

A&HP_A&H1_Interview_12_Sept_2017

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KEY:

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

I: = Interviewer

R1: = Respondent 1

R2: = Respondent 2

A&HO = Arts&Heritage Co-Director

NT1, NT2 = National Trust Staff

ACE = Arts Council England Staff Member

I: Is this on?

R1: Yeah, put it on.

I: So, that should, hopefully that's recording. That's recording. I'll check it is. I'll put this one on as well just as a backup.

R1: New recording.

I: Okay, we're on.

R1: Yes, we're on. Okay.

I: All right, so, [R1]

R1: Yes.

I: Can I ask you to start off by giving us a brief history of how and why Arts&Heritage was established?

R1: Okay. So, I was operating as a sole trader, a sort of self-employed curator when I was working with English Heritage for sixteen years and I curated the six major projects that were happening at Belsay Hall which sort of started all off with designers responding to an empty historic house through to fashion designers, artists, architects. And after that programme, which was very successful for those sixteen years, after the sort of programme, well English Heritage started sort of murmuring about not having the funding to continue that programme at English Heritage, I began to think about setting up my own agency. This coincided with money, funding I got from the Arts Council as an Arts Council fellowship to look into the practice of contemporary art in historic sites and the history of it and who was operating within the field. And so, that was called—

I: When was that?

R1: That was called 'The Clearing' and that was, I think it's 2007. So, I was funded for two years to go and talk to people about their experiences of that and look at the potential that was there.

I: Would talk to curators and artists and organisations or?

R1: It was just curators. There weren't many people, actually, there were not many people operating. So, I spoke to James Putnam who had a long history of curating in historic, in museums actually, the British Museum and other. I spoke to him, I spoke to Gill Hedley who was the Contemporary Art Society who'd done something at the Foundling Museum. But there weren't many people that I actually could go and talk to because the area was quite new. There were places like Bute, the Isle of Bute, Mount, what was it called?

I: Mount Stewart.

R1: Mount Stewart who had done some work. And I did speak to artists such as Nathan Cody who had made work within that sort of the arena. But really, frankly, there wasn't much out there. But what was apparent that there was a lot of potential for artists to be brought into Heritage in historic locations. So, I set up Arts&Heritage thinking, "Okay, I'm going to be sort of, set this up, and look at, other than being, focusing on one historic house, is actually looking at organisations such as the National Trust and then other places that might have the potential to work." So, I set that up in 2008 and I continued working with [A&HO] who I had worked with since 1995, she had been, I'd been working with throughout the English Heritage programme.

I: And that just, the Belsay programme, when did that start? What were the dates?

R1: That started in 1995 to coincide with Visual Arts UK. And so, 1995, during Visual Arts UK, there were three big areas within the North of England where contemporary art was working in places such as the Berwick Ramparts project that was over in Berwick. There was Belsay which was a flagship event and I think the other one was Tynedale which was the Sky Space and the Queen's Hall. So, everything was, there was a lot of activity in 1996 during Visual Arts UK and actually, it all sort of grew from that. So, [A&HO] joined me as director, we were

co-directors of Arts&Heritage and we set up in 2008. At the same time, I think it was the same time, I was asked to be on the National Trust's trust new art advisory panel. So, obviously, they were beginning to think about how, taking the learning from English Heritage, and running with that, and as a National Trust organisation, they sort of had more confidence in it.

I mean, English Heritage then, the Belsay programme stopped, the Berwick programme stopped, and really it was because the chief executive of English Heritage couldn't really see the importance of using contemporary art practice within heritage sites. And their funding, they needed the funding for projects in the southeast of England such as Stonehenge. So, it kind of stopped which was a shame because they had achieved a great deal at Belsay. And that was programme was known as an exemplar of how you could work in a different way.

I: But they hadn't rolled that out to other properties, had they?

R1: They hadn't, no. There were various properties. I think something was done at Dover Castle. But it's usually just somebody, an artist actually coming to a site. So, it was really, rather than organisation actually seeing the value of it and working strategically, it was artists sort of going to the site. So, National Trust took it up and ran with it. Do you want me to continue that?

I: Yeah, go on. Yeah, because my other question was—

R1: It probably leads into it.

I: Are you working? So, the follow on was how has that practice of contemporary Arts and Heritage changed and evolved since Arts&Heritage was established and are you working for the same or different partners? So, it's almost like you started before, pre-Arts&Heritage, you started off with English Heritage.

R1: Yeah. So, I was—

I: And then Arts&Heritage starts and then the mantle turns to National Trust but what about other partners because there's the museum sector and—

R1: There's the museum sector.

I: How does that work? Since 2008 until now—

R1: Since 2008 until now.

I: Nearly ten years.

R1: Yeah, God, I have to think what was the trajectory of it. I mean, I think first of all, Trust New Art started which was the National Trust actually recognising the value of using contemporary art. And unlike English Heritage, they actually created a post within their organisation which was [NT1] becoming the contemporary art manager within National Trust as an employee, not an external consultant that I was, I was always a self-employed external consultant. So, I was never fully

integrated into the organisation. So, they established a post and they made a memorandum of understanding with the Arts Council. That was important.

I: Was that the same time it started?

R1: I think 2008, I think.

I: Was that when Trust New Art started?

R1: Yeah. Somewhere around there. I'm trying to think, it's a long time, it was quite a long time ago. And [NT1] then became, that needed an audit, [they] did an audit of everything that was happening in all the National Trust properties which actually, a lot of it was artist initiated which is where the problem is really is that it's either artist initiated or another organisation initiating it with the property. It's not actually coming from the property itself.

I: Or another arts organisation or curator?

R1: Yeah. It's not the sense of ownership from the National Trust properties, it's more of artists or other arts organisations such as Meadow Trust going to a property such as Attingham and initiating their own project. So, it's sort of, oh, it's happening over there. Somebody else is delivering it. Somebody else is suggesting the artists. Somebody else, it's not fully sort of integrated into the organisation.

I: Is that how it was or how it is now?

R1: That's how it was. So, Trust New Art started, I sat on the advisory panel for that. [NT1] did an audit of it and then [they] started thinking about using the arts in a more strategic way. So, Arts&Heritage then bid in for a contract with Trust New Art to do a sort of learning programme with properties in the London and the South East which we did, which was almost like a module of learning which is running workshops and demonstrating through visual, I mean, I always work visually, so demonstrating through visuals the what actually the value of using contemporary art can bring to the property in showing their history in a different way, addressing difficult narratives but what mostly they're interested in is the business case for them really. And that's where they come from, is the business case. Will this increase our audience? Will it raise our profile? Will it therefore increase our income? So, there is a bottom line, I think, in this, and that's what they really are interested in. And when you work with properties, they, in turn have to, they do have to provide a business case to their boards and to demonstrate.

I: Individual properties?

R1: Yeah, individual properties. So, to get back to Trust New Art. So, we worked in London and the South East in doing a sort of module learning. We also got a contract for the northwest in doing a similar contract is that working with particular properties that had been identified by the National Trust in the North as properties that were receptive or were good for inclusion into any sort of cohort, if you like. So, we worked with properties like Speke Hall, Acorn Bank, Quarry Bank, places

like that in working with the staff in again, demonstrating the value of using contemporary art within their programming.

I: So, this idea, so this is more strategic about the idea of having a cohort of properties within the National Trust portfolio who are engaged in contemporary art. And how do they decide on those ones, Speke Hall, etc. as opposed to.

R1: Well in the beginning, it's changed now, but in the beginning, it was, these properties were identified by somebody called the visitor experience manager who actually knew their patch, if you like. And they would identify them. They'd say, "They're good for development." So, it would be actually the visitor experience manager who was identifying them.

I: Okay. So, it comes from visitor experience.

R1: Yes.

I: Not from curator or property management or historical conversation or something like that?

R1: No. It's coming from visitor experience, very specifically, that's where it's coming from. Yeah. So, we've got North West and then we've got a contract with the North East in Yorkshire. And we started working with properties such as Fountains Abbey and I still advise and work with Fountains Abbey.

I: And they're like a flagship?

R1: They're like a flagship. They're a World Heritage site. They're one of the National Trust's most popular properties for visitors. They've also got their own budgets and they kind of have their own structure. And they have, I have to say, Fountains Abbey, as an example of how it works, is really, really good. Because they have seen the value of bringing certain areas within, certain bits, follies within their grounds by engaging with contemporary arts. Sort of going around.

I: I guess we'll come back to Trust New Art because we're going to talk separately to [NT2] about the history of Trust New Art separately. So, that will feed into what we're about.

R1: Yeah. So, that was Trust New Art. We also initiated our own projects so in 2011, Arts&Heritage applied to the Arts Council to run a cultural Olympiad project called the Great Boxing Booth Revival. And that project was borne out of conversations I was having with a kind of, I suppose you'd call him a sports historian about boxing booths which used to travel the fairgrounds. So, I took that thread of that boxing booth and I sort of unpicked it and developed it into, obviously, you can't take boxing booths around places because that would, health and safety and all of that, you can't do that. So, I began to, what I did with that project, and that was me sort of thinking about it, was actually, if we took a boxing ring around fairgrounds or around agricultural shows or village fetes and instead of boxing, we had cultural, we had dance, we had contemporary dance, or we had contemporary plays, shouting, singing, as well as sport because it was a cultural Olympiad year. So,

we had to sort of bring those two sectors together. So, I'm quite interested in bringing sectors together who might not usually work together. I'm interested in that.

That's what, personally, I'm interested in. So, bringing the sports sector together with the art sector and then showing it within a heritage or rural, agricultural environment such as agricultural shows and villages fetes was interesting to me. So, we also ran that project in 2012. And then in 2015, we sort of used that model again and took the Gallery of Wonder on tour which is taking contemporary visual art into the same structure. So, agricultural shows and village fairs, massive agricultural shows, really big ones, West Midlands. Audience, it's about audience, I mean, it really is about audience. You get the Northumberland County Show or West Midlands County Show, 25,000 visitors. So, you really capitalise on that and you sort of take contemporary art into those sorts of places.

I: So, is it more like a showcase of contemporary art or is that, is the, I know you're using the boxing booth or this which is part of the culture of those things, of those fairs, but does the work intersect? Does it use the idea of the context of a cultural fair or fete as the context for making work? Or is it independent? Is the pre-existing work some of it?

R1: Yeah, no, it's pretty, no, it wasn't pre-existing work, it was commission. We commissioned new work from contemporary dancers which responded to boxing booths. So, it was the heritage of the boxing booth, the history of the boxing booth within fairgrounds which was the starting point and was the brief. Taking it to, obviously, fairgrounds are very difficult, I mean, we wanted to take into fairgrounds and we wanted to take it into the Hoppings and things like that. But actually, that community, we'd have to have worked, it would have to have taken a longer time to do that because that community is a very, very tight community and you just can't turn up and say, "We'd like to do this." It doesn't work. So, we actually looked at a different way of doing that which was the agricultural shows which you can—

I: You can book.

R1: You can book in. Actually, they gave us the sites free. They gave it free because it was an added attraction. But it was the history that was important, the history of the boxing booth was important in the making of new work. So, it prompted new work. Just as Belsay Hall—

I: So, it's a site?

R1: Yeah. So, it's always starting with a root, a history that is a way of responding. So—

I: Same for the Gallery of Wonder?

R1: No, slightly different actually, because that was working with Irene Brown from Newcastle University and she had the Gallery of Wonder, that was slightly different, that was actually taking contemporary visual art into another audience. It was slightly different.

I: So, different from the original one?

R1: Yeah. I mean, personally, for me, and Arts&Heritage, personally, it's the history, using history and contemporising it that is interesting for me. And taking it to another audience is there as well. But it has to, it always has to sort of come back to that starting point. Independent projects, yeah. And then the museums.

I: And then the museums, yeah.

R1: Do you want me to go onto the museums?

I: Yeah, talk about the museums.

R1: Okay. So, we did our own independent project and then we started, I started, and [A&HO], through discussion, started talking about collections. Now, there had been a programme called Museum Maker and what was it called? Museum Maker.

I: It was the Museum Maker.

R1: And, there was Museum Maker, and then, what's it called? I can't remember what it's called. Which followed on from that which was Susie O'Reilly and Brigid Howarth together doing, they did a programme, Museum Maker, it was great, it was really great. And that was, I think that was funded through grants of the Arts Council which was contemporary arts reflecting on collections. So, it was kind of taking that—

I: Museum collections?

R1: Museum collections. So, we, [A&HO] and I started talking about how museums in the North of England, looking at the North of England, and looking at the potential that were there with the museums because they were struggling, really struggling museum sector in attracting new audiences and bringing the like. So, we've often thought, actually, that if you brought into a contemporary artist or craftsperson into that, they could increase the audience for a small museum. [A&HO] was working for Hampshire County Council and we did a little bit of work there, I think, in looking at one of [their] local authority museums. They were really struggling to survive actually. And so, we were thinking, "God, they had a fantastic ceramic collection." You were just thinking, "God. If you've got somebody to respond to that, it would be." Just to contemporise it and so it's a sort of fossilised collection, it's actually alive in a different way. So, we started looking at that area and we applied for Museum Resilience Fund funding that became available.

I: When was that?

R1: 2014, '13, '14.

I: And that was Arts Council?

R1: That was Arts Council.

I: So, this is when Arts Council took over the museum sector?

R1: Yeah. And it was a new fund. It was called the Museum Resilience Fund, new funding. We applied for that to again, we've shifted our focus a little bit and instead of delivering projects ourselves and curating it as I was doing with English Heritage, we're now a more advisory role. So, what we did was suggest, what we ran a series of workshops, again, like a module, a module of learning, a series of workshops, and then we took the museum staff who had signed up to the programme out into artist studios and talking to other curators and other organisations such as the Foundling Museum, such as, we went to artist studios like in Sheffield, in Newcastle, in Liverpool, so that museum staff were actually talking to artists face to face, seeing how they worked, understanding how they worked, and we kind of brokered those two sectors. And then again, we applied within the Museum Resilience Fund, we actually applied for money to deliver commissions within the collections. I've actually forgotten a very important piece of work that happened probably in 2009.

I: Okay, yeah, go back.

R1: See, I'm rambling a little bit.

I: No, that's fine. That's what happens, isn't it? You just remember things, yeah.

R1: Okay. So, actually, probably before Trust New Art actually, the Arts Council funded a piece of work called Arts and Heritage Context North.

I: Gosh, okay. Arts and Heritage Context North.

R1: A I C H N. Arts and Heritage Context North. And that was interrogating what was happening in the North in the heritage and it had, it was quite a complicated contract. But one of the strands was the resource that is now part of this.

I: The audit.

R1: So, the audit of what was happening. So, there was the audit of what was happening, there was to run a series of workshops for artists which we did in Manchester, York, and Newcastle, and we brought speakers from the Heritage, from National Trust, English Heritage to talk to artists about the sorts of issues that they need to consider.

I: So, it was quite practical.

R1: When we're working. So, it was quite a practical thing. So, we ran the workshops and the other strand was, I think, working with English Heritage to try and discover if anything from Belsay or any of those could be developed.

I: Okay. And did that come from Arts Council North from [ACE]?

R1: Yes. So, it was [ACE]. It was [ACE] who actually led that.

I: That's good because we'll go back and interview [ACE] as well.

R1: I'd forgotten all about that contract, but it was a very important one because it also brought people round the table like [NT1]. In that National Trust was absolutely instrumental as well. So, there was [NT1] was part of the panel, just trying to think who was part of the panel, [A&HO] and I, there was [NT1], and there was [s.I [Name]] from English Heritage. And we met as a steering group and discussed this area of practice. I'd forgotten about that.

I: Great. No, that's good.

R1: Arts and Heritage Context North, there was another strand to it which I've forgotten. I'll have to go back into my files and see.

I: Well I can ask [them] independently about that as well.

R1: Yeah, I mean, [ACE] was instrumental in that and yeah.

I: Okay. So, is there anything else on the museum side that you wanted to talk about?

R1: So, that has continued. So, we did Meeting Point One in 2015 and now we're doing Meeting Point Two. Same fund, and we're working with, so, Meeting Point One was working with ten museums in north-eastern Yorkshire, one of them dropped out which was Bede's World during that project, they folded and Meeting Point Two is ten museums in the North West, Yorkshire and the North East. And we work with the museum development managers. And they're quite crucial to this, actually. So, each area has a museum development manager which is, they do training, and they do that. And they have just become a sector support organisation too. So, anyway, I'm straying. So, it's all a bit, we've been doing, obviously, we've had to survive, as an agency, as Arts&Heritage, we've had to survive. So, we've had to bid for contracts and develop projects, our own projects, bid for contracts. We've worked with, recently with Usher College and we're working with Auckland Castle. So, that's where we go to obviously financially survive.

I: Yeah. And because you've talked about these sort of three areas of work. So, you've talked about the museums and you've talked about heritage sites, National Trust, English Heritage.

R1: Fountains Abbey.

I: Yeah. And then this other area which is this sort of more touring and tangible—

R1: Independent.

I: Independent [s.I territorial 0:27:03.6] kind of things. How do you see those, are they all part of what you see as contemporary art in heritage practice or are they three different strands or roots, are they connected or are they quite different? Is the museum's very different from the Trust? And there's

an overlap because some museums are, what I would see as museums with collections, some of them, like Hexham Gaol, it's a museum, but it's a heritage building, there's an overlap. What's that relationship between the museum thing and the heritage site?

R1: For me?

I: For you, Arts&Heritage, yeah.

R1: For me, personally, I think, I've often, I think, the commitment to what I do and an excitement for me and the interest for me actually is what I said earlier which is history provides, it's a living history. We're going to talk about what is heritage, and I was thinking about, is actually, for me, there's a continuum. It's a continuum. I live now but it's no different from, it's making those connections that we are all on a sort of trajectory. We happen to be living now and this is contemporary, but history is being made all the time. So, for me, I think the interesting thing for me is to actually try and connect in a kind of human way, I suppose, is to connect and say, "Well 1860, 2017, it's just the time has changed, and things have changed but there's a significant human sort of connection there." And so, whether a historic house, I'm quite interested in human stories actually so that empty historic house of Belsay, I find really a poignant place because it's empty. I kind of find it more difficult when things are stuffed full and.

I: When there's a collection of things.

R1: When there's a collection, I find that quite difficult, personally speaking. So, if I was thinking curatorially, I sort of enjoy that aspect of it which is why when do the Great Boxing Booth Revival, that's the same sort of thing. You're sort of taking something and making it into a different thing. And you're in control of it. So, I see that as quite separate in my head, in my head, that's quite separate from the work I think doing with the collections. As you say, there are collections within museums or there's a place like Hexham Gaol which again, for me, is quite a poignant and powerful thing is that it's a place which holds within it human stories. Objects, if you're working with a collection of objects, personally, I find that more challenging. And I think Arts&Heritage is [A&HO] and I and I think we just discuss amongst ourselves what is interesting about a place. So, for me, they're quite separate. Does that answer the question?

I: Yeah, I think so.

R1: What else did you, you asked—

I: I was saying, were they a part of this, well maybe go back to the other question here which is how would you define this field of contemporary Art and Heritage practice? Does that define the field, what you've just explained? Does what Arts&Heritage do as an organisation, what you do as a curator, does that define the field of contemporary Art and Heritage for you or is there other things beyond that if we talked about?

R1: Well there's the placing of art, isn't it? Where it's not commissioning, it's not new commissioning, it's the placing of art within, let's say, I have to think about

examples when I think of it, but I keep thinking of Cheeseburn now because I don't know. [Name's] just placed a contemporary work in front of the historic house. Now that's different, that's a different sort of way of working which is more of a, the architecture of working with a contemporary work.

I: In what way? How does the architecture work with the contemporary work?

R1: Well does it work with the contemporary work is the question.

I: Juxtaposition.

R1: Yeah, I mean, that's what, I mean, sculpture in the landscape. I mean, I'm thinking of Yorkshire Sculpture Park but of course, that hasn't got, it's got a historic landscape, what is that? Is that just a showing space or is it a connection to the history? It's not, is it? It's an open air, for me, it's an open-air gallery. It's a showing, so it's using historic landscape to place work. It hasn't got that root of connection of what the National Trust would say sense of place. It's not rooted to the histories of that place. I think I'm more, I'm personally interested in that.

I: In terms of, as a curator, in terms of the making?

R1: Yeah. Well is that a question?

I: That's me just clarifying.

R1: In terms of curating, I think. But of course, there's not the money to keep making new work and if it is very site-specific like that, what happens to it afterwards? Where does that go? Does it make sense anywhere else? Which is an interesting area, I think. If you create something, like for instance, Fountains Abbey is now creating these new follies in response to a Georgian landscape. It's very site-specific, it's about that place which Fountains Abbey now, today, if you go there, is a very lovely place to visit. It's got Cistercian Abbey, it's very beautiful. It's a very polite place, people walk around, they have tea. Actually, that landscape at the time of the (unclear 0:33:43.0) would've been, all sorts of manner of things would have been going on. Debauchery, the whole thing, it would've been shocking to us now even. So, the brief is, bring that alive in some way. Now, if we're going to make these follies that respond to that landscape in some way, does it make sense if you take them down to Stow in the South of England who have got a big part, will they make sense? That's interesting, I think.

I: It makes me think of obviously the, what's it called? Lucky Star it was called.

R1: Lucky Spot.

I: Lucky Spot, the horse, Stella McCartney.

R1: Yeah, the horse.

I: Which was the big – everybody wants to see it because it's a famous person, a famous artist. Did that go anywhere else or was that?

R1: That was interesting because it was made for the castle so Stella McCartney, it was made for that space, it was a very interesting point that you've brought up there because it worked within that space, whatever you thought of that work. Visually, it worked within that space. It was made for that space and it worked with the light in that space. Now, the next year, we put it in the Pillar Hall in Belsay. And that was my decision, actually. But because it was accessible, the hall was accessible, everybody could, if it was in the castle, you had to walk 20 minutes and some people were finding it very difficult and you had to go up the spiral staircase. So, actually, to make it accessible to everyone, it went in the Pillar Hall. It didn't work because the space was too, it was too, it just didn't work.

I: And it's very light and everything, isn't it? With the stone.

R1: Yeah, and it's a very vertical space. It just demonstrated to me that, it was a sculptural piece that needed that space around it and it was a very site-specific place. So, I mean, there are those issues for me that are very pertinent, I think, is that the site, specific pieces are made, and they take in account the space around it. Now, I'm going to digress here. We've just had a really interesting sort of discussion with Fountains Hall, Fountains Abbey, because they are creating new follies where existing follies, Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal used to have a series of folly buildings which have now disappeared. So, now, we're reinstating those follies. Now, one of them is called the bathing house. Now, nobody really knows where the bathing house was although there's been some sort of exploration, archaeology exploration. Now, the archaeologist of Fountains Hall is absolutely adamant that any piece that is alluding to the bathing house has to go on the exact spot where [they have] done, and [they're] adamant, [they're] absolutely adamant that that's the case. The curator, the property curator and myself are saying, "This isn't a historic marker. This is a piece of contemporary work that needs to have its own space around it and make sense within its location. It's not a historic marker."

So, there's real sort of tensions between what is it, what are we doing, what are we doing here? Are we saying, "This is the exact spot that the bathing house is." Or, "This is a piece of contemporary work which shows you, as visitors, that there used to be a bathing house here." And we're doing it in a very playful way. It's going to be a very playful piece of work where you're going to hear water. It's not an information point. So, we've had all these quite, quite, quite tense conversations about this. Actually, I just heard yesterday that we won out with that one, within the contemporary work. No, but the archaeologist is really, of course [they are], that's [their] job. And so, there is a tension, when you work within these historic places, there's a real tension about what we're doing here.

I: Well that brings me to another thing because you said the motivation for National Trust that you said about, the motivation for you about as a curator, wanting to make history contemporaneous and continue that sense. And then for the National Trust, say, it's about visitor experience and the business thing and offering something new for return visitors or getting a slightly different audience in. And it's about maybe telling the history differently or telling a difficult narrative. But there's also what you've just said about the problem with the sort of historians and the artwork is about

that use of an artwork, you said an historic marker, but you could say it about interpretation. There's a form of interpretation.

R1: I'm trying to not use interpretation.

I: (Over-speaking 0:38:59.2) deliberately not using that term.

R1: Yeah, I am. I think it's a loaded, that word is absolutely loaded, interpretation. And it's a really interesting area because when you work with heritage organisations such as English Heritage and National Trust, and you're within the company of conservators and curators, the actual language, contemporary art, is a real barrier. It just immediately separates us. And I've had years of discussion discussing this is that do we actually back down and say, "This isn't contemporary art, it's creative interpretation." Or is that dangerous? Is that really dangerous because then what does that mean, creative interpretation? Interpretation for the heritage sector is a more palatable way of understanding what's going on here. But are we doing that? I don't know. Are we actually doing that, interpreting? Or what are we doing? So, it's a real rich area of debate. And it's about language as well. Because when we work with the museum staff and the heritage staff, the people who are actually going to experience... who are going to meet the public. Or they say, "If we say contemporary art, it puts people off."

So, I'm sort of, I'm thinking, "Okay, so should we call it, if we call it creative interpretation, would that help?" And they say, "Yes." Then I have that slight worry then, what am I doing? What am I doing? If I go to the artist and say, "Actually, I've just described your work as creative interpretation." That doesn't feel comfortable with me. That doesn't sit comfortably with me? Which is why I'm interested in this area of art, working with the artist doesn't sit comfortably with me. I mean, the language, again, when I worked with English Heritage, they would say to me, "The next project that we do has got to be family friendly." That's really difficult to receive. And I'd have to think carefully about what I think of that directive as a curator.

I: Because it seems, because the way you've worked, the way you've worked on this research project, but as well as that bridge between, as a curator, being a bridge between the client and the National Trust and the artist. And being involved in writing that, the brief, which is that difficult area of the client wanting something, particular things like being family friendly or whatever from a project. But the advantage is having you there in writing that brief is to make that, are you trying to make it more, are you taking that as a reality but trying to make it more palatable for the artist? Or are you trying to, you know what an artist might me, are you trying to inject that into the brief?

R1: I'm trying to do both of those things. I'm kind of listening to the client, I'm listening to what they're saying but I'm also to give a sort of message out to the artist about, because I mean, we all talk about this, don't we? If it's too tight, if that brief is too tight, we're not working with artists, we're working, well who are we working? Who are we targeting this at? We're targeting this as creative, historic interpretation. There you go. There you are. So, it's got to fulfil both. It's got to give enough space for an artist to feel that it's interesting and so what I do is, I have to

think carefully about this, what I do is try and inhabit the artist's mind and think, "What would I be interested in?" And I'd be interested in this, the emptiness of something, the emptiness of something, or the root of the history of something. So, when I write the brief sometimes, I try and bring that sort of language into it. Does that make sense?

I: No, it does. I think that will be something that we'll come back to later in the project anyway because it's part of our own process and part of the feedback from the artist. And I know I've gone off-piste on some of the questions now. So, I'm going to return to my list now. I'm just going to do, as a recap, which also follows on from what you said. So, one of the questions is, "Are there some stand out projects that you would identify as being particularly influential on the development of this area of practice?" Well you've already mentioned the work at Belsay, multiple projects at Belsay. You've mentioned Fountains Abbey quite a lot. Are there other projects?

R1: They're our projects.

I: They're your projects but yeah, within your portfolio or others, I mean, you mentioned Berwick Ramparts.

R1: Yeah, Berwick Ramparts.

I: Are there other projects that you're aware of that you say, if we were looking at this whole history of contemporary art and heritage practice, what other landmark projects within that sort of timeline?

R1: See, that's difficult. See, that's the question that'd make me go, "What?" I can think of projects that, the Isle of Bute was one that was leading the way, I think, in responding to a site. Compton Verney. That was important, I think, that Compton Verney (over-speaking 0:44:45.6) which was, that must have been 1996 or something like that. They were, Compton Verney was really doing some very interesting stuff, really interesting stuff, actually. And then it kind of started drifting a little bit. I went to see a Peter Greenaway installation there which was very, it was very theatrical. It was very, as one might imagine, from the film director, was very theatrical but it somehow was a little bit too illustrative for me. It was naming it too much. I mean, there's things like Folkestone which Folkestone Biennale which obviously, I respond to sites as well, and the history of sites. Pallant House did something which was responding, these are years ago, which was responding to the function of the house, the history of the house as a feasting place. So, there has been quite a lot of projects that happen. There's also, I'm trying to think of things which really have made an impression on me.

There's also been things like part of Liverpool Biennale, Liverpool Cathedral being taken over by dreamspeakthink who did a sort of a promenade. I mean, look at the promenade stuff that has been done which is a mixture of theatre and visual art which that's another area which is interesting to look at into what are we trying to do? It's site-specific theatre. When I think back on things, I think the Locus+ things were quite, because they were way before, I think before Belsay actually. I'm trying to remember when that was. And of course, there's been things like

Tatton Park, the Tatton Park Biennale which drills down into various themes of their particular history. Yeah. I'm sure there'll be others, I haven't really thought about.

I: All right. And how would you characterise the present state of practice in this area? Circa 2017.

R1: [s.I September 2017 0:47:24.5]? I think, I mean, it has increased a lot as—

I: In terms of opportunities, number of projects.

R1: Yes, in terms of number of projects and opportunities. I mean, Trust New Art has grown and is now national. It's, there's other, the canals and waterways, so the Arts Council making those memorandums, understanding with forestry, I mean, we haven't even talked about historic landscape with forestry commissions. The canals and waterways are seeing the benefit of that. They've got extraordinary programmes that are going on like Super Slow Way and things like that which are thinking about the history of the canals and how it worked. So, it's absolutely increased.

And I think that heritage organisations and museums are now seeing, by demonstrating that it works, it doesn't always work but by demonstrating that by and large, it works, I mean, there's one area that is, that I find quite difficult and we get back to the Stella McCartney piece. And I have found quite difficult is that often the expectation that is coming from these heritage organisations is that it's going to raise profile. And because you're going to get somebody really quite well known, the person in the street will know, that seems to be, the opening conversation sometimes is, "How can we get Grayson Perry?" How can we get Grayson Perry to do this? How can we get the well-known, the Stella McCartney—

I: Peter Greenaway.

R1: How can we get them because that's how we're going to raise the profile. So, I think the challenge actually is actually getting artists of all levels, emerging artists, young artists, artists of all levels working within this landscape to demonstrate that actually, there's some very interesting work that can carry on, that can be produced. And that's the importance of the brief as well. So, if you go back, the brief is important, that means that the conversations that you're having with the organisations have to be deep. They have to be deep conversations, not surface conversations, if that makes sense. Yeah. Whereas you see, if you think about it now, I'm thinking about James Putnam. James Putnam in about 1990 was working with the British Museum and brought Tracey Emin in. And he was booted out basically because they were outraged that he could bring somebody in to such a hallowed place such as the British Museum and Tracey Emin of all people, giving a talk to curators, they were absolutely outraged and booted him out.

But then you think of years later when you think Grayson Perry in the museum, that's one of the most popular exhibitions within the British Museum that was responding specifically to their collection. And not only that, the retail opportunities, the new shop that came up, the headscarves, the pottery, massive

retail opportunities, massive increase in sales. All the curators, “Oh, that’s really.” Actually, that’s quite an interesting example because I went to a conference where the young curator who had been assigned to Grayson Perry was absolutely terrified because he wanted to rummage through. So, there’s been a big journey from that Tracey Emin being booted out to Grayson Perry being—

I: Being lauded.

R1: Yeah.

I: But I suppose there’s also that question, and it comes up in public art commissioning as well, obviously when you’ve got all that, you’ve got Antony Gormley, you’ve got Claes Oldenburg – you’ve got big names.

R1: You’ve got to demonstrate, yes.

I: These sort of named people. Okay.

R1: So, the answer to that question is there’s a lot going on. There’s a huge amount going on actually that kind of needs connecting up, I think because there’s a huge amount going on in all sorts of independent. I mean, Castle Howard which is privately owned by the Howards, Lord and Lady Howard, we worked with, Arts&Heritage worked with them about two years ago now. They wanted, they can see the value of it now. They want somebody, an artist to come in and do their Christmas offer. There you are. It’s a danger. There’s a danger that lies in this as well.

I: In terms of the expectation and—

R1: In terms of that, the Christmas offer, the family-friendly project, the retail opportunities. There’s a danger in this and where does the artist sit? Which is quite interesting.

I: Yeah. So, that sort of fills in my question, what do you see as the key opportunities, issues, and challenges? I guess that what you’ve just talked about.

R1: There are great challenges, I think, in that it becomes, the business case that the heritage properties have to make, and they do have to make it to their board, they have to demonstrate that, they haven’t got the evidence to provide it. It’s a trust, and they’re forecasting how many percentage of visitors they’re going to increase. Is it going to increase their income, their retail? They have to sort of persuade their levels of management to buy into that and the art commissioning somehow has to fulfil those expectations. Now there’s a danger in that. There’s a danger in that.

I: And we haven’t, that, because I remember when we first were developing the proposal for this project, that kind of came up, didn’t it?

R1: Yeah.

I: And they were doing some work with Audience Agency about audiences and impact. But that's something we haven't touched on really with our partner sites yet and that conversation in terms of that, how our research helps the business case. But anyway, that's another subject.

R1: I think that is an interesting area, there's two things. You know the fourth strand? I couldn't remember. It was The Audience Agency working and they've done a—

I: That recent project, yeah.

R1: Arts and Heritage Context North. They actually did a project, not a project, a thingy.

I: A report?

R1: A report, yes, which I've got. Remind me to give it to you. Because it identified the potential audiences that aren't being capitalised on between the arts and the heritage. Remind me to give you that because that's really important. To get back to what I've just said which again, I find interesting, and I would like to see how my thinking changes as we go through this project is when responding to that, I have to take that on board that I know that they're making, let's say, Fountains Abbey, I know they're making a business case, I know that they are projecting visitor numbers that they've got to hit. And I know that there's discussions about retail opportunities.

Now that influences my thinking about who, what artists to approach. And so, I have to think of artistic practice that has the potential to work with that sort of consideration. For example, I wouldn't go to Martin Creed, as much as I love Martin Creed's work. So, I have to keep my own personal interest in art very separate from my professional curatorial practice. I'm not working in a gallery, it's very different, it's very, very different. And my own personal likes of practice such as, let's say, Martin Creed, other artists who I wouldn't bring them into this arena at all.

I: Not even in a boxing booth? In an independent project.

R1: Well I didn't think of Martin Creed in the boxing booth [laughter]. Possibly, I would, yes, if I had my own independent where it gives me the freedom, those projects give me the freedom that I can explore. But not when I'm working, I compromise my own, to a certain extent.

I: You're doing a job. It's a job, it's a consultancy, it's a contract, it's a service, something.

R1: It is a service, so I have to take those considerations in part. I know that they've got to increase their audience. So, I have to take that on board.

I: Okay. Well we've talked a little bit there about the issues and the challenges. And what about, how would you see this area of practice developing over the next five to ten years? Presumably, it is developing?

R1: It is developing. I think it's going to get more usual. People, the audiences, are going to get more used to seeing contemporary in historic places such as the National Trust. I think it's not going to be this, these things that outrage people and they cancel all their subscriptions and all of that because through—

I: Not buying my National Trust membership and stuff.

R1: Yeah, exactly. If you think about the LGBT year that, you remember the project with Matt Smith? That was Matt Smith, the curator, he's really interesting to talk to. Have I put him down on the list? I have. Matt Smith. I think he did a project in... I don't know where it was now, but with the rainbow (over-speaking 0:58:34.5) hit the newspapers, very good publicity one might add, but, you know... So, I think the audience is going, I think the danger is that it gets watered down. It gets more acceptable I think that's a danger. It's more acceptable and there is that kind of sweet spot in a way which is about really getting good work, good work that responds really well to the place and maybe difficult narratives, really good work which has rigour to it, not just decoration or just dressing the place. I think there's a danger that it could just be used as a, yeah, dressing. But I don't know what happened.

I: Because you've talked about the organisations, English Heritage and National Trust, you've mentioned Canals and Rivers Trust, Forestry Commission, some private properties. Are there any other kind of, if you're thinking about this as a sort of network of organisations or agents who are involved in this area, are there other people, organisations on the periphery of the heritage sector or the arts sector who are not yet involved who are sort of getting involved or in terms of?

R1: Well there's the Churches Conservation Trust who are interested in making a memorandum of understanding the Arts Council. As a small organisation, it's a big challenge for them, a very big challenge, because this area, when the heritage organisations or the museums embark upon these programmes, it takes somebody, it takes human resource within their organisation to start leading on it. And I think that's the biggest challenge. The biggest challenge is that they don't have people within their organisations who can take on that responsibility. And it's over and above what they do, and everybody becomes too stressed. So, it's got to be resourced properly, it really has.

That's why the National Trust, that's why [NT1's] post, it works. [Name] in canals and waterways, it works. Forestry has got various key order and there's various, it works because there's somebody there. But when it's somebody who's not, hasn't got A, the experience, or the expertise within that area, that's what Arts&Heritage provides, obviously. But then it does need somebody to deliver it. So, there's a real challenge there, I think. There's also, of course, Art in Sacred Spaces which used to be called something else. That's been going for some time, actually. It's changed, it used to be called—

I: Have you worked with them? No?

R1: I haven't. Although I've worked, and [they] might be really good to talk to, [Name] who runs the Florence Trust. [Name] used to run Arts Christianity Enquiry. Yeah,

ACE, which wasn't actually a religious thing, it was badly named, really. And [they] worked with St. Paul's, yeah, [they] did a fantastic Yoko Ono piece in St. Paul's.

I: Oh yeah, I've just be reading about that. Yeah. Okay.

R1: [They're] really good to talk, I mean, [they'd] be really good to talk to, and [they're] now a director of the Florence Trust. But [they've] got an expertise within this area. There's Meadow Arts.

I: Meadow Arts and Landmark Trust we've mentioned.

R1: Landmark Trust who are trying, everybody now wants to be part of it.

I: Now you've mentioned St. Paul's, obviously, did you mention Salisbury?

R1: Salisbury? No.

I: That's the other thing. We've talked about is this churches or cathedrals, churches? I mean, obviously Churches Conservation Trust are working with their church buildings but no longer used for regular services etc. But then we've got this other work which is in St. Paul's Cathedral living active with just spaces. In terms of that heritage, so, we've got museums, we've got heritage properties like National Trust, Castles etc. We've got this sort of intangible heritage, festivals, fairs, agricultural shows, sort of possibility, and then this church area. Is that a separate, is that part of this mix as an overlap or is that a kind of, is it slightly separate?

R1: No, I don't think it is separate actually. I don't think it is. And I mean, I think with the Churches Conservation Trust, these are architectural social spaces and actually, the history of them is really rich because some of these churches would have been like townhalls, they would've operated like townhalls.

I: Churches had all these different roles.

R1: Exactly. Like the fire station and all that sort of stuff. So, I think that's a real rich resource, actually.

I: But even St. Paul's or Durham Cathedral or Winchester, these, do you see them in that light as well? They are architectural social spaces as well as sacred spaces or whatever religious, would you call them?

R1: Yes, no, I do think they're integrated as architectural spaces and religious spaces. So, for example, St. Paul's had the Bill Viola piece which was obviously a very spiritual piece, basically responding to that. But then, St. Martin-in-the-Fields has got the beautiful stained glass – not stained glass, architectural glass by Shirazeh... oh...Houshiary?

I: Not quite sure.

R1: Not quite sure. Which is an architect, very much a contemporary architectural piece.

I: Commission.

R1: Commission.

I: Permanent commissions, yeah.

R1: Which I think is really successful. And I prefer that actually, that sort of responding to that. I mean, I think that was a really good example of a good commission, working within a church setting. Then you've got, even locally with James Hugonin's piece at the Heeley Church. So, that kind of works. I don't think they have to be, I mean, the brief, if you're doing a brief for a church, you don't have to be, it has to be a spiritual piece or spiritual work at all. I don't think, in fact, I think it would be more interesting to bring somebody in whose practice is not like that.

I: Have you been involved in briefs? Apart from the Holy Trinity?

R1: In churches? Yes. With Auckland, with the chapel in Auckland but that was, I responded by bringing in Bill Viola which was responding to the spiritual. I've suggested to them Nathan Coley which I'm quite interesting in bringing him into that sort of dialogue and conversation because of course, his practice is very, he interrogates it quite forcefully and can be quite contentious. I'm always trying to get Nathan coming into a church, frankly. Yeah.

I: And Martin Creed.

R1: And Martin Creed probably.

I: Okay. [R2], have I captured all of those questions on that side do you think?

R2: Certainly, bringing up some really interesting questions.

I: No, I just diverged.

R1: No, sorry, I tend to—

I: I realised it's 12:30 and we've probably been talking quite a while.

R1: Yeah. We were talking for about an hour.

R2: About an hour, haven't we? I don't know, just quickly follow it through.

R1: Because we can always follow this up.

I: We can always follow it up and come back.

R1: There are some points, aren't there? Which are really quite, when you think about it, are really quite interesting.

R2: That'll inform our next sort of stages and we have so much informative stage of interviewing.

- I:** Yeah, the next stage of interviewing and also for an article but also beginning to think about the content for the, our conference in terms of sort of themes and some of the people that have come up and some of the projects and also the map, that it's sort of looking at the mapping and there's still the question about where are the boundaries of this practice.
- R1:** For who? For the heritage or for the arts?
- I:** I think for our project in terms of thinking about what is this area—
- R1:** Oh, I see. Oh, yeah. Where are the boundaries.
- I:** Where do we set the boundaries and within it, are there different sorts of practices or different, I'm trying to get at, is a museum very different from, well a museum is a very different place from a church, it just is different, but there's overlap, churches have collections of objects, there's spaces and all, so it's that kind of thing, are there different sorts of types, I don't know, that fit? Was there anything else that I've missed?
- R1:** Not really, apart from, I suppose, we could elaborate on this kind of impact on sites and visitors and where there's been anything done there, looking at visitor impact.
- I:** So, there's some reports.
- R2:** It's really the first thing we're doing. I know there's a little bit, it wasn't from the National Trust.
- R1:** What happens is that usually, the property has to, because it's tied into the business case, they have to demonstrate that they've hit their targets. So, what usually happens, and as a consultant, I'm kept away from that. So, actually, it might not be, it's best to ask [NT2]. (Over-speaking 1:08:56.2) but certainly when I was involved in the Belsay project, they would bring in visitor surveys, they would bring in an outside consultancy which would do a visitor survey and the questions were nonsensical, it didn't make sense. Things like, "Have you come for this?" But it wasn't in any depth whatsoever. So, it wasn't useful frankly. With Fountains Abbey, they still, they have to demonstrate that (a) there's an increase in visitors; (b) what the visitors think. So, various ways of doing that, it's the blackboard feedback, visitor forms. I mean, I've just heard that Hexham Old Gaol have got a visitor book in there.
- I:** Okay, we'll go and have a look.
- R1:** I was like, "Oh no." Because I really don't like visitor books. I think that only the outraged want to do it. So, I don't think that's a measure of it at all. I mean, what I would prefer to do is to, which I used to do at Belsay was actually, as a curator, I would go and be at Belsay during as many times as I can, and talk to people, and that's how I got the measure of what was going on. I mean, I had some really interesting conversations at Belsay about the Hugh Lott piece which caused outrage and I'm picking why it caused outrage.

I: Talking to the visitors?

R1: Yes, talking to the visitors about why it caused outrage. And what they weren't getting in that work, they were just getting outrage, whereas if I explained it a bit more, it was, there was more of a sort of consideration. But immediately, it was a sort of outrage.

I: Well this is what's coming out, isn't it, because it's so much we've just covered in this hour and are the visitors even getting even a touch of that? And what are they getting, and how can you possibly pick up on that with the visitor book where they go, "Great." Or, "Hated it."

R1: When we were at Acorn Bank, in Penrith, and they had a form.

I: (Over-speaking 1:11:08.4). I picked up, I've got a copy of that, which I haven't properly looked at, but that seemed to be asking quite a lot of questions about, although there was nobody actually activating it, but anyway, it was there asking questions about people's, the impact of the work. And it was quite useful to have that copy of what they're actually asking.

R1: I thought that was a very nice piece of work, that Karen Guthrie piece. It was quite poignant with the fountain. Two things, when you're talking about the boundaries, I think, and the conference, first thing, note to self, Nathan Coley is a very good person to talk about this because he has worked in historic sites and churches and quite a lot of things. The other thing is about artists, about the difference between making a piece of work in a gallery and making a piece of work for a historic site. What is it from an artist's point of view? I think that's interesting to unpick that. Such a lot, because as a curator, as I said, what I do as a curator is to try and identify people who have the potential to do something interesting. And that doesn't often mean, the obviously, I mean, everybody wants Grayson Perry, when you talk to the historic sites, they all want Grayson Perry which that's—

R2: Celebrity.

R1: Yeah. It's a celebrity but it's also bang on message, isn't it? He's bang on message. He will do that bang on message. I'm kind of quite interested in the left field thing is that who's out there practicing who is doing something quite interesting that maybe hasn't had that opportunity?

I: What do you mean by interesting? You're saying interesting, artist, interesting, they do something interesting, what's your definition of interesting?

R1: Oh God, well, who are doing kind of work that is quite, which has depth to it, which has a, and often, it doesn't have to be visual art. Sometimes, I think of—

I: Musicians.

R1: Musicians, you think of somebody like PJ Harvey who has done that work, who did work, now that's really interesting at Somerset House, I'm kind of interested in

that sort of, people who are, you can't really pigeonhole, you can't say, "That's their practice. That's what they do." I'm not saying that about Grayson Perry, but you do think, okay, so, and Antony Gormley, you kind of know why you're going to them, you know why you're going to them.

I: They've got kind of product.

R1: They've got something that you know that that, and it might fit, sometimes it might fit, Antony Gormley in Salisbury Cathedral might fit. But someone like PJ Harvey or Bjork in, no, I don't mean Bjork, but somebody like that, some musician, Martin Creed, or like that, I mean, it would be interesting to work with in a church, an empty church. Actually, that's quite a good project, I think I might do that. You know what I mean? It's that, it's that.

I: Because you're not quite sure what they will do?

R2: It's kind of risky.

R1: Yeah, but you know that their work has rigour, you know that it's serious and you know that something's going to come out of that, that placing of those two people. It may not be, it's not going to be the audience pleaser but it's going to be something quite interesting. But that's a risk. I mean, if you think about that example that I just said which is Martin Creed in a church, that is a risk and that doesn't apply to the business case. That won't, you won't, you can't say, "This is going to attract so-and-so." And also, it's a risk all the way through because you'll not know what you're going to get. And the heritage and museums need to know what they're getting; they're risk-averse, they need to know what they're getting.

R2: (Over-speaking 1:15:29).

R1: That is going to be a big direction, the future direction, and that is the danger is that actually the sector is usually risk-averse. And bringing in, so that means you have to, and as a curator, then I have to absolutely lay it down on the line with artists that they can't change their minds. Once they've put that proposal in, it can change somewhat but it can't drastically go off-piste because it's not going to work.

I: Because it's a commission.

R1: Because it's a commission and because the heritage organisation are doing this thing to their board, reporting to their board, getting in health and safety, getting in the archaeologist, getting into the, there's a big—

I: There's a team.

R1: There's a big chasm of misunderstanding sometimes between the two.

I: Okay. I think we should probably—

R1: I could talk for hours.

I: We've got just two more practical questions which are does Arts&Heritage have any kind of data beyond obviously the audit that you've already shared with us, any kind of data or reports on the impact of these kind of projects that you could share?

R1: Meeting Two Point is working on impact at the moment. And we discussed that yesterday, our steering group, about impact. So, you need to talk to [Name] (unclear 1:16:46.0) and [Name] who is leading on evaluation and impact and that's one of the areas that we talked about yesterday. So, we are entering into that right now.

I: All right. So, that's to come.

R1: So, yes, the answer's yes. Is there anything else you'd like to mention apart from this interview? No, because I've mentioned a lot and I've suddenly, through talking, identified areas that really are really important and a danger. It's quite interesting to hear. Good, thank you.

I: Right. Thank you very much, [R1].

[End of Recording]