant and, obviously, engage with the public. So, we don't just- it's not just a load of

stuff in glass cases, with some traditional panels. We do, obviously- because I'm, obviously, part of the digital team as well, it's: "How can we engage with people, using digital technology?" And, you know, digitisation might be a component of that. So, you know, we may be using some of the images being produced for photogrammetry, and they might be rendered as 3D models, or they might be put into a VR experience, or whatever. So, it is representative, but again, there's only so much space, and there's only so much - if an exhibition's running, and then you've got your permanent gallery displays, there's only so many objects you can put on display, really. Again, I didn't mention it before, but we're also- in the early 2020s, there's a massive redevelopment project going on at the York Castle Museum. So, the whole Castle Museum will be renovated. That's where our HQ is based, over there. And then all of the galleries are going to be refitted. So, again, there'll be a large digital- I mean, traditional digitisation of- things'll be moved off displays, so we'll- obviously, get the chance to, you know, Hoover them up as they're being, you know, moved. But there'll also be new panels, and digital interactives, and that sort of thing. The other key thing that always- I, kind of, always sigh, is that, when digital interactives, and digital technology, is plonked in galleries for the sake of it. And is it actually doing anything? And then, really, that kind of approach- I mean, I think you should really take that approach to everything, like, with your online collections, as well as your, kind of, physical spaces, and what you're putting in them. And, you know, it's like: "Why- are we doing this to tick boxes, because it's the current trend in technology? Or are we actually engaging with people?" And again, a lot of our collaborative partnerships that the digital team have, with the University of York, at DC Labs, we've been collecting data on what the feedback to some of the trial, kind of, projects we've implemented into exhibitions. So, about a year and a half ago, two years ago, we worked on a partnership exhibition with the British Museum, called: "Viking: Rediscover the Legend." So, a lot of the York Museums Trust- or Yorkshire Museum collection, should I say, relating to the, kind of, the- just before the Viking period, were on display with British Museum collections items, and it was really good to see them all together. And then it went on a touring exhibition. But as part of that exhibition, the digital team and York Museum- sorry, and DC Labs, from the University of York, worked on a virtual reality headset. But it was a custom-designed virtual reality headset, so it wasn't like a big HTC Vive or an Oculus Rift or something like that, it was actually made of wood, which was really old-school. And, again, it was really interesting to get the figures and the- the feedback, and all the information regarding what the user feedback of using those was. And it- really weirdly, it was a positive, from top-down, age-related, from older people down to younger people, that found it was easy to engage with. Not a massive, futuristic-looking HTC Vive headset, that their grandkids'd play with, but it's a wooden headset that, kind of, doesn't look like a VR heads... So, it's really interesting, getting data regarding the engagement on- using pilot projects, with our collaborations. And again, that helps us steer our, kind of, programming and, obviously, what we're going to be putting into future exhibitions, particularly from a, kind of, digital standpoint. Because it's one of my most hated things, which is: "We'll just stick some digital stuff in there," and it's like, is it actually doing anything? I mean, the most common thing that's requested is: "We'll make a microsite," and it's like: "How many microsities do you need, like, running at the same time?" It's going back to the Collections Online. You just want a website and an end user doesn't know that that's a separate site, or that's not the same thing, and that's not connected to that organisation. They just want to get access to what they- you know, they're either visiting, or they want to do like, a deep dive into what the collection is. I mean, it's even simple stuff, like: image; your basic information about the object; and then as you go down you go into your more academic, kind of, in-depth studies; and, you know, obviously, crediting where it's been featured, and so on, as you go down the record. But I think it's really important to look at how that information is presented, obvious- obviously, from a collections point of view, so... Anyway, I'm rambling on!

HC: There's a question I normally ask, which is that: if an alien came from space, and all that they could suck up was the WiFi, how would they think that heritage- what would they think was represented by heritage? As in, if that was all they could see, and there were no real objects available to them. How would they view what the heritage of Earth was?

CS: It's very weird, because in the, kind of, grand scheme of things, it's very much a drop in the ocean of what's out there. And it does get, kind of, drowned out by a lot of other, kind of, platforms, as such. And again, I think, from a museum's point of view, we always have to take- we are specialists, and people look to heritage organisations as specialists in their fields, which we, you know, that, you know, you speak to a curator, they are. But again, a lot of that gets drowned out. And, I think, there's always that constant battle between the, kind of, research side of things, to the: "We're actually going to, kind of, pump out memes and just, whatever's currently on-trend," or whatever. And it's always that balance. You do have to, kind of, tap into that, sometimes, but I don't think that's all you do. But again, if you go too far over to the research side of things, you know, everything from, you know, the design of your UI on your Collections Online to, you know, the object information you're providing. Do you want it so full of technical jargon that, you know: "I've just started an interest, a really light interest in this subject. Do I want to be engaged?" It's very difficult to, kind of, walk that medium route, or walk that fine line, basically. But, I think, the heritage organisations- there are platforms that, kind of, have tried to, kind of, unify it. So, you have the Google Arts and Culture, that's really, a platform with all museums, and you can do mini exhibitions, and so on and so forth. But, I think, from- you know, no-one with any- would someone looking at it with no, kind of, previous experience? I think it does look very disparate and very, kind of, segmented. Now, there are cross-collaborative projects of people working on things. And again, it's something- I don't know. I mean, hopefully, with our Collections Online, that we do- when we, you know, when it does go live, that the data is accessible. So, if- you know, again, with using our- hopefully, our API's going to be designed to be open, so if people did want to get that data and use it, it can be linked into other things. But it would look very disparate. You know, you've got your... And again, there was always the hierarchy in the heritage industry: your nationals, and your regionals, and so on. And it's very segmented. There are lots of things going on behind the scenes, where there are- you know, it's not that we all just sit in our museums and go: "What are they doing?" And then, like, sneakily look at what they're up to on the internet. It's very collaborative. It is definitely very collaborative. I mean, in the digitisation sector, it's... Have you approached have you heard of the Association of Historical and Fine Art Photographers, at all?

HC: No.

CS: So, these are the people I was going to mention, that you may want to contact, because these are the people who are running the digitisation departments. So, they run a message board that's in- you've got to request, for permission to post- to join, and then, if you're going to post anything, you'd probably want to check with the board admins. But if you contact these guys- I forgot to mention it at the beginning, sorry... *[Unintelligible]*... Or AHFAP as they like to call it! So, these guys hold a conference every year. So, these are the imaging professionals in the heritage sector. So, if you wanted to put anything- if you were looking for anyone to talk to, you have all the nationals on here, who, this is, like, yeah, everyone's on this- basically, on this discussion forum. But if you email their admin, and just see if they're happy for you to join the board, and if they're happy for you to post something. I'm sure they will do. You can, obviously, explain to them about it. But these are the people you'd probably want to- these are the people you'd want to speak to. They have a really cool conference every year, and it's full of, like, lots of- it's people working in the heritage sector, but also the, kind of, arts and entertainment industries, as well. But if you're looking for- primarily for heritage photographers, all in one place, and you can hit them up, particularly from the national

museums, that's the place to go. So, again, we- everyone's very collaborative, but again, it's that- if you think- I suppose, if you look at how different museums- I mean, heritage organisations have, kind of- their decision-making is sometimes built on how they used to do things, and the, kind of, how the data's structured, and how they, you know, even how they store objects. It's all dictated the way they do things. So, there are things in place, particularly with digitisation, where you have digitisation standards that are agreed upon, and I suppose it- how close do you adhere to that, that have shaped the way people do things. But there isn't this, sort of: "All museums work in the same way..." It's still not joined up as much as you would have thought. There isn't, like, a platform for everyone to use, as such. So, yeah, if you were looking at it from an ext- I mean, there are- this is the thing, it's not- everyone works in silos, but there are- there is lots of collaboration going on. But if you didn't know about it, and you weren't working in the heritage industry, I think it could be, kind of, camouflaged quite well, and it'd be, kind of, drowned out by a lot of the other things that are going on. Again, it's going back to that whole: if you were a member of the public, and you thought- and you imagined what a curator did, you'd think they wear a white coat with white gloves and they dust the objects all day. And you speak to a curator, and it's like: "No." Because every photographer always asks them to do that, and they just go: *[sighs]*. And it's not what they do, obviously, you know. It can be a mixture of TV interviews, to documentation, to, you know, curating an exhibition, and so on. I just think, they sometimes put the white coats on just to play up to it and things. But again, it's that- I suppose it's that- there is collaborative working, but is it actually as visible as it should be? I mean, there's lots of museums we work- you know, like I say, our data is going to be openly licensed and, obviously, free to download and use and things. So, hopefully, if other institutions, you know- which some are, follow on that suit, then it does, kind of, open those doors to collaboration, more, doesn't it? That, if there's no pay walls, and there's no barriers for people using the content, then people, you know- it, kind of, can get joined up much easier. Because that's how Wikipedia works. I mean, it's all collaborative, as well, isn't it? That, you have a platform, people can- I mean, again, that's a whole discussion, if you speak to collections staff, regarding Wikipedia: is it a good thing or a bad thing, and is the content authoritative or not authoritative? That's another thing. But we all still look at Wikipedia, don't we? For just a little dip into the subject. So, it's gauging that, really. So... Anyway, I hopefully haven't ranted on too long, sorry!

HC: That's great, no, thank you very much. So, just finally, because we didn't... What do you see as a definition of 'heritage'? How do you define it as something different from 'history'?

CS: Ah, no, you've got me! Well, my stock answer, which I prepped for this morning, was- again, you go from the, kind of, items of historical and cultural value, which I think, well everyone always thinks as: "That's heritage. It's the stuff." But again, I think it's also the, kind of, understanding and the ideas and the practices, as well, that go with it. So, it's the, kind of, things that you can't hold and touch, so to speak. And again, I think that the heritage organisations, we're, kind of, we're a platform, in a way. We're a mechanism to be able to get this stuff- we're custodians. But I think, moving away from the whole: "There's just stuff in glass cases. You just turn the lights on and they clean the cases every day," and then that's all we are. I think that's a very- that's, really, not what we should be. So, we should be, kind of, championing ideas, and the practices, and, obviously, using the heritage of what we've, you know, what's existed, and what we are custodians of. And I think, the key thing is, really, is the engagement. And it's, kind of, getting- I think, I'm shouting from the openly licensed, kind of, platform again, but I think it's just making that accessible, really. I mean, again, I think, from- basically, it shouldn't be just we're reporting on what's happened in the past. I think there should be some sort of- I mean, that's why we- with the programming, we should have things that are challenging. I mean, I think, in- one of your questions was something such as, you know: "What things aren't put online?" Or: "What's deemed as not appropriate to be online?" I mean, there are going to be certain things with copyright restrictions, and things such as human remains,

which are deemed: "No." But again, I think it's always giving that impartial view of: "This is what happened, this is the heritage," but also, acknowledging that we do put programming on, or exhibitions, which might be more challenging. And I think that should be a responsibility, that we don't just remain stale and static. That it should be, kind of, driven forward. I think, the research, and the academic side of things should be, kind of, emphasised, as well, from a heritage point of view. So, I suppose, if you think of copyright, and the way copyright mechanisms work, things fall out of copyright, so people can use those ideas, and that content, to then make new ideas, and make new content. And I think that's the same thing with heritage, that we should be custodians of that, but we should allow- you know, we should engage with people, and then allow people to, you know, kind of, use that content as well, to do whatever they wish with it, really. So, is that too woolly? As an answer of heritage?

HC: It's always woolly.

CS: It's always woolly. OK.

HC: Thank you!

Lauren Palmer
National Trust
25th February 2019

LP: Lauren Palmer

HC: Helen Casey

HC: Could you please introduce yourself for me, and explain your role in your organisation?

LP: Yep. So, my name's Lauren Palmer. My title's Collection Lead for the Cotswolds, which, within the National Trust, the Cotswolds is a portfolio area, encompassing four pay-for-entry properties and two countryside properties. So, we've got a range of items in those houses, and a range of items that have come from archaeological excavations, and I advise and lead on the care of those collections.

HC: OK. So, tell me about the collection that you hold. What does it consist of, what's the size of it, what kind of things are you looking after?

LP: Yeah. So, as I say, there's four pay-for-entry properties. So, we have Chedworth Roman Villa, which is archaeological finds, and that collection, kind of, splits into two. We have the core antiquarian collection that the Victorians put together in the 1860s and 1870s, and then we have excavation finds, where we have accompanying archives with documentation for provenance and things like that. And we tend to split the care of those. The property tends to look after the antiquarian collection, and then we've got archaeological advisers who look after the archive and the associated documents for the new finds. Lodge Park is a Seventeenth Century building which has 17th Century objects in it, but we also have an accompanying store full of 19th and 18th Century furniture that doesn't quite fit with the 17th Century aesthetic now. Newark Park, down towards Tetbury, has a mixed collection, where we have modern furnishings that belong to the tenant, and also, because the tenant was an antiques dealer, we have a, kind of, mixture of antiquarian collection that's- antique collection that's come into that home, which we present as the home of the tenant, at the moment. And then, Horton Court, which is a large property, which is only open a few days a year because it's quite isolated, doesn't really have very much associated collection, apart from some stonework that came probably from the church next door, which has made its way into the house. And then, our countryside properties, we have Ebworth Estate, which encompasses Crickley Hill, which is an enormous Iron Age fort up on the top, and Neolithic villages. We've got all the finds from those excavations. And then we have a number of scheduled ancient monuments, and we have associated archaeological finds from those. So, it's difficult to give you a size for archaeology, because of how we record it. We record it as an excavation with finds, rather than how many finds there are. And then, the collections for the houses, we're doing work on at the moment, to check that those inventories are complete, so there's a bit of flex there at the moment. But it's a real broad range across the portfolio.

HC: And obviously a lot of very different things, and places, you've got buildings as well as objects. You've got furniture as well as big pieces of rock...

LP: So, traditional National Trust furniture and paintings, but also a lot of archaeology, which, I think, we're not really known for. But we're big landowner in the country, as well, and with land comes burial mounds, long barrows, Iron Age remains, hill forts, and those all have archaeology. And if they're investigated, we care for the collection that's come from them.

HC: How do you define 'heritage'?

LP: I would say, 'heritage' is part of what makes us who we are. It's part of identity. So, people don't necessarily find their heritage in their locality. They might be looking abroad, if they've- if their family have come from abroad. So, yeah, heritage is, kind of, a building block, that helps people define themselves. And it does tend to hook into what people are interested in. So, people will go

after Roman history, if that's something that speaks to them, even if they can't personally connect to it. But then they might want to travel to a city locally if they know that their grandmother came from there or something, and they'll go to great lengths for that. So, I think that this, kind of, 'history' and 'heritage' are almost a slightly different thing in my mind. You can be interested in history, but heritage often becomes very personal.

HC: Perfect. I might use that one! And what do you see as the heritage of the organisation as a whole? I mean, it's a huge organisation...

LP: Yeah.

HC: And... How do you see its heritage?

LP: Ah, do you mean, as in the history of the Trust, and how it's developed? Or the reason- how the Trust sees 'heritage'?

HC: I think: "How the Trust sees 'heritage'."

LP: So, the Trust was always about access. It was always about- initially, focusing on beautiful landscapes. It was about giving access to people who didn't, perhaps, have an enormous garden of their own, but giving them access to those open spaces, and that beauty, and that, kind of, inspiration, almost. And the heritage, if you read, kind of, Octavia Hill, they weren't necessarily talking about heritage, initially. They were talking about protecting these beautiful spaces and the, kind of, rise of industrial business, and factories, and the use of land for housing. I think they were about preserving beauty and preserving space and, kind of, places for people to come and be inspired, and feel relaxed. And the heritage element- the, kind of, slight teaching element that, kind of, came a bit later, I think, when the Trust started to acquire more properties, and started to think about what made each one special. And I think that's the Trust's approach to heritage, is: "What is special about this place? What story does it have to tell?" And that's very much what our heritage presentation, our interpretation, is focused on finding.

HC: Tell me about your background. How have you come into heritage, and which direction have you come from?

LP: Yep. So, I studied Conservation of Objects at Cardiff University, and graduated at a point where there were very few jobs. One of those little dips we've had recently. And so, I, prior to that, had done English Literature, and got very interested in special collections that were held in the university library, so having that access to primary material. And so, it was working with the actual objects, rather than working with the text, that I engaged with, and so I went back to university and re-trained as a conservator. And then graduated, unable to find a job, did various internships around the place, and then worked as a conservator on project contracts, so mostly Heritage Lottery funding. So, I worked in Exeter, London, Glasgow, and then a maternity contract came up for the National Trust at Chedworth. So, I came in as a fixed-term contract, as a senior House Steward, which, within the Trust, is the role that's responsible for looking after the collection, but is also responsible for engaging with the public, to talk about the collection, to talk about how we're caring for the collection. So, it's a dual role. It's collection care, but also presentation, which was different for me, and I really enjoyed it. And then, the opportunity came up to broaden that across the portfolio.

HC: Is there a tension between having a conservation background and wanting to keep everything still in time, and also wanting to share it with people, which will involve moving it, handling it, exposing it to the elements?

LP: Sometimes there is a tension there. I think... I feel quite strongly, that if what we're presenting is, for example, a working object – and I've just had this discussion at a property where we had an electrician in, and he checked the light fittings, and he basically condemned the wiring in one of our chandeliers. And the option was, we put it back up without any bulbs in it, or we took it down and put it into storage, and put something else up. Because the diameter of the tubing in the wiring

won't fit- the modern wiring won't fit down there. So, re-wiring, it would have to go to a specialist, it'd be a lot of expense for a light fitting. But as soon as you take something that is meant to be used, and put it in a store where no-one sees it and it's not used, it loses its function and it loses its meaning. So, I think the Trust is different to the experiences I've had in the museum, where, often, when we're presenting homes within the National Trust, if you take something out of the context of the room and the purpose it's meant to serve, it loses a lot of its, kind of, voice, a lot of its meaning, and the connection to the past, which is what we're trying to preserve. So, I think the Trust has a different balance to find, to museums. That doesn't mean there aren't things in the collection that I would say: "No. That's not suitable for handling. Perhaps we'll look at getting a replica." Some things aren't even suitable to go in a case, because we have things that vibration will just destroy. So, there's still that really strong conservation message. I think access is really important. I think there's very little point in caring for what we have unless people are able to appreciate it and build it into their understanding of the world and history. So, I'm quite passionate about access. But I also believe that there are some of our things, that, we will lose them, if people handle them, if they're passed around, if they're on display too much, and we need to think about how we can display those, or how we could convey that information in another way. And we also need to accept that we don't have all the answers, and in fifteen years' time, there might be some new technology that allows us to do it in a much better way. And so, sometimes, we just have to say: "No, we don't know how to do that well yet, so we shouldn't do it."

HC: Which moves us nicely onto digitisation. Do you see that as possibly being a solution to some of these difficult problems? And how have you looked at it, over the years that you've been working and studying?

LP: I think it can be a solution. I think, at the moment, I would always, as a researcher, or as someone who was interested in history, I would always prefer to see the object. I don't think digitisation replaces seeing that object in person. And I don't know if I want it to, actually. I think what it is, at the moment, is a tool to help people who are limited by distance. So, if you want primary source material, but you can't travel, I think there's a really important part for digitisation to play there. If you're doing research and you want to get a broad spectrum of examples, it's a relatively quick way to do that, rather than travelling from place to place to place. So... Sorry, what was the approach to the question, again? It was: "How...?"

HC: Whether digitisation can overcome some of the problems of not being able to handle, or even display, objects?

LP: Yeah...

HC: Because at least then they can be displayed in some form.

LP: Yeah. I think it overcomes some issues. Like I say, I think, we shouldn't second-guess where technology might go in the future. I think, at the moment, some people find digital images, almost, hard to believe. Like, I'm talking public now, rather than specialist. Because computer games can create anything. So, if we're showing them a picture of something, and saying: "Look how amazing this is," how much credibility, how much authenticity, do those images have? Where's the guarantee that we haven't enhanced them in some way? So, I think there's a challenge, for museum collections, that we can't just assume that putting a photograph of what we have online is going to speak to people and is going to excite people. I think you have to have that interpretation and explanation alongside it. So, almost, the digitisation of an object isn't enough, I think. I think it needs that expert voice coming in, to say what it is, to give context. But, I think, yeah, it can improve access to things that lots of people want to see, that, if you allowed it to be handled lots, then it would deteriorate. I think that's a slightly muddled answer, I'm afraid, but... It helps, but I think it needs a lot of resource there to make it really work.

HC: Great. Let me just take a quick pause. Okay, so, onto section two. Have you had any experience of putting collections online? And if so, how did it go, and what was it that was trying to be done? Where did the funding come from? What were the decisions around it?

LP: So, the project we're working on at the moment is to improve our digital content for Chedworth Roman Villa. So, the Trust, uniquely out of places I've worked, has an interface that hooks into the database, the collections database, and reflects it online. And everywhere else I've worked would've killed for that. It's things they talked about wanting to have but never managed to develop, that public-facing bit. Interestingly, the Trust doesn't talk about having it very much, and I think it's because of the level of confidence in the content. So, we know, for example, that our inventory descriptions for Chedworth are based on 1920s, 1930s understanding of what we have. We haven't improved that description. So, we might have a very brief description, saying: "This is Type Two of a dog dish," which doesn't mean a lot to our staff, doesn't mean a lot to some of our volunteers, and means probably less to most of the public that come. But that's what we have, to identify that object. It has a number on the inventory, it has a description, the number is marked on the object, so we can say we've still got it and we know where it is, but we perhaps can't explain what it is and what that means. And so, what this project is doing, is looking at those descriptions, looking to see whether we have more up-to-date reports, and whether we can improve that description. Checking we've got a photograph, looking to see if we've got any information about when that was excavated and who found it, putting some date information on there. And then, when we get to a point when we've got confidence in that, we will point people to the website. So, the website's National Trust Collections. It has everything, from every Trust property in the country, unless, on the database side, you've ticked a box to say it shouldn't be seen, shouldn't be visible, which we do with loans. Doesn't give location information. So, it tells people which property it's at, and it should tell you whether it's on show, so if you went there, whether you'd be able to see it. But again, that's a matter of data accuracy, whether someone's actually had time to go into that database and say whether it's on show or not. I think, for example, all of our stuff is set to 'default: on show', and about seventy percent of it's in storage, so we know that's wrong! So, the project we're doing now is- one of the outcomes is to improve digital access. To improve our confidence in it, to get our staff to the point where they feel like saying: "If you want to know more, you can go home and look on this website, and it will tell you more." And then, future- so, at the moment, resource-wise, it's me working with a team of volunteers, and I also cover other properties, so I've got split focus. But we're going through the inventory, we're making sure our locations are correct, and we're basically gathering a list of future work. So, there will be future investment need for photography, for transcribing those reports that I talked about. There's a lot more to do, but we, kind of, need to know the scope of the work, before we can start costing it.

HC: So, how did this project come about? Why now? Where's the money coming from? And- and what decisions needed to be made, in order for this to go ahead?

LP: So, the National Trust has, for a number of years, had an annual assessment for all of its properties, which they call a 'Conservation Performance Indicator'. So, every property, regardless of whether it's a house, a castle, or a stretch of coastline, is assessed every year for how well the conservation is going. And two or three years ago, they introduced a separate element for collections care. So, before then, it had been folded in under the sites care. Now, we have a separate matrix for how good your documentation is, how confident you are in your inventory descriptions, how many things have photographs, whether things are correctly located as being 'on show' or 'not on show'. It has really been broken down, individually. And it really highlighted the backlog that a lot of properties have, which goes back to staff capacity, it goes back to the fact that those are dual roles, where you're working with the public and you're trying to keep your database up-to-date. And frankly, if you've got a lost child, or a first aid incident, or a slippery footpath that someone's nearly

gone over on, those things always trump sitting there updating your database. And I would probably say that a lot of properties going over to seven-day opening, as well. You might, in the past, have said: "Right, Tuesday's my inventory day." We've lost that day now. So, people are having to find ways to get the work done, but there is a backlog. So, we had our first year of assessment, under this new scoring structure. It highlighted the backlog at all of our properties, and we started thinking about creating a role that was focused solely on that work, without having the operational ties, which is how my role came about. It's a three-year project, and we've structured- we've prioritised different properties on different years. So, Chedworth has got my focus at the moment, but I'll be moving on to another property.

HC: Great. Thank you. How do you decide how to interpret that collection? How much information are you going to be- put in? Presumably, a Roman site, there isn't a great deal of extra information. But are you researching, and how are you making decisions around how much to give people on that database?

LP: So, we've got more information than you'd think, because we've got- because Chedworth was immediately- the media were interested as soon as it was found in 1864. So, we have articles that were published, we have letters that were published, from the people who were doing the excavation. We have a few talks that we have transcriptions for, and then we have the later archaeological reports. In the next two-to-three years, we'll be publishing a new textbook about Chedworth, which is going to proofreading at the moment, and I've got access to those proofs. In terms of deciding what goes out to the public on the database, I don't think we've fully decided that yet. Because for me, there is a slight issue around: we're putting all of this work into a new book, and if I put all of the information online for free, what's the motivation to go and get the book? Who are we aiming this information at? Because on a really basic level, a database is identifying pieces, identifying objects. If we want to make it something the public can engage with, we almost have to go in and re-write all of those descriptions, and make them much more accessible, and not assume that they're coming in with specialist knowledge to start with. But we don't want to dumb it down. So, it's almost, you're going for multiple levels with your descriptions, then, which takes a lot of investment in time and consideration. So, I would want to decide that with members of the property staff, our curator, and it almost becomes an extra wing of your interpretation plan. So, we consider what's going onto our signage, what's going onto our property website. We would have to sit down and have a discussion about what our database is going to look like and what it's going to give to people. But we do have historical data. We've got quotes about particular statues and things like that. But we also have the most recent data that we've gathered for this publication that will be coming out. So, we have got some decisions to make around that.

HC: Do you think the decision to work on this backlog is part of a wider idea of using the online world for access? Is that where the push is coming from?

LP: So, we knew we had a backlog. I started working on this project and decided that the biggest priority for this property was doing a full inventory check and getting our locations bang on. The digital thing has almost come out of that as an additional benefit. So, I don't think the Trust is particularly focusing on its digital output, although that might change in the future. As I say, at the moment, it's not a website that we point a lot of people towards. And that, I think- my personal opinion is, that's to do with a lack of confidence in the quality of what's on there, what people could actually see. Because I'm not aware of properties who've been able to fund, for example, a big photography prog- programme, to make sure everything has got a photograph, and that is the way that a lot of people initially would hook into the system. So, I think the Trust's focus is just on the basics, to start with. So, are we confident in our locations? Are we confident in our movement control? So, they model themselves on the Museum Accreditation Standards. We have accredited museums. Chedworth's accredited. But even properties that aren't are supposed to work to that

standard. And they're checking that we're just doing all of those things first. And then we'll move on to the benefits that will inevitably come from doing everything right!

HC: Great, thank you! Let me just take another quick pause. So, from your experience at the Trust, but also more broadly – I've written down some reasons why you might not digitise collections, or why it may have taken more time for the decision to be made to go ahead and do it. Can you look through them and, maybe, tell me which ones you think are particularly important and why, and which ones you think haven't been such an issue?

LP: The 'copyright' one is particularly interesting. When I was working up in Glasgow, that was a real concern, particularly around people's names, as well: privacy and copyright. So, if we've had an object donated to us, who owns the images, because often the donation forms didn't specifically talk about image rights. Where they'd put a lot of work into the name part of their database. So, names of donors were on there, names of people who might be mentioned in a letter or a book, and all of those names were coming up on their data extraction that was going to go onto their website. And so, I think, that copyright is something people are very nervous around, and feel like it's a big piece of work that would need a lot of detail to understand it and get it right. So, I do think that's something museums worry about. 'Obsolescence' I haven't heard so much. Almost the opposite, actually. I wonder, sometimes, if enough planning goes into making sure it doesn't happen. I'm not convinced it's something people think about at the beginning. I think they think: "If we make a website or an interface, it will just work." So, I'm not sure- the maintenance of something is often the bit that seems to get left off. So, you might invest in a team that designs it for you, but then you don't think about future tweaks or keeping it running. So, I, perhaps, think that's almost at the bottom of the list, because I don't think people think about it enough. I think 'cost' and 'time' are a really big thing. I think, to do it well requires quite a lot- it definitely requires a lot of time. And if you don't want to pay for lots of people, it takes even more time. And I think, sometimes, there's an impatience. People want to start a digital project and then have something to present quite soon after it's started. So, my experience, the pressure is often – particularly with a brand new project – the pressure is to create something that can be shown to people within a year, or within six months. And sometimes, that isn't always the most sensible way of working. Sometimes there's a preparation work that needs to happen first, or you really need to think about who your end users are and what data they would need on there, which might require you to go off and do some research before you can put it onto your interface. So, I think, probably, cost and time are the biggest issues, obsolescence is the one that's thought about the least, and privacy and copyright is a thorny one that people are a little bit worried about.

HC: You said two really interesting things there. The first one was: "If you want to do it well." And the idea that it must be done well is one that's come up in the literature as something which might hold people back. Because I think business is, perhaps, more free to have a go and see if it works, and if it doesn't: "Oh, we'll try something else." And I think, in the heritage world, partly because of the way it's funded, but also because it's full of fairly high-level, high-thinking professionals, they don't want to rush straight at it and produce something that is not of high quality. Do you think that's something that may have slowed down digitisation?

LP: So, the heritage world- the other interesting thing about it, for me, is the differing backgrounds of people that come into it. So, I think I came into it assuming that everyone would have a Museum Studies degree, or a Heritage- or similar, something- Conservation, Museum Studies, something like that. What you actually find is people who've come in from business, or commercial, or retail, and they never have conducted any academic research, themselves, into the Arts section. So, I always think, that if you're doing a digitisation project, one of the most important things to think about is your end user. Who are you making this for? I think there's sometimes a pressure, particularly in museums, to target families. So, you'd get people pushing towards, perhaps, fun graphics, you'd see

investment in different ways of searching... But you might not get the accompanying understanding that academics might want to use this system. And if academics want to use it, we can't just put the finds on. We also have to put the references for the dig, so that they can go and find that on National HBSMR logs, and things like that. We have to understand who we want to use it and make sure we're catering for all of them. And I think, that is what I, kind of, mean by 'doing it well', is that we can make something that looks great, in terms of presentation, and that brings up quick results for people who, perhaps, want to see – I don't know – blue and white china, or something. But do we also cater for the expert? Or the researcher, or the student? What data are they getting out of it. So, I think, for me, 'doing it well' is something that's usable for lots of people. Otherwise, I just think the investment is- it's a bit surface-deep.

HC: The other interesting thing you said is that: "People want results quickly." Have you felt that- for me, there was always a big pressure to do something digital, without necessarily a great idea of what that might be. And I think that came from the big swell of opportunity, in the early 2000s, of what might be possible. And everyone suddenly thought: "We must do this, in some form." Have you felt that? And does it come more from marketing? And how is that felt?

LP: I think, in part, it definitely comes from marketing. I think, museums were getting websites, they're getting social media accounts, photography in particular. Photographs are a really good way to grab people's attention, and just say: "Look at this amazing thing," and then have the information to follow it up afterwards. And marketing teams are constantly looking for that hook, or that, kind of, poster-child object, to have at the top. And you had things like the 'History of the World in a Hundred Objects', things like that. Things that were very much focused on image, as much as on the content. So, I think there was an enormous expansion in capacity for digital work. There was- it was definitely seen as a marketing opportunity, I think. But the work that goes in behind that, and the work that goes into doing that for every object – so if you've got an amazing painting, or you've got a frame that the painting's missing from, which isn't so great to look at but it's still part of your collection, it should still be on equal footing in terms of data management. You have to put the same amount of time into that description and that photography as you are into your star painting. And I think that's where, sometimes, it falls behind. It's like the, kind of, heritage professionals you said, that system is on one side, and then the public presentation of it, and being able to say: "Look at our amazing things," can sometimes be a bit of a pull in opposite directions.

HC: Might just ask the next question. In the early years of the internet, when you could, sort of, see what the possibilities were, when you started working, did you have an idea of what might be possible twenty years in the future? And if so, what did you think might happen?

LP: I mean, my memories of the early years of the internet are copper-wire dial-up, sitting there waiting for it to load, and everything being very slow. I don't think- and- and if a page had loads of photographs on it, it was actually a pain in the neck, because you could never see them, you had to just leave it for kind of, five minutes, before you could see it. So, I don't think we had a concept- certainly, you know, nobody had smartphones or things like that. And you see people going around the British Museum with apps on their phone now, instead of a guidebook, or their personal audio guide. It has moved really, really quickly. And museums look to each other, I think, to see what other people are trying. I don't know if they're always as good at looking outside of the sector. And I don't actually know if this sector thinks of museums and heritage organisations when they're developing apps. So, it has moved quickly. I'd certainly... I remember people talking about digitisation and the potential for it. And I remember it coming up, as well, in early discussions about repatriation of the, kind of, seized items that people might have in their collection, and whether setting up, kind of, a virtual collection, or a digital collection, would be enough, without returning the object, because it would open up access for that collection. And I remember it coming into discussions about things like that, as well as marketing. I think people did see it as a big potential area, to do lots of different

things. But it always comes back to the investment of time and the investment of money, and, kind of, head space to get it right. And as you say, starting a project without an endgame leads to quite an unfocused tool, that doesn't really fit anything that you want it to do, then. So, I think, no, I didn't have a clear idea of potential. And as I say, my memory of the early internet is: it's a lot of text and not a lot of images. And as I say, now, people expect images. They're on their smartphones, swiping. They're flicking through photographs. And everyone has a camera phone. And everyone creates their own, kind of, inventory of what they've seen, if they like it. So, yeah. It's moved on a lot. And I have no idea where it'll go next. Implanted contact lenses or something, I don't know!

HC: 'Black Mirror' madness... Let me just take another pause. So, what you just said, that was interesting, is how fast things are moving. When I first looked for an online museum, I was looking at setting up an online museum, with a colleague. And coming from outside the sector, what surprised me was that there was nothing there. And that's where this inquiry started. What I'm feeling, now, is that maybe object-by-object digitisation, which is what I was looking for – I want to see what you have, and why you have it- is getting overtaken. Because social media was such a huge thing, and it's such a- opportunity to get straight into, you know, to people's phones, and straight into their brains, virtual reality and augmented reality is suddenly roaring up behind us...That- has object-by-object digitisation just, sort of, been left behind, as technology zooms ahead?

LP: Possibly. As I say, I think it would depend on your end user. I think- I've recently been looking at augmented reality apps that are available. The Museum of London had 'Street Museum', have you come across that one?

HC: No.

LP: Unfortunately, they're upgrading it at the moment, because I wanted to see how it worked. But they have a video showing how it did work. They basically- it's an app that you don't use at the museum, which is the thing I found really interesting. But they've scanned a load of photographs from their collection, of streets that still exist to some extent. And so, you could walk around London, and it would suddenly alert you that there was a photograph of this spot, and you would lift up your camera phone, and it would overlay the image where the house – or whatever it was – once stood. So, you'd have images of the Blitz with buildings burning, in a modern street, that you could see on your phone. And those kind of [*momentarily unintelligible*]- right- those kind of application- those- they are different to the database use of the collection, because they are just using targeted items. It's almost like a virtual exhibition, but it's an interactive one, which I think is where they're getting a totally different audience. Because, in the case of that one, you don't even have to come to the museum to use the collection. You're using it out in your everyday walk around town. The database, the individual object digitisation, possibly that is something that calls more towards academics and researchers. Possibly, that isn't something that everyday visitor is ever going to want to interact with. But once you have that data there, and you're confident in the quality of it, and you have your images, and you have your references, and you have the story of how it was found, you can then point people to it. So, if they go to an exhibition- you know, there's exhibitions, now, where you can leave your details and they'll email you afterwards. And you can, kind of, highlight objects you enjoyed looking at or you were interested in, and then you can go and look at the digital information online later on, because they've emailed you to say: "Just a reminder, this is what you wanted to know about, and here's the link." So, I think, they can exist alongside each other. It just always comes back to that: time investment versus how many people are accessing it, I think, as well, for a lot of museums. Like, how do you justify the cost of enhancing your database to the point where it excites people, if you're not getting lots of people looking at it? But you are getting lots of people looking at your app which is more focused use of the collection. But as I say, I almost see an app as a virtual exhibition, but an interactive one. And one that doesn't take up space inside the museum itself.

HC: How do you measure an online engagement? Because, presumably, for an organisation, it's just as important that someone has engaged with a collection, whether they're there or not physically. But do you think the measuring and the metrics are keeping up? Because there are managers at the top who want to know that 'success' is happening, however that- whatever that might be, whether it's actually a money return or whether it's an engagement return. And do you think online engagement is valued?

LP: I'm not sure that it's tracked within the National Trust, at the moment. And I think that, partly, comes back to the thing I was saying earlier, about our level of confidence in directing people to the site, and what profile it does or doesn't have. So, as far as- I'm sure it is tracked, but we're not given the figures, ever, at this point. I think you're right. I think they would want to see a return, if not in money, then in engagement – exactly what you said. I'm trying to think if I've ever worked anywhere where I've been told how many people went to a website... I don't think I have. For a- not for a digital collections database. I don't think I've ever heard anyone talk about number of hits for that. You get told about social media posts that prove popular. Because that's a, kind of, targeted use of your collection, again. And if it's an article, or a short video that someone's done, that really reaches people, and they really enjoy it, and it gets shared, you know, 'x' hundred times or 'x' thousand times... I've been told about that before. But I don't think I've ever been told about number of hits on a collections page. Yeah.

HC: Academics, around the year 2000, is where I've, kind of, focused my original enquiry, because they were making predictions about what may happen and what could happen. And it was quite interesting that they tended to be either quite optimistic or fairly pessimistic about a digital 'black hole', where everything would be there but nothing could be found, or things that were born-digital weren't properly collected. How do you think we've done, in terms of- do you think the online world has been very positive, very negative, or do you not even really think we're, kind of, coming to grips with what it can do yet?

LP: I think the difference in how far organisations have gone with this is quite dramatic. You've got organisations who've really invested in it and really thought about it, and then you've got organisations who don't have a social media account. And I think that's quite challenging. You almost want there to be a national standard we're aiming for, perhaps. Because if you bring it back to research and the study of history, it's a real shame if some organisations don't have that online presence at all. You know, some of them will just have a holding page, that says: "If you want to know about the collection, email us," and it's like, that feels underwhelming in comparison to other people who've done lots of work to make their collections accessible. What I will say is, I know people who've worked on projects that had a digitisation element – so things were being photographed, the inventory descriptions were being checked and updated – but the aim of that project was to put that collection in storage. The museum that they were being shown in was being closed down. It took less space to hire storage and put things in boxes. And I think, people who've worked on- or, the person I knew who worked on that project, felt a little negative about that, a little defeated about that. That they were improving the digital access, but actually, his collections were no longer on display for people to come in and see themselves. And that was, kind of, in the midst of the austerity cuts, it was a council-run organisation. They couldn't justify the cost of keeping a museum open and keep- and the maintenance on that building. And that felt like a negative use of digitisation. It felt like it was being used as a way to justify closing something: "Oh well, you can still see it online." But for someone whose career is focused on access to the collection, the physical being of the collection, and the value of what we can learn from the objects, that felt a bit of a hollow argument.

HC: That's a really interesting one, actually. What you say about the patchy take-up of digitisation – a question I usually ask is: If you were an alien and you came and hovered over the Earth, and all you

could have access to was the WiFi, so you could suck up the digitised collections but nothing else, what do you think you would see? And how would it represent our heritage as a whole?

LP: Oh, I think it would make you think that all of our collections were in perfect shape. I think a lot of what tends to make it online is the star objects. And actually, from a conservation point of view, I've been frustrated in the past, where we've got a set of photographs of an object, that were taken ten years ago, and I've got the object in front of me now, that's deteriorating, and I want to know what's happened in the last ten years. And it had been very carefully photographed from the good side, didn't have any photographs of the damaged side at all. So, I think, digitisation, it's almost like the, kind of, Facebook-Instagram selfie effect, where everything has to shine. Everything should look good. So, I think... What impression would you get? As I say, I think you'd have a lot of information about our, kind of, star heritage items, from around the globe. I think everybody does this. They highlight amazing things, and write about them, but they maybe don't talk about... So, if you're looking at archaeology in particular, you might have some amazing dining ware, but would you also have what the field workers were eating from? I don't know what idea of culture you'd get. I wonder if you'd only get the, kind of, high-status people's way of life. I think you'd miss out on technology, and I think you'd miss out on earthenware pots that have been fired on an open kiln, and things like that. Like, the, kind of, basis of how we got to that high Samian ware, or whatever it is. Yeah.

HC: So, almost, it's a marketed version of the truth of collections, which is that you have all sorts of things, in all sorts of states of disrepair. And actually, this is an argument I've been talking about: the 'busnification' of heritage, which is having to show success in whatever way it might be, and that putting stuff online might be more to do with a branding exercise, to draw physical people in, or... Do you feel like businesses is where the digitisation, sort of, push is going? Is it to make us look good. Is that why we're putting stuff out there, onto the internet?

LP: I think it definitely can be. I think, it maybe goes back a little bit to what I was saying about people from different backgrounds coming in, as well. If you have to sit down and have a discussion, and explain that, you know: "We've got these things that are in disrepair. They're not getting any worse, but they're not in a condition where we would be willing to display them at this point. But actually, they're not a high priority for repair, because we have other things like them in the collection." That's a whole process and discussion and thought process you need to explain, to someone who's not from a heritage background. And then, you need to form it in a way that explains to the public why we haven't treated these things. We've put photographs of them online, but they're in a bad state, but we're not going to do anything about that. I think there's a bit of concern that makes us look bad, that we're not fixing them. But actually, when you look through the, kind of, cost analysis of it, and you look at the condition of it, and the fact that it's not getting worse, it's stable... That's, kind of, a decision that a heritage professional would take, to say: "No, we're going to spend our money on this thing, instead." But I think there is a bit of concern that it makes you look bad, if you've got things that are damaged in your collection, or things that maybe aren't clean in your collection. There's always a balance. And you know, working in museums, you can go into the store and see thousands of objects, but you're only working on the one that's going to be going on exhibition. Your work programme is prioritised based on what's going on show, and what's deteriorating fastest. There are always going to be things that you pass over, because they're not a priority at the moment. And I think, if you go back to this 'digitisation of everything in your collection' thing, you somehow have to explain that to people. You, somehow, have to explain why this looks a bit tatty, or- and it might even be that it's the history of the object, it's a sign of usage. But sometimes there's an idea that everything should be as it was made, rather than as it was found. So, you should clean off all of those, kind of, fingerprints or whatever from the tool, or you should polish something up to get rid of the scratches, but the scratches show where it was used, kind of

thing. So, there's almost an added level of explanation, when you've got something that doesn't look tip-top. Whereas, when you've got something that's 'wow', it becomes your 'wow' moment.

HC: Let me just take a quick pause. Okay, so, this'll be the final part. I've got a theory that I'm working on at the moment, which is that the online space can be used in a much more positive way, by curators, preservationists, and all types of people, coming out from behind the 'Wizard of Oz' curtain, and actually saying: "These are the decisions we've made, and this is why." And I think, actually, your authenticity rests there, with saying: "We are trusted professionals, but we're going to walk you through why we do what we do, and then you'll understand why we present what we present at the end." So, do you think that the online world could be used in a more helpful way? To really get people to understand that not everything's shiny and not everything's, you know, brand-new-looking?

LP: I think it could be used that way. I think, certainly my experience in the museum world, is that senior management, the people who write budgets for these projects, wouldn't even- wouldn't conceive that that thought process happens. I don't think it's something a lot of senior management are aware of, within the museum world. I think, they almost think: "Right, OK. Curators, conservators, they're a specialism. We tell them what we want, they tell us what we can have. That's how it works." They, perhaps, don't fully know that there's that thought process that happens, that working process that happens. So, I think you'd have to get internal recognition of that process, before you got backing for it to become part of the digital presentation. Yeah. I think it could be used as a tool for that. But who would be engaging with that? Who would be interested in learning about that? Who would be your, kind of, market for that information? The justification for the time it would take to put that out there?

HC: I think, from my point of view, working in journalism and TV news, the behind-the-scenes idea is hugely interesting. I think people are interested in finding out what happens behind the doors. One of the joys of being a journalist is you get to go behind the doors and see what happens at the back. And people think you're not- no-one's interested in that, but I think they really are. And if you, sort of, say: "We're going to take you on a journey into our vaults, that no-one ever sees-"

LP: Yeah...

HC: -I think there's a huge idea that you're getting privileged access, and an expert is going to show you through things, and explain why things are the way they are. And I think there's a huge appetite for secret, hidden, unearthed... And I think that's something that curators can do, you know: "How did we choose the things that went into this exhibition?" I think that would be incredibly interesting. "We picked that and not this, and this is why," or "We couldn't fit this in, but here's a thing that we really wanted to put in."

LP: But that's almost like the use of your digitised collection once it's all there. Again, it's like maybe an article, or a curated selection of objects that you've chosen to talk about, to illustrate your points. I don't know how you would integrate that with an entire database, because, I mean, that's an enormous amount of work. So, would you just be like: "OK, we considered twenty-five objects, and we chose ten. So, we're going to write a little entry for all twenty-five, to explain why it was chosen or, conversely, why it wasn't chosen?" I could definitely see that working- I mean, you're right, you get massive take-up for 'tours of the stores', 'meet the curator', you know, behind-the-scenes access, definitely an interest level there. I think, integrating it with an entire database would be a challenge. I could see it working for an article, or a series of articles, or a blog, even. Maybe a blog is the way to go, because that's your development, as well. You're not presenting a finished piece, you're presenting the process. So, yeah. Maybe that, kind of, end of things?

HC: Brilliant. Looking forward, where do you think – it's obviously impossible to know, because we-nobody saw smartphones coming, as you said – where do you now see- that we've- we're twenty

years down the line, we've learned a lot of things about digitisation, which direction can you see it going? And do you think there will, one day, come a day where everything is online, or not?

LP: I don't think everything will ever be online. And I'm thinking specifically, as well, in terms of archaeology, where we have small finds and we have bulk finds, and 'bulk finds' is your bag of pot pieces. And I can't see a time where there'd ever be a justification for photographing and documenting all of those individual pieces and putting that online. I think there will always be an element of selectivism there. And there will always be what we would refer to as 'bulk records', grouped items that, for whatever reason, the kind of- the effort of describing them would not be rewarded by learning any more about them, I think is how I would say that. So, there isn't an academic value in writing individual descriptions of them, the academic value is knowing that there's that many of them. So, there's that many piece- there's that volume of earthenware terracotta pieces at that site, rather than looking at each individual piece. In terms of where it could go, I think some of the most interesting examples I've seen are these, kind of, 3D scans. Which you wouldn't need to do for every object, although it does show really interesting things about: technology, of how things are made; deterioration, because you can't photograph it from the good side, you have to show the whole picture. But also- and I can't think of any specific examples, but things like the Rosetta Stone, where we've got iconography and language that we don't fully understand... In the past people could only study that from books, but suddenly we're giving them the source material in person, and that feels really exciting. That feels like a potential area where we might suddenly make massive leaps forward, because people'll have better access and understanding of the primary material. But yeah, from the point of view of giving the whole picture of something, I think 3D scanning is really exciting, because people can look all the way around, and understand where the rivets are, rather than... You know, they're seeing the effect that the original artist or artisan wanted you to see, but they're also seeing the construction, which is the bit that I find interesting, so...

HC: Fantastic. Thank you very much indeed.

LP: Okay.

Tom Bilson
Courtauld Institute of Art
29th March 2109

TB: Tom Bilson
HC: Helen Casey

HC: So, first of all, could you please introduce yourself for me and tell me your position here?

TB: I am Tom Bilson; I'm Head of Digital at the Courtauld Institute of Art.

HC: Thank you very much. So, the first question is- you've done a little bit of it, sort of, audio, as it were, but could you explain your collection? What it consists of, and how many items you have in it?

TB: Well, I'm talking, here, just about the photographic libraries, not mentioning the Courtauld Gallery, which is another collection, and we have collections of textiles, we have all sorts of other collections. But the collection I'm describing is our photographic library. And it comprises, really, four major collections. One is called the Witt Library, which is a collection of images of paintings, 'round about two-point-two million. One is the Conway Library, images of architectural sculpture, of which we have about a million. And then we have two smaller collections: one is called the Laszlo Collection of Paul Laib Negatives, it's around about twenty-two thousand glass plates, depicting artists at work and finished works in artists' studios, up until about 1940s; and another one called the Anthony Kersting Archive, which is the complete life's work of an architectural photographer called Tony Kersting, which he gave to the Courtauld on his death in 2008, and, of that, there's about sixty thousand negatives and about a hundred and forty thousand prints. So, if you add all those together, you get 'round about, sort of, three-point-six million.

HC: So, tell me about your digitisation project that you're doing now. Why it's happening, where you've got the funding from, and what the aim is, what it's all for.

TB: We're doing two projects concurrently, and to tell you the, kind of, the history of all of them: I first worked at the Courtauld in '99, 2000, on a Lottery project to digitise our gallery collections, and the costs of digitising each painting were very, very high. But I think those figures stuck in people's minds. And although there was always an aspiration to digitise the photographic libraries, I think people pinned those figures of, like, £80 to £250 per image – you know, because they involved scaffolding and they involved cameras and working through the night – onto our photographic collections, at three-point-six million, and just came up with a nightmare figure as to how much it would cost. And I felt very strongly that this, kind of, shouldn't be the case. So, when I started working again, on this collection, the first thing we did was a really comprehensive audit of everything we had. And that was lots and lots of random sampling of boxes, of folders, of checking for condition, with the aim of simply finding a contractor to do the work for us. And we were very lucky. We found- we were given, awarded some funding, from a private donor, that allowed us to do around about two hundred and sixty thousand images from our Witt library. And so, that was, kind of, Project One. So, in a sense, it's a big project, but it was just a test. And those two hundred and sixty thousand, was a lot of debate as to which two hundred and sixty thousand it'd be, given the collection's two-point-two million. But we decided we'd do half of the British School. And some jokey person said, would it be, like, A to M? But instead, we ranked all the artists by date of birth, and did it in that order, so it's, effectively, British art, 1200 to 1799, by date of birth. And that was done after a period of tendering, and the tender was won by a Dutch company called 'Picture Eye' [*spelling?*], who really wiped the board in terms of the responses they gave to our tender document. I mean, every answer was a ten-out-of-ten answer. You know, going from environmental conditions while stored, to transportation, to colour correction, to all of these things that you might ask. So, that project, kind of, ticked away. Nothing else was being done. And, around about that time, a

separate project, kind of, crept up, which was this project called 'Courtauld Connects', which is about, really, improving access to the Courtauld. And I think- I don't know the full story, but I think it went along the lines of: it started as a project about physical access, because Somerset House was built as a series of terraced houses, whereas we occupy the building horizontally, and so we've cut through lots of what were previously dividing walls, and floor levels don't always coincide. So, if you were to leave the lift, and you were in a wheelchair, there would be a limit to how far you could go before you hit stairs, or hit a step. But of course, when you talk to the Lottery – and this was my, sort of, third Lottery project – about access, they say: "Ah yes, but what are you doing for the excluded people in the North-East?" You know, it's a bit- that they interpret 'access' in every single meaning, you know, of the word. And so, it very quickly became a project that was based on improving the physical spaces here and creating more spaces for the public, but also improving access to knowledge, improving access to collections, including- improving levels of public participation, all of these things. And it was that point that we realised, a) that we needed to clear the space that's occupied by the photographic libraries, because it's about sixteen to eighteen percent of the building, but that at the same time, this was a wonderful opportunity to do something to hang on- upon which to hang a project to do with the public access. And that's the point that, after two unsuccessful Lottery applications, that both assumed that we would simply take the Lottery money and give it to a contractor, and thereby the collection would be digitised... Luckily, we worked with a consultant called Jane Staniewicz [*spelling?*], and she said: "You've just got to do it with volunteers. There's no way the HLF will allow you to take this very sacred money and then just, kind of, hand it to somebody else." They said, you know: "You've got to create opportunities for people." And I've, kind of, learned that. I've realised that the Lottery give you money to do what they want, and you are just the, kind of, the instrument that does that, and hopefully you benefit from it as well. But that's sometimes how it, kind of, feels, although of course we have benefits as well. So, we created this volunteer project. Initially, it was to do the Witt and the Conway, but the HLF very quickly showed that they weren't- they didn't think that public interest lay in the Witt library and all those pictures of paintings. It's a, kind of, an academic collection, it's used – a very valuable one – but it's used by scholars, by visiting researchers, by dealers, by auction houses, but there's not much scope for public to get really excited about the Witt. Although it's a fabulous collection and we are thinking of ways to make it more exciting. So, we came up with this volunteer project about the Conway library, and the way the HLF work is that you apply and you receive funding for a, kind of, developmental project, and then you get into the full, sort of, delivery project. And we said that we would have two full-time volunteers for our developmental year just to test all the workflows. And we organised an open day, and literally – this was the beginning of 2017 – and literally, I had twelve teacups and a packet of biscuits, and we opened the door that evening, and there were a hundred and fifty-seven people queueing down the Strand. And that's the moment that, I think, we knew that we had a volunteer project on our hands that was going to do this collection, and do it in a really fabulous way.

HC: Have you come round to the idea of volunteers? What do they bring to it, and are there any challenges with using volunteers to do this work?

TB: We haven't really had many challenges, because we've resourced it really well. We have a volunteer manager, Sarah, who's not in today. She has an assistant, Denise. We recruit- I think, we started off knowing nothing about volunteering, and we saw a lot of projects that were using volunteers, that had things like minimum time commitments and things like that, minimum levels of skills, and we thought: "Well, can't we just-" can we, in a sense, use our lack of experience to say: "Why don't we do a project with no minimum time commitment, no skill requirement, absolutely nothing?" And we'd just say to people: "We're an educational institution, if you don't know how, we'll teach you." So, that was our, kind of, our mantra, really. A lot of the issues of working with

volunteers revolve around just making sure that we have enough people to come in every day, and that they're aware of that. So, the first thing we bought, which is our real, kind of, lifeline, is a cloud-based volunteer management system. So, it's a bit like booking tickets for Glastonbury. You, kind of- we release them every three months, and the tickets for the next three months, all the shifts, have gone. So, that's how it works, and people can book in to say: "I'm coming Monday morning, Thursday afternoon, then I'm going to disappear for a bit." So, we can all- and, you know, it builds in things like waiting lists, and it does fabulous reporting for us. So, that's taken a huge weight off of our shoulders.

HC: So, you've, kind of, professionalised the volunteer system. Where, at the beginning, actually, you were saying: "There are no rules," you've now, actually, very much professionalised-

TB: We have, kind of. But I think we've done it completely on our own terms. And we weren't aware how big this project was. And then we talked to other very well-known heritage centres, and they said: "Well, we've got fifty volunteers..." Things like this. And we thought: "Gosh, well, we really are, sort of, steaming ahead." So, that's worked very well. In terms of, kind of- you asked what sort of skills volunteers bring to the project. Some people are very, very accomplished photographers, and some people have very, very, you know, sort of, high levels of digital skills. Other people not so. But we've built the workflow, the digitisation workflow, hopefully, in a way that is appealing and un-intimidating for somebody who might never have used a camera, or even, like, a computer before, but is also quite satisfying for people who've done it many, many times. And that hinges on one particular thing, that was the biggest, I think, one about the database, and the hundred and fifty-seven people down the road, was the biggest thing that happened to us, which was: we'd visited another project, where digitisation of a similar collection was done by many people working together in a room, with many copy stands, and many cheap Canons on their copy stands. And then they had a big issue about cropping and aligning images, and differences in colour quality, and all of the things that you might expect. And we were, kind of, assuming that that's what we'd have to do. And I think I was, kind of, Googling cameras, and I found out about this company called 'Phase One', who make what they describe as: "The best cameras money can buy." And we went to a demo of some Phase One equipment, and met one of their representatives, who, within about ten minutes, completely changed our mind, because he said: "Well, buy this camera. It will take images as fast as you can press the shutter. And then build your workflow, in human terms, around it." And that's something that we've experimented with, and I think we've finally got right. So, it's really about making people feel happy, and not undervalued, and engaged. You know, essentially, kind of, feeding images, through this camera, and, you know, making sure that people have enough opportunity to look at the photographs, you know, to gain enjoyment from the collection that way, but also contribute to this workflow, which is turning out about a thousand images per camera per day. So- and also, I think, getting that camera was really important, because almost nobody has used one before. So, even people who know a lot about photography, who might, kind of, twiddle with a Nikon and say: "Oh, you're using the wrong aperture; let me just change that for you," when they see this camera, they, kind of, don't know what to do. We felt the same. We got it, but now we are, sort of, masters of it. So, that's been a big- that's a good thing, as well, that we have this...

HC: Can I, sort of, take you back a step? I've kind of jumped in at the middle. What's your background in heritage? And how do you think about heritage? How would you define it?

TB: Ooh, gosh... My background in heritage... I studied Natural Sciences at university, but eventually I ended up coming to the Courtauld and training to be a conservator. And a career in conservation finally led me here. It's something that still interests me, and something that I still do. So, I'm not- I've had experience of working in museums, but I think my interest in heritage, within this project, is trying to establish a, kind of, new sense of realism within digitisation. And I think that's the single biggest thing that this project is going to contribute to this field. It's certainly going to, kind of, startle

people, and possibly flies in the face of the IT perspective on digitisation, but it's something that we hold really closely, almost to the extent that we want to, kind of, establish a, kind of, a movement, or a course, or an organisation, or a, sort of, set of principles, that say: "This is the kind of- the conditions by which we do digitisation projects." So, I think that's been quite... And I think that probably stems from my interest in physical objects, rather than viewing them as, kind of, digital surrogates that exist within the land of IT, and things like that. But I can explain a bit more if you want.

HC: Yeah, how would you define your movement, in a nutshell? What is it you're saying?

TB: Well, I think main thing, I'd say, it really came from the use of photography, in that, I've seen other digitisation projects, and I've done them myself, that uses scanning, for example. And when you scan, you get this very crisp but rather dead image. Whereas, we felt, that because there's a physical collection here, and because, hopefully, this is going to be online in, like, a hundred years' time, and... You know, in the mind of a young person, perhaps, the idea of what a 'library' means to us will be really different to them. You know, maybe libraries won't exist, I don't know. I mean, it'll be very different ideas. But we wanted to emphasise, as much as possible, that when you look at one of these images on the screen- if it was cropped, you might think that you're really looking at Canterbury Cathedral in the 1880s, but we want to emphasise the fact that you're really looking at a piece of cardboard that has a picture of Canterbury Cathedral on it, and in some respects, that piece of cardboard is more interesting than the image it portrays. So, for example, we've got some prints made by T. E. Lawrence. He took the photograph, he developed the film, and he made the print himself. And so, you know, they have a certain physical presence, and a certain, sort of, electrifying presence, if you're a T. E. Lawrence fan. So, the way that we use the camera, is to record as much physical information about the objects. So, we think of photographs as, basically, as three-dimensional objects; they just happen to be very flat ones. So, we use a little bit of raking light whenever we photograph anything, so that it is apparent that you're always looking at a piece of cardboard that's stuck onto another piece of cardboard, you can see the line of shadow along the edge. We always crop outside the border of the object. We never crop into it to make it look more beautiful, because that's what you get, when you come to the collection. And we're very pragmatic in how we catalogue things. So, we transcribe the information, that's simply written on the boxes and the folders, but we also photograph the box, and we also photograph the folder. So, although this will, of course, be copy-typed – or OCR'ed, or whatever's the easiest way of doing it – as a viewer, you're always going to be presented with exactly the same physical material that you are when you come to the library. So, it's not as if we're using digitisation as a means of, kind of, 'cleaning up'. And I think that has been used in the past. I've seen a, sort of, few projects where that's happened. So, we photograph the shelf, so you see where your box lies on the shelf. If there's a folder within the box, we photograph the outside of the folder, so you can see whether it's a bulging folder, or whether it's a, sort of, skinnier folder. You can see whether it's got lots of greasy thumbprints down the side, that might indicate that many people before you have looked at it, or whether it's never been opened before. And I think all of this is an experience that you get when you come to the physical collection, and you're taking on this the whole time, from the minute you walk in the door, whereas, on a website, you are deprived of all of that.

HC: That sounds like a very mature approach to digitisation. Have you changed the way you've digitised over the years? Because this is, now, giving a lot more credibility to the online world, which I think is something that's happening a lot amongst young people. They don't see the difference between online and real life. And is that- what's, sort of, driving you in this direction?

TB: I just think I want- when everybody looks at one of our images, I think, it has to be apparent that they're looking at an image of a physical object. In the case of the photograph, they're looking at a piece of cardboard, upon which an image is written. And I think that's important, because this

library, when it's digitised, will go into store – thank goodness, you know, it'll go into a proper environmentally-controlled store – but it won't be here, it'll be at an off-site location. You may be able to visit it, or you'll certainly be able to ask for material to be brought back, if you really need that. But it's been a physical collection since the 1890s. There's, like, a hundred years of history, of lives, of people cherishing the physical object, of rearranging them, of putting them back in the boxes in the right order. And I'd hate that, somehow, to be regarded as, almost, like, a, sort of, back-story to the new digitised collection, that somehow ennobles it and, you know, sort of, by- by nature of making it accessible, somehow almost, like, reinvents it, whereas it's got a hundred-year history, you know. So, these are already well-established collections. I just, absolutely don't want to deny their physical past, and the lives of the people that interacted with them. So, I think, as much as we can do to, sort of, almost have this, kind of, forensic, sort of, quasi-archaeological approach to digitisation, then that's what we'll do. So, we don't clean up our metadata. So, we have slightly messy metadata with, kind of, artists with the- kind of, two spellings of their names. We're not trying to, kind of, squeeze it all into a, kind of, pre-existing structure. We just take it as it is. The only changes we might want to do, is that, the Conway library is arranged by date. It doesn't look as if it is, but it's arranged by date period, like 'Architecture Pre-1500', and then '1500 to 1800', and '1800 to the Twentieth Century'. And that means that something like St Paul's Cathedral could occur three times in the library, while Somerset House... So, I think we might give an option to toggle the collection, as it's presented online, and put location first and date second. But even still, for people who know the collection, we'll give you the option of browsing it as it sits in the boxes. And we're backing it up with 3D photography of the spaces as well, so, you know, all of this will be preserved.

HC: Okay, so, Part Two... Looking on a- sort of, a wider view of heritage as a whole, if you can remember, back around 2000 when you were doing your first projects as the Internet was just becoming ubiquitous in people's workplaces and we were suddenly starting to see the opportunities, can you remember what you thought might be the opportunities of the Internet, for heritage? And how did you think this twenty years, that we've just had, were going to go?

TB: Well, at that time, we were really, really excited about putting material online. There were worries. I think people worried about whether it would result in a deluge of visitor enquiries, I think that was the single biggest fear. I don't think there was too much anxiety – and I think this was- we were really thankful to this – about the simple notion of sharing images. I don't think we completely understood copyright, at that time. You know, Creative Commons was still, sort of, in the future. I think we took a stand, at that time, that even if we'd created a new image of a work that was out of copyright, somehow we'd created a new copyrighted image. We don't, as an institution, adhere to that now, though I know a lot of other museums do. I think- sorry, can you remind me of the- your...?

HC: A lot of people writing a lot of the literature, around the year 2000, was all about the democratisation of heritage. And I think it was a suggestion that we were going to put everything online, and it was going to be shared amongst everybody, and, you know- Utopia would ensue. And then the other end was people saying: "There'll be a digital black hole, and everything will be obsolete, and we won't know where everything is." And I don't think either of those things have come to pass, but...

TB: I think we were, because of cost, and because of, you know, not having the same facilities of, sort of, digital asset management, and collections mana- I mean, our first collections management system, we built it ourselves. You know, there wasn't a CMS, there wasn't- well probably there was, but it hadn't emerged as a pre-eminent system, or an AdLib, or you know, all of these systems were, sort of, didn't exist. So, I think we didn't do- I think, the idea of doing a collection, I think, in its entirety, hadn't occurred to us, or we would have just shied away from it. So, we were, kind of, digitising highlights. And that project, that we did in 2000, was a, kind of, a bit of a breakthrough,

because we did all of our paintings and all of our drawings. We didn't do our print collection, because it's too big. And we did twenty thousand images for this library, but it took us years to do. I think what we've really seen, in the intervening period, is that we've got a little bit more pragmatic about cataloguing, because the Courtauld ran a project, in the 1990s, called the Witt Computer Index, and that was aimed at cataloguing the entire Witt library. Or part of it. But it employed, you know, eight or nine people, over a, kind of, eight-, nine-, ten-year period, and they managed to catalogue – with no images, because this was 1990s – and they managed to catalogue about, sort of, eight-to-twelve percent of the collection. Now clearly that's, like, a hundred-year project, if you do it at that level of detail, whereas we're very pragmatic now, and although, obviously, we're going to put- we are continuing to put works from the Courtauld Gallery online with really rich metadata, for this project, if we go down to the box and the folder, that gives a project that we can do in four years. So, you'll see a virtual box, a virtual folder, and then you'll display- you'll see the images within that, that all, obviously, share something in common. Sometimes something very, very detailed in common, like 'Cloud studies by John Constable with a tree to the top and the bottom but not at the sides'. I mean, they are- it gets down to quite a level of- but you don't have to catalogue every single image. So, I think we've got a lot more relaxed about that, and not doing these projects that are going to take years and years and years to do. I think we've become a lot more relaxed about copyright and, you know, welcome Creative Commons. I think... I'm trying to think of anything else that's changed... I think we're- another big change that's gone on, is thinking about creating money from images. We run a rights-managed licensing service, but whether it brings in enough money – when you take out 'superstar' works at the Courtauld Gallery, and then we look at money for, say, one of our photographic libraries – is really debatable. So, I think that's- we're feeling more relaxed about our commitment to the HLF, that we have to go through with now, which is to, basically, give away the collection, under a Creative Commons licence, wherever we can. And I think, also, as part of that gesture of giving away images, previously, people always said: "Well, you can have an image, but you'll have the- kind of, the 800x600 one, but somehow we'll keep the other one back, in a, kind of..." But there's no point in giving people an image that's too small for them to resolve any detail. You know, if you're going to give it away to somebody who wants to see the kind of shoes that somebody's wearing in the bottom left-hand corner, reducing an image to just a picture, that you look at and admire, rather than interrogating and seeing detail, that's no use whatsoever. So, when we give collections away, we are going to give away the high-res images, as well.

HC: Do you think there's a push-and-pull, between wanting to share, which most heritage organisations, as a whole, do, because it's part of their educational remit, and also needing to bring in an income? How do you think that's played out over the years?

TB: I mean, there was- I think it's sometimes a surprise that Creative Commons does allow you to charge for images, as well. So, it's really, kind of, an 'honesty box' approach, isn't it? That, if you want to use one of our pictures, and download it, and use it for a commercial purpose, it's really- you know, I don't think it would happen if you were a big multinational company. We'd come after you. But [*briefly unintelligible*] that the idea of high-res images, and making them available for commercial use, it is a bit of a leaky bucket. And that, you know, any kind of request to delete them after use and everything like that, I'm sure never happens. I think we're feeling less protective of our collections. I think there's a much greater sense that the spirit in which these collections were created was that they should be shared as widely as possible. And with physical objects, there are obvious limitations to how you do that, whereas it seemed that, sometimes, when start- people started to digitise, it gave people another bite at that- people who wanted to restrict use, another bite at that, kind of, cherry. To think: "Well, now we can create new barriers to accessing this content." Which seems completely un-compatible with the spirit in which the collections were

created in the first place. So, I think we've had this, kind of, twenty-year hiatus, where we've got back to where we might have been, on the same trajectory from the 1900s, right- you know, going up to the, kind of, 1980s, 1990s. And then digitisation was almost- became a new way of controlling content. But I mean, we will look to make income, generate income, from the collection, but the primary aim is to be able to give it to people, especially to students, especially scholars, especially people writing PhDs. I mean, the idea that somebody has to pay an image right to stick an image in their MA thesis is just abhorrent, really. And if we can be part of, at least, sort of, standing by liberating our collections for that particular use, you know, all the better.

HC: So, Section Three. I'm just keeping an eye on the battery... What I've written down here are reasons not to digitise, barriers to digitisation. Could you comment on them, perhaps rank the ones you think have been most important, and why?

TB: Cost- we thought cost was a barrier, but the big breakthrough was doing a really detailed audit of our collection, which then, I think, meant that whenever we went to a contractor, we were giving them as much information as we could. Because previously, we'd found that people came back to us, adding a big margin on all of their costs, but the fact that we could say: "Well, maybe those are there, you know, we don't know how many images are in each box, you know, just take our problem!" So, I think, cost, we feel cost to be, now, a much, kind of- it's just commensurate with the size of the collection that we're doing. It's not a, kind of, a big worry, that there's going to be a cost of- with many noughts attached. Again, time, you know, we digitised the two hundred and sixty thousand images from the Witt library that were done by Picture Eye; that was done in just over three months. So, I think that surprises people. So, time doesn't seem to worry us. I mean, the project that we're doing now will take another, kind of, two-and-a-half to three years, but you know, for a collection of its size, again, that seems reasonable. Expertise and IT skills... I think we've been through a, sort of, period of having to build many, many systems of, kind of- like, making some sort of storage and infrastructure, then buying a digital asset management system and connecting the two, and then getting a collections management system and then somehow connecting those two, and then building a website and somehow then connecting those. So, there's so many, multiple points of failure, that we experienced in the past, and I don't think that's such an issue now, because we have tendered, and we're going to tender, for the, sort of, dream scenario of integrated storage DAMS, collections management, website, and crowdsourced cataloguing, and there are some companies that will give you the whole thing. And then your, sort of, need to have people to cobble bits together, and to have, kind of, five different people to go to when something goes wrong, will hopefully disappear. Fear of obsolescence; I guess that's an issue in things like file formats that we store. We are still storing the forma- we're using cloud storage, but we're still storing the images on, sort of, portable media. I mean, there's some comfort in knowing that you can pick up your whole project and put it in a little bag and take it home, if you- you know, if there's some disaster within the building. And I think there's still a fear about using cloud storage, from that perspective. And if you know that you've got a backup, and it's here, and you can hold it in your hand, I think that's a very important thing. Lack of political will... I think we- this is quite interesting, in that we have found that- when we got our funding from the New Opportunities Fund, to digitise the gallery and the bit of the photographic library, it felt that that was, like, one of the big- the last chances to get funding specifically for digitisation. And I think we missed the boat with other organisations, who had almost assumed that a digitisation project had taken place, but they were then awarding funding for some activity that was based around that project, to do with enriching the metadata, or visualisation, or things like that. I still think that we're witnessing a very strong case for funding to be continued to be available for digitisation, because we haven't scratched the surface yet. And I think, if anybody thinks all the important stuff has been done, then they need to come and look at the Witt library, because you will not find those images through Google Images. If you look for an artist, like Cezanne

or something, and you search Google, it's nothing compared to what you can get from our boxed-up collection. So, I'd like to see people aware that we've only just scratched the surface. Privacy or copyright... I think people are- I mean, we are grappling with this question, regarding the Witt library, because these images are not initially ours. I mean, they were given to us, but they were given to us for a particular purpose. But I think we've found that the collection- the conversation about rights to publish... I think if it's done from a courtesy perspective, rather than an opportunity for people to make money, then it often goes further. I think the whole idea about charging rights and licensing has turned a conversation, that should be about permission and courtesy and acknowledgement, into a conversation with a pound sign at the beginning. And, you know, who can blame it? I don't blame artists' estates, if they think: "Oh, this is a chance to make money," or if anybody who owns copyright. But that money is often quite small. And I think, to preclude sharing collections online because there's a possibility of making money, is sometimes a bit short-sighted. Yeah.

HC: Great, thank you. Looking forward, what are the things you've learned from your digitisation experiences, over the years?

TB: Ooh... I think, the one I'd learn now, is that, if I had a chance to do anything, I'd probably do it with volunteers.

HC: Okay...

TB: I mean, I love working with Picture Eye, and they will hopefully tender for what remains – the remaining two million images in the rest of the collection – as- along with any other contractor, who goes for that, because it's a fabulous project. And clearly, we can't do everything with volunteers; we're trying to do tons of stuff, here. But I'd certainly rethink that. I think, if you can get your equipment right, and you can get your workflows right, then working with volunteers on a digitisation project is the way to go, because it's such a rich experience. You know, instead of sitting in front of a laptop all day, you can actually talk to people, and, you know, find out a lot about their own personal histories, and how they relate to the collections, and it helps you think through your own ideas about public sharing and public engagement, as well. I think... I think I'd always photograph. I don't think- I can't imagine why I would turn to a scanner any longer. I just don't like that way of working with physical objects. I think, scanning, sort of, almost seems to, kind of, suck the image out of the original, whereas a photograph is a photograph, and I think there's something appropriate about photographing a collection of photographs... Ooh, what are we- I'm, kind of, looking forward to stuff to do with crowdsourced cataloguing, which we want to build into this project. That's something that we tried out, in the past, and we tried it out in a pre-social-media kind of way, where we built- we cobbled together some bulletin board software, and allowed people to use it to put comments underneath images. And we started this in 2001, and sometimes people would say: "That's definitely not the North door of the Parish Church," and we'd just got the caption wrong. But, you know, my whole perception of that was changed by somebody who wrote, against one of the images from the Courtauld Gallery: "This painting reminds me of the last holiday I had with my father," and wrote this very personal piece about their relationship with their late father. And I, kind of, thought: "You can't legitimately separate this from the image any longer." And the idea that- I think we've become more relaxed about the idea that metadata exists in, kind of, shells, and that you can keep your, sort of, boiler-plate metadata in the centre, but there's no reason why it shouldn't go out to personal recollection, reminiscence, all of those things, and that they're just as important. So, I think that's something- we are, sort of, we've learned to, I think, be a little bit more- to welcome, you know, public participation, with the collection.

HC: You've got quite a forward-thinking view of why you share and how you share. Not everyone's doing the same. As you say some copyright issues have- have held people up, and other things. And people have tried to monetise the Internet and it can't be done. If you came down as an alien, and

all you could suck up was the WiFi, so, all you could see was what was online, how would you say heritage is represented overall, based on what's been digitised?

TB: I think it's still hard to find. I mean, I'm thinking of a certain heritage organisation that has a big photographic collection, and even though I know they have it, when I go to their website, it's often quite difficult to actually find within that site. So, I think, sometimes, the visibility of heritage collections online is a problem. And especially when, you know, if you search for things that might echo with their collection, but Google just pushes them way, way down the list, then it's sad. But then again, I'm not a hundred percent fan of projects that try to aggregate collections, as well. I don't think they've always worked. And I rather like the distinctiveness with which a local museum might put its collection online, compared with a big national museum. I think we're becoming more adept at, kind of, reading digital information, and looking at digital collections, and becoming, kind of, connoisseurs of the way in which museum collections are- heritage collections are actually presented online. And there's something- I don't know. It's the wrong word, isn't it? Charming, kind of, engaging, about the way in which a local museum might put its collection online, which I hope that they don't lose. You know, the idea that everybody uses the same collections management system, they have the same online experience, that everything, kind of, coalesces into one big blob, with, kind of, cross-collections searching always being available... I'm not particularly, personally, a fan of that, although I know it would be a, kind of, a wonderful goal.

HC: That's interesting. Do you think there will ever come a point when everything will be online? And if so, when would that be? Or do you think that's never going to happen?

TB: I don't think it ever will happen, because, I think there'll be a, sort of, backlash. And I'm thinking of the way that, you know, when technology passes through, and leaves, kind of, turmoil in its wake, then people with a creative mind, kind of, make use of that, sort of, vacuum, and do creative work. I mean, if you think about how almost every printmaking process, that artists use, used to be a commercial- you know, from woodcuts, to lino cuts, to wood engravings, to etchings... I mean, they're all a, you know, formerly commercially printmaking process that, kind of, artists have seized on. And- in the same way that, if you meet somebody who's really serious about photography, you assume you're talking about somebody who uses film. Or if you have somebody who's, like, a really serious listener, who's got a really serious music collection, you'd probably think that they're talking about records. So, in a sense, I think there'll be a point at which there'll be a certain joy in museums that you can only visit in person, or collections that you have to visit to see. And I think that re-engagement with the physical, or the fact that these things will not appear online, will be, almost, like a new kind of excitement. So, I'm trying to think of this – what was it – I remember once asking somebody about, you know, about, sort of, London, and how it would've looked a hundred years ago, or two hundred years ago, when all of these buildings, that are crumbling now, would've looked new. But they said: "Yes, but next to them would've been another crumbling building, that was..." In a sense, this task is never finished. You know, it never achieves a hundred percent perfection. It just hovers around the fifty percent. And I think that's how it'll be for, kind of, online resources. I think the idea of a totally digitised future will never happen. And I think things will actively conspire, to make sure that it never does.

HC: Fantastic. Thank you very much indeed.

TB: Good.

Fiona Talbott
National Lottery Heritage Fund
11th June 2019

HC: Helen Casey

FT: Fiona Talbott

HC: So, first of all, could you please tell me your name and your position here?

FT: Yeah, so, Fiona Talbott, and I'm Head of Museums, Libraries, Archives, Policy.

HC: Okay. So, just so that I've got a little bit of background as to where you're coming from, can you give me your background in heritage, and how you've got to this point?

FT: So, I've worked, really, in the museums sector for about thirty-five years, now. I started off, God, about thirty-odd years ago, working in the university museum in Newcastle, which is now the Great North Museum, but was then the Heimcourt Museum. So, I was working, really, as a geologist. That was what my first degree was. And then, gradually, over time, I've just- I became more of a generalist, in small museums. So, you know, working as an assistant curator, or something like that. And then, I'd say, probably for the last twenty years, I've, sort of, alternated between working in museum agency type organisations – RA Museum Council, for instance – or running a museum service. I've been at the Heritage Lottery Fund, now, for eleven years, pretty much doing the same job, but sometimes the job title's changed.

HC: Fantastic, thank you. What's your definition – it's a bit 'off the top of your head', I know – but what's your definition of 'heritage'? How do you define it, as opposed to 'history'?

FT: Well, interestingly enough, we don't define 'heritage' here! We keep it- so we basically say heritage is what people value, now, that they want to hand on to people in the future. Deliberately chose not to define it, so that we could be as inclusive and as broad as possible. Although, you know, whenever I do presentations, I do talk about the areas in which we fund, so obviously, I'll talk about museums, libraries and archives, but you know, natural heritage, built heritage, memories, intangible heritage... but, definitely, we don't define it.

HC: Part of what I'm looking at is the pressures on heritage professionals over the last twenty years. I'm trying to look at why digitisation has taken a while to get going... and by that, I mean object-by-object digitisation, putting the catalogue online. And one of the things I'm really interested in is the funding pressures. And I'm looking at how the Heritage Lottery Fund set out to involve communities as quite a priority in – I think it was about 1998, there was a report. And my theory is that that has pushed GLAM organisations towards funding in a, sort of, a project style, where they bring the community in, they create new heritage, such as a memory project. And then that goes online, rather than that, kind of, back-room, sort of, grinding through the catalogue and improving that to get online. Can you tell me about – from your view, inside the organisation – whether- whether that theory, sort of, holds any water, and whether you have any more, kind of, detail on how that funding was tied up in a slightly different way?

FT: Yeah. I mean, some of it's going to be a bit hearsay, of what colleagues have told me before I was here, or what I experienced myself when I was, you know, not working for the Heritage Lottery Fund. So, the early days of the Lottery were, shall we say, a little bit more anarchic. And there wasn't any strategy within which people were operating, or a framework for which decisions were made. I'd have to take your view, if it was 1998. But there was a point at which the Fund developed its first strategic plan, and that was at the point where I'd started looking at – I should remember, the three

cornerstones, which I think were 'participation', 'learning', and... I'm really sorry, I can't remember the third one, but...

HC: I can look it up...

FT: You can look that up. That's- yeah, that'll definitely be online somewhere... With 'learning' being mandatory. Linked to that was always the fact that the Lottery Fund was a funder of projects. So, that- you know, that was part of its remit from government, actually. What a 'project' was, was never defined, and so, I think, as we talk, perhaps, later on, about how we've changed our style of funding a bit, 'projects' can now be things that, maybe, last two, three, four years; they're longer-term. But in the early days, I think, projects were very much driven by what the sector thought its needs were. So, if you were to look at the two sectors that take the most money, in any one year, are the 'built environment', and 'museums, libraries, and archives'. If you look at any of those early projects, they were basically all about, you know, getting the house in order, dealing with all the problems that had arisen through a lack of investment in building infrastructure over the years. And then, we start moving onto this idea of funding projects that are based around activities. So, that might be about an interpretation of a collection, it might be about involving a particular community and interpreting a collection, something like that. And I think that focus has really continued throughout the lifespan of the Fund. And I think, to go back to your question, really, about this idea that we would fund the project, and then things might get put online, obviously, in the early days, they weren't even put online. But I think there was always that sense we weren't funding the infrastructure of digital. Now, you could ask the question: "You've just told me that you have funded lots of infrastructure; it was built infrastructure. And why not digital infrastructure?" But I'm not entirely sure why that wasn't the case. I think, perhaps, too many fingers had got burned by things like the New Opportunities Fund, the DigiFund, and things which really hadn't worked out. And just looking through what your work is, that idea of people almost having this, like, fear of digital, I think perhaps there was some institutional fear that, you know, however much money we've got, here at the Lottery Fund, it's still quite- you know, it's finite. Whereas, funding digital infrastructure could be quite infinite, in many respects. So, I think there was- I can't say for definite, 'cause that was before my time, but I think there was probably a, you know: "Goodness knows what would happen if we went down that road, so we will stick with funding- with defined projects, and 'infrastructure' will mean 'building' and not 'digital infrastructure'."

HC: You were on the other side of the fence, at that time...

FT: Yeah...

HC: What was your early feeling about what the Heritage Lottery Fund was going to do, and was there any idea that you were going to use it for digital? Was that in your mind, at the time?

FT: Being on the other side of the fence at that time, actually, I was working for an area museum council, and we had quite a lot of involvement. All of the area museum councils had, actually, with the Lottery Fund. We give them some some- we had a, sort of, statutory arrangement with them, that we would comment on all applications. And I think, actually, now that I'm thinking about it, there is also a push that came from that other side. Because, as area museum councils, we had a lot less money, obviously, than the Lottery, and could never deal with what we saw as the major issues for many of the heritage- well, for me, museums, but just taking heritage more widely, which was about bringing things into a, sort of, modern fit-for-purpose state. And so, I suspect some of the thinking, that we had, when we were talking to our client base, was, you know: "The Lottery's got lots of money. This is the chance, actually, to do that refurbishment, which you think is the thing that's going to make you attract-" at that point, we were talking about audiences, really, rather than sustainable organisation. So, you know: "-attract new audiences, retain the audiences you've got." So, I think everybody thought, you know, this was the answer to all of those building problems, those big problems, really. And digital was in a very, very early stage. I mean, I do also remember,

the organisation I worked for was a recipient of some money for digital projects, from what was then the Museums and Galleries Commission, and to be very honest with you, we made a real hash of it, because we really didn't know what we were doing. And we worked with a small consultancy who, I think, you know, with hindsight, we could have used them better. But we were basically just digitising education packs that we'd produced. And it was basically just taking, you know, what was on paper, and putting it on-screen, almost. It was very primitive. But we didn't know anything about how we would make things properly discoverable, so all of that just disappeared when we could no longer host it. So, I think there was that, you know, a sector that didn't really understand enough, and didn't know enough about who we should be speaking to, to...

HC: I think that's true across the board. I mean, how-

FT: Yeah. Yeah.

HC: -how could you know?

FT: No, I- and it's- you know, you don't know what you don't know. I mean, you know, I do look back now, and just- I do cringe, and think: "Oh no!" But, you know, I guess you learn.

HC: You learn by doing it, and particularly by doing it wrong, and actually, the people I've spoken to who've got furthest forward tend to have made the biggest mistakes. So, actually I think that we should be a bit kinder about failure, but... So, in terms of how it's changed over the years, and particularly since you've been here and have directly been involved in it, how has the feeling about digital changed, as far as you're aware?

FT: I think, around 2010, I remember being at a Museum Association conference, and listening to quite a few presentations who were talking about what they wanted to do in the digital sphere, and I thought: "Do you know, we've never had these conversations, really, at HLF, about actually how we fund this sort of thing- this sort of project." And you know, I couldn't think of an application that we'd really had, that was about something that was quite major, in terms of putting things online. The only conversations we'd had were probably with the archives sector, who basically just wanted us to fund cataloguing and then digitisation. And that, in itself, would not have met that 'learning' outcome, at that point. So, we were turning quite a hard line, which was: "Whatever you're doing in the real world has to be replicated in the digital world, and if it isn't going to be about doing that activity that we call 'learning', then we can't fund it." I think, you know, some of the legacy of that, with some of those sectors, is still there, in terms of what we will and won't touch, really, in terms of funding. But we were aware that we were behind the curve, actually, in terms of what the more advanced parts of our sector were wanting to try and achieve. And so, that's when we looked at- I think we commissioned a piece of work, to look at some of the projects that we had funded, and you know, just the goods and bads. But I- if you were to look at that work now, you might think that's a strange way of assessing if that was a good or bad project. Again, you know, I don't think we were 'in the moment' when we were looking at it, not thinking about future. But I think we realised that what we needed to do was, actually, you know, make a mark, in terms of saying to the heritage sector: "Actually, we are open for business, for larger-scale digital projects." And we talked to a number of- so, after we did this piece of research, we talked to a number of organisations, all of whom said: "You will be inundated, actually, with applications for large-scale digital projects. But that's good, that's good. Finally. Finally, you know, you're moving on." And then we weren't. We really weren't. It was quite surprising, actually, because I mean, obviously, we can't, as I've said before, you know, there is a finite limit to what we fund. But we were led to believe that we would get projects around the three, four million, five million pound mark, as we do with our larger capital build projects, and that didn't materialise. I mean, what we got was, I remember, at the time, there seemed to be quite a rush for people to develop apps, so there was very much a, sort of: "Ooh, this is the flavour of the month, this is what we should be doing." And again, you know, some of those projects probably didn't work very well. We can come back to what I think about projects that don't work very well

now, because we've learnt quite a bit from that, as well. But we didn't- I don't think we really got as many, what you would call just purely digital projects; we got projects that had elements of digitisation in them. And sometimes, I think, people were thinking: "Ooh, they want digital projects... We haven't got a digital project, but we can put a bit of digitisation of this in, or we can do something-" you know "-we can- we can tart up our website and have it a bit more interactive or something, and that'll look as if we're trying to keep abreast, really, of what HLF want." But I don't think any of the projects, in those early days, were particularly – 'early days' being 2011! – were particularly innovative or exciting.

HC: I actually did try to get some funding, with a colleague of mine – I'd just picked up the project very near the end – and it was for an app, predictably enough. And I remember coming here, and being told: "It can't just be digital. There has to be something physical in this application, otherwise we won't fund it." They actually called me in, to say: "Let's have a chat about why this didn't work, and how you might make it work." And I think we were looking at a way-finding app, a trail, in Merton Council, or something like that.

FT: Oh, right...

HC: And it couldn't just be digital, and I remember being told that very clearly. So, that's quite surprising, to hear you say: "We were expecting full-on, digital-only projects." Do you think the reason you didn't get them was because, like me, people were, maybe, slightly unaware that that was okay?

FT: So, I think, one of the problems, really, that arose, was we had to do a lot of- I mean, we do quite a lot of internal training with staff, whenever anything new is introduced. And I think, where we focused our energies, in the training, was about access to digital material, because we- you know, when we have funded things, in the past, like websites, often, they would, you know, not last more than two, three years. There just wasn't the upkeep for them. And I think where we ended up was, we were really- made a big deal of the Creative Commons licence, which you know, you've probably seen in other stuff. And I think that's what a lot of our training went on, actually: understanding Creative Commons licence, understanding the particular licence we were suggesting. And perhaps there wasn't enough training about, actually, the types of projects you might expect to see, which we probably would have done with- if we were introducing, you know, some other new thing – I'm trying to think what could be 'new', really – but if we were looking at something new in the analogue world, we'd have probably talked about the types of projects you would expect to see: "What's good, what's bad, here's some examples..." But we didn't really do that.

[section removed at the request of the interviewee]

HC: And do you think that the reason you didn't suddenly get a great flood of applications was because other people, perhaps, had this- still were hung up on this, saying: "Well, if it doesn't have a 'learning' or 'community' objective, they're not going to say yes," do you think that was still there?

FT: I mean, interestingly enough, obviously, you know, as I say, it did still have to have a 'learning' objective. I wonder if what was actually going on, with your project for instance, was that the- whoever assessed it thought: "Oh, I can't tell how people are going to be using it, and therefore I can't be sure it is going to be used, and therefore I shouldn't fund- we shouldn't fund it." I think that has been one of the difficulties. I think, one of the other things that I found, when talking with some of the national museums, was that it was easier for them to raise money in other ways, to digitise material which they just wanted digitised. Why go through the hassle of trying to come up with a project which had some sort of activity programme attached to it, when actually that isn't what you wanted to do? You just wanted to do some straightforward digitisation. And similarly, I think, at the same time, the National Archives had gone down a different route with digitisation, and- linking up with commercial companies. And so, those sort of projects, that we were told were going to come to

us, actually didn't, because they were never really Heritage Lottery Fund projects. People would have had to artificially do something to make it an HLF project.

HC: I'd quite like to go through the list that I made. I mean, in a way, my questions are slightly irrelevant to you because these are generally for people on the other side - actually in the profession at the moment. But I've got a list of six reasons, plus one other, why you might not digitise. And I wondered how you look at those, and how you would rank them, and how, in your experience, why have been the reasons why people have decided, perhaps, not to digitise?

FT: And are these in an order that you're checking against? Or is this just the way that you've...

HC: I just came up with them as these are the things that I thought were going to be issues, based on the literature that I'd read. So, I came up with these as possible reasons why digitisation was going to be difficult. And whether- I'm just interested, what you would pick out as important there.

FT: Yeah. Because what we did do, after we'd changed the digital policy, I think, in about 2014, we had a piece of research done on the digital projects that we had funded. So, we got somebody to trawl through our data, and actually look at all of the projects that had some sort of digital element in them, digital output, and then take a selection and analyse the quality. And then, within that selection, do some selected interviews with people. But I've printed something out, from a talk that I gave about a year or so after that, which was being really quite honest with the sector, to say what the problem, that those consultants had seen... And so, I thought it would be quite useful, just to go through them again, actually, because I think some of them are still quite relevant, and actually do fit with what you're saying. So, one of the big things was that, I think, there was a sense that, because we were open to business, for digital projects, people didn't, sort of, see them the way that they would other types of projects. So, they didn't start with the audience needs in mind. They started with what they wanted to do. And of course, any project is not going to succeed if it isn't really addressing audience needs. So, I'm not sure where that would sit within your- your list, there. Probably 'other', actually. And I'm not talking about the reasons not to do digital; that's more like what happens when you don't think through, and you just, sort of, jump on a bandwagon. But there are some other things. So, there was... I'm not sure where this one wants to sit, either. There was a lack of- so, often, digital projects were driven by one or two members of staff, in smaller organisations, and not always getting buy-in from their senior management, so there wasn't much traction projects. So, I'd guess, in terms of that, probably, 'lack of political will', to some extent, at governance level. And yeah, lack of ambition, at the outset, as to what they could do in digital. And I think some of this feeds into some of these. Because the other thing, when we were talking to people, was definitely that 'lack of expertise or IT skills', that people didn't really know what they should - I guess it goes back to understanding the audience needs, to be honest - what they were trying to achieve with the project. And so, often, as I say, that, you know, there was this- initially, this default position of 'develop an app', whether or not an app was the right thing to do. The 'fear of obsolescence' is quite an interesting one, too, because what we were often picking up were projects- or people were coming to us with projects that they'd wanted to do, which were basically upgrading something that they had previously tried, and of course the IT was now obsolete! And that was a tricky one for us, because we've always said we'd never- we don't fund what is essentially ongoing work, and we don't fund reiterations- iterations of projects. And that one, I think, probably ended up being interpreted by different grants officers in different ways. But there is definitely that. I think what stopped some people coming to us was the fear of the IT, that they're suggesting- what they want to suggesting - being obsolete. 'Cost' and 'time' are always issues for us, regardless of what projects. But I think, probably, 'costs'. And that's why we didn't really get those larger projects. The 'privacy or copyright issues', very interesting, because I think the one thing that we began to realise, very early on, was the lack of understanding that there was around copyright in the sector. And still is, to some extent, actually! We had- interestingly enough, we had quite a few private

archive collections come to us – because we do fund private collections, or even private houses or something, under a hundred thousand pounds – but they were unwilling to use a Creative Commons licence. I mean, I know this isn't copyright, but it's, sort of, linked to it. They were completely unwilling to use a Creative Commons licence, because they felt that they would completely lose control of their own material. And certainly, in the early days, we either had to just say to those projects: "We can't be the funder for you." In some of the other projects, I remember a film archive, for instance, which had a number of different collections, they just had to exclude some of the material in the end. Now, whether or not we were being too didactic is a moot point, and that might be something you want to question, or think about, actually. But it was odd that we were funding projects which were not the- didn't have the integrity that they should have done, because of having to pull things out of them. Certainly, I think, 'expertise, IT skills', really, really, really one of the big ones.

HC: And do you think that was true on both sides? I mean, I think, we've all been learning as we went along, and do you think the lack of knowing what is possible has been one of the problems on both sides, in terms of what you're prepared to fund, and also, what people are prepared to ask for?

FT: I think there was a disjoint from the beginning, and I think we probably spoke to the wrong people, in some respects, actually. Because we were talking, as we always do, really, to some extent, to heads of large organisations, or agencies, and they were seeing it very much from their perspective. It was only when I started going more to other conferences, and just listening to what people were saying, and talking about our idea of how you'd test it, and then you might adapt, and then you might do something else, and then you might do something else... So, what you originally said you were going to do, back here in an application, might not be what comes out as the output, and the outcome, at the end. And that was a real problem for those of us who- those that wanted to come to us for funding. Because they said: "There's no way that we can actually tell you, and guarantee, at the onset, what you're going to get." And they would say to me: "And your officers don't understand that. And we can't get them to understand that." And I think that's because we'd always had quite a strong directional relationship with projects, and it was completely not the right way to deal with a lot of digital projects. And maybe, if we'd actually had some of those conversations with people who were actually doing stuff, in the first instance, they could have said: "You're going to have to do this differently, and you're going to maybe have to have, you know, a different strand, or you're just going to have to-" well, we would just have to, you know, train our staff in different ways. So, I think there was a bit of a mismatch at the onset, really, actually.

HC: As one of the major funders of the last twenty years, how do you think the policies that you've had have impacted on what has and hasn't gone online, and how that's happened?

FT: Oh, I think it's had quite... I was going to say, quite significant... Because I think what people have chosen to do is look at those projects, where they know they will get the most traction, in terms of interest online – I mean, I had quite a few conversations, I remember, with various archives, who were saying, you know: "We've got-" I remember National Archives, for instance, talking about a collection that they wanted to put online, which was an archive of fabric samples – which, that doesn't sound that interesting, but actually, when you see them in real life, they are great, fantastic – but would have been quite difficult, I think, to have that... So, by this time, we had moved to the 'outcomes assessment', rather than the three aims, and the one mandatory aim... It would have been quite difficult to show people outcomes from that. So, I think what we were doing, was basically skewing what people would come to us for, because they'd think: "Actually, what would work better, in terms of engagement?" So, I mean the British Library Sounds Project, for instance, was one of the few that was a big digital project – and believe me, there were some problems on both sides! But you know, they could see they could make that work, because of the material that they had, and what people's interests were. And what people might do with that material, as well,

because I mean, it's a whole range of things, from music to wildlife sounds and things. Would the British Library have done that project if Heritage Lottery Fund wasn't here with large amounts of money to fund that? I think is an interesting question, and probably they wouldn't. They would have looked at what their priorities were. Not to say that wasn't a priority for them, but they would have probably been able to take a purer decision, I think. So, I think, yeah, I think there's definitely been some skewing. And of course, because we're a project funder, it's always going to be something that you can put a box around, and say: "This is the project." And so, you get- I mean, I, sort of, see it, almost, in my head, as a patchwork quilt of things that have been put online, without any sense of what makes sense to have online, actually. And I think it's a bit unfortunate, that – 'bit' unfortunate! – that there wasn't large sums of money elsewhere. I mean, whenever we talk to government, which you will know, yourself, you know, we are always told: "There's no money for digitising material; it has to be through organisations like yours." And we can only skim the surface.

HC: And it's interesting, because even 'Culture is Digital', which came out last year was still suggesting that putting the catalogue online – not in so many words, but that's basically what they were saying – was vital, must still happen. All these years later. They've been saying it for years. But without you offering money for something like that, which grinds on in the background, endlessly and without them giving any money from it I'm not quite sure how they thought that was supposed to happen.

FT: I know. And I would just agree with you. It was a- I mean, you know, we were partly involved in 'Culture is Digital', and it was really difficult. And I think, we certainly got- I mean, obviously, we had to make that point, that there just wasn't the money. You know, you could spend all of our annual budget, couldn't you? On digitisation. Especially given the cover: 'all of this heritage'. I mean, we got pulled very much in the direction of skills, and what we could do there, which is not something we've talked about in much detail, but... Because I think there was a sense that, perhaps, we could better use our money and fund, to the needs of the sector, as they defined it. But yeah, we were exactly in the same position. And I have a lot of sympathy with what you've just said, because I think, without a real strategic approach, from government, as to digitising material, how would it happen? But then, I don't know if we've, perhaps, moved on from the idea of having everything digitised. I have to say, I'm in two minds, there, really, as to whether or not that works for- and that's the thing that would work for all collections.

I was just going to add to that, actually, because up till last year, I was also managing the National Heritage Memorial Fund, which is the small part of the organisation which gets grant from DCMS. This is not to do with digitisation, but it's about how we used digital material ourselves. So, part of it is funding things of national significance, and importance, as often, you'd have to - well, not me, but my grants officers would have to do research around particular... Whatever it was. So, let's just say it's a painting. So, they would always be looking online, to find information about that painting, but also works of art by the artist, or related things. And I could see that, actually, that made their job so much easier, because previously, they would have had to go through- well, we would have had mounds of catalogues. And so, when I said I'm 'in two minds', I could see, in part of my job, how vital it was to just have all of that stuff online. But from the funding side, I think: "Hmm... Is it? Or is it just a few people who would use it, actually?" But I mean, it's interesting, what Art UK have done, with our funding, actually, on the Public Sculpture project, based on the project we didn't fund. And I think they're doing it in quite an interesting way, involving people in quite a creative way really, actually, in sorts of crowd-sourcing knowledge. And perhaps that was the sort of thing we were expecting more of, but didn't get. But we had all those sorts of issues about Creative Commons there as well, I have to say, so that wasn't easy sailing.

HC: Most people that I've asked, when I ask them: "Will everything be online one day?" are pretty emphatic that they won't. And there are a couple of reasons why they say 'no'. One is that there is

just too much stuff, and the other is that perhaps we are, now, as you just said, 'post-digitisation'. There's so much more going on online than just object-by-object records. Where do you see us going?

FT: It's interesting, because when I looked at – this is just part of the talk I gave, and even in 2015, I was just posing the challenge to the people, as to whether or not we were actually- we'd moved beyond just looking at digital, and maybe it was just a strand of everything that we do. But at the same time, it had to be integral to everything we do. So, it was less about, you know, content, in terms of every object being online. I think, given where the debate is, really, in – sorry, I can only really talk from a collections background, here – but looking at where we are with the debate around collections, and whether or not, certainly museums, are perhaps holding too much material, and are holding duplicates, and they don't even know exactly what they've got, and they're not using it... It would be utterly pointless to then replicate that in the digital sphere. So, I think we probably have moved beyond that, and it's more about actually being cannier about what you do put online, and how it gets used, actually. But I would come back to that issue I made earlier on, which is: absolutely needs to be audience-driven, otherwise what's the point of it? It's just material that may never be discovered, because nobody searches for it.

HC: I think people expect everything to be online, now. It was a surprise to me, when I started this, that what I was looking for didn't really exist, and a few people were doing it a bit, but that was about it. So, do you think the audience is interested in seeing collections object-by-object like that? Do you think that's an audience need?

FT: I've never heard it expressed from, you know, the sectors that I deal with, other than the archives sector, and I think they're- that is a different issue, because that's about access to information. And I think- very, very different issue. And I would argue that, probably: yes, that does need to be online. Whether or not we need- are you talking about object-by-object, really? Well, it's interesting, isn't it? Because, you know, I'm somebody who expects everything to be online, now. But actually, that's not an area I would tend to search. And yet, when you do, I can see there is some validity in it, with some objects, for various reasons. You know, conservation, preservation reasons. That you can explore that object online, in a way that you would not be able to, because of, you know, the nature of it, perhaps, being delicate, or something like that. So, I just feel it's a mixed economy. I'm not convinced that having everything online is necessarily going to be useful. Because I'm not convinced that people will necessarily just want to use it, and find it.

HC: They might-

FT: Even though they do say they expect everything to be online.

HC: Yes. And I think, yeah, in a perfect world, maybe. The Rijksmuseum did do this. What's been your experience? Presumably, you've seen them presenting at conferences- How do you feel that they- their decision, to digitise object-by-object – I know it's art, which can be slightly different- how do you feel they, sort of, sit, in a world where nobody else is really doing this, and we think, maybe, we're already past it? How have they managed to ignore everyone and do it anyway?

FT: Well... It is interesting, actually, because you remember I said earlier about some museums saying to us they didn't come to us. Natural History Museum have done something – obviously not paintings – but with their botanical collections. So, I guess, if you've got the collection that's going to capture the imagination, and you can either fund it through your own funding, or attract other funding, then why not, to some extent? I- the conferences I've been at recently, when- you know, it's been a bit of a hotchpotch of projects, talking about what they've done, and then things like Google Culture... There's always been something slightly in the back of my mind, which is, the Rijksmuseum controlled that themselves, and they've got everything there, whereas Google Culture is effectively cherry-picking. And that, in itself, starts- you know, I don't know where that road will

take us, actually, as to what then does become discoverable, and what people value, because it's online, versus the stuff that isn't online – even though I did just say, you know, I don't think everything can be online. And that's one of the slight worries I have, actually, of larger corporations being the one that almost make the curatorial decisions. Whereas, at least, the Rijksmuseum could make that curatorial decision themselves. And, you know, I think there probably are collections, in the UK, that could probably do that, through an HLF – sorry, we're National Lottery Heritage Fund, now – project, because they've got a relatively self-contained collection. The Wallace Collection, for instance. Not that I'm soliciting an application from them! But I mean, you know, it- that's a defined collection. Probably could be done.

HC: And nowadays, you would say: "Yes. Putting that online for people, with some interpretation, is a perfectly reasonable use of our funding."

FT: Yeah. We would say that. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think we'd expect something a bit more than just a 'bit' of information, and perhaps, you know, some sort of online activity you could do. But yeah, we would say that's perfectly reasonable.

HC: So, expect a second flood, now, of...!

[Both laugh]

FT: I should say, actually, I wonder also if, you know, demand for projects, to us, does vary, depending on the message we give out, at any time, about our own funding. So, a couple of years ago, we were giving quite a strong message out, that Lottery sales were dropping – well, we weren't saying that, actually, we were saying they were fluctuating. But I mean, the result, that we were saying, was: "There's less money." If people hear 'less money', I think maybe, subliminally, they're thinking: "That means 'no large projects'." And if you translate that into 'what's a large project now?', that is: a big shiny new build, or maybe it's something major in the digital sphere. So, there might be a slight perception, at the moment, that actually it's not worth coming to HLF for that sort of funding.

HC: That is interesting. You've been in heritage for all the time that I'm looking at, as in, the time when computers started becoming just a normal part of our lives. Can you remember back, to when they were shiny and new, and being introduced into workplaces? Can you remember what you thought might be the possibilities, and where you thought this might go?

FT: You know, at that time, I thought it would be about objects online, and online exhibitions. I think, when website – what was it, Web 2.0? Or whatever it's been called – I thought there might be more- even though not everything was online, I thought: "Well, actually, this might be a chance for a different type of online exhibition." You know, sort of, that whole co-curation thing, which was happening in the analogue world, could be done in the digital world as well. So, I think there was- both of which turned out not to be the case! Honestly, though, back in the very early days, I really thought there would just- we would just be putting catalogues online, and that actually... And that was pre-Lottery-Fund, really. So, actually, at that point, I think, there was less of that imperative, really, to be outwardly focused on the audience, and still more focused on research and scholarship. And so, there would be more about the information itself being online, and less about images. That was probably just because that was the way computers were, a bit, as well, weren't they? And yeah, I remember my early days, actually. My first job, actually, was cataloguing, in order to – back at the Great North Museum – in order to get the catalogue online. There was quite a- I think it was about ten of us working on it, actually. And that was the thing. We would get all of that information, and it would be freely available, and every museum would do it. I mean, that was university-funded at the time, as well, so I guess there was more of an imperative to have all of that information there. So, I think, initially, information. And that in itself would mean that all the information that museums held would be available. And then that never came to pass, really. And then, I think, there was the

idea of- this idea of just having the objects, and then this, you know, being able to do something with the objects. None of which has really happened!

HC: I was very interested, looking at the literature around the year 2000, the confidence with which everybody writing assumed that everyone was going to be really interested to have this stuff, and that it was going to be incredibly exciting, for people to be able to go online and see an exhibition. And yet, now, you really feel like we're asking the audience: "What do you want?" and quite often, it's not 'stuff' at all, and I see presentations where they haven't even got a collection. They're a contemporary art space, essentially. And that seems to be where we're going. If you're really chasing the bodies, and the interest of the people, collections seem to be taking a back seat. And I don't know what's quite happened over that period of time, but I wondered if you remember that confidence, and wonder what's happened to it?

FT: I think it's interesting that, on one hand, you had that confidence, of everything being available, and yet, you know, back in the museum itself, the exact opposite was happening. Not lack of confidence, but actually, it was more and more and more and more about the audiences, and to some extent, less and less about the collections. So, I mean, I've worked in museums where the audience work, to some extent, was driven by the collections, and the collections- we use the collections. I've worked in museums where exhibitions have been done, and you might as well have not had a collection, because it wasn't used, it was really focusing on audiences. Which is interesting, isn't it? Because here- you know, over here, you've got something happening, and over there, you've got an idea that something else will happen. And actually, what has happened, is that idea of engagement, in a digital sphere, has completely overtaken the idea of, you know, being able to see stuff online, as you say, and see exhibitions online. And I think, perhaps, what we didn't appreciate sufficiently, was this idea that people would want more, in terms of experience, than anything else. Which is what we're seeing more generally, now, isn't it? You know, I mean, retail is struggling, whilst people want to spend their money on experience, whether that be holidays, or something else, or just, you know, some sort of wellbeing-type experience. And I think museums, perhaps, didn't twig onto that sufficiently. And I think we, as policy-makers, probably didn't either, actually. I think one thing we've learned here, in the organisation, is we need to have a broader sense of how we're developing policy, now. So, it's not just about the sector, but it's actually much more about what's happening more broadly, and how that might be interpreted, in terms of what will happen in the heritage sector. I don't think we're ever – oops, sorry-

HC: Do go on...

FT: -did you want to stop it?

HC: No...

FT: Oh. I don't think we're ever going to be the ones that are the real innovators, actually, in terms of where cultural experiences are happening, but I think we follow very closely behind.

HC: OK... I went to a very interesting talk, actually, last week, and it was very much what you just said. People have an experience in their wider life, and they expect to have that experience, then, everywhere we- they go. So, if they can do it with their banking, they expect to be able to do it in your museum etcetera. So, do you think, perhaps, that the GLAM sector has been a little bit siloed, looking at what it can do within its own world, and perhaps always should have been thinking: "What's going on with digital everywhere else?" and perhaps looking a bit more at that?

FT: I would completely agree, actually. I think that's certainly been an issue. And I still don't think we're actually looking at it sufficiently. I mean, it's a sector that's always said that it, you know, it's outward-focused, and wants to respond to what people want and need of it. But I don't think we're taking sufficiently- I just don't think we're quite aware, sufficiently, of those bigger- you know, those macro-trends, really. And I agree. I mean, I think people- you know, banking is a classic example, isn't it? I mean, I don't know the last time I went into a bank, really! And it's about trying to

keep ahead, isn't it? And I don't think we've done that sufficiently as a sector. And you know, I have to take, you know, as much blame for it as everyone else. I don't think, as policy makers, we've been sufficiently on the ball, there.

HC: And do you think, partly, it's because, generally, the sector is funded, rather than funding itself? Though that's not true, obviously, across the board, because places do charge. But the fact that they have to be funded... My idea is that the way that funding is set up – not just from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, but councils, and- and other funders – is that they expect to see a return on investment, they expect to see a cost benefit, and that's just not how digital works. Because if you look at what the Rijksmuseum did, it makes no sense but their brand value is through the roof, and you know, they're a national, you know treasure. Is there a problem, in that, the way- if you give someone money, you expect something back, and somehow, it's quite difficult to measure the benefit?

FT: Well, I think it's that fear of failure, actually. I think that's become more prevalent over the years. Even if we are looking, at the same time, how digital actually- you know, sometimes you have to fail in order to learn and to change what you're doing. I think it is very difficult, under the current climate, for, certainly local authority museums, to even dare to be seen to not effectively and efficiently use the money they've got, because they're so wary of that money then being taken from them. And I think, it's probably not quite so bad with national museums, often because they can probably be a bit fleeter of foot, and hide things, actually, and then- you know, be able to hide the failures and actually then highlight the successes. But I think, absolutely, fear of failure, actually. And that idea of 'return on investment', absolutely. I think it would be a very brave local authority museum that was prepared to try something that was really out there, now. Which is a shame, really, because they were often way ahead of what they were doing, in terms of audience development. But perhaps because that wasn't so... Failure could probably be hidden. You could learn internally, and move on, and then do something that you could shout about. But actually, a digital failure can often be quite an expensive failure, and I think that's one of the problems.

HC: And what do you think that you've learned, from the failures that you've identified over the years?

FT: Well, I think the first one, as I said, was that we need to be looking much more in the round, about how- what our direction of funding is. I think we need to be talking to a wider range of people than just the usual suspects. And I think we need to be able to fund in different ways. So, I think... Actually, we have done this in the odd programme, here and there, where we've actually trusted an organisation to do something, to use our money, and not to have to keep coming back to us, saying: "Oh, actually, we need to do this, we need to do that..." I think we need- I mean, this is our twenty-fifth birthday - it's the Lottery's twenty-fifth birthday this year. You know, we are twenty-five years old; we should be moving into that maturity, of an organisation that can actually say: "Yeah, we can live with projects failing. Failure isn't failure, it's a way of learning." I think, we're a bit risk-averse ourselves, and we'd have to learn to be less risk-averse. But a confident, mature organisation can say: "No. We hold our hands up. That didn't work. But we were never sure it was going to work, and neither was the grantee. But the learning experience is 'blah blah blah', and that can be applied more widely across the sector." And so... You know, I could live with that. But I'm not sure, you know, in the current climate we're in, where there is a lot of scrutiny of public money, and you know, twenty-four-hour news... I think there's a real wariness about being seen to be the organisation that, maybe, has funded a huge failure.

HC: Which I- yes, which I think is a real fear, and rightly so.

FT: And I can see it, you know, why it should be a genuine fear, but it can mean that you- you get stuck, a bit, and not move on, and be innovative enough, yourself.

HC: Where do you think heritage will be going, in the online space, in the coming years? Having- now we've got this, sort of, twenty-year view, back to the Millennium, when we had all these ideas of what might be possible, is it possible to project forward? And if so, what can you see?

FT: Well, obviously, I've got it wrong so far, from what I said to you earlier, in terms of how I thought things would be used! So, I'm not sure that I'm actually going to get it right again! I don't know. I guess it's about organisations... As a funder, I think it's about understanding, we need organisations to be able to be much bolder, themselves, in what they want to do, and see... And, so, you know, moving beyond this idea of 'digital', because I think that's the other thing. I mean, all the way through, I was conscious, I kept saying 'digital', and I wonder, when you listen to this back, how many times I say that word, when in fact, it's a way of operating, isn't it? But it isn't the only way. And just to take the banking analogy, I mean, – you know, I'm sure you do the same – if you're banking online, you don't think: "I'm doing this 'digitally'," you're just sorting your money out. You just do it in a different way from what you did ten years ago. And so, I think that's where this sector needs to be, which is: actually, what is the best visitor experience, now? And perhaps that technology called 'digital' is one way of supporting it, underpinning it, or making it more widely available. But it's not, sort of, thinking: "That's what we do: 'digitally'." So, that's what I'd say. But I'll be wrong again, probably.

HC: Most people won't make a prediction after they've finished...

[Both laugh]

HC: Thinking about all the ways in the-

FT: Well that's the thing-

HC: -in which they were wrong!

FT: -yes, yeah, yeah. Yeah...

HC: If you came down, as an alien, from outer space, and the only thing you actually had access to was sucking up the WiFi – so, you could only see what was online – how do you think heritage is represented, only based on what's online?

FT: I would- I'm just thinking of heritage organisations, that I might see online... I think they'd be quite obsessed, actually, in telling you: how to get to them; what they can eat and drink, when they get there; and what they can buy. If I was an alien with a bit of knowledge, I probably would be thinking: "Hmm, but I want to know what I'm going to see." And so, I'd probably have to do a bit more looking. I'd- be a bit surprised I wasn't seeing what I was going to see first, rather than what I was gonna eat, drink, and shop.

HC: And do you think that's going to change? Or do you think there's something fundamental about feet through the door, and that's how it's always going to be?

FT: Well, I have noticed a couple of projects, which actually we haven't funded, are just digital-only. There was something I got sent recently, from someone that we used to work with quite closely, when she was working in an actual museum, who's set something up, just online. And I think that's quite interesting, because the traditional part of me is thinking: "Well, is that a museum? Because it hasn't got a collection, really..." Or has it? Is that the collection, online, and is that my narrow way of seeing a museum? Sorry, I've forgotten what- what my point is, there...

HC: Will it always just...

FT: Oh, feet through-

HC: Feet through the door...

FT: -through- feet through the door... Well, I often say to colleagues, one way of looking to the future, actually, is you have to understand the past, and where you've got to where you are. And museums have, pretty much, existed as organisations where 'feet through the door' is quite key, since they were set up. They may have changed what you see when you get through the door, and what the experience is. But I think, on the basis of, that's what I always suggest to people, that we

look back when we're trying to predict forward, I would say: "Yes." Yes. I think that it will still be important, in terms of feet through the door, because I think, personally, you can't beat the real thing.

HC: And I think that's true of a lot of people, that actually, we're putting all this stuff online but actually, some people, who are post-digitisation, are just using the online space to get real people to come and look at the collection. And so, I guess, is your prediction that there will never be a time when everything's online? If you had all the money and all the time in the world, would you do it?

FT: Now? Probably not. Probably not, no. I would be thinking more about the experience, rather than the content.

HC: Thank you very much.

FT: Okay.

Chris Mumby
The National Archives
19th June 2019

CM: Chris Mumby
HC: Helen Casey

HC: OK, so could you introduce yourself, and tell me what your position is here?

CM: OK. So, my name is Chris Mumby. I'm currently Head of Business Development at the National Archives. Prior to that, I was Head of Digitisation and Commercial Services, and I've been here since December 2008.

HC: Tell me a bit about the National Archives, what kind of collection it holds...

CM: So, the National Archives is a government department, first and foremost. We operate under a piece of legislation called the Public Record Act, which was first drafted in 1958. Became law in 1959, I think. And the Public Record Act basically says three things: that government will collect the records of government; it will preserve those records; and it will provide public access to those records. And that's essentially what the National Archives does. That's our remit, is to do those three things. So, we work with all of the central government departments – so Foreign Office, Home Office, Cabinet Office, whatever – to collect their records. And the records are, essentially, the records of government at work. To preserve those records. And then, helpfully, the Public Record Act states: "Preserve in perpetuity," which is quite a long time. And we also provide access. So, part of the building, here at Kew, is our Reading Rooms, where you can access the physical record. Obviously, we'll talk a little bit about digitisation, which allows a greater level of access. But essentially, that's what the National Archives is here to do, in terms of a statutory obligation.

HC: Would you describe it as a heritage organisation, or is it- does it cross over into a, sort of, a legal-obligation organisation, as well?

CM: It's a good question. Up until, probably, about five years ago, so, let me explain: the National Archives is a government department, but we're quite small. So, most government departments of our size usually have a, kind of, parent department, that they report into. Up until about five years ago, our parent, bigger department, was the Ministry of Justice, because essentially, we're executing a piece of law, and law is Ministry of Justice's territory. So, in terms of statutory, and obligation, and doing the right thing by the Public Record Act, it made sense to report into MOJ. About five years ago, though – it might even be less than that – we shifted, and we now report into DCMS, and DCMS is obviously culture and heritage. So, that's made quite an interesting shift, in terms of the organisation, and the way we think about what we are and what we do. So, up until that shift, we were – although we always considered ourselves to have heritage elements to us, because our collection is essentially the history of the English nation, from the last thousand years. So, you can't avoid heritage, in that respect. But I guess the, kind of, strategic emphasis, was a little bit more around compliance and responsibility, rather than – for want of a better word – exploitation, through a, kind of, heritage model. Shifting to DCMS has, kind of, shifted that, so that we're now very much more in the case of engagement, we're doing much more with exhibitions, we're trying to do more events, we're trying to get a much broader public, I guess – what's the word I'm looking for? – recognition. So, the National Archives is a really interesting place, if you know about the National Archives. But if I walked into a pub, and the conversation turned to, you know: "Where do you work and what do you do?" and I said: "The National Archives," two out of the ten people at the table would say: "Oh, brilliant, yeah, the National Archives! Ah yeah, I'm doing my family history, 'ra-ra-wa-wa'." The other eight would sit there and go: "Huh? What's that, then? Never heard of it." So, a big challenge for us is, actually, those eight people. We need to introduce them to the National

Archives and what we've got. Because what we've got is important. And important, not just from a historical perspective, but also from a perspective of, kind of, government transparency. Essentially, what we're doing, is we're collecting the workings of government, and we're making those available to the public. And that level of scrutiny, of what government does, the decisions it makes, why it makes them, how it goes about doing things, are really, really important if you want to keep government to account. And without that visibility and that transparency, then it's a closed door. And it's difficult, therefore, in a scenario like that – and then we work with, you know, other National Archives around the world, who have a very different access regime, where it isn't about 'open by default', it's actually about 'closed by default', and it's a different relationship with the public. And I would argue that democracy, ultimately, is underpinned by transparency and accountability of government, and if you don't have those things, then how the hell can you trust what they're doing? And we provide that. Now, how that affects people day-to-day, is an interesting challenge. Because, fundamentally, you can get it. But does it actually make any difference? The other thing that we've got, which ties into that a little bit, is – and to be fair, it's quite difficult getting people to engage in a, you know, a financial report of the economic stability of the West Midlands in 1932. I mean, seriously! But there's also a bit of: we've got some amazing stories, about the history of the nation, about things that went on, about things that happened in the Twentieth Century, but also things that- you know, our oldest document is, I think, from 958 AD. So, we've got a thousand years of English history, which no-one else has got. Fundamentally, our records are unique. So, there's some amazing stories in there, that we can tell people. And we just need to unlock some of that stuff, and to get it out there, to- people engage with it, in a meaningful way.

HC: So, in terms of your digitisation strategy, did that come in before the- five years ago? Was it driven more by a, sort of, a legal openness agenda? Or was it driven by: "We've got these incredible stories, we should be sharing them with people"? Where has the strategy gone, in terms of putting the collection online?

CM: So, I guess, if you think back before digitisation, when we were in the world of creating microfilm, so... One of the bits of the Public Record Act is that it talks about this idea of being able to expose the collection to the public, and allow them to access it. Within that Public Record Act, it gives us the ability to make copies of those records, for people that want to use them. And, back in the day, we had a statutory- and that's a statutory obligation, because it's part of the act. So, if somebody wants a copy of something, we have to provide that. We're allowed to charge for it, but we fundamentally have to give it to them. If it's an open public record, that's the whole point of the thing. So, back in the day, that used to be microfilm. So, initially, our document imaging service, rather than either digitisation or the idea of making a copy of a record, and giving it to somebody, was driven very much out of statutory responsibility. We had to do it, and therefore we did it. And the mechanism we used to use was microfilm, because that was, essentially, the only way you could do it. What digitisation does, though, is – and one of the challenges of microfilm is it's still a physical format, so it can only be seen by somebody looking at that piece of microfilm at that time. So, it's a very one-to-one transaction, if you like. Digitisation widens those boundaries, because it allows you to publish information on a website, and therefore allow a much wider engagement to an audience, that isn't then tied to a physicality, either a physical object, or having to go to a specific location to see something. So, digitisation, kind of, changed our game, away from being a, kind of, statutory responsibility to provide a copy of a record – and we still do that digitally. So, if somebody wants a copy, we won't give them microfilm anymore, we now give them a digital file of that thing. And that's still part of that statutory obligation. We'll continue to do that. But what we've also found, is that actually, digitisation opens the door. So, we can digitise for other reasons.

HC: And how have decisions been made, around what to digitise and why? Because you have so much, here. Have you concentrated on star objects that have interest, or has there been any

pressure from government to do certain things? How have you made choices, around where to begin and where to go next?

CM: There's three fundamental tenets about what we've decided to digitise, and any of those three can be the overriding reason. In most cases, they all have a component to add. And the three are, essentially: issues around access, so are the records- so, in a world where money is not an object, and you – because digitisation has a cost to it, and I'm sure we'll talk about that in a bit, but... One of the best things to do with digitisation is, if you've got a record that, as a physical record, is highly requested by people that want to see it, it makes sense to digitise that content. Because then: a) you don't have to bring out the piece of paper every time, so it gives you an efficiency and some saving; and 2) the fact that lots of people are requesting it, that means there's probably an awful lot more people that want to request it, but either don't know it exists, or can't get here. So, if you digitise it, and stick it online, you can massively improve the access to that particular piece of information. So, certainly, access is a key component of why we would digitise something. I guess, the popularity of that record has relevance. The second thing is conservation. So, as I mentioned, you know, the Public Record Act very kindly says that we've got to look after everything forever. Well, we could do that, if we had a perfect condition, where we could put everything in a locked cupboard, and you know, turn the lights off, and maintain the environment, and not let anybody look at anything, and we'd keep it for a thousand years. And you open the door in a thousand years' time, and you'll pull out the piece of paper, and you'll still be able to read that information. Wonderful. But for me – and for the organisation, certainly – the whole component of being able to interact with the records, and to get the information that's locked within them out, is fundamental to the other two components of collection and preservation. You can collect and preserve for all you like, but unless you're providing access, so that people can learn from what you've got, and use that information, then, quite honestly, why would you bother with the first two? But of course, access puts pressure on documents. And OK, you might argue that bringing out a piece of paper from the repository, and putting it in front of a reader, and letting them read it, doesn't materially harm the document. But if you extrapolate that interaction over a thousand years, every single time you touch that piece of paper, you're degrading it. And over a long enough time period, you'll destroy that document, regardless of the quality and condition of it. So, what digitisation - and that's a very, very long game, but it's really relevant, because not every record comes to us in perfect condition. So, digitisation offers the opportunity to provide access to the information that's within the record, without creating more of a physical burden on it. And in actual fact, what, in a lot of cases, we do, is we actually do active conservation on the record before digitisation, as part of the workflow, to make sure that the quality of the image we get is good, and that the document doesn't get harmed during the physical process. So, digitisation is actually a very positive conservation step for us. And obviously, once it's digitised and is available online, we don't have to bring out the bit of paper. So, it then, effectively, is in the locked room, to some degree. But the information is still being reused. The third component, which, I guess, is slightly more controversial, is a commercial consideration. So, we are in a time of constraint. Government has gone through austerity, for the last God-knows-how-many years. The reality is that we're never going to get more money, from Treasury, than we get. Unless we fundamentally change what we do, and therefore have a justification for it. But the government is never going to have more money than it's had. It's only going to diminish, in terms of what it gives out. Or it's going to prioritise the usual things – healthcare, education, defence, public security – over the Archive. You know, we're always seven hundred and fifty-sixth on the priority list, I'm sure. But as an organisation, we are active, we are ambitious, we want to grow, we need to... We need to move forward. And you can only do that with investment. Plus, of course, everything is becoming more expensive. So, even if we get the same amount of money from Treasury every year, in real terms, that's a loss, because of inflation, and costs of everything are going up. So, we have to

find ways to generate income ourselves, to subsidise effectively the amount that we get from Treasury. We currently do that to about twenty-five percent of our operating budget. So, about a quarter of what it takes, to run the National Archives, we generate ourselves. The rest comes through government. The burden on that twenty-five percent is only going to be more, and we need to grow it – I mean, that’s my role, as Business Development, now, is to basically find the next thing that’s going to give us more money. What we identified, is that a lot of our records have commercial viability. A classic example is censuses. So, there is a huge market for family history. Lots and lots of people- hundreds of thousands of people, in the UK, do family history as personal research. It’s their hobby, and for some it’s more than that. And there has, therefore, become an industry, around family history. So, there are people like Ancestry, and in the UK, Find My Past, who are big online providers of content. Again, what they’ve identified, is that doing family history research isn’t just about talking to your grandad. It’s – if you want to go back to the 1700s and beyond, you’ve got to go into- you’ve got to do proper research, you know. It’s a hobby, but it’s actually serious research. And a lot of those records are physical records, and you’ve got to go somewhere and read them, whether that’s a parish record in your local area, whether it’s a local government record, or whether it’s something at the National Archives, here. If it’s a physical object, the only way you can get the information out of it is to go there and read it. Digitisation offers that opportunity, to do way more than that, and to interact with people. And also – and I’m sure, again, we’ll touch on this, in terms of process – if you can digitise, and couple that digitisation with the ability to search the records electronically, then it becomes a really powerful research opportunity. And it makes the life of the researcher much easier, to find and identify appropriate information. So, there’s this whole industry, built up around digitising stuff, and sticking it online, and then charging people for access. So, we have a bit of that, in that, a lot of our records are digitised through commercial partnerships, both with Ancestry and Find My Past, as well as other people, and they charge for access to that, and we get a cut of the money. So, commercially, digitisation is significant for us, and drives quite a lot of the decisions about what we might digitise. Because if we can make money out of it, and still tick the boxes of: it preserves the individual record, it provides a greater level of access to that record, and we can make some money out of it that’ll subsidise us to do lots of other things, why would we not do that?

HC: Okay, so, Part Two... Overwhelmingly, one of the findings that I’ve had is that heritage, online, is not something that makes a lot of money. Even selling images of really well-known and famous paintings, or sculptures, there’s only a very limited market for such things. Do you think archives, by their nature, have got more commercial potential, because they hold these records that people are interested in, literally just for family history? Is that one sector really driving archives forward, in digitisation, where others are- are, kind of, thinking: “We’re not making any money out of this”?

CM: It is all about the content, and what content you’ve got will mean what opportunities are out there for you. I’ve spent my life thinking about how we can make money out of stuff. So, for me, any collection has a commercial viability. You’ve just got to look at it from the right context, with the right customer base. Some are bigger than others, for sure. We’ve talked about family history, as being a prime market for us, but we also do an awful lot of work with academic publishers, who are essentially digitising records to create research resources for academic communities around the world, and there’s big money in that. You know, there are some very, very large academic publishers in the world, significant, who make lots of money through publication of information for researchers. Whether it’s journal publication, sort of, people like Elsevier, and people like that, or whether it’s, you know, your Taylor & Francis, who, traditionally, have come from a, kind of, publication of textbooks and things like that, who are now recognising that textbooks just don’t exist anymore, and... I don’t know; that’s a bit of a cheeky way of putting it. But that market is diminishing rapidly. And actually, what researchers really want, is access to primary source. And if you can

digitise primary source, and put it onto a Web package, and curate it in a way that makes sense from an academic perspective – again, using the appropriate search tools, classification, tagging, organisation of stuff – then you’re making the researcher’s life so much more efficient. They’ve still got to read some stuff, and they’ve still got to do the work, but they can do it from the comfort of their own office, room, bedroom, whatever it is, rather than having to schlep around the country, visiting places of interest, to read the stuff. And very often not finding it, because there’s just too much to read in their timeframe. So, archives intrinsically hold information. That’s what, you know, the nature of them are. More so than, kind of, a museum that holds objects. Obviously, objects have informational value, but not in the same way that a written record might do, and that’s why archives and museums are a little bit different. They all tell stories. They all have amazing things. They all have key touch-points. But the way the information is used and accessed is a little bit different. So – that’s a very general statement, I don’t know if it’s even true, but in my head it is, a little bit. But archives just have loads of good stuff, that is just locked away on bits of paper, that you could spend a lifetime reading and still not find the piece that you need. What digitisation does, is it just opens the door to all of that stuff. If it’s coupled with the right level of searchability, and find-ability, and there are online tools to make it easy to access that stuff, suddenly you’re in an entirely different regime for research, that gives you a much greater opportunity. And the academic publishers picked up on that, and they sell packages into academic- you know, universities, and places like that, for significant amounts of money. And again, we partner with them commercially, and make money out of it. I would argue that most archives have something that is relevant for somebody, somewhere. Otherwise, what’s the point in keeping it? You know? That’s part of what we’re all about, is we’ve got records that have value, and therefore should be kept and preserved, and made available to people. If there is a demand for something, I would argue that there’s potentially a commercial aspect to that. But it’s tricky, because a lot of archives – and especially us at the National Archives – you know, there is a fine line between being commercial, and also recognising that we have statutory obligations that we have to fulfil. And some of those obligations we have to do free of charge. So, it’s not about just slapping a price tag on everything; it’s about finding appropriate ways to charge, in an appropriate way. So, there’s a, kind of, a tightrope to walk, if you like, or a route through the minefield to navigate, that’s not straightforward. My history is that I was a retailer. In retail, you sell stuff to make profit. And regardless of how you think about what shops do, they’re not there to give you stuff, they’re there to make money. That’s fundamental to what they do, and it’s a very single-minded purpose. At places like the National Archives, and other heritage institutions, it’s not straightforward like that. We have many obligations that we need to fulfil, some of which can be commercialised, some of which can’t. And we’ve got to be very careful, in terms of managing our reputation, making sure we don’t break the law, making sure that we follow the appropriate guides – and as a government department, we have a whole bunch of guides that sits around that, that’s even worse than if you’re a private collection, for example. So, it’s a sophisticated model. And it’s not just: ‘charge for everything where you can get away with it’, it’s: ‘do the right thing for the record’, but also: ‘don’t let opportunities go by unnecessarily’. If you can find an opportunity to make money out of it, and it’s appropriate to do so, then I think it’s our obligation to the taxpayer to do that, because otherwise, we’re essentially relying on Treasury, and therefore, you know, use the taxpayer to pay for what I do, which I quite like, but you might not!

HC: So, in terms of- if you, then, changed jobs, and went to a museum holding objects...

CM: Yeah...

HC: Would you argue that they should take a more businesslike approach? Or do you feel that there is that fundamental push-and-pull, between: ‘this is actually belonging to the nation, and you should have access to it for free’...?

CM: So, every heritage organisation that I've worked with, over the last ten years, is exactly the same as TNA. They have a bunch of people who think everything should be free, and you just give people access to it and that's the end of the story, and another bunch of people are going: "Well, we can't sustain that, in the long term. We have to think more commercially about self-generation of income if we want to thrive and survive." So, every organisation has that challenge, in the heritage world. And every place that I've worked with has that same internal conflict, of a bunch of people who think it should be free, and that's appropriate, and they're right, and there's a bunch of other people saying: "But you can't keep doing that forever!" So, it varies by degree. We are more forward-thinking than a lot of other people, and certainly, in the archives sector, we're seen as a- I mean, we have a role as sector leader, as well, for the archives sector in the UK. So, we're seen as the benchmark, and the model where a lot of people come to and say: "How do you do it, and can we learn from you?" And increasingly, in the archives sector, people are cottoning on to the fact that they need to be more commercial these days. And it's a changing world. Certainly, in the last ten years that I've been here, things have moved on quite a lot. There are some very smart people out there, who 'get it', and are thinking really hard about how they can go forward in an appropriate way.

HC: I've got a list of reasons why you might not digitise.

CM: OK...

HC: Could you have a look at them, and if you can put them in some sort of order, do, or give me some comment about whether or not they have affected this organisation's approach to digitisation?

CM: So, we've got: 'cost, time, expertise, fear of obsolescence, lack of political will'... So, I think you're missing a couple. Well, I suppose 'privacy and copyright' are- data protection is- is a key component of that. So, 'cost' is significant, and I mean, the cost of digitisation is not cheap, and- well, that's not true. The cost of appropriate digitisation, for heritage material, is not cheap. You can digitise an awful lot of material very quickly, and very cheaply, if you don't care about what happens to the material. So, you can get some really, really big, high-powered sheet-feed scanners, that will scan thousands of pages per hour. And literally, it's just a conveyor belt, with amazing speed of paper going through it. Problem is, what comes out the other end is confetti. Because the documents get ripped, they get destroyed, they get damaged... It's just horrible. So, that model works really, really well for modern businesses, who want to digitise things like their post room. So, instead of a post room, for an organisation, taking in bits of paper and then circulating those letters to people, what they do is they take it all in, digitise it, and then send the electronic files to the people. But it's all modern paper, it's not to be kept. So, they can use these high-powered things to do it really fast and really quickly. And the cost, per digitisation per sheet, is points of a penny. In those models, digitisation is very cost-effective. And ultimately, the- part of the reason that organisations do it, is it saves them huge amounts of money, of moving lots of bits of paper around. From a heritage perspective, certainly for us, where, you know, the Public Record Act says that we have public records, that we have a legal responsibility to looking after forever, putting them through that kind of process, that potentially destroys the documents, is just not acceptable behaviour. We just can't do it. So, as a consequence, our digitisation is therefore slower, and is more considerate to the original material. And our collection is so big, there's a load of stuff you couldn't even put through that, because it's bound volumes, or it's maps the size of this table, or whatever. So, digitisation is much slower. And because it's slower, it's more manual, and more manual means more people, and therefore it's more ex- expensive. So, cost is a massive factor. And... But it's not just 'cost', in terms of the cost of doing it, it's also the availability of money to do it. So, as we've already talked about, the government has no money. When I first started here, I used to have an internal budget of something like a quarter of a million pounds a year, to digitise stuff that I just

came up with, and said: "Right, spend some money, digitise some things, stick it online, great stuff, go for it!" I haven't- for the last four, five years, my- that budget has been zero. So, we have no spare cash, to digitise just for the sake of digitising. And that's partly why our commercial models become interesting, because they allow us to, essentially, digitise work and material, and get it into the public domain, that we couldn't afford to do so ourselves. So, cost is significant, and it's a significant driver. But it's not just the cost of digitisation, it's the availability of money to afford digitisation, as much as the individual cost itself. 'Time'... is a factor, I guess, and it depends on the size of your collections, depends on how fast you can digitise, depends how long that you've got the money for. There's a whole bunch of things. But that's- I wouldn't say that's a constraint, so much. I'd say that's just a factor of life. 'Expertise or IT skills', well, I guess, in the wider archival world, that's a significant problem. It's not for us. We've been imaging records, through microfilm processors, since the 1960s, 70s, so we've got a huge amount of experience of photographing our records. And because our record collection is so huge and diverse, we've pretty much figured out a way to digitise almost anything. And we're quite good at it now, having done it for quite a long time. So, for us, we pride ourselves on our expertise. We're really, really – and I'm- I'm just saying that 'cause I work here! – we're really good at it. There are very few organisations in the world that can do the kind of digitisation quality that we can do, and address the type of material that we can address. But if you extrapolate out to the wider sector, in a small, you know, local archive, where you've got one archivist and a flatbed scanner, it can be a massive issue. So, that's a challenge. I mean, there are commercial companies out there who offer digitisation services, so there are ways to do digitisation where you don't have to have the knowledge yourself. But having some knowledge is really useful, because again, if you're employing a contractor to do a piece of work for you, they will only execute to your requirements. If your requirements are not very good, because you don't understand, then they'll do a bad job, and it won't be their fault. So, you've, kind of, got to have some knowledge of what you're trying to achieve and how you're trying to achieve it, in order to instruct somebody appropriately to get the good- the outcome that you ultimately want. So, expertise and knowledge and stuff is really important, as much as the IT skills. And I think, there's the bit that's missing from your thing, here, is- and I guess, point a), it would be long-term sustainability. So, digitisation creates a set of resources. It creates a set of images. If you're an archive, then you want to keep those images, because you want to provide 'x', and... So, there's a whole regime of digital preservation, of: how do you look after them securely? How do you manage that process? How do you do it cost-effectively? How do you do it over time? Because you migrate- you know, IT doesn't last anywhere near as long as a bit of paper does. So, there's some really interesting challenges. So, the expertise and IT skills, I would say that extrapolates more into understanding of digital preservation, as much as it does about the actual process for digi- if you spend all this money digitising something, and two years later, the hard drive that you've got them sitting in goes 'pop', you're dead. And if you've got no backup of that stuff, you've got no- that information is not anywhere else, you've thrown it away. So, you've got to have a longer-term plan, for managing the assets. And that's probably more what's scaring the sector, now, than the actual digitisation. People know about digital. We've been digitising archival records for a lot of years, now. Most people get it. They know how to do it. They still get fixated on: "What camera should I use, and what DPI should I be using it in, and what file format should it be at- put in?" But actually, a lot of people have moved beyond that, now, and they are thinking about: "Well, I've got this stuff, I've got these twenty thousand images now... How do I look- and what happens when the IT guy wants the server space back?" And they're real questions, that people are having to answer, that are not easy. And they're not digitisation questions, as such, but they're a direct consequence of digitisation. And if you don't answer those questions, you can't really justify successful digitisation. What else have we got? 'Fear of'- so, 'fear of obsolescence', I guess, touches into that a little bit. There's this whole issue of: "Well, if I'm digitally preserving a set

of images, I can do that for three years, but then I've got to replace my computer, so I've got to move everything... Over ten years, well, they're all created as Adobe PDFs, but Adobe went bust two years ago, and those PDFs are now obsolete, so how do I do that?" Whereas, again, with a piece of paper, it's a piece of paper. You can read it. Although, you'd argue that there is obsolescence in documents, because a lot of our early Twelfth, Thirteenth, to Fourteenth Century documents are in Latin, so I can't read 'em. Domesday is a classic example, one of the most iconic records that we've got: impenetrable. Because it's in Latin. No idea what it says. Great piece of history, but as a document to interact with, forget it! So, you can see that. And that- the timeframe of that is much tighter with IT. It's literally a number of years, where things can start to change. And again, that's part of the digital preservation challenge, and how you get around that. I don't think it's a barrier. It shouldn't stop people doing it. And certainly, you know, even basic image formats, like TIF, because they are such a basic image format, there will always be a piece of software, somewhere, that will read a TIF, and be able to recreate the image. So, I think, people getting hung up on this idea of obsolescence - it's something to be aware of, but I don't think it's something that should stop people. It might make some decisions about what file formats you want to output, but again, if you, kind of, understand the challenge, then you can address it appropriately. What else have we got? 'Lack of political will'... I guess, is that big political or little political? Because 'big political' is 'what do the politicians want?', 'little political' is 'what does the organisation want?'. And, you know, we've talked already about the idea of: some organisations think 'commercial' is a dirty word, and should never be darkening their doors. And that's a political statement, whether you like it or not. It puts a stance on the organisation, it sets out a strategy. So, it can be significant, because if people say you can only do stuff for free, then the other issues, around cost and stuff, well, how do you pay for all this stuff? There are intrinsic links into some of those strategic decisions, and strategic positions, that people will adopt, for whatever reasons, that will affect your ability to do digitisation as an organisation. And some of it is, we just don't want to rock the boat. We don't want to upset our user base. And we understand that we need to make money, but we just don't want to piss off all of our user base by charging them for things. And it's very difficult, if something was free, to then start imposing a charged regime on it, because it's much easier to start charging from day one, because that's just the way it is. But if you've had ten years of 'it's free', and now it's payable, you can see why people get reluctant around some of that stuff. 'Privacy and copyright'... So, these are real, legal issues. So, privacy around data protection, it's one of the few things that digitisation can do that can get you fined. So, the ICO will rule, if you breach data protection, and you will get hit. There is no question of it. If you do the wrong thing- and not to mention the distress it can cause, for living individuals, and relatives of, etcetera, etcetera. That's huge. And data protection is a significant barrier to digitising Twentieth Century material that contains personal information. And you've got to do it- do the right thing. It's a law. You can't ignore it. And it's the same with copyright: if you don't own the copyright to somebody's content, and you publish it, you're in breach. And if they want to sue you, they can sue you. It becomes less of an issue, usually, if you're providing free access, because people might get grumpy, but they understand it. If you couple digitisation with commercialisation, and money's involved, suddenly the game changes for a lot of people, and it's like: "Well, you're making money out of my stuff, and you didn't ask me about it. Not only is that not allowed, but I want a cut." So, again, a lot of the reasons why Twentieth Century material isn't digitised- a lot of it isn't digitised, is because of copyright issues, because it's still in copyright and people won't allow it. Or the cost of copyright clearance on large digitisation projects is huge, potentially, depending on the risk appetite of the organisation, and the material at stake- being- being looked at. And it can be a barrier. 'Other'. I think we've covered the 'other', haven't we? Is that enough detail?

HC: Yeah, that's great, thank you. Let me just take another quick pause.

CM: Yeah.

HC: Okay, so, the next section's about looking back. You say you weren't in heritage, around the year 2000. But we were all alive. I wasn't in heritage in the year 2000. But can you remember when the Internet was, sort of, brand new, and came into your workplace? What did you think was going to be possible, back then? Or did you have any idea what might happen, in terms of what would end up being online?

CM: I'll think, what I was doing in 2000, and where I was... No, not really. I mean, it's just, essentially, the- well, I guess, the Internet, it's all coupled with the, kind of, idea that- the move to a digital world from a physical world. So, I used to work in a job where – and this is before 2000, but – I used to be a logistics person for a retail company. So, I used to order stock and get it delivered to stores, and things like that. And a lot of my day – so, you'd do the orders electronically, but then you'd have to get the information and get it over to- get the purchase orders to the companies, make sure they shipped them. So, there was a lot of time on the phone, talking to people, and ringing shops to say: "Why didn't you receive the delivery when it turned up on your door at seven o' clock this morning?" And etcetera, etcetera. So, my day used to consist of, literally, having twenty-five voicemails, that I would then have to answer and ring, and shout at people down the phone, and scream, and get things done. And that's, maybe, just my way of doing it, but it was a very analogue, kind of, world. Lots of physical interactions with people, but very- it was all, literally, done in that way. As we got through, kind of, the late 90s into the 2000s, and we got things like email and electronic communication, then the model changed, and we moved away from that analogue model into a more digital world. So, from a business perspective, it was just another tool. And the Internet is just another tool that allowed us to do things more efficiently, in the different way. But I never really thought – because my job wasn't anything to do with it, it was just something that happened, you know, as the technology moved on. And you suddenly find yourself in 2019, and it's like, you can't live without having a permanent Internet connection. So, it, kind of, crept up on me a little bit, and I didn't really think about it in any significant way. We did- but obviously, working here, it becomes a massive thing, although, to be fair, as a retailer, one of the things that I did, was- so I was a stock controller, then I was a buyer. So, I would make the purchasing decisions, about what stock would be sold, in various places. And then I moved, in the first organisation, to build a website for them. So, I actually built websites, for years. And I did one for Staples, the office supplies company, and worked at Amazon for a year, and then I went to WH Smiths, where I ran their online, e-commerce business, for four years. So, for me, the Internet was basically a selling vehicle, more than an informational vehicle. And I think that's, kind of, how it started, really. In terms of what really, significantly engaged the population, was an opportunity, and a way, to purchase things much quicker and easier. So, for me, kind of, I was very much driving a lot of that work. But in a very different way to what we would consider from an archival, information-sharing type environment. Although it's quite interesting, because even selling stuff online, you've got to start thinking about metadata, and you've got to start thinking about how you replace a physical shopping experience with a screen. And it's really interesting, certainly in there are certain types of products that sell really well online, and some that really don't sell online very well at all. Although the model of that- even that is changing, now, as people just got used to it. And I always thought that, the Internet is very good for buying stuff if you know what you want. If you don't know what you want, trying to find it serendipitously is really hard. And especially- even more so, today, because there are lots of very, very clever algorithms out there, that personalise, that look at your past history and recommend other things of a similar vein. So, it, kind of, funnels you. And the example I use is books. So, I used to be a book retailer, WH Smiths and Amazon, primarily. And there's something about walking into a bookshop, and just having your eye caught by a cover, or a title, as you walk past a shelf, or a display, or whatever, and just picking it up and reading the back cover. And it might be a

book in a section that you've never read for ten years. You know, I don't read a lot of crime fiction. But you can just walk past, and go: "Ah, wow, that's a really interesting story," but you're just finding it because it's there. It's really, really hard to do that online, because everything's driven by search, or browsing is- is challenging, especially in the books area, because you've got- there are about- at any given time, there are between one and two million books in publication in the UK, and that's not including the out-of-print stuff, that's just what's in current publication circulation. So, trying to find, serendipitously, something interesting, is really hard to do online. Whereas, in a bookshop, you can almost fall over stuff, and find it. So, there's some really interesting challenges there, about how the Internet has to replicate some of that things. And you can do that by recommendations, user reviews are a massively powerful tool for helping people learn things, how you describe an object is really interesting. So, from a retail perspective, if you want to sell something, you've got to be able to provide a picture of it. We did some analysis, to look at the proportion of stuff that sold that had an image, versus stuff that didn't. And back in the early days of the Internet, there was a load of books that we used to put up, that didn't have a cover image. We just couldn't get it off anybody. And they didn't sell, funnily enough, because people couldn't see what they were buying, even though they might have the ISBN, and know it's the right book. The confidence level... So, there's a whole piece of things around understanding that it's not just about the object, it's about how you describe the object. And that very much translates into the archival world. It's not just about digitising a bit of paper and sticking it on a website. It's about: what metadata have you got, that describes that object? Where did it come from? What's it used by? Can you search the detail in it? Where does it fit in the hierarchy of the collection? There's a whole bunch of things that sit around it, that are not just digitisation. And when people talk about digitisation, the default is, you think about, well, the camera, and how you're going to take the picture. And that's ninety percent of what people obsess on. And actually, it's ten percent. The rest of it is: preparation of the stuff; taking the picture for sure, is important; it's getting the right outputs; it's getting those into the right place; it's getting availability on a website; it's getting the context of that. Is it searchable? How do you find stuff? Without any of that stuff, without understanding what- the endgame of what you're trying to achieve through digitisation, don't do the digitisation! Digitisation for the sake of digitisation is just an absolute waste of money.

HC: Your explanation, of walking into a bookshop, and accidentally coming across something you really like, unexpectedly, sounds exactly like the experience of walking into a museum and seeing something in a glass case that you were never expecting, you were just trying to go through a gallery to get to another bit that you were interested in.

CM: Yeah.

HC: Something catches your eye.

CM: Definitely.

HC: So, do you think that something about being in the commercial sector has pushed you ahead in your thinking, in a way? Because it sounds to me like museums could have done with that sort of thinking. When they were thinking about what to digitise and why, having that really targeted, 'what works, and what doesn't work' idea, because you had a commercial pressure, made it much more important for you to get it right. Do you think that the heritage world needs to have that much sharper thinking, about why it's doing this in the first place?

CM: Absolutely. And in my career, here – and- and again, being the National Archives, we get lots of contact with other archives, who just need some help, and just say: "My boss has given me ten grand to digitise some stuff; help!" And very often, the conversation that I have with those people is not about: "What camera are you using, what file format, what resolution?" It's like: "Why are you doing it? Who is your audience? What are you trying to achieve by this thing?" Because if you don't have an endgame, then you'll get it wrong. You'll digitise something that won't be fit for purpose,

and you'll have wasted time, effort, and money by doing so, and you'll be frustrated in the process. And there was a lot, in the early days of digitisation, where people gave money just to digitise stuff, and people digitised it, and then went: "Oh, shit, I can't use this." And so, then, you get into conversations around: "Well, do you need standards?" So, if everybody digitised everything to a certain standard, it would be infinitely reusable and wonderful and great. And I hate standards. Standards are artificial. They work for a certain set of individuals, at a certain time, but the minute you've written a standard, it's out of date. So, for me, the whole- each digitisation project is unique, based on: a) the outcomes and the audience you are trying to achieve; and b) the collection you're digitising. Because there's so much variety, within archives, that every interaction with records is a little bit different, because they're all unique records. Yes, there are similarities, but they're all a bit different. Some need more conservation, some don't need any, some are bound volumes that you have to take two people to lift them, some of them are bits of A4 paper. So, the digitisation has to be a- having it constrained by a set of, I guess – I don't know if 'regulation' is the right word, but – kind of, those standards, is... It pushes everybody into one box, and one box definitely does not and should not fit all. In our Reading Rooms upstairs, we actually encourage people to digitise records when they come in to look at them. If you're a researcher, and you are coming to Kew, to look at some records, and you're reading physical records, you can only read a certain amount of words in a day. But if you come in with your camera phone – for want of a better word – you can digitise all day. And I tell you what: you will digitise an awful lot more pages in a day than you can read in a day. So, from a research perspective, in terms of an efficiency, it's much more efficient to spend a day at Kew, photographing everything, and then taking it home, and using those images to conduct your research. Yes, you'll have photographed a whole lot of pages that have no use to you, but you would have read those anyway, and you'll have a lot more materials to get at. So, you'll have more chance of getting it, getting the answer to your question that you need, than if you're just sitting here physically reading. By any set of archival standards, those photographs, that are taken on your camera phone, are not going to be fit for purpose. But they're exactly fit for the purpose for the individual researcher. But they're probably not images that you would be able to put on a website. I mean, there's rules, that we don't allow people to do that, because the images you create are for personal use only. But if, for example, somebody wanted to publish them online, they'd be horrible. They'd be too dark, they'd be difficult to read, they'd probably have hands in there half the time, they wouldn't be straight, they wouldn't have a border around them... It'd just be horrible inconsistencies and, sort of, things like that. So, I guess, the point is that no digitisation is bad, but equally digitisation is bad if you don't understand the outcome that you're trying to achieve with it. And by taking a picture on your camera phone, you are digitising a record. At its very fundamental level. And there's nothing wrong with that. But if you then want to publish those images on a website, and have people attracted to them and search for them, they're probably not, organisationally, what you would want to show to your user group. So, in that case, they're definitely not appropriate. So, it's about that, kind of, cause and effect. It is that, unless you know what the endgame is – the endgame, essentially, governs all of the digitisation decisions that you will make, to get to that endgame. So, if you don't know the endgame, how can you make those decisions appropriately? Does that make sense?

HC: Yeah, absolutely... Where do you think technology is going to take heritage, in the next twenty years? We've looked back twenty years; what about looking forward? And is digitising still going to be a thing?

CM: Oh, yeah. For sure. Well, I guess there's two things that are happening... Two things – there's a million things that are happening... So, I guess, there's a bit, fundamentally, of the creation of digital images, using camera technology, will evolve a bit, because cameras, and the technology, it'll all move on. We're doing some trialling at the moment, looking at, essentially, using what's effectively a

video camera, to digitise. One of the problems of most digital cameras, especially if you're doing volume- so, when we talk about digitisation at the National Archives, we talk about digitisation at scale. We're not digitising twenty pages a year. We digitise anywhere in the region of- up to a million pages of our collection a year. Through various routes, through various partnerships, etcetera, etcetera. To do that, at that sort of scale, you need a lot of people, and you need very good kit. And most digital cameras still rely, a little bit, on a lot of physical, old camera technology. They have shutters, they have lenses, blah blah blah, and things like that. A shutter wears out, and if you're digitising a million pages in a year, you get through quite a lot of shutters. So, there's a cost to all of that. One of the things that we're looking at, at the moment, is – because video capture technology has now improved significantly, in terms of the quality. If you can have a camera that has no moving parts whatsoever, then you don't have mechanical wear. So, there's some interesting evolutions in technology, like that, that could make the cost of digitisation, over a longer period of time, potentially, cheaper. You could argue the video camera that you need- the camera itself might be more expensive. But over time, it probably manages its way out. So, there's things like that, that will move digitisation, as a process, on. I guess there are other things that are happening, around things like virtual reality and augmented reality, which look at digitisation outputs in different ways. I'm really keen on what VR could do. I think VR really opens the door to a whole different world, in completely immersive reality. You know, it's science fiction at the moment, but my kids have got a PlayStation VR system, and I've used it, and I love it. I could live there. It's amazing. If you've never used it, go and do some. Because it just, completely- it's a different world. And the technology is now good enough that you lose yourself in there. There's got to be applications beyond just entertainment for that. E- educational, interaction, telling stories, using archival collections in ways- and this is not digitising a bit of paper so you can read bits of paper in a VR world; that's just nonsense. But using that information to create something... I mean, there's lots of examples, in the archives sector, of using technologies to move things on. I remember, a couple of years ago, at one of our conferences, we had a presentation from, I think it was Hull University, somewhere up- somebody up in Hull. Who, basically, had a load of building plans, that they'd digitised, and they used those building plans, with the local community, and used Minecraft to build them. In Minecraft. Unbelievable! I mean, it's fantastic, you know, a way to get your kids to engage in historical records, and architecture, and buildings and stuff, using a format that they are completely comfortable in. Phenomenal. So, that sort of application, going forward, has to be the way to get – you know, I talked at the beginning about: how do you get those eight out of ten people, that had never heard of the National Archives, to understand what the hell we do? It's that kind of thing. And digitisation, the transformation of a physical asset into a digital asset, is intrinsic to that, I think, in terms of just getting to a mass market. Whatever that format may be, whether it's – again, analogue, through- oh, analogue- but, kind of, the traditional Internet model, versus a virtual reality model, versus whatever comes next, beyond that. I think they're really interesting spaces, that we're just going to find out more and more about. I think, the other challenge is that, from a record-keeping world, we are also moving into a digital age, where there is no paper equivalent. Where you have what are called 'born-digital' records. Where there is no analogue equivalent, it is just a digital thing. As we move further into that, then we're going to have to find ways to service that digital information, in meaningful and useful ways for people. And learnings from the work on born-digital material will influence and help us with digitisation, and the assets that we create from digitisation, because we'll be able to look at them in different ways. We'll have different tools, that'll be able to interpret them in different ways. We'll be able to do more stuff with them. So, I think, the evolution of having to handle born-digital records will help us, with the management, and the thinking, that goes into the transformation of further analogue into digital. Does that make sense?

HC: Would you say that's why archives, generally, seem to be ahead of the curve, in heritage? Do you think that's one of the reasons why: because born-digital has come up, for them, much earlier than it has for everybody else?

CM: Yeah, I think it's definitely an element. I think the other thing is that archives generally – and this is a massive generalisation, so I apologise to all archives out there – archives tend to hold bits of paper with words on it. Bits of paper with words on it are really, really hard to get excited about. Whereas, a museum, who has a sarcophagus of King Ramses Blah-blah-blah, you know, you can press your face against the glass, and go: "Wow!" I don't know why I used that example. There's a physicality, that is really, really hard to get over. And we've got some amazing documents, don't get me wrong. You know, 'Valor Ecclesiasticus' is a beautiful book, that you can just look at, and can forget what's written on it. It's just lovely to look at. It's got illumination, and gold leaf, and all sorts of- it's just gorgeous. And I'm not a history geek, but I look at it and go: "That's cool." But most archival stuff really isn't that. It's bits of paper with words on it. And they're really, really hard to get people excited about. You know, a museum of bits of paper with words on it, funnily enough, probably ain't going to get you your million visitors a year. So, I think archives have had to find ways to innovate, to get people to interact with their collection, beyond just the core researcher, who is quite prepared to read all of those boring, dull pages of words, because that's what they live in. So, I think, the nature of the collections has driven it. And I think, increasingly, the shift to digital, in terms of bondage, sort of, records, is very new. There are lots of questions that nobody in the world has answered yet. But everybody's scared to death of what it means. Because if you get it wrong, you lose information. If you lose information, in the archival world, you are losing history. And you won't get it back, and once it's gone, it's gone. And that terrifies an archivist, because they're intrinsically built around: we preserve history. So, I think it's pushing people in that direction, very much. So, yeah.

HC: I usually ask everybody: if you were an alien, and came down in a spaceship, and the only thing you were able to gather from the Earth was the WiFi – so, everything that's online – what would your impression be of the heritage that we have, literally just from the basis of what's been digitised? Do you think that it's balanced? Or do you think that we'll get a particular view?

CM: Oh, no, there's huge amounts of things that are completely not digitised and never will be. This is back to your little box of drivers, that allow you to not digitise stuff. So, a thing like copyright and data protection, there's huge gaps in the digital world because of that. Cost is huge. I mean, we've got – so, ooh, let's put it in context: so, the National Archives, we've been digitising stuff for fifteen years, properly. We have digitised about – depending on whose number you trust – somewhere between a hundred and twenty, and a hundred and forty, million pages' worth of information. That's quite a lot. That represents about six percent of our physical collection. There is no way we will ever digitise everything that we've got. So, as a consequence, there will be a bunch of stuff that's left on the shelf. Literally. And that creates gaps in the record. You know, and one of the challenges of working in a commercial environment, around digitisation, is that the decisions about what gets digitised are driven by a commercial agenda, by the companies that we work in partnership with. So, the family history guys only want stuff that's got loads of names in it, because that's where they can sell. So, censuses, military records, passenger lists, immigration things, prisoner records... Anything that's about people, with names in it, they lap up and love. Anything that's got no names in it, quite honestly, they don't give a monkey's, so they'll never digitise them. So, if you're driven entirely by a commercial agenda, your digitisation landscape will exist to fulfil their needs, more than they will your organisational needs. And that's where some of the- you know, we talked earlier about the, kind of, challenge of being overtly commercial versus what's right for the organisation, and again, your point about: is political a driver or an inhibitor for digitisation? It can be both. But there are consequences. If you go down a certain route, you'll get a certain outcome. And as long as you're

prepared to accept that, and live with the consequences, then that's fine. But a lot of people, kind of, step into these things, and they don't realise that there's an unintended outcome of it. Interestingly, the interest from academic publishers is opening the door to digitising much greater amounts of material, that are driven by lots and lots of different factors. So, they're not about names. So, they can be much more interesting – or much more wide, I guess, is the thing. But equally, it's still driven by a cost element, and there are certain- you know, there are certain hot topics, within history and research, that they want to digitise, because they know there's a market for people interested in them. But there's a whole bunch of stuff that, again, there's three academics in the world researching. They're not going to spend two hundred thousand pounds on a massive digitisation project to fulfil the needs of three academics. So, that model definitely drives you in a certain direction, and it leaves things, as I say, off the table. And it's the same in anything. So, I think, yes, if you were looking at it, you'd see a fragmented picture. You'd see a lot of information in certain areas, and you'd see huge black holes of information in other areas. But you could argue that that's the whole archival process anyway. It's- you know, as a government department, we're tasked with collecting the records of government. We do not collect every single piece of information that government creates. And if we did, we'd need a building the size of London. We collect something like, the statistic that I'm told is about five percent, of what government creates. It is ultimately selected for permanent preservation and transferred to the National Archives. So, that's an awful lot of things that get created and done, that we never get to- that are just not worth keeping, in any long-term sense. You know, all those emails that say: "Thanks," probably not a lot of archival value in some of that stuff. So, the archival world, itself, is fragmentary in nature. So, even if you digitised everything, it would still be a fragmented picture. But we don't digitise everything, so it's just a distillation of that, I guess, down the line. Does that make sense?

HC: And what do you think gets lost, with the choices that you make? In terms of funding, the choices that you make, in terms of what you can and can't put online, the commercial pressures... Is there anything important that you think is getting lost somewhere along the way? Or do you think all the best stuff will end up going online, because the best stuff is what people are interested in?

CM: I guess it depends on what your definition of 'important' is. So, I'd say that everything that we digitise has value, and the stuff that we don't digitise, doesn't mean it has lesser value, it just has a different value to different people. So, it's almost imposs- I mean, and this is very National-Archives-centric, but the process of us selecting that five percent of what we keep from government – how the hell do you make that decision? What's worth keeping? So, there is a whole- we have a collections policy, which, we work with government departments, to help them make the decision. Ultimately, it's them that make the decision, about what's worth keeping or not. because they're the creators of the information, they're the owners of it, and they are best-placed to make the decisions, about what's important, or what's not. But it's a really hard question to ask. So, their context of 'important' might be different from – you know, they might throw stuff aw- "Well, it's got a load of names in it. Well, that's nothing to do with government," and I'm sitting there, going: "But that's a goldmine, commercially! Aah, you can't lose that information!" So, there's some really interesting challenges and it's all about perspective, and it's all about what you deem- what your definition of 'important' is. I would argue that anything that's been through that selection process, for us, and has become a public record, is important, somewhere, for somebody. Whether that translates into whether it's important enough to be digitised, and I think, then, it's – well, again, it's back to that question of: why are you digitising it? And if you're digitising it for an audience, which, presumably – I mean, you might not. Sometimes, people do digitisation entirely for preservation reasons. They never publish their content. They just want an electronic copy in case the paper goes up in flames somewhere. Nothing wrong with that. Absolutely perfectly valid and reasonable thing to do. But it's

a different outcome for a different reason. We're in the game of providing access to our records, so we always have to think about who's the audience that we're intending reaching, with what we do. And as a consequence, I guess the important thing, for us, is: "Well, which one am I going to get the biggest impact with? What's the large level of engagement? What's the most important, in terms of: is it going to fundamentally change research around this particular topic? Is it going to create a new way of thinking about something? Is it going to engage with the family history audience?" Because the next census that we're releasing, 1921, will be the single biggest event in the family history calendar. Ever. Full stop. It is the largest census that will ever be published online – to date. And the next one, after 1921, is 1951, because there is a census gap. It will be the single biggest event. And it will also be one of the single biggest digitisation projects ever undertaken, because it's something in the region of - from an archival perspective – it is over twenty-five million pages. And that's huge. And that's, kind of, at that very extreme end of: massive impact, huge change, and should be prioritised, and should be done. But that doesn't mean that the, you know, the records that we've got, on 1932 economic policy in West Midlands is not a valid record, and somebody, somewhere, needs access to it. The challenge is, when you balance all the other factors, about cost, and impact, and blah-blah-blah, and you've only got a limited amount of money, where do you put that money? And that's a life choice that everybody has- every archive is making all the time. So, I don't know. I think it's an impossible question to answer, that.

HC: Good. And with that, thank you very much indeed.

CM: Okay!

HC: Thank you.

HC: So, we just want to do a final word on authenticity.

CM: So, one of the things that the National Archives does, is it presents the record of government. And in order for it to have value – and you could argue that every archive, whatever they present, is only a snapshot, it's... But if you can read the original piece of paper, from the 1960s, written by the Foreign Office diplomat, in the Middle East, about the Sheikh who got drunk and beat his wife – well, that's a really horrible example, but... If it's written in black-and-white, on a piece of paper, that you can see has providence and authenticity, whether the words are, actually, what really happened, you can at least say that somebody recorded it. And therefore, you can quote it. And it becomes a source that you can trust, to some degree. And one of the challenges, of moving from a physical world to a digital world, is how you maintain that level of authenticity. Because we live in a world where there's lots of very clever electronic tools. Photoshop, for example, means that you could change all of the words on a piece of paper – on a digital version of the piece of paper. You could omit things, you could change names, you could remove stuff, you could put stuff in... So, how do you prove that the digital version, that you're showing somebody, is actually a true representation of the piece of paper that you're showing them? In the world of digitisation – from analogue to digital; when you're in the born-digital world, it's a bit different. So, how the hell do you do that? And how do you do that with enough authority that people still trust and believe in you? And from a heritage organisation's perspective, your reputation, around authenticity, is absolutely vital, for people to continue to trust you, and work with you, and have value in what you do. So, it's a real challenge. We're not going to get into the technical aspects, but there are some things that you can do, technically, around the metadata, that allows you to provide, essentially, an electronic audit trail, of when the digital image was taken. "This is a true representation of the piece of paper, at that time, and I can prove to you that, subsequently, this image has not been altered or changed in any way," because you can see that in the metadata. So, while we're not getting into the technical side of it, there are some levers that the – technical innovations, that are coming through, allow organisations to be able to prove that authenticity, on records where it's harder to do so. Well, certainly from a digital perspective. And that's really key and important. There are some- so, one of the things that

we're doing, now, is that, there are certain elements of public record, that – essentially, it's bits of paper that were selected for transfer to the National Archives, that, for various reasons, we said: "No, we're not going to take the piece of paper into the collection. What we'll do, is we'll digitise it, and we will take the digital version as the formal public record." Because the- essentially, what you get into this model of, if you're digitising an archival collection, you're creating what we'd call a 'digital surrogate', a digital copy of the original. But what you're not doing, is you're not throwing the piece of paper away, because it's still the archival – and in our case, the public – record. I'm not allowed to throw it away. So, if there's something wrong with the digital image, you can always go back to the bit of paper. So, if you want to prove that the digital image is a version of, you can always bring out the bit of paper and wave it at somebody, saying: "Look! Show me the difference." If you move into the world where you have a digital object, but you don't have a physical representation anymore, because it's been thrown away or it's been lost, then you can't prove it, because you can't bring out the paper anymore. So, how do you prove it electronically? You can use metadata, to prove that the image was authentic at the time and hasn't been fiddled with since. So, even if you haven't got the physical thing to look at anymore, you can prove that this is as good as you're ever going to get, and we can trust that it still contains information that hasn't been changed or altered in any way. And that's massive. And that makes a big difference, in terms of- of, kind of, the trust, and the authenticity of the record. Certainly in a heritage perspective, you know. We're in a world, very much, now, of fake news, where it's – d'you know, it's an Oxford English Dictionary definition for God's sake. So, the idea of: 'how do you prove something?', in a digital and electronic world, is becoming much harder to do. Heritage institutions play a huge role in that, in terms of, you've got to be able to trust us. If you can't trust us, then what are we here for? And that's massive, actually. And digitisation can play a huge role in that, if you do it right. And again, it's that: knowing the endgame, knowing what you're trying to achieve before you do it. Because once you create the digital image, if you didn't capture the metadata at the outset, you can't prove it anymore. Because it's too late. You've missed it. So, there's some really interesting challenges around that.

HC: Brilliant.

CM: Okay

HC: Thank you very much.

Andrew Ellis
Art UK
20th November 2019

AE: Andrew Ellis

HC: Helen Casey

HC: Could you tell me your name and your position?

AE: So, Andy Ellis, Director of Art UK.

HC: Perfect. So, first of all, can you tell me a bit about this organisation, and what it does in the heritage sector?

AE: So, we're a cultural education charity, we were launched in 2003, and we are enabling global audiences to learn about art in UK public collections. So, at heart, what we do is, we have been digitising the nation's art collection and public collections across the UK. Our first big project was to digitise all the oil paintings, which took ten years. We're now doing sculptures. So, the oils, we photographed all of those; sculptures, we are recording everything indoors, photographing about twenty percent of it, recording everything outdoors, and photographing everything. So, that's the digitisation focus. The next big project will be to widen the art that comes onto Art UK. Already, some of the collections put works on paper on there, but we will, we've funded digitisation programmes [to] enable a lot more of that post the sculpture project. So, we are the online home for every public art collection in the UK, so some three thousand two hundred and fifty collections share the platform to showcase their art to a global audience. But it's not just digitisation. We spend a lot of time telling the stories behind the art to, sort of, you know, bring artworks to the surface, for those to be shared in an engaging way. We have an Art Detective platform, which connects collections in need of specialist knowledge, with information about those missing sitter names, missing artist names. So, that's called 'Art Detective'. We have a shop platform to allow the public collections to generate commercial income from their digital assets, and we're growing the schools' learning resources on the site, to be able to counter the marginalisation of the teaching of the Arts in UK state schools.

HC: So, can you tell me a bit about the reasoning behind the decision to put all of the oil paintings online? Why was that done, and how was that funded, and what was supposed to be the benefit of that?

AE: So, we, as a nation, own, arguably, you know, the greatest public art collection in the world, at least eighty percent of those in store, much of it hadn't been photographed. So, this was about transforming access to that collection, making accessible – publicly accessible – what was publicly owned. So, that project cost us – putting aside the costs of the website and the publication of books, which was, you know, the route we took for the first project – that cost six million pounds, to digitise over two hundred thousand paintings, so it was incredibly good value. Incredibly good value. The vast majority of that was privately funded, from charitable trusts, individuals, corporates. The public sector came in quite late in the day, with funding from, effectively, the NLA, which then became Arts Council.

HC: And what was the benefit? What was it supposed to do? Was there a, sort of, a mission statement, for what people would be doing once that stuff was online?

AE: So, there were benefits to the collections, because it created access to the art that, you know, was, in many cases, in store. There were benefits to the public, because they could discover the art that they actually owned, that they could then plan visits to them. They could use it for research purposes, academic purposes. But as the project has developed, you know, the art is used on the site for a variety of reasons. So, you know, a good percentage of our audience come to the site just to look for subject matter, because of the tagging. It means you can, you know, if you're interested in, say, the bonnet in history, or in the portraits of George III, or the Yorkshire moors, you know, you can find documentary-imaged evidence of that. But at the same time, you might be interested in

stories around Impressionism, or you might want to plan a visit to- you're going to the North-East, you want to see what art is available to see in the North-East, or you might use it for school projects, or academic projects. So, about seventy percent of our audience, online, is a mainstream audience with general interest, and about thirty percent is an academic, professional audience, coming to the site for those reasons.

HC: To what extent do you measure, and use metrics, to, sort of, dig into those visitors and what it is they're doing?

AE: So, we use Google Analytics, very extensively, to see where our audience is, to have some sense of the age of the audience, how long they're coming to the site, what they like on the site, what they don't like. And then we use survey evidence, as well, quite considerably. So, each year we try and do a survey to find the reasons why people are coming to the site. Also, to ask about identity, as well, so to discover to what degree, you know, we are managing to reach a more diverse audience, so that's an important part of that survey work. But, you know, the rationale for coming to the site is an important part of that survey work. Google Analytics tells us where the audience comes from. So, we know that, for example, approaching, you know, something like forty-six percent of our audience is from overseas, and we know where, overseas, it comes from, and so forth.

HC: And have you found evidence that there is a democratisation of heritage, as a result of this? There have been studies, in the past, that have said: "Actually, you're double-serving the same audience." What kind of evidence have you found, that you are reaching more, and more importantly, different people?

AE: Earlier survey data – but this is quite long ago – did suggest that we were doing well, in terms of reaching C2DE audiences. You know, very well, compared to what we expected, I think. Also, I think, what we're finding is that, because there is a focus, quite often, on the subject matter, rather than on the art, that that is another way in which we're actually bringing a much wider audience than would be the audience that would just go to galleries. So, we try very hard to, you know, so, to give you some examples, you know, when the Gentleman Jack programme was on, you know, we could write about Anne Lister, because Anne Lister's portrait was on the site, and we can tie in with that audience who's coming to that programme, who then might want to discover a bit more about Anne Lister, in terms of art. Or we might do, as we've done, the story about hats in art, which'll bring in an audience interested in fashion, but not, perhaps, interested in art, per se. So, those are the sort of things that we're trying to do, to democratise access. We have podcasts, that are called 'Art Matters', that link popular culture in with art, so, you know, recent subject matter is included, you know, the monuments men, Hallowe'en, witchcraft and art. We've done articles on – what else have we done? It's gone... So many of these, you know, just, my mind has just gone completely blank. Yeah, so what else have we done? So, you know, black presence in art, sculpture in Harlow, beauty and power in art, great women artists, designs of stamps in art, and so forth. So, that'll give you a, you know, a sense of the other things that we've done, you know. Let's talk about erotic art, introduction to the camp aesthetic, painting by numbers, art on the Underground, and so forth, so...

HC: Do you think that art has an advantage, in that it is more accessible, on a basic level, than perhaps some other areas of heritage that need a lot more interpretation? And do you think that's been a benefit to you?

AE: It partly depends on how you serve it up, really. So, I think that digital gives you a really good opportunity to try and democratise access to art, in the way I've just described, through the storytelling, through podcasts. For example, we've done a competition around poetry and art, you know, creating poems inspired by art you've seen on the site. So, I think that is very important. Also, I think, digital has at its heart the opportunity, here, to allow people to discover and learn at their own pace. And in a way, you know, what we saw in our initial research – which, actually, the BBC did, before our first incarnation online, which was with the BBC – was that audiences were very off-put – or, certain audiences were off-put – by going to galleries, paintings in gold frames, and found that rather alienating. And that there was an element of pressure there, to learn fast, and almost slightly competitive, with the other people who were looking at the paintings, whereas online, you

can do this in the privacy of your own home, and at your own pace. And I think, responding to that opportunity, in the audience, is something that it's very important that organisations such as ours actually, you know, do well.

HC: Is there a different challenge, when it comes to digitising sculpture? The beauty of art is that it is, almost, in two dimensions and photographs really well. Have you had to make a set of different decisions when you- and why did you decide that sculpture was the next thing you were going to do?

AE: So, let's take the second bit first. When we finished the oil paintings, we thought about what we would do next. And obviously, we considered watercolours and prints and drawings. There, in actual fact, we decided not to proceed, because the numbers are so very, very large. The sculptures is a much more doable number. So, from an economics point of view, there was actually a case for going the sculpture route. Secondly, we felt that, because it provided challenges around how you'd photograph them, that would be an interesting route to take, for us, because we wanted that, sort of, intellectual challenge. Thirdly, we thought it was very interesting that sculpture would bring to Art UK a much more global collection. So, sculpture... The paintings are – because it's oil paintings – are, principally, a European tradition. The sculpture that's on Art UK is really coming from around the world, from Japan, from India, from Mexico, and so forth. So, that was very important to us, as well. And then, also, there was, fourthly and finally, there was this little challenge around, as one artist, Ed Reinhardt, once said: "Sculpture is what you bump into when you step back to look at the painting." So, it was very much a, sort of, poor relation of the flat art. Even though sculpture is all around us, in the streets. But we often just walk past it. So, we thought that was a really interesting challenge, how do you bring sculpture to the fore? So, those were the four reasons why sculpture was chosen. In terms of how we show sculpture on the site, obviously, it comes with, you know, because of its very nature – and I'll just show you, as we're sitting here, so if you look at the sculptures on the site, you'll see that we're actually taking multiple photographs of them. So, let's take, you know, if we take this one here, this Frink – sorry, no, this is Alan Thornhill – so, you know, you can see multiple angles of the sculpture, and then you can see them all together, as well. This is obviously something we didn't do with the oil paintings. And there will be some 3D scans on the site, as well, with some public engagement around that, where the public are creating the 3D scans, by multiple photography which is being stitched together.

HC: So, a lot of this is imagery. How have decisions been made around interpretation? What information are you putting around it, and how have you decided what to give, and how much to give?

AE: We've decided to give basic information, which we thought was information that could be provided by the collections. And we knew, from the oil painting project, that that baseline was, you know, probably ten or so pieces of information: title, artist, dates of artist, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. What people can do, though, when the objects go onto the site, is then add information through the Art Detective network. So, if there're particular pieces of information that are missing, that are really important, like, you know: "Who is the sitter?" You know, then the Art Detective network can ask those questions, and the public can help fill those answers in, or specialists can help fill those answers in. So, we accept that when stuff comes onto the site, it is the beginning, really, that there's more that can be added. Obviously, you know, the bigger collections, they are much- you know, they have sophisticated records, and a lot of that information is there. But our work is not just museums, very importantly. Our work is the university collections, the hospital collections, the civic buildings, mayors' parlours, libraries, etcetera, etcetera.

HC: I'm just going to take a quick break. Can you talk a bit about how you've managed rights? Because copyright is a huge issue. And obviously, some of your stuff is still within copyright. How have you coped with that? And have you had to, sort of, invent new processes, or was there a framework available for you?

AE: No, there was no framework at all. So, we thought it would be a very big challenge. It's been a big challenge that has needed to be resourced but has not been as risky as we thought it would be.

So, we have an excellent copyright team here. And for what we do, we need two sets of permissions. So, we need permissions from the collections, so there needs to be a collection agreement, about, you know: can we photograph there, can we put it online, what resolution, can we use it on social media, can we crop it? All of that. That comes in an agreement, and that's been signed by- well, all three thousand two hundred and fifty collections have had an agreement, and signed an agreement. So, it's a massive legal infrastructure that underpins this. Then, there are artists' rights. So, if the artwork is in copyright, so in other words, the artist is alive, or died in the last seventy years, we need a second permission. So, in that case- and these are significant numbers, because sixty- you know, something like sixty percent of the forty-two-and-a-half thousand artists on Art UK are in copyright. Although I think it's nearer – and I can confirm this – something like forty-five percent of the artworks are in copyright. So, we have thousands of agreements, with estates and with artists, and we also have agreements with DACS, and with Bridgeman, who are, sort of, effectively, agencies for numbers of rights owners. And that allows us to, basically, publish everything online. We, unfortunately, have to pay DACS. That is a big fee, costs us twelve, thirteen thousand pounds a year, really quite significant, to publish the DACS artists. But those artists are the likes of, you know, Picasso, Matisse, etcetera, etcetera. No-one else charges. It's a very interesting situation. No-one else charges. And where there've been one or two attempts to charge, we've said no. And then, there are the orphan works. Those are the works where our due diligence has tried to find the copyright owner, our due diligence doesn't find it, and then we publish those, as well. And we've taken out an insurance policy, to cover us against any litigation. At no point in the- it's since, you know, 2011, when we first went online, have we had any real issues with people getting upset about what we've published. And sometimes, where we've published orphan works, and the orphan work owner comes through afterwards, they've said: "We're delighted that you've published." So, I think the risk, around copyright, is probably overstated, as far as we can tell. There have been no court cases around a heritage institution publishing an online image, or any, you know, serious litigation. Because, you know, we obviously have a take-down policy. If someone were – and we have a few cases of this, we have a few cases of – you know, typically, it might be an artist who will say: "Look, I'd rather my earlier works were forgotten," you know. "Please don't publish them." And, you know, we have to respect that, so we leave the record and take the image down. But because it's online, we can take these images down, you know, very, very fast. It's not too much of an issue. But as you can imagine, you know, with three thousand-plus collections, forty thousand-plus artists, it is a resource challenge. It's also a very complicated rights challenge in the database, because each of those sides might have varying degrees of openness in the images. And so, there's- the software basically needs to say, you know- it needs to take account of both. And if, you know, one side is more restrictive than the- if the art is more restrictive than the collection, then you go with the artist's restrictions, and you follow that. And the code has to reflect that.

HC: Can you understand why some collections have been very cautious? Because it is complicated. There is risk, and perhaps people feel that the benefit is not great enough to justify the risk. Can you understand why there has been this big struggle over copyright?

AE: Yeah, no, we can, and many institutions don't have a rights team. So, particularly if you don't have a trained rights IP officer in your team, then you might feel far more risk-averse about publishing something online. But our experience, here, is that the real risks, here, of publishing online, are not significant. But we can obviously say that, because, you know, we have had a lot of experience with that, I suppose, but I fully understand how someone who doesn't have a rights team might say, you know: "This is no-" why- you know, "It's asymmetric here. There's, you know, there's probably much more risk to us than there is benefit."

HC: And work, as well, because your team has done a huge amount of work, to get two different sets of permissions for every single piece of work.

AE: And we've also, to be frank, had a lot of very significant, pro-bono legal advice, from Freshfields, in this, which has not cost us, but they've been incredibly generous with their time, in helping us put the agreements in place. And that, obviously, is not available to everyone. But it does, I think, show

the real benefits, of a shared infrastructure like this, because this is a shared platform, and it means that, you know, you do that legal work once, and then it applies across the three thousand collections.

HC: Let's move onto funding. You started off with a lot of private funding; you did end up with public funding. But has that been a struggle? To actually get public funding for pure digitisation projects?

AE: Yes. Without a doubt. In some ways, the initial project was- interestingly, the initial project was to digitise and photograph the oil paintings and put them in a series of books – of which I'll give you one on the way out – county-by-county, nine images per page. Started in 2003. And, as one of our trustees – and I think, quite rightly – said, that acted as a Trojan horse, because the collections signed an agreement. It did say, in the agreement, that ultimately, this would go online, but the main focus was on the books. And so, they seemed quite happy with the books. Online was down the road, and when the books were published, that was all very benign, and, you know, as time progressed, between 2003 and 2011, everyone became a bit more relaxed about digital. So, when it first went online in 2011, it was, by then, you know, a bit more acceptable. So that- and to many of the funders, because we funded this book-by-book, county-by-county, with a funding stream where you'd have the Lord-Lieutenant, you know, heading the funding. You know, this was quite a, sort of, an analogue project, you know, with a lot of county pride, around the Hertfordshire volume, or the Essex volume, or whatever. So, that allowed us to raise, you know, reasonable amounts of money, but no-one really knew that that was- or thought that that was, you know, digitisation in the way we think about it now. So, that was quite an interesting start. But then, as that took quite a long time, to do that county-by-county, we started approaching the big charitable trusts. And those charitable trusts, you know, to be fair, you know, reacted positively. So, we're talking now, 2009, 2010, and for example, the Monument, which is one of the Sainsbury's Family Trust, you know, was very, very generous in its funding. Then, late in the day, we managed to convince the NLA, and the regional hubs to come in, and they were supportive, as well. Since then, interestingly, it has become a bit more difficult to raise money. So, when we finished in 2012, the oil paintings, we knew we wanted to do sculpture next, but the really big challenge was raising the amount of money we needed to do it. And in this case, instead of doing it as we went, which was what we did with the oil paintings – and that's why it took ten years, because we did it as we went – in the case of the sculpture, we wanted to raise the money in advance. And that's how you would do it with the National Lottery, or the HLF, as it was called then. But the problem was, it took us four-and-a-half years, to raise that money from the HLF. And this was because, you know, they really weren't doing digital projects. This was a real exception. Fortunately, we had a track record, but it took some time to get it through. We didn't get through on the first pass, and then we got it through on the second, and then we needed to raise the million pounds of matched funding, and that took us, you know, at least a year to do. So, overall, four-and-a-half years, for a very small charity, and that was really, really, really problematic. Really problematic. Since then, I would say, now, as we stand, I think it would be very- most of those big charitable trusts are not interested in pure digitisation projects. And interestingly, as we were doing a lot of the matched funding, you know, they would say: "Oh, it's the learning bit that's far more interesting." And indeed, for the National- for the Heritage Lottery, a really important point, here, is the three-point – so, we raised three-point-eight million in the end, for sculpture, two-point-eight million from the Heritage Lottery, one million of matched – effectively, a half of that three-point-eight million was for 'learning and engagement', which is not where we would have started. You know, we were wanting pure digitisation money. The HLF said: "There's no way. There's no way you'll get pure digitisation money from us. You have to create a learning and engagement programme, and a volunteering programme, around that." So, that, in itself, took quite a long time. Now, there's no doubt that we are a better organisation as a result of that. Because that learning investment, the engagement side, has been, you know, it has been, I think, you know, thrilling to work on for the team. Has given us, you know, a new aspect to the way we – as I talked about earlier, you know, schools' learning is very important for us now, and that wouldn't have happened without that HLF money – but it wasn't what we started thinking. And going- and then- and now, I

don't know. I think it's difficult to see where you'd go, even with the National Lottery, whether you could really go to them just for digitisation money. I think, in every case, you're going to have to add other things. Even though, you know, we naturally want to do those other things, if we want to find- because as I say, what we want to do next is really change the model around dramatically. So, instead of us saying: "OK, we've done oils, we've done sculptures, we're now doing drawings," we don't want to do that. Instead, we want to turn it round, and we want to say, okay, going forward, we want to hold, basically, funds, that will then allow us to respond to collections coming to us, saying: "We've got a fantastic collection of drawings, fantastic collection of miniatures," or, you know, "We've got a great mural in our school, can you digitise that?" And we're the, sort of, team of experts; we'd decide which would go first, and which would be excluded, which would be included. But also, with a lot of public input, into what they want to see being digitised. So, the model changes dramatically. But where do you go, you know, if you wanted, you know, over five years, ten million pounds' worth of digitisation money? That's difficult to see. And, you know, we recently put an expression of interest into the National Lottery, which was looking for a big, bold Heritage Horizons idea, minimum ask of five million. And we put in an application for eleven-and-a-half-million, out of a twenty-two-million project, but that was not just digitisation. It was digitisation in the way I've just described, driven by the collections and the public, but was also very much about local storytelling, community storytelling, you know, building expert knowledge, connecting local schools to their local art collections... So, we're still tentative about the idea of going to them for pure digitisation money, because they don't seem to be encouraging that.

HC: OK. What's quite interesting, that you just said, was: "We couldn't get money for straight digitisation, but when we were forced to do these other things they turned out to be very beneficial."

AE: Yes, yes.

HC: So, in a way, have they got a point? That pure digitisation- does it need to come with all these other things attached? Or do you think there's a case where organisations know what it is they're doing and why, and they don't really need that, sort of, extra... I don't know, almost, sort of, a patronising: "Well, you must involve people in this"? Because all organisations have that, at the heart, anyway. Do you think there should be more trust, and the money should be available on that basis?

AE: I think, for us, in this- and, as I was saying, and we're explicitly, you know, saying, you know, it was a very good thing, in hindsight. But going forward, you know, we would like the flexibility to have a digitisation fund, that can just digitise, and then, on the other hand, do all these other things, but not necessarily with the same- from the same pot, where there're constraints. I think we need more flexibility, because if you're going to do this at scale, which is what we're all about, you know, you want to do the digitisation well, and then, you know, across the piece, you want to do the storytelling well, and you want to do the shop well, and, you know, the schools' learning stuff well. But they're potentially very different funders, for those things, who, you know, only really want to do schools' learning. You know, if you go to the Claude Duffy Foundation, they're not going to be interested in- or Paul Hamlyn, they're not going to be interested in digitisation, but they are interested in that learning side, and they're specialists in that area, and they can guide in that area. So, I think, that sort of division of funding would give us greater flexibility. And obviously, from the collections point of view, if Derby- so, Derby Art Gallery, it's a really interesting case, you know. They have four hundred works on paper that they need digitising, and they can't find the funding to do that, so they would be an ideal candidate to come to us for that. We would digitise that. But the last thing they want is then to be told: "Well, we're going to do this, if you do this, this, and this, in Derby Art Gallery, on the learning and engagement and volunteering side," and then we do the same when next collection comes, and so forth. So, I think that's- I do think that there needs to be more trust, here. And I think, what we've shown, certainly, is that, you know, this is not- Art UK is not one of those digitisation graveyards, where, you know, things get digitised, and they just get, you know, plonked on VADS or whatever, and no-one goes to see them. You know, this is living, it's growing,

the audience is growing, you know, two-point-three-million people come to the site each year. And, you know, these artworks are being seen. So, I think, you know, hopefully they trust us to do that properly.

HC: I think they are changing. And I think they're aware that they need to change. Because I'm aware we're running out of time, I've got some, kind of, questions that I ask everybody - if I can rattle through them? Do you- if you can cast your mind back to, sort of, the early 2000s, when we all got our first Internet-connected computer in the office, and you started thinking about the opportunities of- of heritage online, what... Can you remember whether you, kind of, made an assumption that everything would be online by now? And were you ever thinking about what the possibilities might be?

AE: In the early 2000s, you know, because I- you know, we were so focused on the book project, we weren't really looking into that. I think, by 2010, I think, we thought, if we were thinking then, I think, by now, we would have thought that a lot more would be digitised. A lot more would be connected across collections.

HC: And I've got seven reasons for why you may not choose not to digitise. Would you be able to rank, comment, or otherwise, on whether you think any of those are significant, and if so, why?

AE: This applies to us, or generally?

HC: To... I would say, generally, in your experience, across your career. You can give examples...

AE: But across other organisations? 'Cause you know- we- you know...

HC: If you have knowledge, and you can comment on other organisations that you're- I mean, it's basically your overview, because you're an expert and I'm not.

AE: Yeah...

HC: In your experience, where do you feel those reasons have come to bear?

AE: So, outside Art UK, in terms of the sector in general, I would say that... 'Cost' has been very high up the list... Perhaps 'lack of political will', if you think that- at the top of the organisation, lack of the will of senior management, if that's what that's referring to. That would be quite high up, I think... Then followed by 'expertise'... Then followed by... 'Time', which is 'cost', I suppose... Followed by 'privacy', and 'fear of obsolescence' last. I don't think 'fear of obsolescence' gets in the way of this in a very serious way. So...

HC: And is there anything I've missed?

AE: ...I think, you know, possibly, you know, once digitised, is there the marketing- budgets and communications strategies, then, to make it accessible? And to not make it accessible would make people aware of it. And I think that's probably quite important, as well...

HC: You've obviously seen the benefit of putting heritage online. You put the 'lack of political will' quite high, there. Is there a sense that we still don't understand the cost benefit? Because, when it comes to it, that's what a board may consider: "What's the benefit, to us, of doing this?" And is there a problem, that we still can't put a number on that, and that's what's stopping this happening?

AE: Yeah... I think there's a lack of political will, partly because the perceived costs are very high, and many of these collections - particularly the local authority collections - are facing very serious challenges in many different ways, as we know. I think- at a national level, I think there is a complete lack of political will to do this. I mean, over the years, as we know, there've been various discussions around this, and, you know, smaller projects, and a lot of consultation... But in the end, at a national level, even now, with what we're doing, and I don't sense that there is a great national, governmental desire to get behind this in our particular area of heritage. And I don't understand that. Because, you know, in terms of soft power, you know, we take the British public collection into every computer, in every country of the world, twenty-four-seven, and incredibly cost-efficiently. And I just don't understand why there isn't more political support for this. So, I think that lack of political will, I think it really does need people at top of an organisation to drive- and some of the organisations obviously see this. They can see that, you know, putting the British Museum collection online you know, reaches a far bigger audience than the people who actually go through the doors on an annual basis. And so, some boards really see that. But I don't think that's as, you know, that's

not as pervasive as it should be. And- but it's understandable that, you know, when you get to a smaller collection, putting it online, unless you are, you know, you are part of a bigger platform, such as Art UK, or other aggregator platforms, then it's possible that, you know, without that marketing budget, which I came back to it before, you wouldn't be able to get that multiple of people seeing your site online as come into it. So, that's an interesting difference, actually, between those larger organisations with, you know, big digital budgets, marketing budgets, social media power, and so forth. So...

HC: What do you think about the future? Do you still think there is a wish to get everything online, from a democratisation point of view? Or are we starting to think, actually, people don't necessarily want this, and that matters?

AE: I certainly, don't think that, you know, we shouldn't be talking about getting everything online, because that's economically impossible, and the cost benefit of that is- just doesn't really work. It's about getting- increasing, dramatically, selective digitisation of objects in collections, where connections can be made, of relevance to audiences. So, through the storytelling, through relevance to the local community, relevance to international audiences. That's where strategic thinking has to take place, as to what you then digitise. So, that's why we're starting to think that the digitisation we do, in the future, gets driven by, you know, by the local, you know, by the community, by the collections, by local people, and the national audience, for Art UK. And I think that's a much better way of approaching it. But also, you cannot do this without doing things in parallel. You need to be telling the stories around the digitisation of objects. And you also, very importantly, as I think we're trying to do, very hard, is make it very discoverable. You've got to make it discoverable, through, you know, particular subject interests, and so forth. So, I think that's a really key aspect of how you take it forward.

HC: Can I just quickly check this, just see if I've got enough time for just one more... What have you learned, from your experience of digitisation, that you wish you'd known at the beginning?

AE: Putting a lot more money into marketing is, you know, what we needed to do much earlier on. And we just didn't have it. And I think, you cannot do this, and just expect people to find you. You have got to spend money telling them about it.

HC: And if you are a very small team, with a small collection, you can see why this is a problem. You don't necessarily have a team or maybe not even a person. Do you think not having a marketing team is one of the reasons why digitisation's not happening?

AE: It's quite possible. It's quite possible you know, there's a conscious connection between those two points, or it's just, you know, understood, at senior management level, that, you know, we could do this, but we can't then tell people about it. But I don't know. I think, you know, it's taken us time to work this out. And obviously, we spend most of our time thinking about digitisation. So, I mean, the economics of this are, you know, as we find, very challenging. You know, how do you maintain digital assets is a really significant challenge. And, you know, finding funders, to- we talked earlier about new digitisation, which is tough in itself. But finding funders who will actually fund the upkeep of a digital platform? Even more difficult. Even more difficult. And that's a really key aspect of- if we want to take this forward, you know, the reason why so many of those digitised assets sit in digital graveyards is because there hasn't been the, you know, the money to maintain them, and to publicise them, and tell stories around them.

HC: And so, is the key that bigger organisations have to help small organisations? Because the money just isn't there?

AE: We are, absolutely, a hundred percent of the view that the only way to do this, for the vast majority of UK collections, is through a platform like Art UK. You know, the Tates and the National Galleries can do this on their own – British Museum, Science Museum, and so forth – but really, the vast majority of those three-thousand-two-hundred-and-fifty collections, on Art UK, could not show their art to a local audience without an aggregator platform, such as Art UK.

HC: Great. Thank you very much.

John White
The Space
7th May 2020
Phone interview

JW: John White

HC: Helen Casey

HC: Well, the reason that I got in touch with you in the first place is my research is about heritage digitisation. I'm trying to find out the barriers to heritage digitisation since the year 2000 when it was really flagged as something that was definitely going to happen. Everyone was going to do it and it was going to be wonderful. And then there seemed to be a decade in which really not very much happened. And I'm just kind of digging into that a little bit. What's quite interesting to me now is that in the last couple of years, there's been a flurry of agreement almost that digital literacy is the problem. And that is what this particular digital maturity index, which is why I think it was originally called, came about. And I'm just interested to know where you started in this process and how you've gone on and what it is you're trying to do and how you're going about it, just to kind of find out a little bit more about what instructions you've had from the beginning and how it's developed and changed, because obviously the name is changed, which I think is interesting in itself and how you apply it differently in a heritage context than the original research which was done using business tools, which perhaps aren't quite as appropriate. So that's the sort of area I'm looking at. So, I don't know whether you just want to kind of talk me through a bit about how that would be great.

JW: How familiar are you with Culture is Digital?

HC: I've done quite a lot of work on the 2018 report, and I've seen Tonya Nelson speaking a couple of times. And some of the things she had to say were very interesting to me, particularly the access does not equal democratisation argument, because I think that's been a very important realisation that just giving people access to something doesn't magically make something happen. But it's interesting to me that Culture is Digital still holds up object-by-object digitisation, as it were, showing the collection online as an idea that they still want to go forward, even though it's proved to be very difficult. So, because I'm looking at object by object digitisation, basically I was wondering why I couldn't see a collection online. And that's slightly different from all the other digital tools and magic things and social media and everything else that's happened since. But I'm interested that object-by-object digitisation is still in Culture is Digital 2018. Even after other things like VR and AR and social media have all happened. And I am interested to know whether we think that is actually going to happen.

JW: And I should caveat by saying in terms of my personal perspective, I mean, obviously The Space started life and is still primarily focused on supporting digital in the performing arts. My background is actually completely outside the arts and cultural sector anyway. I'm a digital producer by, as much as I'm anything in my career, my background is as a digital producer. So, I come from the commercial sector. I've now been in The Space for sort of five or six years, so I suppose I have to stop claiming to be a newbie at some point and start owning it. But we've only relatively recently been working more actively with museums and, aspirationally, we want to get more involved with the heritage site because from our point of view, which is primarily Space is about audience engagement with digital content and helping cultural organisations to do that. And so, we come at the whole collections digitisation thing with a very particular perspective, which is the public audience for this stuff rather than necessarily the research audience and so on. So, with all that in mind, I'm very happy to give you my take on it as a sort of semi non-expert on this. So, the content of Culture is Digital and the various recommendations, basically came out the back of, there was a team seconded into DCMS for six months, of which Tonya was a part, and I think, I might be wrong on this. This is probably something not to quote me on, but I think the digital maturity thing was an idea that she

championed from her pre-ACE days as a secondee into that team. So, they looked at a range of ideas. They engaged quite widely with the sector. There were various sessions that we were involved in, sort of chatting through what the issues were, what the barriers were. And, essentially, the recommendations that came out were a bit of a combination of new initiatives and building and pulling together things that were already in train and trying to get a bit more joined up about them. So, we, The Space, had two or three things in there that that we led on. The Culture Compass, the Digital Maturity Index wasn't initially one of those, but it was a thing that ACE and the Heritage Fund agreed to, kind of, partner on and develop. And, there was a little bit of morphing of what... because then the general election got in the way, so the seconded team had to leave, because their six months was up before the final report was published. [Off the record comment removed]

But I know from people who were seconded onto that team that they were a bit disappointed that some of the initiatives that surfaced from it weren't really what they had in mind when they were writing them. But I think generally the big benefit has been a lot more co-ordination between different organisations because we've had common projects to work on. So I know from The Space's point of view, the Culture Compass, working with Culture 24 and others - means we're a lot more aware of what each other is doing and there's still ongoing conversations that that team is having, which is helping respond to the Covid situation as well. So that's been a really useful sort of side effect of the Culture is Digital initiatives. But yeah, so the Maturity Index, what happened was having been announced as the thing that was going to happen, ACE and the Heritage Fund then obviously needed to get into the nitty gritty of exactly what it was. And they had a notion that the Charter, the Digital Charter, which was a separate initiative, should probably be combined into it as a single online tool. So, they asked me if I could do an initial piece of scoping work - consultancy work - to, kind of, dig into the detail of how it might work and some of the assumptions. So, one of the key questions initially, for example, was: is this going to be an assessment tool that the Arts Council in particular and possibly the Heritage Fund used for assessing funding bids? So, the Heritage Fund has the Resilience Health Checker, which is not a mandatory requirement if you're applying for funding, but it's a, sort of, strongly recommended, and it's become a quasi, therefore, required thing if you want to put in a strong bid, you should assess your organisation using that Resilience Health Checker. And so, perhaps the Digital Maturity Index would be a similar thing that would help funders make decisions on where best to focus investment. So, that was one of the types of issues that we looked at and decided that no, this should be a self-assessment tool, which has ups and downs because there's no catalyst, there's no mandatory reason to go in and fill it in once a year or whatever, so utilisation might be lower, but potentially people might be freer and franker and use it in a way that's most helpful to them as opposed to being required to fill yet another form, or whatever. So, we did a consultancy project on that and it then had to go out to tender, and I was then in the odd position of thinking, do I want to pitch for this thing, having helped think through what it might be? And, I knew it was going to be complicated and, for reasons which I have discussed, inevitably, it has to be something of a compromise. There is no perfect solution to this problem because it's an incredibly complex problem. So, do I want to wrestle with all those compromises and trying to pull together a consortia of people with different interest and expertise, or do I want to sit on the sidelines and watch somebody else make a mess of it instead of me? Having genuinely wrestled with that, I decided that no, I'm a glutton for punishment and I want to put a bid in, which we did, and which fortunately we weren't the only bidder, it was a fairly close race, I'm told. But we were successful, I think, mainly because we had a very wide consortium of Culture 24, museums background, The Audience Agency, ourselves and the University of Leicester. So, it was a big combination of expertise that we could bring to bear. And we knew from the start we would have to bring in specialist consultants to cover the different areas that even between those four organisations we don't have expertise in - which is what we did around digital fundraising, collections, management with the Collections Trust - so, there's about four or five other organisations or experts that were quite heavily involved in authoring what we came up with. And then obviously, we ran workshops in each nation looking at various stages of prototyping an

approach. We spent a lot of time ourselves brainstorming and thinking through some of these compromises of how complex and detailed and how superficial to go. We've headed towards the more complex end because there's lots of relatively light touch tools out there already and they don't generate actionable insight. It's incredibly hard to generate actionable insight, even with a detailed analysis, but that's what we decided to opt for. So we've ended up with something that is at the more heavy duty end, which does have implications for utilisation, especially when, sort of, three weeks after you launch it, the country goes into complete lockdown and all the funding gets diverted to much more urgent requirements.

So that hasn't helped in uptake. But we do know from workshop sessions that the various partners have been running, that people are finding it really useful, often just taking a segment and as a tool, it is most useful if you can have expert advice to help walk you through all the kind of questions that it prompts. So, that's the big preamble. And we are now starting to look at doing a lightweight, sort of, coffee break version of it, which will be an intro to people at the more basic stage, or who've got less time to spend, just to give some initial feedback and sort of gently introduce them to the principles of the Charter and the Compass. So that's where we are in the, sort of, journey of it so far. Where would you like to go from there?

HC: I'm interested to know, I've looked at the One by One project, which is obviously the University of Leicester's project. And they learnt quite heavily on some research by Price and James in 2018 looking at digital maturity. And they used a commercial tool - I think they used the Forrester commercial tool - I wondered how, in your view, heritage is different from a commercial business in terms of how you look at digital maturity and how you've taken that into account.

JW: So, the person you should really talk to, and I'm happy to intro you is Dr Lauren Vargas, who's been one of the digital fellows on One by One, but whose commercial background in digital maturity models is probably what led them to that Forrester model. So, Lauren and I and Ross, who's the Professor at the University of Leicester, Professor of Museum Studies, we worked quite a lot in the early days of going through those more sort of academic and commercial models and looking... I think the general... obviously, there are crucial differences, I would say the differences are not so much around... There are some differences around the emphasis in any not-for-profit third sector, and we looked at third sector tools and models as well, versus a commercial business, just in that the drivers of priority are obviously different. And, I think it's fair to say – so, there's a number of little thoughts milling around here for me - there are some ... a good digital maturity tool is actually not - the word digital is deeply misleading and unhelpful because actually it's a general organisational maturity tool – just that the examples and the things you're getting it to focus on are digital and digital throws up two, sort of, interesting aspects, and most people tend to fixate on one or the other without realising that bias. So, there are digital tools that enable you to do non-digital things. So, even if I'm doing, even if I'm running a live event or whatever, I'm probably using Office 365 and I'm using Google Docs and I'm using email and I just don't think about that as digital because it's just pervasive. But it is a digital skill set that some people don't have and don't have access to. And that's a barrier. And then there are obviously digital outputs, social media, films, whatever, interactive collections. And that's what people tend to assume you're talking about, and you have to keep widening out the conversation. So, sorry, I'm rambling somewhat, but yeah, so, the heritage - what's specific about heritage is a) the non-profit mindset, which means you've got different drivers around the quality of access and so on that are much - should be relevant to a business - but become more relevant and somewhat more complex when you're looking at a public, when your product is a public good of some description. And specifically, when you get into heritage and things like Collections Management, you then get into very specific challenges around – this is where I don't have the expertise - but around say, for example, if you are digitising, what's the access to that? What are the formats? What's the taxonomy you're using to catalogue stuff and are they compatible with other collections? How do you align sort of academic priorities, which is where a lot of the research comes from, which is a big driver here is where's the funding and what's the priorities of the funders? And that's what drives a

lot of this notion of comprehensive collections digitisation versus what the public need, or the audience, however you broadly construe that, need, which is different, sometimes, quite often different. And then, there's a whole subset of very specific domain challenges that are the same in all the different areas of the Compass that we had to try and get our heads round without a huge amount of resource and time to do it. Is that in any way helpful as an answer?

HC: I'm actually also not from the heritage world. I'm actually a journalist. So I've come from a commercial world in the same way that you have. And I'm wrestling with how heritage is different from what we do in journalism, which is just try it out and see if it works.

JW: There's been a lot of big - so, again, Kevin Gosling, who runs the Collections Trust, is probably a good person to talk to about this because he's across a lot of the initiatives and the history of those initiatives and what's worked and what hasn't, and he's currently looking at - I don't know where it's got to in the current circumstances - but was looking at yet another big infrastructure investment to try again to get things more joined up between collections. So, yeah, he's probably less on the actual digitisation, of taking objects and scanning them and whatever, but certainly in terms of collection management systems and how they speak to each other and how to get more joined up, that's a big area where he's got a lot of expertise and insight into more of the business and organisational drivers of that, not just the technical collections, management systems stuff. So he might be an interesting person to speak to. But the big thing from our perspective is a lot of that investment is in: we're going to take a particular collection and we're going to digitize it from A through Z because we can and because a domain expert would say, well, I want the comprehensive collection. The fact that the audience will, the public audience, will never engage with that, or if they do, only with a tiny subset of it, and they won't - without context and without it being curated and them being led through it, their interest will drop very quickly. So a lot of these big millions and millions of objects, global collections, only a tiny fraction of them ever get explored because the public doesn't have the appetite and isn't being guided through it in the way that they would want to be. So, it's outside of their comfort zone. So, I think a lot of a lot of academic research, money, Research Council money goes into funding these things. And no one's already thought about what the end benefit is outside of just having comprehensive collections of stuff.

HC: I think I'm also, because I'm coming in as an outsider, I'm coming in from an interested visitor rather than a researcher, weirdly, and I think what is becoming clear is that people aren't necessarily seeking out collections that wouldn't seek them out anyway. Is there an element in what you're being asked to do to reach new people? Or not, because it's becoming clear that reaching new people who aren't interested in heritage on the surface of it is actually very difficult. And just offering access is not a solution to that.

JW: Yes, I'd absolutely agree. I mean, what we're - so, I guess I need to separate out a couple of things. What we were asked to do in the Compass tool, was, and in its design and creation, was try and create something that was relevant across the heritage and arts culture sectors quite broadly. I mean, in real practical terms, across the types of organisation that Arts Council England would fund and the types of organisation that National Lottery Heritage Fund would fund, and that's an enormously broad church to try and reach. I mean, we used to joke, we are talking about trying to build something that is relevant both to the Royal Opera House and the National Theatre and the RSC at one end and three people managing a community duck pond that's a site of scientific interest at the other end, and you cannot possibly build a single tool that keeps all of those people happy and is relevant and accessible to all of them. So, you have to, sort of, fudge it a bit. And as I say, we've gone for more the upper end of that spectrum and are now trying to build something that would deal in a much more superficial way at the lower end. So, there's that aspect of what we were asked to do, which is try and be comprehensive and inclusive, but also get more into the detail of what's really driving an organisation to be sophisticated and, back to the early points there, the principles that underlie it, those levels of maturity. There's five levels and they are very closely drawn, refined a little bit from the Forrester and other similar models to say, at the most basic level, you've just started doing something, the, sort of, level one: there is some activity going on, but there's no real

plan. I may get the levels wrong here, so cross-check with the tool. But at the level two, there is a plan, but it, sort of, sits in a silo. So, the marketing team is the normal example, has a plan, but then on talking to the curators about how to get joined up with digital, so everyone knows what they're doing in their own little groups, but there's no wider plug-in to the strategy. And then, at the, sort of, integrated level there is that plug-in, there is a joined-up plan across the organisation, but maybe the evidence base for that is not there or is not being systematically reviewed. The fourth level - we're optimising, we're gathering that evidence and we're refining what we're doing based on the data we're gathering. And then the fifth level, which is the one that we debated an awful lot and sort of, goes outside of what the commercial models do, you know, how we articulate it is 'transforming'. And the reason we had issues around it was because you can be going, you can be transforming your organisation by going from doing everything with pen and paper to using Office 365. That could be transformational for a low-level organisation. And, that's not what we were trying to get at there, we were trying to get at more innovation, but also in a not-for-profit sense of sharing best practice with the wider community and generally trying to shift the balance of what the whole heritage, or cultural ecosystem is doing. So that's an example where we've taken something that there's really good business reasons why that's a good way of describing maturity, because that's actual general business maturity that applies to anything that you're trying to do. You know: is there a good strategy? Is it joined up with everything else you're doing? Are you using evidence to improve it and iterate? Those are just general good business planning principles outside of digital, and equally relevant to not-for-profit as they are to commercial. The thing that's a bit different is the wider public good and the sharing best practice that commercial organisations, for obvious reasons, would not do so much of because they're trying to out-compete each other.

So, yes, I meandered off again, but that's really one of the key differences, but the reason for rooting it in a lot of business research, that's already gone on as to what generically describing 'good' looks like in a tiered way.

HC: By turning it into a compass, you're basically asking organisations - because I haven't really had a good look at it, I don't quite know how it works - it's asking organisations to look at themselves and set their own course, as it were based on asking certain questions, which you will put to them?

JW: Yes, it's based on their priorities. So, it's got twelve areas in it. And what we say right up front is not all of these areas will be relevant to all organisations. It starts with strategy and planning, which is generally going to be relevant to everybody. And then it has things in it - there's a little diagram floating around that has sort of, it looks a bit like a house or a pavilion. It's got a roof, which is the strategy, it's got some pillars which are the sort of vertical specialisms, which tend to be relevant to the cultural sector. And, then it's got some horizontal foundations which are cross-cutting business capabilities, which you would find in a commercial model, which are things like marketing, operations, finance, HR, those underlying foundations that sit across all the verticals. And the verticals are the big catch-all one-call programme which is designed to capture, if you're a theatre company, that's the productions you're staging, if you're a museum, that's the exhibitions you're staging. If you're a heritage organisation, that may be events, or whatever, or just the general availability of your asset, your building or whatever it is, and your landscape, your wilderness. And then we go into physical building management, where you've got a venue and you're thinking about wi-fi and so on and on into areas like enterprise, where you're selling products, merchandise, alongside tickets, so you can see, and then collections management is an area. But if I'm not a museum and I don't have a collection, I don't fill in that bit and it's up to me to decide which bits of the of survey are relevant, which areas, which are the twelve areas. And then within those twelve areas there are between five and ten capabilities that we ask them to think about. And again, they can decide that an entire capability is not relevant to them. So as an example, some organisations have equipment, you know, camera equipment or props or costumes that they might lease out, or they might have a shop, you know, a physical cafe or whatever, and others don't, so we're not going to ask them about that. And that doesn't affect their overall assessment. And then they go in and they basically, for each of those capabilities, they say whether they're just doing a level one, so

something's going on but it's not really well planned, all the way through to level five where it's absolutely pivotal and they're using it to transform the organisation. And, we suggest that even if you're the RSC with loads of resources, you're probably only looking at being level five on two or three areas across your entire organisation. So, we're trying to get people out of the mindset of 'I have to score 100 percent on everything' because what we're saying is different organisations, different priorities, different areas of working, different challenges and constraints. So, for god's sake, I think the DCMS wanted to be able to say 'currently the heritage sector or the cultural sector is scoring 65 percent in digital maturity. I'm going to come back in two years' time and then we'll be scoring 75 percent. Isn't that marvellous?' And we're like, no, that's completely the wrong approach to understanding the problem. The problem is not about completion. It's actually about focus. And they have to focus on what they're doing and why, especially in a world of constrained resources and public value. Why are you doing this? What's it about? If it's just about trying to max out on your digital, then you're going badly wrong. So, we wanted to build it in a way that gets away from that and says no, you need to tailor this to what you're trying to achieve, and then in real practical terms, they go and assess where they currently are and where they would like to score in twelve months' time. And then they describe in the notes against each of those what they're going to need to do differently to get from A to B. So, it's a self-assessment tool for them to decide what their priorities are. But it follows a very, or a fairly rigorous, standardised structure. So, it tries to look at each area of capability using exactly the same methodology, so there's some consistency across it.

HC: It seems to me that the word digital has kind of disappeared from the problem in that digital is now, sort of everywhere, and in terms of what we do in business, it's involved in everything. It's just a tool, like a telephone is a tool.

JW: Yeah, and I kept trying to find an analogy for exactly what you were saying, which is it's almost like talking about budgets or finance or something. You can't come across an area of operation where the money side of it, in terms of resources, people, time, whatever the cost, is not a factor that you would want to be considering. And it's the same with digital. You should always have it being considered as a way to enable whatever it is, there were so many different aspects of what it can enable. Yeah, I think if you ask any of the digital specialist organisations that are working on the tool whether we would like to throw away the word digital, I mean, most of us would. But we still have, it's still a problem. It is still a barrier. And it's a very real, even if it's a confidence barrier only, it's a cost and expertise barrier as well, realistically. There's a lot of organisations out there who say, well, we just don't get digital. It's not for us or it's too scary or too expensive or whatever. And it's that really basic barrier that we're trying to get through, which is where, from what I know of the One by One project, and it's a lot of the same team working, running One by One has been involved in the Compass, so we talk a lot. It's that focus on individual literacy, and those barriers, and on the leadership piece in museums is a big thing about trying to distil down - what are those core skills and capabilities that people need and how do we describe them and how do we move people along the, kind of, confidence and the skill set levels to get better at this stuff?

HC: One of my arguments is that heritage organisations like museums are being dragged, kind of, into the 21st century and being made to act more like businesses, and I think particularly under a Tory government, you get a lot more of that. Is there a sense in which museums are just not very good at being businesses or heritage organisations are just - they just need to learn to be better businesses, and then all of this stuff, digital stuff, will fall into place automatically?

JW: I think there would be a DCMS government view that that is the kind of problem you are trying to solve. And to some extent, the funders are therefore under that pressure. So, there is, I have a lot more knowledge of the Arts Council and its strategies and focus, and that has been a lot more - the underlying assumption is that public funding for this stuff has to reduce over time. You never get better than standstill. Obviously, the current situation throws a lot of that up in the air in that there's a lot more money being spent on survival at the minute, which means there's going to be less available for sustaining in the medium to long term. So, it's going to get more acute. But yeah, fundamentally, there is that assumption that you can solve the problem that way. And I think that's

a fairly flawed assumption. There are obviously ways that organisations can get more commercially savvy, bringing revenues through running events, running merchandising shops, cafes, bring in those revenue streams. But, yeah, it's not, and bringing in some of those business and management disciplines, but it's a very difficult economy, it's a very tight limited resource environment. Salary levels are lower than in the commercial world, so in the digital sphere, the same is true in the arts. As soon as you get a junior person, who comes into an arts and cultural organisation that is passionate about it, gets a certain level of digital skill, they can command a much higher salary going back out into the commercial world. And some of them will stay because of their passion for the subject. And they're willing to be paid less to do the same job, and a lot move on. So, there's a constant cycle of skills loss. We run a digital mentoring program and we quite often find that we'll start working with an organisation and six months later the people we're working with have moved on because of that issue. So, it makes it very hard for organisations to deliver that innovation piece and to see what the rationale is for doing it.

HC: One of the arguments I'm trying to make is that heritage organisations aren't businesses, and that they can't be forced to act like businesses because, as you say, they don't survive well in a commercial world, that's not what they are. And therefore, is a lack of digitisation just down to the fact that they know what they do well and that just putting a load of stuff online is not actually going to benefit them in any way that really means anything.

JW: I mean, it's probably, that's a positive way of painting the thing. I think often what we find and again, this applies in the performing arts, is they don't think about the audience proposition, that's not their natural starting point for doing something. That is possibly shifting in terms of people are becoming much more aware of it. So, the performing arts example is – to give you a reference point I'm more familiar with - is that they've got a creative idea and a concept. They may have been somewhat distracted by a shiny piece of technology that they want to experiment with, and in the most extreme version, they're kind of like, well, I'm the artist. I don't care what the audience thinks. I'm about my art. And if people are interested, they are. And if they're not, then so be it. That's not my primary reason for doing this thing to which the public funders increasingly say well, yeah, but you're spending public money, so you need to be thinking about how the public benefits an awful lot more. And we are going to prioritise funding those things that are delivering that public benefit in a way that you can evidence. And if you want to carry on being a high art form small audience person, you may find that public funding doesn't follow you. I think there is probably a version of that in the museum sector, which is about 'my passion here is this collection that I curate and I am responsible for and preserving for the future and researching it in more and more detail. I know that I have to let the public in to look at it because that's what we have to do, but that's not the main reason I'm doing it.' I'm massively stereotyping, but that mindset definitely exists out there. And so, that means that their reasons for doing it may not be the same as the funders' reasons for wanting to fund it, but the funding structures are increasingly emphasising that access is a heritage funds mandatory priority, it's increasing access and broadening it out. And back to one of your questions, whether evidencing that digitally is really difficult is actually a problem I was just talking to another - someone looking at putting in an AHRC funding bid about how we might start to build out an evidence base that all of this digital stuff is actually reaching newer audiences because that is a big emphasis is opening out, given that everybody's paying through tax or whatever, so the arts and culture that's out there, it should be benefiting the widest possible audience, which is not the same as having everything being general, general populist content. But it is about thinking about how we get people who wouldn't normally go there to go there, and why they would want to do it. You can't manufacture a reason from nothing.

HC: That kind of leads into one of the questions that I meant to follow up on earlier, and that it was interpretation. You were saying that people online need to have strongly curated content so that they can understand what they're looking at. Which is something that kind of chimes in with me. But on the opposite side of the coin, we're seeing a much greater call for people to curate their own content – co-curate, co-create, and have much more input into it. Have you found that that push and

pull between the expertise on the one hand of the person who knows about what they're talking about, and giving it away to the person so that they can have much more experience rather than just sort of receiving the information? Is that something that's come up? And how do you how do you serve that audience when they both want to be told what something is but also play with it themselves?

JW: I don't have a huge, and certainly from the heritage sector and what we were calling a huge example of that to talk to, so I want to be a little bit wary of. I can give you a view, which is, and I think you should probably should have a look at the Wellcome Collection if you haven't already. They are. I mean, they are incredibly well resourced and they are very thoughtful about the digital experience they're offering. And obviously, they have a wider sort of public education purpose outside of just the physical materials and assets and exhibitions that they curate. But they've gone down a very journalist or the platform, which is, there's various examples of people speaking about this and blogging about the process and approach themselves, which is they have the themes, they have an editorial schedule, they have themes. They invite artists and other guest experts to sort of comment and take people through the collection online. So they are, I think, an example of doing it quite well, but one that's quite removed from the model of 'here's 25 objects that you might find interesting from our collection'. But it has got that narrative and it does get wide engagement and traction. But it needs an editorial team which most institutions just can't afford to run. And I think that is that is quite a key point. You'll know as a journalist, the way you the way you articulate something and make it accessible for an audience that is not necessarily themselves an expert in that subject is quite different and it's quite a different expertise from someone who's deep in the detail of that collection. And you do find people who can do both and do it well, but it's not necessarily the case that your archivist is your best articulator of the value of what they're cataloguing to a general audience. The thing that made me slightly hesitate is I wonder about the play, I do wonder about the extent - this notion of co-curation and collaboration and interaction, and we've tried various projects to do it - it's very difficult to do really well and I question the extent to which that's always what the audience wants. I think it's nice - I was having a conversation earlier with someone who is looking at applying to us for funding because there is this big emphasis on engaging with the public and getting the public view on what they're interested in. Sometimes they don't know what they're interested in, so it's kind of - you have to sort of take them and guide them to the answer. And, yes, you do want to be open to those conversations and you do want to be getting the feedback and helping them engage and maybe, you know, contributing their own material - 'here's photographs of my generation' and that thing, and that can be a really valuable process. But I think, yeah, the element to which you need to lead them and the element to which they want to be presented with stuff and taken through it is a really interesting conundrum.

HC: Yeah, I do actually think the co-curation thing is kind of distracting from existing collections because co-curation tends to create new collections and that is then backgrounding my original interest, which is show me the stuff that you've got in the stores that I can't see, which is what surely digital is for in that you can then, you know, you can give me an idea of the whole collection whereas normally I if I go there physically, even if I'm able to do so, I can only see 10 percent. So. I'm just interested in what you've talked about, audiences being important and heritage organisations perhaps not being very good at thinking of the audience first. How are you trying to change that? How do you use the tool to, kind of, get them to think about audiences primarily?

JW: The tool doesn't - so, the tool has a big section on and often thinks, and littered through it is the audience thing. The tool is, I guess if you like, agnostic about strategic priorities, or tries to be, other than making sure that those things are in there. We, in what we do and what we're set up to do as The Space, are always very audience focused because that is in our view the missing piece of the jigsaw. Certainly, what the performing arts are trying to do, it's a little bit different for the heritage because there is a genuine multiple purpose for heritage organisations. There is a big preservation aspect to what they do, which is of value. Not to get too philosophical, but it's a value. And they're recording its history of value as well as the current access of the current audience to the thing.

Whereas in our more normal organisation, performing arts, the sort of ephemeral aspect is less of an issue, you are just mainly focused on getting that experience right here and now to that audience, even if it's recorded and served up some months later or whatever, but you're trying to give the audience a current experience and that's your primary focus. Whereas, yeah, I'd say heritage is a little bit more complex, there is more that mixed set of priorities to be thinking about. And there's a really interesting dilemma now.

I suspect, and my boss certainly has strong views on it, that a lot of these collections and these physical buildings won't be able to be sustained anymore because there just won't be the funding. Some of these organisations are going to go bust. They're going to go to the wall. There is then a role for digital in, kind of, amalgamating those collections and more, having more storage facilities that, other than specialist researchers, the public won't be able to access, but that the digitised collections will still be accessible. So, there'll be a smaller proportion of all of the holdings that we currently have available to walk in and see, but the digital can pick up some of the slack on that. So there is that interesting dilemma, as you were saying, you know, you might have an interest in going in and seeing the 90 percent, or some of the 90 percent of the collection that you can't see because it's digital. But what's driving your interest and how many people have the same interest as you? There's an economy of audience and value around that piece, which is something that the subsidised cultural sector has wrestled with. The example of the BBC – if reaching the largest possible audience was the key driver, you wouldn't have Radio 4 and you wouldn't have Radio 3 or BBC Four or all of those things you'd get rid of because the audience isn't big enough to justify the money being spent. But then you'd have a very homogenous and dull, kind of, cultural offering. And it's a version of the same thing with collections.

HC: I think you put your finger on it there. That's a really interesting view that physical organisations won't be sustained through this. That is an argument that object-by-object digitisation suddenly does become more important, whereas actually what we have seen is that it seems to become less and less important because so much of the shiny stuff out there in terms of digital experience and heritage overall, where do you think heritage is in terms of its digital maturity? Have you discovered through the work that you've done? How would you assess its progress and where it's sitting at the moment?

JW: So, this is - again, this is purely anecdotal and it's skewed by the fact that the National Lottery Heritage Fund funds is quite different from how the Arts Council funds. So, the Arts Council has a national portfolio of about 800 organisations, which it funds between 30,000 and millions of pounds at the top end, and those are funded on a four-year cycle. So, there's like a core client base of organisations that have a long term relationship with the Arts Council, which increasingly over the last few years, certainly in the mid to upper end of that, there are requirements, mandatory requirements around digital development. I was involved in writing some of the policy guidelines of the last funding round, around what those mandatory requirements were and trying to make them less about volume and doing a whole range of different things and more about focusing on what the organisation's unique proposition is and how to do it best and use digital to enable that. So, they've had a lot of drivers around funding to get more digitally mature. And I think, you know, there's evidence through the NESTA survey certainly that those activities are happening, and more recently sustaining them. There seems to be a fall off, but again, is that because people, almost now they realise how much they don't know? So, they're a bit more pessimistic about their levels of maturity and their levels of activity and so on. So, there's interesting skews on that side. For the Heritage Fund, they fund a much larger number of organisations on a project-by-project basis. And they did have, and they've put them under review, they've been under review for a while, they did have some digital guidelines around what you have to do if you receive money digitally in terms of open licensing of the content you were creating, accessibility and so on. And I think it's widely known, I think this is in the public domain, that when they assessed compliance with those guidelines, it was found to be very, very low. They didn't, the Heritage Fund didn't have the skills in-house and the capacity to understand what they were asking people to do and to be able to assess it, whether they

were doing it well or not. And the organisations either hadn't really paid attention to the guidelines or if they had, didn't really understand them or if they understood them, hadn't prioritised them. And so they took a step back and to look again, because some of the things they're asking them to do would be actually problematic, so, asking if you're spending public money, it sounds like a good principle to say you mustn't get any commercial benefit from that. But if you're asking organisations to become resilient and commercially future-proof, then how the hell are they supposed to square those two things? But, generally speaking, the heritage funded entities are smaller, less well digitally developed and a much more diverse, sort of, ecology of types of organisations, so they are, generally speaking, and it's a gross generalisation, probably less far along the maturity spectrum compared to the organisations that the Arts Council is funding. But a lot of that has to do with funding models and focus and what they're being asked to achieve, so it's not really a fair comparison.

HC: I think one of my argument is, you're right, you are asking heritage organisations to do an impossible thing, as you say, to be more like businesses when they're not like businesses at all, but also to give everything away for free, which is the opposite of what a business would do unless you're the Rijksmuseum which has somehow managed to figure out how to do that, but it costs huge amounts of money to do so.

JW: Yeah, and there's a really interesting example of the commercial and I'm going to get, I think it might be the Metropolitan Museum - I might be wrong, the references will be out there, and you may have come across it already - they started off trying to commercialise their image library. And so, if you wanted a high res image, you had to pay for it. And they realised that the revenue from doing that versus the cost of running it just didn't make sense. So, they took the whole thing, millions and millions of images, and they made them available for free, providing they were attributed. And in doing that, they gained a mass – a) obviously they didn't have any of the issues of having to manage the revenue, b) they didn't, they got a lot of positive publicity from the public good of doing it. And c) they got a lot of free marketing benefit because those images were then out there being much more widely disseminated and they were being credited. Now, that doesn't work. I mean, there is a commercial upside to that in terms of the marketing benefit. It probably doesn't, it's not a decision a commercial organisation would ever have taken. And so, some of the drivers for doing that were the wider public good drivers. But it does illustrate the point that, it's the opposite point of what I said about the Heritage Fund's guidelines, almost. That assuming you should commercialise a commercialisable asset may be the wrong decision if you're a public museum. Equally, assuming you should not commercialise a publicly-funded thing may also be the wrong decision if you're trying to become more resilient and future-proof. It may be a better use of public money to give you a leg up to being able to make a profit in order that you don't come back to me next year and want more public money to keep doing the same thing. But trying to describe that in a robust way is really hard. I was talking to someone who is on one of the AHRC advisory groups because they were, they're about to launch a major fund and they were trying to work out how they could - could or should or shouldn't - allow the people they're funding to make money from what they're giving them money to do. And so, they had this classic requirement that everything you build using our money has to be open source. And, the code has to be out there so that other people can take it and use it. And I can give you a whole hour on the problems of why it's an admirable thing to want to do and virtually impossible to do well.

HC: Well. I have taken up quite a lot of your time, I've just got one more question, if that's okay. You are at quite an early stage of this. You've developed it, you literally have just launched it in a ridiculous situation where nothing's working at the moment. How will you measure success considering digital success is very difficult to measure. And how will you know that this is working? What will you be asking heritage organisations to do to measure their own success?

JW: The tool itself should be measuring, is their way of defining their objectives and their success. I think, you know, the real long term, 'how do we know this is a good thing and it's working well?' is going to come in it having facilitated discussions, and organisations working through a planning process that has helped them focus their resources and improve what they're doing digitally and

make it more relevant to what they're doing and think it through systematically. There's an interesting, because of how this was structured, which is a classic funder's issue, it was DCMS money that was used to fund this being launched. There was no money and no plan for maintaining it and rolling it out beyond that - it wasn't previously part of what the Arts Council, the Heritage Fund, were planning to do in their digital strategy. It was an extra thing and extra money was found to do it, but it suffers, ironically - we know this and the Arts Council knows this, and the Heritage Fund knows this - it suffers ironically from the same flaw as a lot of digital projects suffer from, which is a lot of focus on launching it and not enough focus on thinking about the lifecycle of it beyond that, partly because that lifecycle will be determined by interest and uptake. But you need money to prime and develop the interest and uptake, so a rambling way of saying, the thinking through of how we measure the success of it beyond the number of people filling in the surveys and the feedback we get from them, there isn't anything currently more robust than that, but we would like there to be. What we want to do is tie it in more tightly, and I say 'we', in a broader sense of what I know of the Arts Council's thinking around it and my thinking with them around it is to tie it in as tightly as we can to what sets of support organisations like The Space and Culture 24 and others are doing when they're interacting with the sector, to use it as a reference point. The Arts Council's tech champions, who are the team of, sort of, nine digital experts that they have in-house - to get them referencing and pointing people towards it. And then, ideally, we would run, be running workshops with organisations to take them through using it and supporting them in using it and introducing them to consultants who use it and take it up and make it part of their practice. So, there's just a common, the benefit as much as anything is that people have a common language and a common way of talking about this stuff. And common reference points, because a lot of the time people are talking at cross purposes using different terminology, not really thinking through and understanding the issue. So even if the tool itself online doesn't get a huge amount of raw usage - people sitting at keying stuff into it, if it becomes a common framework that lots of people are using in workshop contexts to think through their problems, then maybe populating it and running a survey and sharing it with colleagues, that would be fantastic. But the measures of success are much broader than who goes online and fills in a survey.

HC: And how do you explain to the DCMS that you can't use a 65 percent going up to 75 percent model when they've asked for an index and presumably an index shows progress in a quantifiable way like that?

JW: By talking in the way I've talked to you. But obviously as with any organisation, the DCMS is not a marvellously joined-up hive mind. So, the policy people who we were working with, the senior policy advisers who were pretty bright, sharp people who in the course of working with us, sort of understood or came to understand a lot of these issues, those two individuals have now moved on. So, there's now different people who are taking this on, and clearly, at the minute, it's not very high up their priority list. So I think you can have those conversations. And I'm obviously not the Arts Council, so my client is the Arts Council, not the DCMS. So, fortunately for me, do not have to persuade the DCMS, but I'm one step removed, usually from that process, I'm occasionally, or have been occasionally in the room when the minister is asking questions. But to be honest, at the ministerial level, their level of understanding of this, as with all sorts of policy areas, is not hugely detailed. [Off the record comment removed] So, as I say, at the government level, their grasp of this is not great. At the policy level with the right people in the room, there is a greater understanding than there used to be, but there is still that overall driver of, well, we need to reduce funding, we want to see consolidation, these organisations need to become more independent and self-sustaining. But we'd all like to carry on existing because isn't British culture marvellous?

HC: That's absolutely put your finger on the problem which everybody is trying to solve. That's fantastic. Thank you very much for your time.

Lauren Vargas
One by One
15th May 2020
Zoom interview

HC: Helen Casey

LV: Lauren Vargas

HC: Thank you for taking the time today. I just wondered, could you just start by introducing yourself and explaining sort the way you sit in One by One and how you've been involved also in the Compass as well, how that fits together?

LV: Sure. So, I'm Dr Lauren Vargas and I've been with the One by One project since the fall of 2018. And I am one of the researchers. So, I was one of the quote unquote digital fellows in the first iteration of the One by One project. And we've had another round of funding. So, the first three years of One by One was really focused on UK museums and how to build, well, one, to identify if there was an issue with digital skills - how do people define what digital means, much less the skills that are needed to support those competencies, capabilities and literacies. And the first three phases of the project were really research-based with many, many other partners. And then beginning with the fourth phase, there were embedded researchers. So, there were five researchers across six museums. I was one of the researchers that was embedded in two museums, so, two of the London museums - the National Army Museum and the Museum of London. And we were embedded for 15 months. And out of that came a certain number of outputs that included the resources that are now up on Culture 24 pathways. In February, the same time we had a two week overlap, the same time that that One by One research project came to an end, we had another round of funding and we expanded - not just UK museums, but also US museums. So, this is a pilot and we are working with three different Smithsonian Institution's units and one of their initiatives and very similar to what we did in the first iteration of One by One, we are virtually embedded this time, not physically embedded, and we have partnered a new set of UK museums as critical friends with the US museums. So, really trying to build and scale those skills from one person and one organisation to another. So that's my involvement with One by One. So, in this in this current phase, we only have two researchers across all of the eight museums. How I came about with a digital culture compass is my - I didn't make the complete leap into the museum sector until 2018. I come from corporate. I spent my first 10 years with the federal government agency and then moved into start-ups and one regulated industry after another. So, for 18 years, that's been my world while going to school full time as well. And I've been teaching Museum Studies since 2012 and my PhD was around how to gauge digital maturity, museums' digital maturity, by looking at their relationship with data collection and use - digital data collection and use. And, so part of what I did in my real world job before making the move over to the museum sector was - I have always been on the cusp of communication and digital transformation. That's always been my role. And I'm very used to certain types of corporate or private sector business tools. And, one of the ones that I use quite often was a maturity self-assessment. And I was working with a lot of different, like, big-name consultants, you know, consultancies and agencies. You know, Gartner, IDC, Forrester and such. And I could do that, you know, because I was part of Fortune 50 corporations. When I was going through my PhD, we originally thought that we could tap into one of those business tools and make it available for the museum sector. But obviously, you know, that's not the game plan, the overall game plan for those corporations. Right. They've got a certain, you know, pay quota that they have to meet. And so, there was nothing available that was specific to the cultural sector, that was specific to museums to gauge where they were. And so, I ended up creating my own maturity self-assessment, my own maturity matrix, and that looked specifically across six different areas with almost one hundred and fifty inputs around digital data collection and use. So, looking at everything from: what's the governance look like? What does management look like? Community tools,

measurement. I'm looking across those, kind of, really big categories for the capabilities, competencies and literacies associated with data. As I was wrapping up that PhD, my supervisor, who is also who is the lead on the One by One project, he got a call from The Space and they were bidding for the Digital Culture Compass. And we were all well aware of the Culture is Digital report. And, because One by One, a lot of the resources and everything that was currently in place was, you know, well, all that was – it happened before the Culture is Digital report. But when we were thinking about the resources, etc, we wanted to make sure we were answering those needs of the nation and of the government. And so, when The Space was bidding for this, they reached out to the University of Leicester and Ross said, well, as a matter of fact, one of my students who is wrapping up her PhD, and just so happens to be moving on to the One by One project has just built an entire maturity matrix - you might want to talk to her. And so, it started out as just an exploratory discussion. And then I was brought into the core working team throughout the entirety of 2019. Sorry, that was a really long answer to your question.

HC: But it was really useful, thank you. A couple of things popped out of that. How are you finding the US and the UK are different in terms of because that I think they're quite different in the way that they're funded, in the way that they're run. And in their general outlook, how are, you kind of, assessing and describing that as you try and work the two together?

LV: Yeah, that's great. So, we were able to use or infuse – to put it differently - working with that core working group, all of the design elements of how to put together a really good working maturity matrix, a maturity self-assessment, that rigour, it doesn't matter what context or condition - those design principles remain the same. So, that's something that I could bring to the table, to that particular group. But you're right, there were a lot of areas where, you know - some of some of what I'd already put together could transfer. But the Digital Culture Compass was looking at digital more broadly than what I was looking at because I was using digital data collection use as a proxy for overall digital. But the areas where we really saw that we couldn't - that we really needed to customise or do some rigorous analysis of that - would it necessarily be relevant beyond the UK - was funding. I mean, that's just, I mean, as you said, there is just so much difference around that. Along with collections, you know, there's a different set of parameters. And you know, with the Collections Trust and the scaffolding that's in place in the UK, so much different and so much more centralised than it is in the US. Now, when it comes to marketing and communications, talent, HR, overall IT and skills and strategy and governance, that is - that's people - and that can translate across countries.

HC: Great. From the work that you've done on One by One so far, is there anything broad and useful that you can say about how museums are doing in terms of digitisation? My focus is on object-by-object digitisation. I'm also from outside the sector and I'm just wondering why I can't see collections online as much as I thought I'd be able to. It's changing. But. I was just, I couldn't understand why there wasn't an object-by-object page where I could actually see something. Some photographs of it. A little bit of information about it. So that's what I've been looking at, barriers to digitisation. And for me, I think digital literacy is clearly a part of it. And obviously, Ross and your team has been doing that job alongside what I've been doing. Have you managed to find anything that you can, kind of, say as a summary if you were to meet someone and say this is what we've found out from the phases that we've done so far? Can you say anything useful?

LV: Yeah. Can I say anything useful? I guess it's all a matter of the beholder. Right? (laughs) And I should be very clear, you know, all of the other all of the other researchers had a different take and a different perspective. And in that first phase, in that first iteration of One by One, each of the researchers had a different focus area. And so, there was one on visioning, one on storytelling, one on community process

and people. I had leadership, and leadership actually encapsulates all of them. And I guess, to boil down what came out of that 15 months of being embedded in those two organisations and then what I saw in working on the periphery with the other involved institutions would be - There is, I've got, like, this formula that business maturity plus emotional intelligence equals digital maturity. And

I find a lot of institutions kind of skip to the end. They, you know, they're taking on these, like, huge digital or digitisation projects without necessarily grounding in what is needed to make that activity or output successful. Who's the end user? Why are you doing this? What is the impact going to be? How are you going to resource this? How is it going to be maintained, sustained and evolve over time? Those are basic business maturity questions. There's so much more to digital than just the digitisation of collections. And when we think about - what's that scaffolding, what's that infrastructure that needs to support digital collections? Oftentimes I find that's the part that's overlooked, right? And so, you know, the collaboration and the workflow and how we structure for that change and how we structure for that impact is not given, it is not given the time and the space to be built. And then we end up with, you know, either piecemeal, and where you can really see where something was, you know, kind of Frankensteined together or it didn't really start out with a clear purpose or focus, or maybe there were lags in what that focus was, you know, during the project. And, you know, when we think about what business maturity actually means, it's definitely digital literacy, but it's also the project and product management skills and different types of information architecture and things of that nature. And it can't just rely, or be on just on one person or one central, you know, one team's shoulders, because that data, that information, that collection belongs to so many others. And so, there's that lack of voices. I don't find that we have, necessarily, technology issues. We don't have digital issues. We have people, we have communication and collaboration issues. And we need to understand that no matter what the condition and context is, we have people that are in the mix. And we don't think from an emotional intelligence standpoint of what the labour, what the cost of digitisation looks like, what type of talent and resources we need, how we sustain that talent, how we, you know, when we think about diversity, inclusion and equity of our collections, how many voices are giving, are we giving the mic to, the digital mic to, and this platform? How has that been conveyed? Is that all behind the scenes? And then we take for granted that people think that, yes, we have been inclusive or are we making that really well-known? So, when we think about, like, just summarising where there's kind of huge gaps, it's business maturity, emotional intelligence, those are needed before digital maturity occurs. And that's where we're falling down.

HC: I'm interested that you talk so much about business maturity, because from my point of view, as an outsider, what I can see is that the heritage sector is being asked more and more to act like businesses. But they are not businesses. And the way they are funded doesn't necessarily allow them to be businesses, because if they are given funding for a project, they're not necessarily allowed to make money from that project because they've been given money for that project and they're almost tied into this - you're dependent, but we want you to be independent, but we're not going to give you the tools to do that. Do you see, coming from the corporate sector that what you're dealing with is an area where, almost, they're almost being hamstrung and they're not businesses, but they're being pushed in that direction and they don't necessarily have business as a reason to exist, they're not there to make money, that's what business is. And so, expecting them to be more like businesses means that they're going to do things for business reasons and actually digitisation isn't necessarily going to make money. So I'm, kind of, they're in a weird place where they're being forced into something that they're not. Can you, kind of, consider whether that is something that you would agree with. And if not, why not?

LV: I'll challenge that a bit, because I definitely hear that quite a bit. I know, sometimes when I say business, you know, it's like a taboo word. But, I'm not necessarily using business to equate with revenue. At the end of the day, you have to have a certain amount of business operation maturity to ensure that you have a building and staff that can maintain and support the collections. And if you don't have, like, really basic - that business maturity - you can't allow that infrastructure to exist. So it's you know, it's you know, finances, it's strategic, you know, strategic thinking, governance, product and project management - that doesn't need to tie to revenue, but it does need to tie to how are you supporting the infrastructure that you're building, whether it's your physical and digital and the bridges between. I would also challenge that, and all of those, let me just go back, all of

those capabilities, competencies, literacies are necessary for any type of funded project as well. So, you need those things in place to ensure that your project is running to time, it's on budget, you've got the right people in place, you've got the right outputs, the resources to have, you know, whatever it is to take shape. So, you need that. And what I find is - and I hate to make this gross generalisation - but those types of skills are non-existent or they are thought of as - we don't necessarily need those because our mission and vision is not to be a business. All right - I'm with you that your mission and vision is very, very different than a corporation. But you need to ensure that that collection is well taken care of. You need to ensure that that collection gets that community or that researcher interest. And, if you don't have that business maturity in place, there's a pretty short runway. And as we see, even within the UK itself, the funding models across all of Europe actually are changing. And so where things were highly subsidised, it's now kind of being rolled back and that subsidisation that people depended on, these organisations depended on, now it's almost moving to the US model where it's kind of a bit cut-throat and you're doing a lot of fundraising and membership and development. Membership and development goes away from, you know, just that that spirit of community relations or some of those high profile donors to - we now need donors at all levels. We now need to have a membership scheme that, you know, that services and cuts across all of our community to be able to keep our doors open. And if anything, I think Covid-19, shines a pretty huge spotlight on what those gaps and opportunities are. Because when we look at the stats of who is going to be able to survive and you know how well some institutions were in managing their operations, managing their funds, managing their talent, and who needs a bailout or, you know, additional funding, you know, the business maturity needs to be factored into that. Or are we continuing to put money out there to fund organisations that operationally cannot exist on their own?

So, I don't think it's an either or. But I think there needs to be this infusion of skills. And I think on the same token, I mean, why I came from corporate into the cultural sector is because I think there are a lot of things that can transfer and where corporations could also learn from non-profits in the cultural sector. There's so much, you know, technology with heart and, you know, community and human centred purpose. Yeah, our corporations could definitely use a dose of that. So, let's, and I think people react to the jargon or to the - we've got, like, this mission and vision and we talk money and we take everything, you know, we strip all that away. And that's not the case. It's allowing us to operate in the ways that we can in the ecosystem and be community partners and not depend on international tourists, as, you know, or blockbuster exhibitions as our main source of income. Because when that's not there, what do we do to exist?

HC: Do you think that the government understands that level of complexity? Because, when I was, I've talked to other people and they've said actually they want to see an index. And then they want to see an improvement on that index. And they want to see - they want to see things in quite simple black and white ways that don't necessarily help the organisation themselves. They just want to see, we've put money in and we've got X result. Do you think that something as nuanced as what you're talking about is ever really going to be heard at the government level?

LV: I think it will be heard, whether it's acted upon and how it's acted upon is a different story, right? I think activity for activity's sake is not - busywork for busywork - is not something that we should be prescribing. And I think, going back to the maturity index, that is a tool that is meant to jump start and get your organisation thinking in a different way or to help develop a roadmap to think through different scenarios. You can have a current snapshot and an aspirational snapshot. Where things, where maturity matrices really fall down is when you use it as a, you know, a bully pulpit or a checklist. And then people are going to be scoring as they think that they should be scored, not necessarily where they are and where they could and should be and how they can get there. And so, then it becomes, you know, it just becomes an act of performance. And, you know, and I think in a lot of instances, what's being asked, you know, as far as impact studies and various things, it's you know, there are vanity metrics. It's not looking at true engagement. It's not looking at the sustainability and resilience of those numbers and of that impact. Now, I think that there are a lot of

people in in our government organisations that know and understand that. But then when you try to put something to the masses and you make it one size fits all, we kind of lose that that nuance. Now, and I say that but in the same token, every organisation thinks they're incredibly unique. And well, yes, you have certain contexts and conditions that are definitely you know, because I talk about, you know, a museum having its own terroir, it has its own unique characteristics and that are brought about by the community in which you're located and you're not going to be able to cut and copy, copy and paste that particular model to any other organisation. But there are some foundational elements that exist from organisation to organisation. And that's where we need to put our focus and our funding and our training and try to help with some, you know, if not standardisation, which - I get a little twitchy about that word as well - but you create some type of commonality or common language, common goals, shared goals and activity that we can all swarm around. And if we're collectively swarming around them, then maybe as a sector we can progress and move the needle versus - depending what size organisation you are and like, you know, how high profile or who is on your board or who you have access to or how viral your one piece of content is, you know, that's not where decisions are made, right? And that's not that's not necessarily who's going to be left standing at the end of all of this.

HC: Do you think the problem then that you've discovered is actually, it's not a digital problem, but it is a business problem, that all these organisations do need to be more businesslike? And digital is just, it's something new that they've not really engaged with because it costs money.

LV: I think there are a lot of issues of why people haven't engaged with digital. I think there's a huge fear factor that's associated with it. There's, you know, not having enough time and space to be able to embrace a growth mindset, to be able to learn and adapt and adopt new skills. There is kind of like this, you know, also if we bring in experiences or interactives on the external side, then everything is golden and then we forget all about what's needed behind the scenes and internally. And so, if we're doing more experimentation internally, I strongly believe we'll have better visitor experiences and interactive stroke digital, you know, overall digital experiences. But I think it really comes down to, is digital an add on? Is digital a bolt-on? Or is digital woven into your strategy, into your objectives? And I think that's kind of where you start to see different organisations start to diverge from one another.

HC: Have you become aware of – from going to conferences and listen to people talking - I feel that there's a kind of an existential angst that's going on within museums, particularly at the moment because of discussions around decolonisation. What should we be holding? Who are we for? If after all of this activity, we're still not seeing diverse people visiting, should we change the collection itself? Do you think that this discourse is almost kind of taking over and maybe making people unwilling to commit to what they're putting online, because that might then reveal that they haven't got very far along this conversation they're having with themselves.

LV: I think that's an element of it. And I think that's wrapped up into the fear factor. You know, it's the fear of mis-stepping. It's the fear of, you know, do I have, do I know what I don't know? Don't know what I don't know? You know, it's a matter of, yeah, I think it's a matter of mis-stepping, it's a matter of - do I have the right resources? I don't want to look like I don't know what I'm doing. You know, as an individual team organisation, you know, and is it better just to, you know, maybe kind of sit back and, you know, de-prioritise or do something that is like, the minimal viable product possible? And then call it a day? I think those are some - what I just said there were some pretty gross generalisations - but when it comes down to it, I think a lot of it is wrapped up in fear, fear of mis-stepping one way or the other, whether it's internally or externally.

HC: Again, is that linked to funding? Because I think when you are funded, project based or government based, you have got to show success. And is that a problem?

LV: Yeah, definitely, because - but once again - that goes back to those vanity metrics, right? Like, if you're looking at growth just for growth's sake, you know the number of visitors you have coming in your door, taking a snapshot of that, that doesn't really say anything. How many numbers of people are coming back? How many people are having experiences both physically and digital? You know, is

there a difference between your digital visitor and your physical visitor? You know, what does their footprint look like? And so many different questions, really interesting questions about engagement and about participation that are much more important than just growth for growth's sake. So, you know, when we put out that kind of like checkbox, you know, then just people, then there's just that natural mentality about - what I need to ensure that I'm checking that box and so that I can either, you know, get that funding or show that I did a great job on this project so I can set myself up for that next round of funding. So, it's this vicious cycle that we have perpetuated.

HC: And do you think that that's the fault, in part, of the people who are giving the funding because they are expecting to see things in numbers that they can understand?

LV: This transcript is going to be seen.

HC: By all means, if you want to tell me something off the record, just say it's off the record. I'm just interested to know what you think and I won't use anything that you tell me is off the record.

[off the record remarks removed]

HC: I've spoken to the Lottery Fund for Heritage, and actually they have admitted that their funding structure has been part of the problem. So it's not like they're not aware of the fact that, oh, yeah, this project based funding where the community has had to be involved and, just, numbers count more than anything and ticking boxes, they are aware that that is the case and they have not helped the situation.

So that's really interesting. In terms of object-by-object digitisation, which I'm talking about, is it reasonable for me to expect to see that coming in? Is that something useful or do you just think we're way beyond that? All everybody now is talking about VR and AR and much more shiny things with high profile business. The government itself is starting to talk in a much more shiny digital nation leading kind of way. And to me, my idea of just digitising the catalogue in a way that people can actually go and see what you have and why you have it has kind of fallen away into the background. Is it unreasonable for me to have expected to see that in the first place? And is it unreasonable for me to still want to see that now?

LV: I don't think it's unreasonable at all. I mean, I think it's - once again, we can't just think about the shiny stuff because the shiny stuff has to sit on top of a foundational structure. And we talk about - and you were spot on earlier - museums are facing, they're having an existential crisis. And, when we talk about - strip everything back, what is the purpose of a museum? And it is to preserve, collect and preserve, you know, objects for humanity. It is incredibly important to ensure or make available your collections and to figure out a way to interpret them and to invite people to help you interpret them. And I think if Covid has taught us anything it's that those physical collections are worth nothing if nobody can see them. And if we don't have them available, not just for during these times, I mean, we look at researchers and people all over the globe that would love to be able to experience an object, and I may never be able to get to the British Library, but I would love to be able to like, you know, zoom in on this particular text because I'm writing a paper about it. But, you know, with that same capability, we just can't be slapdash about it. We have to think about the metadata. We have to think about the interpretation. How do we co-curate? How do we co-interpret? How do we co-design our digital collections for a collective experience? And that's the part that's missing, I think, from most of the digital collection conversations. You can look to other countries like Netherlands where, you know, they went all in on the digitisation of their collections and took a very nation-forward approach to it. But now, well they have that, what they don't necessarily have is the community and the engagement wrapper to make those collections compelling, right? So, they have a lot of work to do. It wasn't just a digital collection one and done, great, that's it. It was, okay, now that we've got that foundation in place, now we can think of new ways in which to get people excited about this collections. We can use VR, we can use AR, we can use physical and digital community engagements to be able to get people excited. And so many other things. But unless you've got that foundation, what are you working with exactly? How are you any different than any other non-profit or any other community organisation?

HC: Do you think there'll be a time when all of the heritage organisations will have at least a good percentage of their collections online in a way that is useful? Or do you think that that digitisation enthusiasm is gone and never to return? Because now we've realised what a huge job of work it is to interpret each piece, when you could have a million even in a, you know, a medium-sized museum. Are we just realising it just costs too much, it's too hard and people aren't going to use it in numbers that make it worth our while - if we're going to talk in a businesslike way about this?

LV: I think it's unrealistic to think that every single collect, every single object in your collection will be digitised. Which is why I think it's important for museums to take more of a business approach and understand who their audiences are, who their communities that they're serving are.

What is most important? Like who's viewing what? Why are they viewing it? Why are they coming into your museum in the first place? What about your collection is different and unique than other collections? Prioritise the digitisation of those objects and then maybe you have in the background, as you can, digitise any other objects. But there is so much time, intensity, effort, resources and I think yes, you're right that, there's kind of like that sense of dread of like I've got, you know, these objects with me and my team of maybe two or something like that, it's going to take us, you know, seventy five years to digitise all of this. And then they go, I'm done, right? That's not the way to look at it. It's - what can we digitise that will serve our community most appropriate, most relevant?

What is the right object at the right place at the right time for the right person?

HC: And do you think that the problem with the lack of business maturity is actually that that decision that they're struggling to make because they're still arguing with themselves over who exactly are we, who are our people and how do we equitably serve them?

LV: That's definitely part of it. And then there's also, you know, the internal politics as well. You know, having that type of conversation about what is important, try having that between a marketing and comms person and a curator, right? (laughs) There's a lot of tension that needs to be addressed.

HC: Is that something that you've seen yourself, you don't have to name any names, but explain to me that tension between the comms person and the curator. It's presumably not as simple as I want to show everybody this. Well, you can't move it or get it out of storage or touch it or get anywhere near it. It's more complicated than that presumably?

LV: It is more complicated than that. But what you just outlined is something I've seen so many times over, right? Like, we know we have this in our collection, you know, we think it'd be really great if we could showcase it, and this is why. And then you go, it's going to take, you know, a couple hundred pounds to, like, just get it out and get it ready to be shown. Is it worth it? And then by the time you've gone through that, you know, that case, the time and opportunity has gone and went. But then there's also the, you know, when you're thinking about what do you prioritise, are you prioritising by the number of people that are clicking, you know, on a certain category with a number of people that are coming into your physical location and are showing interest around X? Because if you're making -

you shouldn't be making data driven decisions, but you can be making data-informed decisions and even when you're in - first off, there's a lack of data overall, which is what my information showed across the board. So, even having that conversation with data is very difficult for a lot of organisations. So the tension is out of these assumptions. So, you've got these, kind of these broad assumptions that are made by different parts of the organisation that are coming in conflict with the assumptions of other parts of the organisation. So, it could be like we've got this upcoming anniversary and we'd love to be able to show this. And we, you know, we want to put out on the website, we want to have, you know, some type of conversation around it. And the curator goes, yeah, I don't necessarily agree with you or that's not the right one. And I think this is more appropriate. But then you're like yeah but, that doesn't have enough interest or impact or whatever. And then they argue, well, of course, it's impactful. And it goes back to this point in history, you know. And you get, like, this - once again, it comes down to there's no shared language, common goals, etc. that is bringing them together. And so right now, there's just a lot of conflict, a lot of

tension and tension, I think is good. It helps us challenge our beliefs and assumptions. So, we don't want to get rid of the tension, but we need to address the tension.

HC: Would it be fair to say that the advent of digital, just the sheer existence of the chance to put your collection online has just revealed something that was really there all along - this conflict - this lack of maturity that, it was there all along, but until we had to make these big decisions about how we represent ourselves online, it wasn't that clear that that was what the problem was.

LV: Oh, definitely. I mean, think about this as like a massive iceberg. You have cracks in the surface and a lot that isn't seen. And, you know, both the act and the continued evolution of digital and digital practice, especially accelerated or exacerbated by Covid-19, has exposed those cracks as huge chasms that we have to cross.

HC: And if I can just finally just go back. So, are we talking about this as an organisational management problem that digital has revealed? Would you say that's fair to say?

LV: I do. I think that's fair. But I think it's also sector-wide. Like, it's you know, it's not just what it shows about the organisation in and of itself, but it shows where we are as a sector overall and what the government then has to grapple with and try to make these one size fits all, you know, projects and funding to help, kind of, paste over the cracks.

HC: And what do you hope that One by One will achieve, or even two by two by the time you get to the end? What do you what would you aspire to actually achieve?

LV: It's all about building confidence in organisations. It's feeling confidence that even if you - it's being able to say, I don't know and I'm either going to make time and space to make room to grow and my people or I'm going to bring in and pay accordingly the right talent and resources to make this a reality. So, I think it's just giving people the resources, the tools, the courage to be able to ask the right questions of themselves and the organisation.

HC: Great. Is there anything else you'd like to say that's been brought up by this discussion, or are you happy?

LV: I guess quite a bit. Probably too much

HC: Feel free to make any comments if you think anything I'm saying is kind of going off in the wrong direction. If I've missed something massive?

LV: No, I mean, it is a fascinating and you've picked quite a big chunk of time, too. There's a lot, those ebbs and flows, you know. And when we look back, there's really almost six decades of digitisation within the museum sector that we have to grapple with. And, you know, if we look at, you know, the pace and the theory of change and how that has just accelerated in the last five, 10 years, you know, if we don't make some significant changes to our infrastructure and our planning, our strategies, not just organisation by organisation, but sector-wide nationwide, it's going to be very, very difficult for us to keep the pace of technology, technological change in concert with how the museum is evolving.

HC: I've taken a lot of your time, so I'll say thank you very much. Would I be able to email you if anything else pops up?

LV: Of course, any time

HC: that would be fantastic. Thank you very much indeed for your time today.

Kevin Gosling
Collections Trust
19th August 2021

HC: Helen Casey
KG: Kevin Gosling

KG: I'm Kevin Gosling, Chief Executive of Collections Trust

HC: And to get an idea of where you're coming from, can I ask for a bit of background in terms of what you've done before and how you've come to be in this position now?

KG: Sure. So, I actually, well, I've been working in museums on and off for, well, since the late 80s, so quite a while. But relevant to this conversation, I worked for the Museum Documentation Association, which was the previous name of Collections Trust in the mid-1990s. So, I was one of their outreach managers delivering training, but that was, sort of, when the World Wide Web was shiny and new. I mean it was first used by the public in, what? 91 or 92, something like that? And so, there was a lot of interest, you know, at MDA in digitisation. We had a technical officer, a guy called Tony Gill came, and museums were needing quite a lot of hand holding in terms of just what kind of kit to buy and all of that. But there was interest in digitising, in putting material up onto websites. And so, really by the mid-90s - 1995? – Tony and I convened some workshops on the subject of what it would take to bring together a kind of virtual national collection. There were four of them and we wrote them up. Actually, I think there is a link to it on my LinkedIn, I'll send you a link to it. And that was attended by, there were people, kind of policymakers from the Museums and Galleries Commission, as was then, and the big museums. And it did result, actually, in the germ of an idea that was then picked up by the Museums and Galleries Commission. And then, after I had left MDA, there were steps towards building the kind of infrastructure that was discussed in that. So, the Museums and Galleries Commission had DOMUS, for example, which was the database of museum stats (Digest of Museum Statistics). People like Chadwick Healey were involved in putting together, kind of, collections of digitised images on CD, for example, kind of commercial things. So, yeah, there was a sort of a lot going on in the mid-90s, I kind of went away and came back to Collections Trust in 2015 to kind of find that things had, sort of, slid backwards, having progressed a bit. So, Culture Grid had been set up by my predecessor, who is also involved in, I think, the early days of Europeana, but Culture Grid never really got enough traction to make it self-sustainable.

And it was never really properly funded. I think even in its heyday, there was something like point six of a person looking after it. It was a useful proof of concept, but it kind of proved, also, that there needed, there wasn't enough in it for the museums themselves to actually go to the considerable trouble of standardising and sharing their data. And we certainly found that, working on various Europeana projects, we would be talking to museums – even some quite big ones - that have the data and assets ready to go, and we'd be trying to persuade them to come into these projects. And they would just say, well, look, there's nothing in it for us. It was very much a kind of model that you digitise, you standardise that data according to some schema, that then goes off to some central aggregator and is presented to a presumably grateful public. The only trouble being that the user stats for things like Europeana are very disappointing. So, I don't know if you talked to Andy Ellis or anybody else from Art UK. It's really, if you contrast what Art UK have done with what a kind of a normal aggregator would do, the value added by Art UK is enormous. So, you know, they do a lot of the heavy lifting of clearing rights. You know, they've got a very good comms, there's the retail and all of those things, so if you have an art collection, and Art UK is coming along and even offering to take the photographs, you know, you would be crazy not to do it. So, there's a very clear trade off, it's not much money, it's not much effort rather, for a museum to share their data with Art UK and the rewards and the benefits are clear to directors and other decision makers, whereas in most of the aggregators that exist out there, those benefits are really not so clear at all. It's more of a, kind

of, article of faith that it must be a good thing to share your data. And these days, that just isn't good enough for museums.

HC: So, am I right in thinking then that at this point, you are bravely taking on yet another attempt to encourage museums to allow you to gather up their data and try once again to create this thing?

KG: Yeah. So, the difference is that last year we had an opportunity. We got some funding and some mentoring from the Open Data Institute for this project, well I'll send you the link that's on our website. And that was a really useful opportunity to just take stock and think about why – really going back to first principles and say, well, why has this failed in the past? Why is it unsustainable? And to look at what happened in other countries, and one of the case studies that we looked at was Swedish National Heritage. So, as it happens, I'm kind of living in Sweden at the moment, so it was kind of interesting, and I always thought that they had pretty well sorted. And it became very clear that the Europeana model, if you will, and the model of most other aggregators is just really inefficient. And even with the Swedish National Heritage database, they've only got a fraction of the country museums, because it's hard work - they are expecting the museum to have their collections available online in the first place, they're then expected to have that data standardised into a particular schema. And all of that is just a lot of work, so there's something like 50 or so Swedish museums that take part. But actually, there's many hundreds of others that aren't because it's a faff. And so, the light bulb moment. Came when I kind of thought what happens if we don't try and standardise the data, if we separate the business of simply springing this data from the silos of seventeen-hundred Museum databases, and we just pull it together so that it is simply preserving the data structures and the field names and all of the inconsistencies of the source data. But we just pull all that together. We're not trying to pull in images or video or anything like that, it's just simply the metadata, and we've just keep that as JSON records in the most neutral form that we could. So, you'd have a way of identifying that these records have come from a particular museum. There would be usage statements, so, you know, you could be clear what you could do with that data. We'd only collect non- confidential data, so we wouldn't be pulling in donor addresses and any of that, kind of, sensitive stuff. So, it's purely the sort of stuff that is of, kind of a wider relevance, the sort of thing that a museum would want to put on its own website. And, actually, it turns out that in order to build that basic infrastructure would be stupidly cheap. I mean, it's ludicrous - tens of thousands of pounds to do all of that. And then, you know, in the process, you've got the capacity to mint Persistent Identifiers. Because you've got a central repository of data, you are allowing that data to be persistent and resolvable. And you're then saying to anybody that wants to use that data, well, here you go. If you need it standardising or processing in some way, here's the raw data off you go. And somebody like Art UK would do that. So, they have a business need to standardise things into their own house style. So, if you had this big data lake of all the records from all the museums, Art UK would take what they want from it, and they would then process that to meet their needs. And similarly, if we had funding for, say, a natural history project, we'd take all the natural history data and we would work with relevant curators and we'd format it so that it can go off to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, for example.

HC: So the idea is that this is not a ready - visitor-facing project?

KG: No, it's the back end. It's simply the bit of pulling the data together in a way that can be used by anybody for any purpose. And that would include back-office functions. So, if you're a group of curators trying to do a collections review at a regional level or subject specialist level, you've got the data. If you're conservators doing condition reviews, if you're an exhibition team putting an exhibition together, collaborating with other museums, you've got that. And if you want to produce a particular website on a particular topic, you've got the raw material.

HC: Do you think that the big idea that came out in 2000 when the Internet was shiny and new and everyone was very enthusiastic about it, that there would be such a thing as a visitor facing version - do you think that aspiration's gone away in a way? Do you think it's just proved to be too difficult?

KG: I think it was, I think it was naive because it forgot the basic rule of marketing, which is that, you know, one size does not fit all. And you need - there will be a demand for particular online products.

But, you know, they need to be tailored. You need content that is geared towards a particular audience and a particular purpose. And the sort of thing that was imagined, I think, just took no account of that. It was just really weird that, you know, this is sort of - when it comes to digital, you know, a lot of people in leadership positions just forget everything they know about how things work in the real world, and their minds just turn to mush and it's just really weird. So, you know, we're saying, well, you know, if somebody's got a bright idea and some project funding to create a - I don't know - website about the Tudors for Key Stage 2 kids, that's great. What we would - our part in that would be to a) help them assemble the raw material so they'd be able to find relevant stuff that might exist in places they might not think of. And then the other really important part of the framework that we're proposing is that we need tools for capturing content that is created for any purpose and linking that back to object records, either as linked data that lives outside collection management systems and/or that gets brought back into collection management systems and then helps to, kind of, enrich and enhance the record. And that is a huge problem. It's a problem at the level of physical exhibition text, which nobody ever keeps, and it's a real problem, and we're involved in a project at the moment with the University of York and Culture24 and a few others called 'Making It Fair'. And we are working with eight really small museums, so we're talking about Foxtan Canal Museum, run by volunteers, and the Somme Museum in Northern Ireland. And they're really good at putting stuff out on social media and engaging with the audiences. But the content that they are creating only lives on those platforms. So, if in five years' time, Facebook doesn't exist and, you know, I wouldn't bet on it still being around, then all of that content is suddenly no longer accessible or has to be very laboriously, kind of, copied and pasted back in to a format so what we want to do is to develop some tools or the framework that will allow museums to work with their data really for any purpose and then send it off to the website or the designer or the social media platform, but send a copy of it back to a central repository. So, it then becomes fair data that is reusable and accessible. And so, you kind of build up the stock of content that is available for anybody. So, it kind of feels like a no brainer and it would be genuinely transformational. And, in order to do it, it really doesn't take - we're not talking about huge amounts of money. So, we're working with Art UK, we're working with a University and hoping to launch a museum data service that's based in this University within this financial year. So, there's a business plan that has to be put together and then signed off by the university, but it may well be that in the New Year we can announce the launch of it. And if we get the basics in place, then other project-funded projects will help build up the infrastructure, but we just need to get the basics in the place.

HC: Do you think - one thing that I think I've noticed from looking at government digitisation policy since 2000, one problem is the fast turnover of different people with different ideas, which means that - in your first answer, you were saying this organisation was then called this, and then it was called this. And this constant, sort of, churn of short termist projects...

KG: that's certainly been a problem for sure.

HC: But also, the fact that it feels as to those writing things like Culture is Digital, although they had a lot of really expert curatorial voices in the background, what came out appeared to me to show a slight misunderstanding about what was possible, what already existed and what could be done. Do you think government has a good idea of where we are and where we could go?

KG: They have not a clue. No, so it's actually worse than that. So, there was a, I don't know if you've kind of looked into the process behind Culture is Digital? So, there were some expert groups, expert panels, and there were some people seconded to DCMS to work on this. And you're right. They had really good people and it was a really good process. And we were involved in pitching ideas to the infrastructure group, which then produced a paper which went to DCMS and had seven recommendations. And one of those recommendations was that they should invest in the kind of infrastructure that we're now talking about, and so DCMS received that, had the rationale for it and went, 'no, we're not going to do that'. They just didn't get it. And we try and talk to DCMS and there's polite interest and then they can't quite come up with any money to support it. We could

have funded this several times over with the salaries of the people they send to meetings to say there's no money. And the truth is, there is lots of money. They're just spending on the wrong stuff.

HC: It seems to me that there's an assumption that these digitised collections already exist. That every institution has this beautiful catalogue full of high-quality photographs and descriptions of everything in their collections. And the limited research I've done sort of suggests that about a third of museums have up to 25 or 30% of their stuff online, sort of thing. It's kind of - the figures that are available show that we're absolutely nowhere near this sort of bulk digitisation. Can you see a time when that's ever the case? Is it worth museums' time doing it - what's it really for?

KG: So I think if what you're talking about by digitisation - so that's another problem is that actually people have got wildly different ideas what that term even means, so ranging from the, kind of, making a digital facsimile of a physical object to just taking digital photographs, to creating catalogue records or transferring catalogue records on to computer with no other kind of digital asset attached to it. And so that's part of the problem. That even at fairly senior levels, I've spent so much time in meetings where allegedly the smartest people in the sector who we kind of put on to steering groups, the scoping groups will go there and I'm saying yeah, what do we actually mean by that?

HC: For me, my description of it, I'm coming from a visitor point of view, what I was surprised to find when I started in 2014 was just a lack of object by object, well-described, with a photograph - I wanted to know what people had in their collections. I wanted to look through it and have a look at some stuff because I was looking at possibly being involved in a project to design a virtual museum. So I went 'what are virtual museums like these days?' and found that they didn't really exist. There were some catalogue with some images, but the data was very sort of internal curatorial records rather than - there was no, sort of, exhibition style, stuff that was there for me as a visitor.

KG: So, I think that that comes back to what I was saying about museums have been really scandalously bad in recent years at archiving and reusing the public-facing content that they, kind of, I mean, I've put exhibitions together and you spend months and months sweating over every word like it's a haiku poem. And then the exhibition goes on, and then the content just sits in a word document or a spreadsheet and never sees the light of day again. And in the meantime, you've got exactly that experience that people down the corridor in the museum, are trying to put web stuff together, and they're working with these really thin records that are not very descriptive. And, yeah, there's just no meeting of that, so museums are missing a trick because they are creating fantastic public-facing content the whole time. They're just treating it as single use and disposable rather than reusable. So, I think we're making headway with that argument that, actually, we - as a sector - there is a digital preservation problem, that we are throwing away perfectly good content, which is exactly the sort of thing that users like yourself expect to see or want to see. So, we can do things better so that it just grows, that the stock of digital content that users actually want grows as a by-product of things that we're already doing, projects that we're already doing.

So, nobody has to necessarily sit down and speculatively write a whole bunch of text. And I think this brings us back to the 'who's it for?' argument. So, if I have a museum specialism it's runic inscriptions, okay? So, if I were looking online for runic stuff, I would be quite satisfied with the kind of - there's a translation, and there's a photograph, there's a translation of the text into English and maybe a bit of description, and that's it. Or, I don't want that. I want a lot more detail, I want the transliteration, I want more detail than a non-specialist visitor would want. And it's very hard. If you are creating a web resource, you know, who's it pitched at? It's really difficult. So, the solution that I think we're proposing is by putting everything out there as the raw material. If you are the kind of nerdy researcher that really wants, though, the sort of detail that wouldn't and shouldn't ever make its way to a public synthesis, then you can find that information. And similarly, if you are then wanting to create, you know, a kid's guide to runic inscriptions, you've got the more material and you can create something, and if you archive that content in the way that we're suggesting, then that website will come and go in the scheme of things. I mean, I think the average life of a website is, what, five years or so? Something like that. So, your project funding runs out, that particular web resource becomes obsolete and goes down. But, actually, the content can endure and can then be

picked up by somebody else and reused in some other way. That's what we're talking about. So really, it's transforming the way that the whole sector thinks about its digital content. And we just get away from this idea that you can create a - well, even this 'Towards a National Collection', 19 million quid. And I'm on the Scoping group for what they might do next in terms of infrastructure. And it's just hilarious because, again, we've got all of these top people, and we're spending hours sitting around going 'yeah, but who's it for?' It's just like, well, just get away from the idea that there's one thing. It doesn't need to be one thing for one kind of audience. So, you don't have to make that kind of decision at a national level because that's doomed to failure, nobody's cracked it. HC: From what you say about these various projects feeding into this, is there a difficult conversation that needs to be had about who owns what? Because one of the things that I find really frustrating is things that are clearly in the public domain are still claimed by certain organisations. And can you see a problem where something's been funded and is therefore owned by somebody? Are there going to be rights issues in terms of allowing that to sort of feed into the national conversation? KG: Well, funded material ought to be released under some kind of open licence. So, I mean, I'm sure you've seen the Heritage Fund, for example. I mean, they've you know - it would be a condition of anything funded by them that the resulting material would be released under a Creative Commons licence. So that's fine. In our framework, we're suggesting that text can also be licenced according to different levels, depending on what the museum is comfortable with. And that's purely because our experience with Europeana is that it's a deal breaker for many institutions to sign up to the CC0 public domain licence. So that's not because they don't want to share their data or they want to commercially exploit it, they just need to have the attribution and don't want to just say, okay, it goes out. So, in our model, in the same way that a museum could have different specific licences for different images, depending on what the right situation was, you know, it may well be that you need to apply that same level of nuance to different kinds of text. So, if you've got curated content, it goes out with, you know, a slightly more restrictive CC licence, but it's still, anybody can use it, anybody can reuse it. But, you know, the source is acknowledged. And I think that that actually is a helpful development, because if I write something about a subject I know nothing about and stick it up on the web, it's of less value than the curator of that who specialises in that particular subject in a big museum. So, it's worth knowing who's written something or who's put it out there, so I think it kind of helps - there's some trust in the data that museums are putting out there if it has that kind of attribution, so we're assuming that most people will want to stick to some kind of attribution.

HC: That's quite interesting. I've done a case study of the Rijksmuseum, which has claimed to be very commercially successful by giving everything away for absolutely any use whatsoever. And I do sense that in the UK there is quite a strong resistance to that type of idea, despite the fact that it seems to have had the result that that the government would, you know, bite your arm off for in that it claims to be enormously commercially successful and all that kind of thing.

KG: Well, so DCMS is really interesting. I've been sort of talking to various people within DCMS about this for five years and they want it both ways, the DCMS, they don't have a clear policy. And on the one hand, they are saying, no, you must generate as much income as you can and be more commercial, while at the same time you must be releasing stuff openly and you can't have both. And when you talk to DCMS people head on and say, okay, which is it to be? There's no answer, they don't know. So, there is no clear steer from DCMS about this. And also, there's no - in many ways - there's no legal clarity. So, this is another big issue. So, we do lots of copyright training and every session we do, people say, but what about, you know, material - you know, can we claim copyright if we take a picture of an 18th century painting, can we claim copyright in that? And UK law is actually silent on that subject. It's very ambiguous. It's a very grey area, with the result that many of the bigger museums have got stuff online at the moment where they are claiming copyright, and I reckon I'd be quite happy to go ahead and publish that and say, sue me, because I don't think they would have a leg to stand on. But, you know, why would you take that risk? It's never been tested in

law. And so, again, one thing that DCMS could really do is just clarify the legal position and they can't, or won't or can't be bothered to.

HC: I think they probably also don't understand what it is they're saying by doing both of those things because they have to be commercial. I think it was much easier for museums when people were working under Tony Blair's social inclusion agenda because that's something that museums do very naturally, which is reach out into their communities. Whereas now they've got this nation building global marketplace, post Brexit thing, it's just less of a natural fit for them. And yet they are still commercial operations because they must be to survive. Do you think that's really at the heart of the problem we've got here?

KG: No, I think it's actually muddled thinking. Have you seen, there's a really good report that actually my predecessor wrote, at the NMDC, called Striking the Balance. Have you seen that? It was about five years ago, six years ago, a commission by an NMDC. And it was really just looking at different scenarios and different attitudes that museums have, from Yorkshire Museum, which has this sort of open licence policy through to others. And at the launch of that, we had a really interesting presentation from the head of enterprise at V&A who was saying that what people fail to realise is that it's actually not - the value to the V&A is not selling a William Morris image, it's having a bag with a William Morris image on it and the V&A logo. So, it's the brand that is the important thing rather than, you know, the inherent value of the digital assets. And in most cases, you will spend more time trying to make money than you would if you just gave the stuff away, which is true. And I think that's where people like Art UK have made real progress because they have taken on the heavy lifting of setting up a really good retail operation and sharing the profits with the contributing museums, so you can have both. If you're a museum, you can make low resolution versions of your images available through a CC licence. And then you can keep the high-resolution stuff back for commercial use and make money through joint retail operations like the one that Art UK runs. So that's actually a really good model and you can have it both ways.

HC: Can I quickly ask the original question because I'm aware we're running out of time and that's Europeana and the pipeline to Europeana – could you break down exactly what's happened to that?

GK: Yeah. So Europeana, as a matter of policy, just need to be dealing with other aggregators. They can't be dealing with individual institutions across Europe, that would just be nuts. So, there is a network of national aggregators, and a few years ago, maybe four years ago, they set up a scheme actually, to have accredited aggregators. So, there's a certain criteria that you meet, you become accredited. And Culture Grid was the pipeline. So, anybody who wanted to put stuff into Europeana, apart from the really big ones, so, like the British Library, they go straight to Europeana. But anybody else, even down to say the level of the Horniman or somebody like that, which is still a big institution, would go through Culture Grid. And of course, so 2015, Arts Council England decided they weren't going to fund Culture Grid any more, we have been paying the server fee just to kind of keep it going ever since. So, yeah, it's a sad story. Currently there is no national pipeline into Europeana apart from one or two projects since 2015. So, there was a project we were involved with called Europeana Food and Drink, for example, so that fed stuff directly through as a project. But no, routinely, and hilariously people like the government art collection occasionally get in touch and say 'we'd really like to put stuff into Europeana, how do we do that?' And we just go, trot along the corridors to DCMS, knock on the door of the people who could fund the replacement aggregator and make it happen.

HC: Just finally, can government policy solve this? And in which case, what does the policy need to be? What should they be doing that they're not doing that could actually change things that haven't changed in the last 20 years.

GK: So, the biggest policy change that they could make would be to take more seriously the funding of infrastructure. That's the big problem. So, we don't, you know - DCMS don't know anything about digital assets or anything like that and we don't need the help on this. What we do need is for them to, when funding criteria are being created, to not always be looking at the press release, the kind of the flashy, big set piece items - sometimes what you need are, sort of, fairly modest, but important

bits of infrastructure behind the scenes and, I mean, Towards the National Collection is a fantastic example, so £19 million for a three-year research project that is not going to actually result in any infrastructure whatsoever, but was announced in a big fanfare. £19 million is almost exactly the amount of money that you would need to do everything that we would like to do in terms of actually bringing together all of the nation's collections and then endowing that service to run until the end of time. So, if you had an endowment fund to run it, it coincidentally comes to about £19 million. And it's the same with ACE and the Heritage Fund, when they shape their grant giving criteria, they just have nowhere for somebody who wants a little bit of money for something that is strategically important, to go to for this kind of basic infrastructure. So, this is not the only area where it's a problem, it's a British thing that it's no problem at all to get millions and millions for unstrategic shiny stuff. It's almost impossible to get a few tens of thousands of pounds for something that actually will make a real difference. So DCMS just don't get it. Happy for you to quote me slagging off DCMS. I've said it to their face.

HC: I can't say it so I'm glad that you can, but it's reassuring to understand that I'm not going mad, that really none of this really makes a lot of sense when you dig down. It doesn't join up at all and never has, and will it ever? I wonder.

GK: Not through DCMS, no. And you're quite right, it's just change of personnel. I've probably talked to 15 different people in the last five years, and only one of them actually, kind of, got it. So, yeah, it's very, very difficult, very difficult. So, you know, the best thing would happen would be we just influence the policy, the funding, to allow this kind of thing to be funded, and then we just need to crack on and do it. That's the thing. There are plenty of people out there who have got experience and know exactly what needs to be done. It's just very difficult to get the funding, because it's neither one thing or the other.

GK: It's not David Attenborough in 3D is it? That's the problem with it.

HC: The other thing that is worth saying, and I think ACE themselves would acknowledge this, is they have been struggling with where to locate the things that we've been talking about, because they've got a museums team that doesn't really know anything about digital. And then they've got a digital team that doesn't really know anything about museums and what we're talking about involves museums and computers, and that just makes their heads explode. They don't know how to deal with that. And in policy terms and whose responsibility it is within ACE, no idea. So, that's quite difficult for them. So, we've not been particularly well served by ACE. The one senior person who did get it, unfortunately, then moved into a different role, and that thread was lost. We'll get there.

HC: I feel your pain. Thank you.

GK: Very good luck with the writing up and do follow up if you need to.

HC: Thanks very much.