



The Leicester Graduate Network

Museum Studies Connect

Issue 8 · Autumn 2017

Research Collaboration generates National Debate

Prejudice and Pride is a collaborative research project between the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries and the National Trust that explores and reveals LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) connections across the Trust's properties and experiments with new ways of engaging audiences around these largely untold and hidden histories. Working closely with a cohort of properties and key staff, the project team is seeking to generate new insights for the burgeoning international field of queer public heritage through the following research question:

How can we offer diverse audiences (new and existing) authentic, engaging and meaningful experiences and purposefully engage the public in debates surrounding LGBTQ history, culture and equality by researching, acknowledging and presenting the LGBTQ histories and associations in the places, stories and collections of the National Trust?

As well as supporting properties across England and Wales to research and present their LGBTQ stories, the RCMG team has worked especially closely with a smaller number of sites to experiment with new ways of engaging audiences around histories of same sex love and desire and gender diversity. These include Felbrigg Hall in north Norfolk where

researchers created a short film, narrated by Stephen Fry, that tells visitors the story of the last squire and an immersive installation at Kingston Lacy that supports visitors to make connections between the history of the house and contemporary LGBTQ lives. The collaboration has stimulated considerable debate in the national media and amongst many tens of thousands of visitors who have experienced *Prejudice and Pride* at a Trust property or at one of the many Pride

events held across the UK in 2017. In depth research into audience engagement and response is currently being carried out to explore the impact of the project on visitors' thinking and attitudes around contemporary LGBTQ equality. Richard Sandell, who is leading the project, is currently working with performer David McAlmont to create a unique research-led performance, which will premiere in May 2018 at an international conference run in collaboration with the National Trust.



*Exile: a research-led installation at Kingston Lacy
National Trust images / Steven Haywood*

Graduate Profile: Joe Carr: Music and Education on the East Coast

I have many wonderful memories of my year at the Department of Museum Studies which began back in September 2001. The department was then located in the lovely Princess Road East buildings. I must admit we had a magnificent group of students, a wonderful mix of experience, passion and fun. As well as enjoying the outstanding course, our year had an active social organiser, numerous legendary house parties (mainly thanks to Jana Manuelpillai of *The Noble Sage Gallery*) and we even fielded a Museum Studies 5 a side football team! I am delighted that so many of the people in that year have carved out glittering careers in the museum (or similar) sectors.

After leaving Leicester I was lucky enough to get my first museum job at Norfolk Museum Service. I worked for Great Yarmouth Museums, on the HLF funded project to develop Time and Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth. I was fortunate to work with Sheila Watson, and a brilliant Yarmouth team. The result was a multi-award winning museum that we all were extremely proud of. I became Assistant Curator and later Curator at Great Yarmouth.

However, the bright lights of London beckoned and I took the difficult decision to leave Great Yarmouth and headed to Brent Museum as the Curator. This was a challenging but very rewarding experience, as working in one of the most diverse

communities in the UK opened my eyes to the importance of community engagement, contemporary collecting and ensuring our stories and collections are accessible to all. I was lucky enough to work on a number of fascinating projects; such as, *Reassessing What We Collect*- working with Polish and Brazilian communities; and the pilot of the National: Regional Loans scheme, which resulted the first ever loan of the Gayer Anderson Cat out of the British Museum.

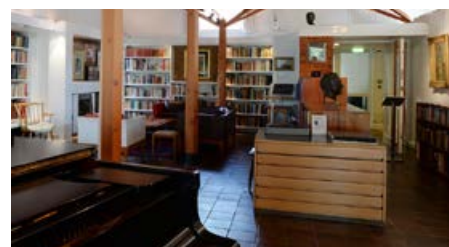
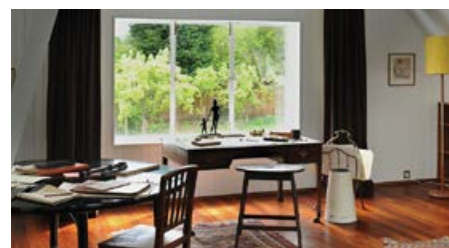
After 4 years at Brent Museum I headed east once again and began to work at West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village in Suffolk. This was my first purely education role, leading and developing the schools and families offer at this unique archaeological site. I was managing over 120 school children visiting every day of the year, and I am proud to have really developed the education experience they received. The sessions were nominated for a national Best School Trip Award in 2016.

However, from April 2017 I have begun a new role as Curator of Collections and Learning at The Red House in Aldeburgh (Britten-Pears Foundation). This is a truly unique and beautiful site linked to the world famous composer Benjamin Britten. It includes his house, his composition studio, his extensive library, a beautiful museum space, as well as over 5 acres of stunning gardens. My role is to bring the stories and collections to life, managing the collections

and developing a new learning offer to engage with schools, families and young people. I have always been fascinated by how music can engage and inspire all ages, so the opportunity to use music, history, collections and heritage to inspire future generations is very exciting. I am currently developing a range of new KS1, 2 and 3 school sessions, leading a 0-5 Toddler music session (complete with guitar), developing externally funded projects with High School Students, creating family activities and resources and exploring how to enhance the use of the collections. We have also just been nominated for the Suffolk Museums of the Year Family Friendly Award. This is thanks to a wonderful summer where we have seen families and young people enjoying Benjamin Britten's beautiful garden and learning about his life and music. It has been heart-warming to see the genuine enthusiasm and energy as families, many intergenerational, have enjoyed croquet, tennis, musical instruments and much more.

It is a very exciting time to be working at the Red House and I look forward to welcoming the new wave of Leicester Museum Students for placements here this year!

Joe Carr,
Curator of Collections and Learning
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Sarita taking part in a workshop, Summer School 2015

Graduate Profile: Sarita Sundar: Storytelling in India's Museums

It is not easy explaining to people I have just met what I do – my work, my interests and how they all intersect – particularly if I have to make that '10 seconds elevator pitch'. In some ways I could say my work straddles practice and research at the intersections of design, art and heritage studies.

While my graduate degree in visual communications from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, India, taught me the practical skills in graphic design, I often veered towards projects that provided me the opportunity to study visual and material culture. A final year project realized through a book and animation film looked at how people navigate the multitude of messages; the chaos and clutter that shout out in Indian streets, following a school boy's journey down the rabbit hole of Indian streets. This interest at looking at how we, as Indians, crowd together people and information took form in a paper I recently wrote called 'Indians don't like White Space'. (White space is a term in graphic design that explains the blank areas on a page that helps provide relief to densely layered content)

I have always liked visiting art galleries, museums and attending folk performances in villages. I soon realized that while we had so many museums in India, with incredible cultural objects, the museums were mostly object-oriented, with little or no interpretation, very little narrative and interactive elements. What started with an epiphanic encounter with a Hanuman (a monkey god) puppet while watching a shadow puppet performance in rural India became an overriding passion: to study cultural objects and their agency in the context of performance cultures. That is when I decided to pursue a Masters Program at the School of Museum Studies, in 2013. Visual and material culture at its margins continues to be of particular interest to me especially when dealing with issues concerning real and imagined borders, the uneasy relationship that material objects and images have with intangible culture in performance practices, and urbanism's links with folk culture.

The Masters degree, besides opening my mind to an entirely new vocabulary in the field of museum and heritage studies,

helped me recognise that interpretation is often plural, complicated and fluid, and audiences 'read' differently. Today I continue to balance practice based projects with research through a consultancy based in Bangalore (www.hanno.in). The master narratives that we create at Hanno attempt to weave multiple stories, allowing them to intersect, diverge or even contradict one another. At Hanno we visualize and curate diverse narratives with a particular focus on museum, heritage and social communication. We work with brand strategy and design solutions, but are deeply involved in research into visual culture. We also formulate approaches and weave storylines for archival and commemorative communication. (Hanno is the name of an elephant gifted to the Pope in the 16th century, his poignant story was brought to our attention during an exhibition project we were putting together on the herbal tradition of the Malabar coast as documented in five European books of the 16th century)

Sarita Sundar, MA Heritage and Interpretation (Distance Learning), 2016

Museum Studies Reconnect 2017

Accessible Design and the Jodi Awards



We were delighted to be able to welcome MS Connect members to the School for the fourth annual MS Reconnect event. This saw many of our members mingling with current distance learning students, taking part in an Accessible Design Workshop and attending the **Jodi Awards** ceremony, at Attenborough Arts Centre.

The Jodis recognise outstanding practice in the ways digital technology is used to increase participation for disabled people within museums, libraries, archives and the heritage sites. We heard from the National Museums Liverpool on their House of Memories, an innovative dementia awareness programme. Another project, at Manchester Museum

had, through the use of 3D technology, improved access to their collection for blind and visually impaired people. The winner of the 2017 awards was Signly @ The Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre. This fabulous app delivers smart signed content to digital devices to enable deaf visitors to access exhibit information.

The evening brought together many of our students, past and present. We were very proud to be involved in an event that embodies so many of the Schools own values.

Please save the date now for Reconnect 2018, Thursday 14th June. More details to follow!

Janet Marstine visits her 'alma mater'

In September, I had the honour of returning to the Department of Art History at the University of Pittsburgh where I earned my PhD some 25 years ago. I was asked to give the distinguished alumni lecture. The invitation came as quite a shock because I was not a stellar student but, in fact, very much a work-in-progress; it took me a long time to learn how to write clearly, to make an original argument and to speak up confidently for what I believed. In fact, when I got the surprising news, the first thing I did was to email my supervisor, now retired and living in New Hampshire, in disbelief. 'Who'd have thunk it?', I asked'.

I was both excited and anxious when I arrived in Pittsburgh. This is my hometown and the occasion provided an opportunity

for my father, at 85, to hear me speak in public for the first time. It also prompted me to wonder how I would measure up to scrutiny among the current generation of academics in the department and the graduate students as well.

So, on that crisp September afternoon, I arrived a bit early and took a few moments on the steps of the building to take a deep breath and, moreover, to take stock of my journey from past to present. I allowed my older self to talk to my younger self and tell her that she did ok after all, that, through a combination of determination, good fortune, generous mentoring, and family support, she eventually found her way to Leicester where she has amazing colleagues and students and work that

is truly satisfying. I also acknowledged to my younger self the gender-based barriers I didn't quite understand then that had contributed to my inability to see myself as a promising emerging scholar.

By the time I got to the familiar old hall where my talk was scheduled, I felt ready. Of course, the talk went fine. My retired supervisor surprised me by traveling down from New England to be there and he was proud. My father was elated. I really enjoyed the discussions that ensued with the new generation of academics and students. But most of all I relished that conversation with myself.

*Janet Marstine, Associate Professor,
School of Museum Studies*



Janet as a PhD student



Janet reunited with her PhD supervisor David Wilkins (with Ann Wilkins)



School staff and students speak at 'Art and Presence' Conference

On the 15 – 16 September 2017, a group of PhD students and academics from the School attended the **Art and Presence** Conference at the University of Southern Denmark, which brought together academics from architecture, philosophy, anthropology, literature and museum studies. Sandra Dudley, Head of our School, gave a keynote lecture on the potential of 'displaced' objects in museums to influence powerful encounters between people and things. On the same day, our PhD student Oonagh Quigley talked about how objects can be used to connect museum visitors with time, place and other people. On the second day, former PhD student Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert discussed how art museum visitors use photographic devices to richly mediate their gallery experiences. Our Teaching Fellow Jen Walklate also gave an insightful presentation about an application of literary concepts in understanding presence in museums.

Amornchat Sermcheep
PhD Student

Encountering the Unexpected

Connecting people, museums and nature to encourage successful ageing

Encountering the Unexpected is a two year project developed by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) that explores the roles museums and natural heritage collections can play in supporting successful ageing through nature connectedness. To age successfully older people need to remain actively engaged with the world, be socially connected and retain a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

Bringing together a diverse group of people including natural heritage curators and engagement staff from museums in the North West, including Manchester Museum, Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, World Museum Liverpool, The Whitaker, Gallery Oldham and The Atkinson, as well as a number of strategic partners engaged in the environment and nature connectedness, active ageing, and the arts, *Encountering the Unexpected* has begun to interrogate the potential of natural heritage collections to enable people to engage with, and have a stake in, the present and the future, and have unexpected encounters through a series of museum experiments. As part of the process RCMG led three exchanges with the museums and strategic partners

to ensure that staff working with these collections had the skills and confidence to use them effectively to inspire rich, stimulating and meaningful encounters.

Over the summer the museums have been busy working with a diverse range of older people through their experiments. Each museum approached the experiments in different ways, some as one-off events and workshops promoted in the museums' public programme material, some as a series of workshops taking place over several months with a newly formed group brought together for the project, and others through working with established groups, such as coffee mornings and church community groups. They have reached participants through working in partnership with local housing associations, working with older people as ambassadors for the museum, and encouraging established groups to take part in something new and unexpected.

Through using their collections in new and imaginative ways, the museums have worked towards supporting successful ageing by re-connecting older people with the natural world through pathways to

nature connectedness, stimulating people to look at the unfamiliar and the familiar in new ways, facilitating meaningful encounters, and encouraging people to 'be in the moment'. RCMG observed a number of experiments, interviewed project participants, key workers, museum engagement staff and curators to capture the impact of the project, and are currently in the process of analysis and interpretation.

Encountering the Unexpected is a very ambitious project and has been fruitful in enabling practitioners to think very differently about their collections and develop their practice. In particular, using the concept of nature connectedness as a different lens through which to engage older people with natural heritage collections and encourage participants to 'be in the moment', has begun to challenge conventional thinking and museum practice.

For more information contact:

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or visit the RCMG website:

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/encountering-the-unexpected>



Museum visits to Bolton Museum, Manchester Museum and World Museum Liverpool. Photos by Luke Blazejewski



Museum visits to Gallery Oldham, The Atkinson and The Whitaker. Photos by Luke Blazejewski



Encountering the Unexpected Experiments at National Museums Liverpool, The Whitaker, The Atkinson, Manchester Museum, Bolton Museum and Gallery Oldham, May – August 2017, Photos by Luke Blazejewski

School to Lead on UK Digital Transformation

For the next two years the School will be at the centre of a nationwide project, to deliver a transformative framework for museum workforce digital literacy.

The 'One by One' project brings together a number of key national agencies, including Arts Council England, the Museums Association, Independent Association of Museums,

Museum Development Network and Culture 24. This ambitious programme of work is supported by the HLF, Nesta, the National Museum Directors Council and the Collections Trust, and in partnership with the Warwick Institute of Employment Research.

Led by the School's Ross Parry and funded by a £0.5mn award from the Arts and

Humanities Research Council, a network of six 'Digital Fellows' will run action research projects across the country in Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales, National Museums Scotland, National Army Museum, Royal Pavilion & Museums Brighton and Hove, Derby Museums Trust, and the Museum of London.



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