

HPS_NT_Gibside_Interview_20_Sep_2017

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KEY:

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

I1: = Interviewer

I2: = Interviewer

R1: = Respondent 1

R2: = Respondent 2

I1: That's now recording.

I2: I have to read this. 'Thank you both for agreeing to be part of the project. The purpose of this is to collect information about your experience of being involved in the commissioning and presentation of contemporary art for a heritage site. You may decide you don't want to answer some questions and that's perfectly alright. There will be a lot to say for some questions and not a lot for others but whatever, it's wherever it goes. It's part of a longitudinal research process. We hope to follow up on these questions in later interviews. All the information you provide will be strictly confidential and no information will be reported with your name, address or any identification attached to it. Also, if we are going to use it in some way we will ask you. Is that okay?'

R1: Yes.

R2: That's fine.

I2: What does the phrase 'contemporary art' mean to you?

R2: To me it's art that is created in a contemporary setting that is relevant to contemporary themes, problems and issues.

R1: Ditto basically. It's art that is created around us today. It's art that is being created as we are here relevant to things we are interested in.

I1: We are quite interested in how people receive the word ‘contemporary’ and the language we use like what does contemporary art mean to your visitors? What does it mean?

R1: There are connotations, aren’t there? I think until I was involved in this piece of work perhaps I might have heard the word ‘contemporary art’ and thought it had to mean something quite radical as opposed to what I now view as contemporary art. I think particularly in the National Trust context there has been a tendency to view contemporary art as something more radical than contemporary in terms of *what those two words mean*.

I2: Yes. If you think about what those words actually mean it’s about working now.

R2: Yes.

I2: It doesn’t really mean anything more than that.

R1: Yes. I think you can sometimes jump to jarring, minimalist pieces that you might associate with the phrase ‘contemporary art’ working in the environment that we do.

I2: Do you think your visitors might think that?

R2: You can’t speak for all of the visitors but for Gibside specifically rather than the whole National Trust we do have quite a family-based audience and perhaps their understanding of contemporary art would be something that maybe wouldn’t be for them something or would be that would challenge them. That might be their understanding.

R1: I think at the other end of the visitor spectrum what we would perhaps refer to a ‘curious minds’ or the more senior audiences, if we could speak for them, which we shouldn’t do really but if we did, I think they might view that phrase ‘contemporary art’ with a slight suspicion. If we were to say on our front gate today, ‘We have got contemporary art. Come and look!’ I think there would be a few stand-offish opinions expressed I would have thought and a slight suspicion.

R2: Yes. Perhaps it would be something they aren’t comfortable with.

R1: Yes but we like that. [Laughter].

R2: Yes. We like to challenge people.

I2: What happens if you take away that word ‘contemporary’?

R1: That would remove some of that suspicion I have just described.

R2: Yes.

I2: What is your previous experience of engagement with contemporary art?

I1: That can be professionally or related to your personal background.

R1: Professionally for me I haven't had a great deal of experience of contemporary art. This process has been something quite fresh to me. Personally outside of work it is something I am quietly interested in as a visitor to other places. It's something that appeals to me when I am brought to it. I don't actively seek it out generally although I think I have become more so since the start of this process.

R2: It is my first experience professionally working with contemporary art. It has been really exciting for me with lots to learn. Personally I would say I am interested in art generally including more contemporary art. I do enjoy visiting galleries and it's something I do in my spare time.

I1: Can you give any examples like any recent exhibitions you have seen?

R2: I just got back from Barcelona and I spent a lot of time going to see Gaudi and Picasso. There is a gallery, which I have forgotten the name of, but they were doing an exhibition about shipping containers which was really challenging and I loved it. It was about how they have changed the world.

I2: It was about shipping containers?

R2: It was a modern, artistic interpretation of how shipping containers have changed logistics. It was incredible.

I1: I was in Barcelona a few weeks ago and I didn't come across that. Where was it?

R2: I could look it up for you.

I2: I think I saw something about that somewhere.

I1: That would be really interesting.

I2: Was it in a gallery?

R2: Yes. It's quite a famous gallery.

I1: It may have been the Museum of Contemporary Art. I think there is one which we didn't go to so that could be it.

I2: If there was something on like that at the BALTIC or something, would you go?

R1: I am tempted to say 'yes' but I actually don't visit the BALTIC very often and I don't live close by. I think I think of myself as someone who should visit but actually don't.

I2: That's interesting that you say 'should'.

R1: Yes.

R2: It's very much a kind of holiday recreation activity for me. I think when things are on your doorstep, you feel you should go and appreciate it but it's something you just don't get round to.

R1: Yes.

I2: What do you see as the value of presenting contemporary art in the heritage context?

R2: I shouldn't speak for visitors but if I was generalising they imagine places like the National Trust and other heritage organisations as being very traditional, looking at traditional values and perhaps being a bit stale compared to what modern audiences want. By putting contemporary art in there you are challenging their perceptions, giving them new ways to think about things and perhaps making those heritage themes more relevant to modern audiences.

R1: I would agree with that. There are a couple of ways to reinforce that. [R2] mentioned 'relevance' there which I think is really important. I think the benefits and the value of contemporary art are huge. It gives us an opportunity to open up a relevance to visitors that we sometimes struggle to create because we are seen as very traditional. Speaking for the National Trust we are seen as a very traditional organisation and we struggle to engage with people on an emotional level sometimes. Contemporary art gives us a way of asking questions and challenging people in a way that we would struggle to do just using our own voice.

R2: Yes.

R1: We are a very established brand and there is a very established perception of what we are and what we do. Because, we want to ask more challenging questions and push people more emotionally contemporary art is a fantastic tool that we can use to do that.

I2: It gives you another tool. Is that what you are saying?

R1: Yes and it is a different way of telling a story. People are very used to the way we tell stories. If you go to a National Trust property you expect a guided tour, you expect some interpretation and expect the staff and volunteers to be knowledgeable and interacting in what we are talking to you about. Increasingly though I think we are finding that traditional methods of engagement are not delivering the outcomes that our strategy demands. Our strategy demands us to engage people on an emotional level and it is getting more difficult to deliver that level of emotional engagement to a modern audience through those old tools of the guided tours and the guidebooks.

R2: Yes.

R1: This is obviously a new thing for us but we are expecting that contemporary art can do that and we have certainly seen it from other places so far.

I2: Have you seen any contemporary art projects at any of your properties?

R2: I went to Beningbrough Hall in 2016 and saw a portrait exhibition. That was it.

I2: That was just bringing in existing work, wasn't it?

R2: Yes.

I2: Croome has done something.

R1: I have seen a few things.

I2: There was Berrington Hall. Did I send you a picture of that piece?

I1: Possibly.

R1: Things that I have seen recently are things like the Lake District Acorn Bank which was last year. I can't remember the artist. I was involved in that project with a very light touch professionally. I was really more of an observer but that was very interesting. It was the idea of the National Trust story around Beatrix Potter and her influence as a female farmer. The exhibition, and I forget the name of the artist, but it was a response. It was all about portraits of contemporary women who were farmers or who work with animals and livestock. There was a set of very colourful portraits of these modern-day Beatrix Potters. The portraits were a lot more than just portraits. Each one told a story but in a very relevant way.

I2: Yes.

R1: I know from working over there that we struggle to sell Beatrix Potter as anything more than bunnies and cabbages. There is the really wonderful story as her as a very strong female character but we struggle to sell that to people because all they want to do is see where Peter Rabbit was. The portraits told the stories of these modern-day Beatrix Potters which actually makes you think, "Ah, okay." It gives you a foot in where the historic story doesn't.

I2: Yes.

R1: I have also been impressed by the Nostell Project with the clocks. I went to see that in a semi-professional capacity and was very impressed with the idea of something quite small but very detailed. It was by Luke Jerram. Again, it just made me really think about the Nostell story. Nostell wanted to make a story around a particular broken clock that is part of the collection and the big question of whether you start replacing bits or you just accept that it's old and will fall apart. If you replace everything, is it still an historic thing? That was their starting point but they told it in a contemporary way through Luke's work which was a room completely full of clocks which breathes with the ticking and the ringing. It is wonderful.

I1: Yes.

R1: That was probably my biggest shove in the right direction in terms of this piece of work. That made me think we could use that as a means of getting across some of our stories.

I2: **Interestingly Acorn bank has another piece this year which is very different. It's not an illustrative piece. It's a Karen Guthrie piece. It focusses on the different history of Acorn Bank. I thought it was a really poignant piece.**

I1: Yes.

I2: **How do you see the opportunities or the challenges of making work in this context as we go through this process? When Acorn Bank and other properties were doing that, what do you think were other opportunities and what might be the things that prove to be more difficult?**

R2: In terms of difficulties or challenges getting buy-in from all of the volunteers in the volunteer base can be a challenge.

R1: Yes.

I2: Yes.

R1: They are such a huge part of what we do so it's very important we do get their buy-in. That's not always easy with contemporary projects be it art or any kind of changes. I think it's a similar thing with our very traditional visitor base. We have a non-traditional visitor base at Gibside but we have got our traditional quarter and anything that is seen as anything other than restoring the landscape to how it should be and was is difficult for them. It's not always easy to explain that actually just restoring it to how it was isn't always the right thing to do. Often we don't know what it was and often what it was wasn't right.

I2: Yes.

R1: A challenge comes through doing things that are perceived a not National Trust's core work for visitors and volunteers, however we know that often the ways that aren't perceived as core work actually help us with our core work. (Unclear 0:16:53.9) opportunities and there is one big cold hard one which is the business case for it. Speaking strictly for Gibside one of the opportunities for us is to really grow our mid-week visitor business. Our weekend visitor business is basically capped because we can't get any more visitors in. The audience we are able to grow is the mid-week audience which is a more adult and intellectual audience and contemporary art is a piece of programming we can use to drive the element of the business we want to grow.

R2: Can I add to that? I think another opportunity is the chance it gives us to tell a story that we are really struggling to tell at the moment. I am really excited about that because Gibside in particular seems to struggle telling its story to our visitors.

This is a way for us to do that and to increase that emotional connection that we have with them. I am excited to see how it turns out.

I2: What about challenges?

R1: There is this thing about bringing people with us and that thing around the perception of the core purpose which we have talked about. Depending on the piece we work in a very delicate protected heritage environment so with anything that we do there can be a physical challenge. For example, with the piece we are looking at for the orangery there is a physical challenge. It's not insurmountable but it is there. There is also the perception that goes with that so if we dig a hole somewhere for contemporary art there is always that question from volunteers and other staff. I am struggling with challenges.

I2: You will find out.

R1: Yes.

I1: We will ask again in six months.

R1: Obviously we are taking a very consortium approach to this. We are working with partners. It is a very new thing for us but it would be a challenge if we were working by ourselves on this to know the way forward. To make connections, to know how to approach things, to know how to make things happen and evaluate them would be a challenge if we weren't being supported.

I1: We will come back to that. It's an important point.

R1: Can I come back to one thing about challenges? I suppose working with artists can take away the control from us so although we very carefully write the brief the whole point of art is that it is an artist's response to a brief so we don't have full control over something that is being created on our behalf. You will probably find we are a little bit nervous about that. That's coming from us who have always looked after places. We are working on that and trying to be a lot more open to doing things differently. Certainly having someone view something and say, "We are going to do this on your area. What do you think?" can be a challenge for us.

I2: It challenges your thinking.

R1: Yes. It certainly pushes us as an organisation and as individual properties who normally have very strong perceptions of who we are and what we do. I would like to think we are relatively far along the line in terms of modernisation and I think we are open to new ways of doing things certainly in our team. It still pushes us but that's definitely a good thing. We want that challenge. National Trust needs it.

I1: There are a couple of questions around the commissioning process and that's been a relatively short space of time. Where are you up to now in this

process? Can you say a little about your experience of that commissioning process so far around the initial invitations, the selection process, site visits and interviews?

R1: It seems like a very logical process to us. It has gone very smoothly. We have been kept informed on every step and supported at every step. I have been surprised by...I don't want to say simplicity but it all seems quite achievable. We have needed walking through it but I wouldn't be nervous about going into it again and perhaps taking a step away from the support. It's a very logical process of writing a brief, inviting artists in, seeing what they think which involved bringing down the list and doing a more detailed interview and making a selection. It's quite logical and isn't alien from how we do other things which I expected it to be.

R2: No.

R1: I think I thought we couldn't possibly do it but actually with a bit of hand holding and support it's all quite logical. There are definitely bits to it that we wouldn't be able to do by ourselves. There is an expertise and specialism needed. For as much as I say it's a logical process you need that specialism somewhere whether early or later on.

I2: Can you pinpoint where you think that might be?

R1: I would say definitely around writing the brief. If we had been given a totally free hand at the brief stage we would have just written down what we were trying to achieve and what we wanted. Not having the knowledge or the skillset around the contemporary arts world we wouldn't have gotten as good a brief. We also wouldn't have had the success in the selection process that we have had.

I2: Yes.

R1: Similarly at the selection stages, it was really interesting to be a full part of the selection with a mixed panel of our staff and staff from other areas. I thought it made it a really robust process and very interesting. Again, if that had just been us it wouldn't have been as robust a process and I don't think we would have got the same quality at the end.

I2: Are you talking about the artists?

R1: Yes but also the confidence that the right decisions have been made. Had we been left to our own devices we would have made a selection but probably wouldn't have felt as confident in it.

R2: Yes. I don't have anything to add to that.

I2: Selfishly it's really important to hear that you could do it on your own.

R1: Yes. I want to take that back. [Laughter].

I2: No but if you do it you see it's probably not any different from what you do anyway.

I1: Thinking more about the way the project has been delivered, can you reflect on the working relationships with the artist and the research team?

R1: As I said before, we feel very supported.

R2: Absolutely.

R1: It has been a very inclusive process. My concern was that there would have been a brief written for the team that without any input from us and there would be an artist appointment that we weren't a part of. We would then be stuck delivering something that we haven't really played a big part in selecting. We really had the opposite experience of that. We were a big part of writing the brief and of the selection process. There was also a lot of communication in between so I think that was very positive.

I1: Yes.

R1: In terms of the artists, it is quite early days so I think it is difficult to say too much yet. Everything that Fiona has done so far has been very communicative. She has been very understanding about some of the restrictions we have had to share with her. She has been very flexible and very good at keeping in touch. I haven't had much contact with our other artists but I am hoping we will pick that up very soon, we will get more details and I am sure things will go forward more collaboratively. We haven't really started that side of things yet.

I2: Fiona has visited, hasn't she?

R1: At least once. She has been and seen me. We have been in touch by email since then.

R2: That sums it up very well.

I1: You have talked about the strong aspects of support but is there anything that could be improved for you or other projects in general?

R1: It is difficult to say at this stage. It will be useful to come back to that question when we are at the delivery end. I think that's where we will have seen more things. There hasn't been anything to go wrong so far. That's great and hopefully nothing will.

I1: Okay.

R1: The key thing for us with a project like this is just being informed and feeling like we have got...it comes back to control again. Feeling that something is out of control is tricky for us. Our job is to look after a place so if something is happening

and we feel we don't have a handle on it then that makes us feel quite uncomfortable. That really hasn't happened though.

R2: No. In terms of programming my deadlines for the team briefs are incredibly far in advance so for example my deadline for May is tomorrow. For me and Programming and Marketing we need to know things a lot further in advance than other organisations can perhaps work with.

I2: **This comes up all the time with new commissioning because you don't actually know and haven't got an image of what it is. This will continue. It is always an issue. I am having it at Fountains at the moment about marketing deadlines and having to be in the guidebook.**

R1: It's the same system.

I2: **It is the same thing and when you commission something that is site specific it's always a big issue.**

I1: **That is that section done. Expert answers.**

I2: **What is the relationship in your opinion between this contemporary art project and your approach to site interpretation at Gibside?**

R1: I know what it should be from our perspective. What I would like to think that in terms of what we are aiming for we know that our programming locally isn't perfect. We are working really hard to be able to programme further in advance to match our marketing deadlines but also because the more ahead of the game we can be the more efficient we are. We are looking to pull back the data constantly. The ideal thing would be that contemporary art would support or give another limb to the programming theme that we are going to run with. For example, next year we have a strong theme on one of our female characters Mary Eleanor. That ties in with a national theme so things are lining up next year and it makes it a really strong year for us. We have been able to use this contemporary arts project to support that existing programme and interpretation.

R2: Yes.

R1: As it happens things are coming together simultaneously. This contemporary art project is actually going to form part of our programming for next year. Because, we have been aware of this we haven't perhaps done some other things that we might have done so it's forming a bigger part of our interpretation than it would have just because of timings. I would like to think that we would always have a programming or interpretation strategy for a year of a number of years and the contemporary art should form an arm of that.

R2: Just adding to that it has come at a really good time in terms of our interpretation. We were aware as a property that the time was coming to rethink how we were doing things and this project has given us the breathing space to step back, think big and really challenge our own internal thinking. It's been really useful.

R1: Yes. Talking about Gibside specifically as opposed to other places, Gibside just doesn't have interpretation basically or very little. We know that people don't really appreciate what Gibside is and what we do there. It's a blank canvas which is why it's a strong time to do this. We want to do things differently. We know that major investment is needed interpretation-wise but we also know that we don't really want to go traditional. This is providing a practical element in terms of it is filling an interpretation blank but it is also allowing us to test a new way of doing things. It is testing the non-traditional interpretation. We have just had a feeling that it's not right for Gibside and our spirit of place but we need to prove it.

I2: It will be a test because you are such a big site and if you had a massive budget you could put things right around your site.

R1: Yes. We had to think commercially as well. If our Commercial Manager was here [they] would be giving us some facts and figures. I wish I could but in terms of programming there are two main strands. We think about telling our story but we also have to think about business. Yes, we are a charity but we have to put money in the bank for our charitable purpose and programming becomes a big part of that.

R2: Yes.

R1: We mentioned earlier that we have got a commercial interest in contemporary art. It can bring business in at a time when we want to bring business in and we know it will put bums on seats in the cafes and in the shop as well as sell memberships etc.

I2: I am interested in this question. You have three things going on but what you have got is the two contemporary pieces but you have also got the money which is going to do that interpretation for you. I am interested in the language regarding interpretation.

R1: Things have come together slightly organically for next year but it's actually quite pleasing the way it is panning out. The way I see it in terms of how these things fit together is that we are going to be telling a story through some more traditional interpretation, the story of Mary Eleanor, but we will also be bringing some contemporary voices into that.

I2: How are you going to tell that story?

R1: We don't quite know yet but potentially it could be a video piece, so audio-visual or it could be something more physical. It's a small budget but it will be some kind of contemporary interpretation. When I say contemporary I mean just not a guidebook. We are looking at working with an author called Wendy Moore who is a contemporary writer to bring to life the story but then bring in relevance using the voices of contemporary women to compare and contrast with Mary Eleanor on contemporary issues.

I2: I hope you don't find somebody who has had a story like Mary Eleanor.

- R1: We are looking at the issues facing Mary Eleanor and the contemporary equivalent. We came up with things like domestic violence, representation in the media, marital law and male dominated workplaces in the academic field. There are things in there that ring true with things you see in the papers today. That's what we are hoping to play on but I would say that will be a more traditional interpretation piece in that it will be a video or a set of panels that tell a story and give opinions. That forms what we are seeing as a base layer. The two contemporary pieces form an alternative view. The brief we gave for the interpretation to secure the money for that was very similar in content to the brief that we set the artist for the two contemporary pieces.
- I2: **Okay.**
- R1: What we will effectively get is a traditional level for people who are more open to that but then two more challenging versions of the story. It's the same story but it's different interpretations. That's what I am saying. We know our audiences are many and varied so we try to do things in different levels. The contemporary stuff is pushing to a new level that we haven't tackled before. That's the plan. It's an organic plan.
- R2: Yes.
- I2: **Interesting. How does this project represent a new departure from your previous activity? You have had some things at Gibside. What is the departure?**
- R1: We have. I don't know too much about the previous contemporary arts project so I won't talk about that. I think what is new is that we feel very included in the process. It's our brief, it has been our selection process and it is our story. It fits with our business plan, it fits with my team's objectives and what I am asking them to do this year, it fits with the stories that we have prioritised for next year. It is very much our plan as opposed to what someone else wants to do.
- I1: **Just to qualify, even though you are repeating things you have said, one thing that is important from a research perspective is we need the evidence of you saying that for us to be able to connect up.**
- R1: Okay.
- R2: Okay.
- I2: **What does success look like in terms of this project for you?**
- R2: From a purely mercenary perspective it would be great to see visitors coming in mid-week and visitors that perhaps aren't our usually Gibside fit like different kinds of people coming in.
- R1: Yes.

R2: From a more emotional long-term perspective it would be good to see people having a different response to Gibside and challenging how they perceive us and our story.

R1: Yes. If we were already telling a strong story I would say a deeper engagement with the telling of the story. However, we aren't really telling that story at all at the moment so success would be a greater connection with the story. Visitors are a part of success too so success will also be seen through our KPIs which are both commercial and story led.

I1: **You said success for you was 'visitors mid-week' but then you said something else about a different type of audience. Can you remember what word you used?**

R2: I said a 'non-fit audience'. We talk within the National Trust about having a 'fit audience' which are people we would expect to attract and then a 'non-fit audience' who are those that wouldn't traditionally come to a National Trust place.

R1: I think we are saying 'out of fit' as 'non-fit' sounded a bit rude. It's internal language.

R2: Okay.

I1: **The question is who is that audience?**

R2: For Gibside the majority of our visitors are what we would call 'explorer families' which are families that are looking to have experiences together so it's the kids and adults interacting with each other. We also have what we call 'curious minds' which are what you would perhaps perceive as the traditional National Trust member, perhaps retired and with an interest in country houses and gardens. By 'non-fit' we mean people who wouldn't necessarily come to see us so it's about encouraging in young people and people from the City. We get a lot of urban visitors but it would be nice if we could maybe attract more non-families in terms of our mid-week visitors.

I1: **Okay. So, it's the sense of your audience segmentation and the majority are 'explorer families' and it's effectively all the other parts of that pie that you have segmented where those 'fit' and those are a 'non-fit'.**

R2: Not necessarily. We do get visitors from all sections of the pie. The majority of our visitors come from the 'explorer families' section and 'curious minds section'. There are other sections that we do get in smaller numbers. Our 'explorer families' are our safe business who will keep coming regardless of what we do because they come to the play area and to do other things. What we would like to do is increase the numbers in the other segments coming in and to do that we need to have things that are going to draw them in. Does that sum it up?

R1: Yes.

I2: The Arts Council have that segmentation. The ones you want are ‘urban explorers’.

R1: That sounds very us, doesn't it?

R2: It does.

I1: I used to ask my students to self-identify with one of those.

I2: I do too and they are horrified. You would be.

I1: I know it is still early in the process and that's a target audience but what are you imagining visitors are going to do in relation to this artwork? How are they going to engage with it?

I2: With the principal piece.

R1: It's a very visual piece. It's a sculpture which will be visible from quite a long way away. Where we have positioned it is on a busy visitor route. It is also visible from the busiest single visitor route at Gibside. It will be seen from a long way away and I think it will be approached. It's a piece you will look to as well so it will be enjoyed from a distance...I say enjoyed but it will be noticed from a distance and it will create curiosity that will draw people to it at which point they will engage with it through some interpretative addition to help tell the story.

I1: Yes.

R1: People will gain that when they approach it at which point we are hoping they will decide is telling an interesting story and they are open to it. It will provoke some negatives and challenge as well though definitely because of where it is. It's in quite a sensitive location and will have a big impact on the historic beauty of the location. We are fine with that because we know it's a temporary intervention and it's asking questions. We are hoping it will provoke those questions of, "Why have they done that and why here?"

R2: Can I talk about social media? Increasingly social media is a tool people use to either really compliment us or not compliment us. That is very public and is there for everybody to see and read. I am interested to see what the social media response is going to be. People are perhaps a lot more vocal when they are hiding behind their screen than they are when they are speaking to us.

R1: Yes.

R2: They are perhaps more prepared to say what they really think on social media.

I1: You can answer these questions how you like.

I2: It prompts me to think about other things too.

R1: There is no hiding the fact that some of our volunteers and some of our visitors won't like it. There will be strong negative reactions to it, probably from the minority but they will be quite vocal and we know that from recent experience. Doing something contemporary in an historical environment provokes challenge. There is no hiding from that but we are in a place now where we are up for that. We want the chance to have that debate with our audience about what we do. The National Trust is a very interesting place at the moment. There has been a lot in the media this year about people challenging our decisions in a way they haven't before. Rainbow lanyards are the obvious one. That has been really interesting but we are welcoming that now. We will try to avoid any future versions of that because that wasn't handled very well but the thinking behind that and the fact that we did what we did at Felbrigg and the reason the National Trust is doing what it is doing with Pride this year is there for a reason. It's there because we are ready for those comments and those questions.

I1: **The next question is around how contemporary art changes people's experience. I am interested in your reflections on how contemporary art might change things connected to when you said you might get some negative reaction to something contemporary in a historic place. I am interested in trying to understand what the nature of that does. Why are you already anticipating that change and reaction?**

R1: Maybe we are just a bit battle scarred.

R2: Perhaps.

R1: It has been a challenging year.

R2: Our established volunteer base and some of our visitors just don't like change. People are uncomfortable with change so any change regardless of whether it's our internal logistics or contemporary art is always going to cause tension.

R1: Yes.

R2: I think we are perhaps just reflective on things that have happened this year.

R1: We are opening ourselves up to these debates now that I think we would have shied away from previously. We aren't allowing it to slow us down or change our strategy. The strategy is clear.

I1: **The question broadly is, in what way do you think the work might change people's experience of the site?**

R1: Currently there isn't much to challenge you, certainly at Gibside. The vast majority of visitors come for a nice walk. Most people have an inkling that it is a historic estate because it has a ruin of a house and it looks like a designed landscape but people don't really engage with it as an historic landscape. It's more a nice walk, a play area and a café which is what most of our visitors come for.

I1: Yes.

R1: What we would like to start doing and what we are hoping this will do is challenge people to question...we want people to go away with a better sense of what Gibside is and why it is relevant to them.

I2: Yes.

R1: We have struggled with that through traditional methods so we are hoping this project will force people to think. They may think, "Christ! What is that? What is that big thing in the garden?" Even if it provokes that reaction they will go over to it, be curious about it, read about it and ask about it. They will find out the story behind it and even if they go away thinking, "That was bloody ugly" having engaged with it they will know more about it and therefore they will know more about us at Gibside and what we do. If they go home to write an email to complain about how terrible what we have done is I don't really mind because they have engaged. It has forced them to leap to the defence of their favourite place which is fine. It has provoked a strong reaction in that case.

I1: Yes.

R1: I am talking really negatively about the people who are going to complain. There will be people who will really like this and will praise the fact we are doing something different. We get an awful lot of positive feedback from people saying things along the lines of, "We really like Gibside. There is always something different whenever we go there." There is normally something different but it is normally something traditionally different. This is something that is going to force people to think differently as opposed to just doing different things.

R2: From a visitor experience point of view we are always very focussed on creating really positive things for people all of the time. We have good customer service but also we make sure everything is very nice, comfortable and as easy as possible for them to access. By doing this though we are still going to have that great customer service and welcome friendliness but we aren't providing that 'nice' experience. I want a better word than nice. Maybe 'comfortable'.

I2: 'Predictable'?

R2: Yes. I think it's very exciting and it's keeping the ball rolling from the things the National Trust has been changing recently. It's keeping the momentum going.

R1: It's going to be inescapable I think as well. You can walk around Gibside having a nice, predictable walk. You don't have to read any of the signs or pick up a guidebook or go on a guided tour. Most people don't, whereas this will be inescapable. You will have to go and look at it, get closer to it to find out what it is and to question things like, "Why have they got big flannels coming out of this big black box?" That is brilliant because they aren't asking us that and we are desperate to tell them. I think if nothing else Fiona's piece will pose a question. People will say, "What?" and "Why?" they might approach us. They might email us. They might come and talk to us and might find out about it there and then

through the actual exhibit itself but it will be inescapable and will force people to ask questions who previously wouldn't have engaged with us on a traditional level.

I1: Yes.

I2: What does the word 'heritage' mean to you?

R2: I could write you a book on that. For me heritage is about our story, where we come from and ultimately our heritage is what an individual defines to be their heritage. My heritage might be different from yours or his but it is very personal. It's what you identify with.

R1: Very articulately put. I don't think I can beat that. Very simply it's where you come from. It's quite personal as opposed to history. It's where you or something *comes from. It's story. It's why it is there and what it is there for.*

I2: People have written PhDs on this I am sure.

I1: Yes. We have some in our school. I have one last question which again is picking up on the difference between heritage and history. Is there one? What is it? You said it wasn't history.

R1: I will look up in the dictionary and feel stupid, wont I?

I1: Not in the slightest. There are many debates on what the differences are. I am curious as you picked it up in your response.

R1: I can't do better than what you said. You nailed it.

R2: History is the facts and the figures. Heritage is personal.

I2: That's good. You said that with confidence as well.

I1: You first answer sounds like you had prepared for it. It was fantastic.

I2: That's really good. I think we will repeat the questions as we go through to see how it changes.

I1: We can perhaps pick up other ones as well because part of this will be shaped by what happens and your responses. If you as the people we are interviewing are saying certain things we might think to tease that out a bit more. The other thing we do need at some point which is slightly separate is for you to provide a short description of your role and possibly your professional background and training. We would like to understand the questions around your experience of contemporary art for example and it's useful to see how you have come through.

R1: That would be fine.

I1: Thank you very much.

R1: Thank you.

[End of Recording]