

A&HP_NT3_Interview_30_Oct_2018

Date: transcribed 09/11/2018
Comments: anonymised March 2021
Duration: 00:57:39

KEY:

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

I: = Interviewer

R: = Respondent

NT1, NT2 = National Trust Staff

I: I will just switch these things on now, so that we have got these running.

R: Funnily enough I started the day with an interview for a research project near Leicester, it was a really small town, I think it's kind of a postdoc project. around contentious issues in museums. [Laughter].

I: That sounds great. These seem to be working, so that is encouraging. So, we have got just under an hour, is that all right?

R: Yeah, definitely.

I: Okay, so I have got, kind of, a structure which I use for all the interviews, but it's a bit general. So, we can go anywhere, really. But, my first question is firstly for you to describe what your current role is in the National Trust? And then to tell me a bit about how you got to that role? You know, what is your background? Is that all right?

R: Yeah, of course. So, I am programme curator for national public programmes – that is my job title – [laughter]. And that means I lead the curation of the national public programme themes at the trust. So, that is one theme one year, and last year it was Prejudice and Pride and this year Women in Power and next year's People's Landscapes. And that started out as a small pilot that I started with [NT1] – when we were in different roles in the organisation. And it has massively grown, so now we have team curators, assistant curators and whatever. So, yeah, I got into that from being a visitor experience consultant in the National Trust, so that was in London South East.

I: And that is a National Trust role, isn't it?

R: Yeah.

I: Not an external consultant role? It is a consultancy role in the National Trust, yeah?

R: Yes, an internal consultancy role. So, it basically means you support a portfolio of properties, you get given a number – maybe ten – of National Trust properties and you support them around visitor experience and visitor engagement and interpretation and that kind of thing. And I did that for two-years – I did that for about a year before I started building the national public programme, and it took about another year to transition into this role. [Laughter]. And before that I worked in independent museums and galleries and did my masters here in Newcastle. So, I worked for the Lakeland Arts Trust in Cumbria doing an interpretation and engagement role there for a while. And some front of house roles at Beamish Museum and York Archaeological Trust where I do my masters. And before that I worked in local government, so I did a bit of cultural development there. And that is what made me think this is far too far from the front line where I wanted to be.

I: **Okay. So, the national programme, you said you founded it with [NT1].**

R: Yeah.

I: **So, how did that come about? So, from the two of you as an idea rather than a policy?**

R: Yeah, definitely.

I: **Okay.**

R: So, I have been working with [NT1] for a little while before being in a role in the South East. And before I started thinking a lot about diversity and the diversity of history and the diversity of audiences. And I feel like there is huge potential in that area, particularly having all my previous roles were either Arts Council or HLF funded. And there is a huge emphasis on outreach of public engagement and not necessarily going for the easiest audiences and all that kind of thing. And I have in particular been looking at LGBT history. In fact, I read a guidebook at one of my places and it kind of (over-speaking out 00:04:49.3) out an obviously 'queer' history with some slightly uncomfortable euphemisms and that kind of thing. I thought 'great' and it made me feel great.

I: **Yes, and that's a personal resonance with you?**

R: Yes. Yeah. It's the kind of thing that makes me feel less comfortable about being out in your workplace. And I'm thinking if I'm feeling that, you know other staff will be feeling that, the volunteers will be feeling that and the audiences. So I started doing bits of research and talking to other people who I knew were interested in that area. I met with the Historic England Pride of Place team, which is an incredibly fortuitous thing (over-speaking 00:05:28.7) programme, they did that work. And at the same time, [NT1], in [their] contemporary arts role, was looking at 'actually, we should be doing more national programmes across the Trust. Why don't we have a theme across the year?'

I: **Because at the time, [they were] managing the Trust New Art?**

R: Yes. And we worked together quite closely, and I was the Regional Lead for Contemporary Art in South East. So [they were] one of the people that I would have those kinds of conversations with. [They were] doing a lot of the groundwork

around establishing some kind of... getting some budget for us to have a pilot for some kind of national programme that wasn't just contemporary art, it was one theme, one year. So I pitched a bit to [them] around the idea that we should be looking at histories that are perceived to be challenging, and particularly to launch with LGBT history in line with the anniversary, which was 50 years of partial decriminalisation. And [they] agreed then we wrote it and it became approved, we got the budget.

I: So what channels did that have to go through in terms of the National Trust?

R: [NT1] did a lot of the internal stuff because [they're] the lead. It went through [their], which is the National Experience Team, who are all incredibly supportive and creative, and open-minded, then up through the Exec. So it was signed off by the Director General.

I: And that was all very...?

R: Yes. Definitely, but it was seen to be quite a small pilot. [Laughs]

I: And you say it was a pilot for this Challenging Histories programme?

R: Yes, so the pilot was the idea of directly tackling Challenging Histories and the idea of curating nationally and having a national programme. So it was all very new, and there was only [NT1] and I involved, and we were both in other roles at the time so it felt like it was really small. But then because the potential was so huge, the partners were so brilliant, and we were so passionate, we managed to... it grew really quickly.

I: obviously, I know a bit about the programme, but how did that come about? So you've got this idea of doing the pilot that's been signed off nationally by the National Trust, then how did that go about being developed in terms of how did you decide where this would happen or what kind of format that would take?

R: Yes. So we had the signed off pilot as a three-year programme, so we knew we had LGBT history, women's history and an outdoors programme around protesting landscapes, probably acknowledging people like... And we were given a budget for each year, and the idea was we would align content across all of the National Trust channels. So the idea was that... we publish our books and write articles in magazines and have a retail range and programme offers, and every now and then we'd have a podcast and actually we could align all of those activities. That was the idea, rather than being very pro-actively curating something... and we had a national artist in residence for the programme. So we knew it was going to take that form, and we already had an output in some way that could deal with the structure, then there was some very light-touch internal research by me into what (over-speaking 00:09:27.5) LGBT history, for some really obvious, though not interpreted on site, things like the Bloomsbury Group had loads of Bloomsbury connections, obviously... [Laughter]

I: (Over-speaking 00:09:38.8) biographies, yes.

R: Yes. Then putting that over to the reader and trying to get other people to come forward, trying to get people to nominate themselves. Then there was a bit of back and forth with property teams around... a fantastic property in the Midlands,

Wightwick, just put their hands up straight away and went, “Oh yes, we’ll do this.” They have a Pre-Raphaelite collection and were like, “Yes, we’ve definitely got some...” (Over-speaking 00:10:01.9).. And some were very hesitant but had really strong stories so then it was about sometimes me and [NT1] going and having a chat with the manager and saying, “This could be great.” Then a big part of the development was getting the [s.l University investor 00:10:20.5] on board. They really did stretch the ambition of the programme. So we asked them to help monitor and evaluate what we were doing but also do a bit of general support and encouragement, and provide guidance around the area because we’d never... the National Trust had never done anything like it before. So we managed to corral about 10 property teams at the time to send someone to meet, and I did a full day workshop with the Leicester team on what we could do, why we should do it. And at that stage, this was at the end of 2016, at that stage, they were still very... ambitions were still quite small. We said, “Oh, we’ll change the panel. We’ll do some research then we’ll do a talk then others will know more.” Then we worked with them to stretch their ambition a bit. Yeah. Then talking to the central teams, which was a bit easier, saying, “We want to do a guidebook on this.” Then they could go away and commission someone to write it and that was much easier.

I: Yes. And how does it tie in with Trust New Art?

R: So the Trust New Art team (unclear 00:11:38.2) programme, are one team in the Trust, or were until last week. So we worked in all of the, with all of those conversations we had informally about ‘what shall we do next?’ The team was me, [NT1], then [NT2] was the other person in our team who fed in a lot. At the start, it was relatively a light-touch in terms of formality. We gave part of our budget to [NT2] to run a contemporary... to run an arts residency, Prejudice and Pride, then we managed that together. So [NT2] wasn’t directly involved in many of the property [s.l offers 00:12:18.8] for Prejudice and Pride, but for Women and Power (unclear 00:12:23.7- 00:12:24). Women and Power, the Trust New Art programme, has been much more involved in almost every major property intervention, and has also been a Trust New Art project. A lot of the regional teams, property teams that are participating in the national public programme are looking at the theme and thinking, ‘oh, we can do something...’ and are then jumping straight into, “Oh, Trust New Art, a really good way of doing this. We’ve got this interesting history about someone who was against women’s suffrage at the time – how do we tackle it?” “Bring in New Art, they’ll help navigate...” Yes, so for Women and Power, it’s been much more woven through.

I: That’s interesting, for me, because obviously as you said, the national programme has books like guidebooks and other forms of interpretation, then one element of it is artist commissions. For us, the key question is why would you go to an artist, a contemporary art of some kind, to work on this? Why is a contemporary artist or an artwork the port of call, the way for doing this particularly, and does it have a strong place in that? How does that work alongside a guidebook or a podcast?

R: Yes, it definitely works really well for us as a... for the on-site property experiences. That’s where most of all that has been. So it’s about the local teams who are looking to tell their story or share their story or understand their connection to the theme. It’s really that level, that local level where it’s worked best. We’ve been experimenting with different ways of having a national artist residency, with mixed success across the programme. Because it’s really tricky for an artist to begin to tackle the big national things across...

I: Were there four, for Prejudice and Pride, were there four, three artists...?

R: Two. Yes, it was a shared, joint residency, then for Women and Power... part of their role, it was slightly different. They did things like support (unclear 00:14:47.8) so they went to... they were particularly interested in film, so they went to one of the Pride festivals, did interviews, and created film from that. Then they, in the end, selected one property they were particularly interested in and focused on that place. So it started national, the benefits and the outputs were quite local to that property, which we agreed was fine because the idea was brilliant and it fitted well, it was great for the property team. So that was the kind of... it started national but was (unclear 00:15:20.4). So for Women and Power, we decided to set up a programme of five separate residencies to give the artist a chance to delve into some level of detail. So looking across the theme, it can be very shallow and not as rich as when you get into a property and you've got a collection and you can talk... So we set up five related residencies, called A Room of One's own, acknowledging 90 years of... (over-speaking 00:15:54.1). So they ended up being quite separate, and they, again, have been really positive experiences for the property teams and have given us our lead focal properties. So when we launched the programme in January and I was talking to the press and giving examples of the kinds of properties we were working with on the story, they were always the ones I used and who were the most interesting in a lot of ways and we were evaluating them more closely. Because they had more innovative approaches than the other properties, which was great, but again, quite local – we'd always speak to each other.

So with [s.l People's Landscapes 00:16:33.9], we again, are still experimenting with this format but how do we have something that's locally relevant but has national reach and speaks to the national theme? We are working with an advisory artist and then we're trying a slightly different model. So the advisory artist is leading on the recruitment of the artist to work with for Local Places, then they're kind of shaping the curatorial (over-speaking 00:17:03.2) across the programme. Then we're having a range of artists across those four places and we're hoping that will have that national reach. Yeah, that's been one of the most experimental areas of the whole programme. Yeah.

I: Yes, I've experienced some of those things. I was in Knole last week or the week before, and this idea of having... we had a number of different artists making interventions of different kinds at the site. How does that work, whether you've got one artist on site or if you've got a number of artists in a site?

R: So A Woman's Place developed in parallel to the Women and Power programme, so they are incredibly complementary and from the National Trust perspective and the kind of brand perspective, that's part of (over-speaking 00:18:05.5), but obviously they had a longer running time than we did for the entire programme and a slightly bigger budget than any other property we had. So yes.

I: So that was Knole?

R: Yes. I'm sure the other people you talk to talk about the delegated model.

I: Yes.

R: So a lot of what [NT2] and I have been trying to do through these residencies is work out how you curate... it's about curating nationally with a delegated model, and they do pull in opposite directions. Yeah, so in terms of the local, if you have one artist in one place doing a relatively minor intervention and a number of artists in another place doing a major take over, they both contribute to the same programme. With Women and Power, we've had 100 places take part. So some of them have been massive... Knole was probably the biggest and some of them have been relatively minor, like (unclear 00:19:05.4), all of that.

I: **So lots of different (over-speaking 00:19:08.4).**

R: Yes, I don't worry about that. [Laughs]. I can't control that.

I: **No, okay. And I'm just wondering, stepping back a little bit, this idea of Challenging Histories, it resonates... you said that in 2017, these are all celebrations of centenaries or particular historical markers of change, so they become not just part of the programme for the National Trust but part of a wider programme you mentioned, English Heritage days. Is that a deliberate thing and why would you do that?**

R: Yes, because that's a changing element of the programme. Yes, the LGBT theme, women's history theme and protest theme are all big national anniversaries. I don't know that we would have had the LGBT theme signed off there wasn't a major national anniversary attached to it because it gives a bit of momentum. It meant that I was able, when I was doing the advocacy for it, to say, "This is the list of organisations who are profiling LGBT history this year. We need to be on that list."

I: **So a bit of peer pressure?**

R: Yes, really strong. I think that did make a big difference definitely because it makes a leader of an organisation, I think, see that there are risks of not participating as well as participating, which is good. But there was a lot of persuasion in the early days. So that worked really well at the start. For the suffrage anniversary this year, it's been so massive. I think it would have been a massive gap for us not to do it. Peterloo less so. Going forward, 2020 is slightly different, 2021 onwards we're not necessarily aligning with anniversaries at all, which I think is probably a reflection of having built confidence over the years where we've been able to work more with other partners and people have been doing similar things. So for 2021, 2022, '23 and '24, which haven't quite been pinned down yet, it's more about looking at our collections and saying, "What are the gaps? Where are the opportunities?" either what are the gaps in terms of we're just not talking about these at all or what are the opportunities for pulling these stories together nationally that we're not tapping into.

I: **I've got down here that you've got, so 2020 was a bit of a question mark. Originally I had health and wellbeing that somebody mentioned and then that's a centenary for the trust itself, is that right?**

R: Yes, it's 125 years of the trust. There will be some work around health and wellbeing but we're almost stepping back the Challenging Histories programme in 2020 to give ourselves some space to plan, to catch up then plan ahead. So that anniversary activity is being run by a different bit of the organisation. So we'll feed in but it's not going to be a national programme in the same way.

I: I've noticed, just from national advertising, there's been a bit of a change in a couple of things where it's been a little film and some other advertising, print advertising where it does focus on that wellbeing, it's important for me, as a recovery from cancer or whatever, to be out in the landscape.

R: I went to the cinema last week and saw that in the cinema, which is bizarre.

I: Maybe that is the starting point for those sorts of things.

R: It is more about what is the National Trust as an organisation, who are we for, how do we help people understand that the National Trust is a charity and that the care of these places benefits people. It's that which is a bit more about the market and the brand stuff than it is around a curated history programme.

I: Also there seems to be, with that as well, I think I've heard in other conversations about we very much focus, and actually do focus on it, I was just rereading your essay (over-speaking 00:23:44), which is really interesting. But in terms of the original reasons why the National Trust was formed about preserving natural landscapes and then it's become very much associated with the country house museum and the country houses. So there seems to be a bit of a move to go back to that. I know that there have been some Trust New Art projects which have obviously stemmed from what you were talking about here which are focused more on landscape than on other things.

R: Yes, but also there's more of a sense that the original mission of the National Trust was to set up outdoor places, green spaces, green lawn. Octavia Hill coined the phrase green lawn, who founded the National Trust, which is amazing. There were interestingly really radical social issues, so things like social housing. That's Octavia Hill's big passion. Green spaces for the urban poor is where the National Trust came from. So if it's early decades, it was all about green spaces, then the country house agenda, crisis agenda response to other. That shifted the emphasis definitely, of the organisation. Now looking back, it's not just about putting something outdoors, although there is a bit of that, it's more about going back to what the founding of the Trust was for and applying it across everything, saying, "Well if this was about benefit for people in isolated or urban communities accessing things they wouldn't normally access, what does that mean for our country houses and our collections?"

So it's not just about the outdoors, it's about going back to the whole cause which is special places forever for everyone.

I: Yes, and that kind of access issue.

R: Yes.

I: Does that tie in, interestingly we were talking earlier about your background and visitor experience, so is that very much driven, this agenda, this contemporary art agenda, is that driven about the idea that the audience experience this rather than as an interpretation of collections or opportunities for artists and just working with contemporary arts?

R: Yes, it definitely does. It plays all the way through. In some ways it's a contemporary art programme. A few areas of the national experiences programme have been in that place for a while anyway and then the organisation has shifted and put more emphasis back on that. Now there's a lot more room for that kind of deeper engagement with audiences. It's not about us didactically telling things to audiences about our amazing collections and why on earth they should be interested and why that's relevant to them so it does connect through. There are two areas that overlap most between those two things are - if I remember these - one is around the diversity agenda. So before Prejudice and Pride we didn't have any full-time role in the National Trust looking at diversity and inclusion, which for the size is quite unusual, but now we do. The other one is around participation.

So there is a lot of emphasis internally about how we become a more open organisation and how we, not just in terms of providing experiences for audiences but how we bring audiences with us in that really broad way because they might not be engaging with us now but the people that are volunteers, how do we be more open and increase them, how do we let people participate in the organisation? I think from a contemporary art perspective, that overlap is particularly in that sort of area. I think there's a huge growth in where local teams are looking at themes like women in power and thinking, "Well I know that I can't just write this, whatever we want to do in a room on my own. It needs to be more open, more relevant to more people. How do we do that?" I think a lot of the properties this year have answered that with, "We'll bring in an artist. An artist will help us to do that."

I: **That's interesting that that's, in the research somebody said it was the go-to thing. That's what immediately pops into people's minds.**

R: I think partly in the National Trust, because the Trust New Art programme has been running for some years on its on in this area. It's familiar. There's a relatively established methodology around it. There is some support around it that [NT1] and Grave have developed. It makes people feel more confident.

I: **I know there is a whole audience insight, parallel activity going on as well and there's quite a segmentation of your visitor audience but you talked about volunteering. I think about the National Trust as three layers. You've got your very active volunteers, who obviously have been involved with some of our projects as well and you've got National Trust members who pay their subscription and may or may not use it and go. Then you've got people visit who are both members and people who pay on the door and come in. Of course there's the other people who go to open air landscape sites which are run by the National Trust but you might not know unless you see the Acorn logo that it's free to enter. So I'm just wondering, I know that evaluation or reactions and responses of those different groups to these kind of programmes, I know obviously there was a lot in the press about the Prejudice and Pride programme.**

R: We've done so much evaluation on Prejudice and Pride. There is loads I can share if you would be interested in it. The evaluation of Prejudice and Pride, we broke it down into people who'd experienced the programme on site and the Leicester team led that evaluation. That's really deep and rich. That's the most thorough I'd say, staff and volunteers and their experience. We got Morris Hargreaves McIntyre to come in and do that so that we could understand that some staff and volunteers had had a really tough time, mainly at Felbrigg. It was on site, staff and volunteers.

We did a wider sector piece which was around lots of award nominations and all of those type of things, people who hadn't necessarily come into contact with any of the content programme but were expressing very strong opinions. That was another really chunky piece and that was the press and social media particularly.

That was where a lot of the resistance was, which is interesting because it was people who, by and large, hadn't engaged with the programme at all but fundamentally objected to the National Trust engaging with the theme because they thought it was political. I have an evaluation of each of those and then a report sits on top of them that you can have.

I: That would be great if you could share that with us. That would be brilliant. I suppose it's a bit early, is that same thing happening with the Women in Power?

R: Yes. It won't be as thorough. The onsite evaluation won't be as thorough because we don't have the same scale of partnership that we did with Leicester but we're working with an academic from Manchester Uni for some external because the idea is that these all run totally externally to our team and then we run them. Our internal insight team do all the evaluation around press, social media. The other bit of that is the actual mechanics of the programme as well so there is a strand around that, but things like how many people engage with it, where, what works, what didn't, all that sort of stuff. So it's slightly scaled back in terms of onsite but equal. Then for People's Landscapes, the biggest single strand of the People's Landscapes programme is this artist commission project across the four key sites and the evaluation, we've put a chunk of money into the evaluation of that programme as well just to make sure that we do get that deeper evaluation from there as well.

It's things like understanding what happened, having shareable learning, so particularly with People's Landscapes, thinking about all the challenges. It's a social history programme in the outdoors with no infrastructure to tell social history, all of these sorts of things.

I: I was going to say, what are the sites, which are those sites that you're working with?

R: It's Tolpuddle in Dorset, Tolpuddle Martyrs, their right to protest (unclear 00:32:59), Kinder Scout in Derbyshire, Kinder Scout trespass in the early 20th century, Durham coast thinking about mining history, really interesting. Then jointly the other one is a Peterloo related site and that's particularly...

I: In Manchester?

R: Yes, it's the Manchester cluster so it's Quarry Bank and Dunham Massey jointly are working together to do Peterloo.

I: Is it total coincidence that there's a new film?

R: Well I don't think it's a coincidence. In fact Mike Leigh, who directed the film, has written the introduction to our guide book, which is nice. It's going to be interesting because I think that's going to have quite a high impact. It's fairly high profile already. It's out this weekend. It's quite radical. The Shelley poem, that inspired

Peterloo, there are few which is where the Labour Party's current slogan comes from. It's going to be interesting to see how people respond.

I: But I don't think a lot of people know a huge amount about that history so having that film will be good.

R: The film and this project, these sites are part of the foundation towards class and social mobility in 2021 as well so it gives us a test.

I: Okay, so is that the next one?

R: Yes, '21.

I: How far is that? I have been actually, strangely, in a couple because as part of our grant commissions programme, in a couple of properties where I've seen, when we've been in some office or something there's been a white board or something with these different themes and obviously some workshops going on about what's going to happen.

R: The amazing thing about the national funding programme in the Trust is that a lot of my role is just throwing out provocation and themes and then the enthusiasm around property themes is amazing, like this year having 100 sites choose to (unclear 00:35:04) is going to be like that as well because it's equally not a minority history. It's the vast majority history. Right now, between now and December we're scoping what the focus will be and then we're hoping that in January we'll have some framework, saying, "These are our top three themes," something like that. It's likely we'll have a couple of sentences, like, "This is what we're thinking it's going to be. These are our subthemes," so that local properties can start thinking about how they fit. There's loads of ideas. It's also likely that there'll be a core programme, which is the same as all of these, that has quite a tight focus.

That's probably going to be about points of change and then a much wider halo of activity where potentially 100 places could take part and do something around giving greater profile to work class history or histories that have been marginalised or forgotten.

I: There is also this issue with, it makes me think about Wallington but just because I think we spoke before about that, we've got this centre where we're talking about a country house, you've always got this thing between the family history, the Knole story where we know it through particular members of the owning family but then there are these other histories which often are hinted at along a dark corridor towards the kitchen you get some photographs of people who worked there. Is it about looking at those different people's stories as well?

R: Yes, some of it will be, like Women in Power, acknowledging that there's a heavy bias in the interpretation that we've inherited in histories we understand, so basically what our research has been and where the records are and history that we interpret, where the emphasis is the visitor experience and looking again at those two things and saying, "Well actually, assuming all of these lives are of equal value, let's learn more about the hidden lives," which is kind of what the broader foundation of Women in Power has been this year. For a lot of places it is

just saying, they started about two years ago saying, "We probably do have hidden women's history. Let's start researching which are the most interesting."

I: One of the things you said about the Prejudice and Pride thing, which comes up in the book and in some other things I've seen is that this is not just a one-off year to do something to celebrate these things but it's a continuing legacy. You've put it into place, you've got a diversity person. You've put it into place in the organisation of the National Trust and it's continuing thing. Is the idea of these future challenging histories that they will do the same thing?

R: Yes, definitely. It will be different for different years. Prejudice and Pride was particularly marginalised and we had to particularly show running times. So there are a lot of opportunities still for us to pick up on. We've got a commission with David McAlmont, the singer songwriter, right now going on, he's been doing a tour. His was a really interesting project actually. It was researching, across our places pick three particularly interesting stories, wrote a performance piece and has performed at a few other places and then now these three places all the way through to next February. So there's still that kind of thing going on, active projects. Then we are going to do a five-year review of LGBT history and inclusion at the trust in 2022, and everyone knows that, every region will be asked to tell us about how they've built on the legacy, which is quite strong. So there's a bit of framework around that. We also have the LGBT staff and volunteer group that we didn't have before.

We are part of Stonewall's Diversity Champions, which we weren't before. So that's really through. From the People's Landscapes, the legacy is more likely to be things like, "How do we tell social histories on an outdoor environment? What have we practically learnt about these challenges?" as well as some learnings towards class, so how do we build on that in two years' time, more than it doesn't have the same contemporary resonance and the same gaps that we did have with LGBT history. So it will be a bit different for every area but every area will have a legacy attached to it.

I: In terms of the artist that you're working with, I mean obviously our project, you know about the commissions that we've done which come from very much a visual arts, fine art place. But I mean the Trust New Art, you've already mentioned, somebody who is an artist working in a different art form. So is that something that you see expanding in terms of the sorts of artists that you've worked with in this programme and more generally with the National Trust, the types of artists?

R: Yes, I would think so. I think one of the big changes in how we work with the artistry programme will be about having this much longer running time, which opens up so many more opportunities than we've had before, both nationally but also for local teams to know what they're doing in three years' time and go, "Okay, well we can plan differently." I hope so.

I: I mean making any kind of commission is something and where it involves research and just thinking about different properties and things, it's a long-term project.

R: We've not been able to give any of the artists who participated in the programme very much of a running time, yet, we just haven't. It's just not been possible.

I: It's still near the beginning.

R: Yes, whereas we will be able to around class and the colonialism themes. So that does give much more scope for an artist to work in a much more embedded way, to have more of that research time, which is kind of what we've done with David McAlmont because he didn't have to deliver in a year. He had had longer to research and his was a much more research-led commission.

I: It was quite in-depth and then the artwork had a legacy itself. I've got 2022 down as potential legacies to slavery.

R: So we've had it pencilled in for a long time, legacy to colonialism and slavery but it's likely this is part of the work that (unclear 00:42:02) we're doing before the end of this year, (unclear 00:42:05). It's likely that we're going to expand it out into a multiyear programme but we're working out how to do that. But it's likely that in the medium-term future that we'll be looking at themes of empire, particularly we have really strong connections to India through the East India Company, houses that's a particularly strong National Trust theme in our collections and places. I think empire is likely to take over 2022, so empire in India but also a bit more broadly. Migration, we're definitely going to do a year around migration at some point. We need to find out when. Then slavery probably is its own theme separately. So they might be 2022, '23, '24 but we won't know until January.

I: These are big, big themes and there's the zeitgeist thing as well but can that be continued? Could you see this something that always happens?

R: Like where next?

I: Yes, where next.

R: Yes. The next thing that I know the leadership around the organisation are particularly keen on is having more than one theme, one national bullet programme. We are doing that a little bit this year. We're doing a lot of Armistice commemorations this month. We're part of the Danny Boyle Project so the national beaches and we're doing a Beacons project separately with another partner, I can't remember who that is. But that's not like the Women in Power programme which has been the full year, a huge part of the year. This is much smaller but it's still national. So I think we might have a lead theme and two other things that take place across the year. It gives us a bit of space to play around with, we can be much more challenging in this smaller way and maybe some of the themes will be less challenging in other areas.

The other areas of development is exhibitions that we're looking to work with external partners to promote more exhibitions nationally. So we've gone from not curating nationally at all two years ago to now, by 2022 we will probably have a couple of different themes, maybe a major exhibition somewhere else.

I: Do you mean exhibitions in an exhibition venue off site, not in a National Trust site?

R: There's work around both, on site and off site.

I: It seems to me, talking about this as well, like you were saying about linking in with the Armistice and other things that are happening which are big national heritage or national moments. Rather than the National Trust seeing itself as a conservation organisation looking after its portfolio or its collection of (unclear 00:45:13) and places, actually contributing as a heritage organisation that contributes to the national identity. Is that the case?

R: Massively so. That's the main driving force I think behind all of the activity. Conservation doesn't mean you just dust things and then pass those things on to the next generation. It's been about, particularly the director of curation is a relatively new director of curation experiences is very keen that we're perceived to be an active cultural heritage organisation and that we do participate in contemporary debate around these cultural heritage questions and that we're not passive.

I: That link with contemporary art practice, however that manifests itself, is a key route for doing that because it... well I don't know, because why? What does that do to the visitor experience? What's different about making a contemporary artwork in a site to do that rather than allowing somebody to walk round with some headphones for a different sort of interpretation, of course there may be an overlap with artwork or read a different kind of guide book? Why?

R: A lot of the ways that we're trying to approach the programme, the curatorial drivers behind it are around presenting more and more diverse perspective on our collections and places. So contemporary artists massively help us to do that and they are different perspectives on our places and if they can come in and interrogate our assumptions and then challenge them and shift them and then share their perspective but also then perhaps facilitate bringing in other perspectives. Then we can present them to an audience. So it's about moving away from this is our institutional voice, this is our institutional line, this is the one way that you should see this object, you enjoy it.

I: We'll tell you about Robert Adam and whatever.

R: Yes. More towards what might this mean for real people today. That's not necessarily the same for you and me or this other person or this artist or that artist who have both looked at the same thing, that kind of thing. It's more questioning. It's definitely all about multiple perspectives.

I: I think we're going to get interfered with in a minute, somebody is going to come banging on the door. So I've got one last question I'm asking everybody which is a general one which is about what do you see as the key opportunities, issues or challenges for this contemporary art practice in these heritage contexts?

R: Read it again.

I: The key opportunities, issues and challenges for contemporary art and heritage practice.

R: I think the thing that struck me with that is around embedding it. I think that's because of where we are in our programme, now that we have. It's been brilliant

bringing in new people to challenge us. I've definitely seen massively, some of the artists that have worked with the local places have helped move them forward just massively to open their minds.

I: Move the places?

R: The teams and breaking down assumptions about, "But we have to do this," or, "Of course this is the primary story," or, "This is true." You think, "Is it? Is it the whole truth?" That's been so positive. I suppose that's the opportunity. But then you have staff turnover and people move and leave, especially because we are working a lot with residencies and that kind of collaborative, artists supporting our teams very actively, not necessarily creating the output and then it's all about the output. It is very processed focused. Then if people move on it's like what is left behind. What is the legacy of that? Thinking about the opportunities in that same way, we talked a lot more when we met last time around diversifying our histories and how artists are really helping to diversify histories. I think that's where we will be going in our programme.

That's definitely where I'll be talking to [NT2] about how do we bring in other perspectives because so many of our collections and records, our previous research and our interpretation are all giving voice to, largely a voice, to (unclear 00:50:27) privileged white men. If we're looking at themes like slavery, well that's really uncomfortable. That's not right. That's not what it should be. So definitely I'll be talking to [NT2] about how do we bring in more contemporary voices to help balance that and share different perspectives on those collections and help break down those assumptions and challenge the bias that we've inherited by not a particularly diverse workforce at all. So I think that's quite a big area.

I: So in terms of bringing people who are ethnically diverse, culturally diverse artists to work with you, is that an important part of what you're saying?

R: Yes, or just different backgrounds, different perspectives, placing an emphasis on things that our curators might not have noticed. It will be different for each theme. Most of the artists we've worked with this year have been women, naturally. I think all the artists we've worked with. Prejudice and Pride identified LGBT. In that programme we worked with a fantastic arts curator, he was trans, conscious that we were really struggling to understand our trans history and the language around identifying the complexities. It's very difficult to look at history (unclear 00:51:55). You automatically project back. The historical individual wouldn't have identified that at the time. It is particularly problematic and they are particularly hidden. Trans rights are particularly threatened right now. So we brought in someone who has done a lot of advocacy around that, who understands that, all of those areas and identifies themselves as trans, to come in.

We gave him a voice and space. So he scripted our podcast to make sure that we had discussions around that area in there, just making sure it wasn't missed. I think there's a huge opportunity there.

I: So you said challenges, the embeddedness of it.

R: I don't know the answer to that.

I: I know. It's surprising. You think some of these practices have been going on, well it's almost the same with commissions and residency type activity,

everybody moves on. You're almost having to go back to the fundamentals on a regular basis.

R: That's national internal practices around being a massive organisation with work to do around archives and things like that. But I think really for anyone, when you build those relationships with an artist, they have really challenged the thinking of the team. You could easily just replicate that situation again in five years' time.

I: **Of course the artists move on themselves, although I've noticed, just going through the data that we have on this kind of practice, there are quite a lot of artists who have worked with lots of different National Trust properties but also other heritage sites. They're taking something with them in their practice about how to work in this.**

R: There's something as well around thinking about that area of diversifying histories, around almost like supporting the artist and the challenges around whose voices are valued. Obviously PC was the major accusation towards Prejudice and Pride and that definitely came from this idea of the inherited institutional knowledge is the truth and the whole truth. By bringing in a different perspective, that's a deviation. Then as a deviation, that's politicisation. Then you get to this PC. There is something around getting past that and past the idea that there is this neutral truth, which is also an opportunity and challenge.

I: **Is there anything else you want to add? I mean we could go on talking. We're at 55 minutes. So are you happy to end it there for the time being?**

R: Yes. I didn't talk about contemporary art very much.

I: **Well no, we did really. I mean did you want to say anything else about that?**

R: No. I think it is about moving from one to multi perspectives in a more participatory process. They are definitely the two things that...

I: **I mean one of the things that we've come across in our own project is of course how people who aren't consciously contemporary arts audiences in terms of staff or volunteers or your visitors, when you call something a contemporary art programme, I don't go to the BALTIC but I see this here. Would I want to see this here kind of attitude? That's maybe an issue for later on about what are the boundaries around contemporary art practice as well as being just in itself quite a difficult concept.**

R: It's also around deviation worries as well. How it was 30 years ago is the right way for it to be. That's the assumption and not understanding that there were people led choices that went into that and that those people who made those choices had their own biases. In fact, a really live example of that is at Cragside right now where they've done the Great Cragside Cover-Up as part of their... do you know about this project? So they've partnered with the University and then all the installations and then this relatively small little cover-up. They've received a huge amount - they're having a tough time - of criticism around that with the idea that it's censoring out... there's very little sense that whatever you see in place is a curated experience anyway. So a contemporary artist coming in and curating it in a different way, whether that's (unclear 00:57:12), whatever they've done to the space, is as valid as the choice that you've seen for the last 20 years but just that curator made 20 years ago.

It's not the authentic experience (unclear 00:57:25) from that. It's that same sort of territory around that politicisation and stuff.

I: Okay, thanks very much. Thanks, [R]. I'll close now.

[End of Recording]