

**A&HP\_A&H2\_Interview\_7\_May\_2018**

**Date:** 7th May 2018

**Comments:**

**Duration:** 01:09:22

**KEY:**

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

**I: = Interviewer (Interviewer in bold)**

R: = Respondent

A&HO = Arts&Heritage Co-Director

NT1, NT2, NT3, NT4 = National Trust Staff

NCC1, NCC2: = Northumberland County Council Staff

O = Other colleague

VAO1, VAO2, VAO3 = Visual Arts Officers

B = Belsay Hall Staff

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**I: I've got two recorders on. I've got my questions but we'll probably just drift around, if that's alright. So my first question is, for the record, can you tell me about your current involvement in the contemporary art and heritage field, which is basically my question about Arts&Heritage, your role there or outside that.**

R: Well, I'm [R]. I am Co-Director of Arts&Heritage. Arts&Heritage is a national agency that specialises in offering opportunities for artists to be commissioned in heritage or museum context to tell stories and narratives in different ways to increase their audience reach.

**I: Can you give me a brief history, from your perspective, of how and why Arts&Heritage was set up?**

R: [A&HO] and I first worked together at Belsay Hall in 1996 with Visual Arts UK. We curated, by committee, it was a strange thing, Living at Belsay, which was a major craft component, exhibition and subsequent auction at Belsay Hall. I'd been working at Northumberland County Council before that and had established a relationship with English Heritage at Berwick Barracks and set up the Berwick

Gymnasium. So it was a natural progression to actually liaise with English Heritage. They had this empty hall. Northern Arts in those days was looking for a major craft thing. My specialism in those days was craft and so it developed from there. [A&HO] was brought in to coordinate it. That started really our interest in working in heritage contexts. I suppose Arts&Heritage formerly started... [A&HO] was offered a research grant from the Arts Council - and I've forgotten what it was called - to do research into this area of practice because it was starting to take off in about 2008/09.

**I: When you say starting to take off... we might come back to that.**

R: So [they were] doing research. [They] did some national research because I can remember [they] went to Compton Verney and talked to Kathleen Soriano, the V&A and places across the country. [They] gathered a whole lot of information. By that time I was working freelance again. I'd been in various other jobs. Because we're friends, we had a meeting, [they] said, "I don't know what to do with all this research." So I said, "Well we need to pull it together and make a business case." So that's what we did. We took it to, they were Arts Council because they left when they ceased to be Northern Arts. We presented it and the then head of visual arts said, "Well who is going to fund this?" In our naivety, we thought, "Well maybe you might or at least part fund, get us off the ground." Anyway, they didn't seem that keen because we were so new and green probably. So we decided just to set it up. So we set ourselves up as a company. [A&HO] had done some work but we formally constituted ourselves in January 2011 but we'd been working in 2010 together.

If I say that I was also doing other freelance work, [A&HO] was still, I think, working for English Heritage at this stage, had a contract with them. So we were doing other stuff but trying to get the agency going in 2010 and really, 2011 we became serious because we applied to the Arts Council and didn't get any funding at that stage but we started to motor. We weren't earning a huge amount of money, not that we do now, but we called ourselves Arts&Heritage. We went out and got small contracts from different agencies to allow us to work.

**I: What sort of agencies?**

R: National Trust, English Heritage. We did some work at Compton Verney. I'm trying to think where else. I could look at what we did do but it was contract by contract basis and it was slow.

**I: Projects and programmes. You did a training kind of thing, didn't you?**

R: Yes. Well, that came a bit later. We also, because the Cultural Olympiad was coming up and [A&HO] was in discussion with Harry Pearson who was then The Guardian sports correspondent. He talked about the boxing booths. So we created the boxing booth, 'The Great Boxing Booth Revival' and toured it. So in 2012, the year after, even though we hadn't got core funding from the Arts Council, we got a substantial grant from them to deliver the boxing. That was the main thrust I suppose of our work in 2012, even though I think we were doing other small bits of contracts as well. So we did actually deliver things. We have actually...

**I: You curated and delivered those.**

**R:** Yes. We have done three different curate and deliver, because there was 'The Great Boxing Booth Revival', there was 'The Gallery Of Wonder' in partnership with Irene Brown here at the University. I think that was 2015 and then 'The Mansio' in partnership with Hexham Book Festival in 2016. I'm going backwards and forwards a bit because we did those in amongst the contract work. But when we then applied again to the Arts Council, we did a lot of brainstorming also with our embryonic advisory board in that day. We were hopping from one thing to another so almost seeing where there is a bit of money that fitted what we wanted to do and we would do it, instead of being strategic in how we developed. I can remember one particular advisory meeting with [Name], who was on our panel then, just saying to us, "Come on, [R/A&HO], you need to get some big money. You need to go big." At that time, and that must have been about 2015, the Arts Council released their Museum Resilience Fund. We looked at that and we just thought, "This just fits what we do."

I backpedal a bit, I'm sorry I'm jumping around. But it seemed ideal for what we were doing, which was supporting small organisations through a training programme and helping them to commission and deliver contemporary art projects. So we bid for three years. They were oversubscribed and they gave us the first year and then said, "Please come back in again," but by that time it wasn't three years because it takes longer than a year to deliver, well you know from this one. It takes longer than a year to go through the whole process. So I'm now going to backtrack because we'd already had experience and we were supported from the Arts Council's north east office to a project called Arts & Heritage Context North. That was led in a way by the National Trust - we had done work with the National Trust - by [NT1], National Trust in partnership and the Audience Agency as well. It was unbelievably complicated and I think [Name] agreed with us. It had four different strands in it. That's right, before that we'd got some work with the National Trust in the North East and Yorkshire doing some development work with [NT2]. I think [they're] on the...

**I: Yes, [they're] on the panel.**

**R:** So this Arts & Heritage Context North was to address the fact that we, Arts&Heritage, hadn't worked in the North West. So there was a North West development strand. There was an Audience Agency strand mapping out audience data, where it overlapped with Arts Council, segmentation and data and where was the opportunity for driving people into heritage properties that were maybe art gallery goers. There was a strand that was to try and encourage English Heritage to come back into the fold because they'd left. English Heritage separated into two different agencies and that's when our relationship with English Heritage not severed but ceased to be, while they were going through enormous strategic national change. So English Heritage, Audience Agency and doing some research into, what...

**I: You did an audit, didn't you?**

R: An audit of what has happened and also some case studies of existing practice, which were supposed to be put on the Arts Council and National Trust websites. They never did but they are on ours. We delivered what we said we would deliver. Sorry, then I backtrack, we had got a contract in the North East and Yorkshire and that was as a result of being asked to attend meeting after meeting, unpaid. I just said at one point to [A&HO], "We can't continue to do this. They are asking our advice, asking us how to do things and not paying us." So I can remember the then deputy director of National Trust in the region then said, "Well what is it you want?" I said, "Well we'd like to be paid for this work and do a consolidated piece of work." That's what we then did. We worked with Cragside, Edinburgh, Fountains Abbey. So there were some in Yorkshire, some in the North East.

I: **So when was that? So that was after 2015?**

R: No, I think it was before.

I: **So there was the Museum Resilience Fund 2015.**

R: It was before 2015. So it would have been '13/'14 I would think. I can look up the exact date.

I: **How long was that?**

R: It was an 18-month contract. From that we did some development stuff but we realised that it was better if we developed a structure to the programme of how we did it, which is a model we use now we know works. So we did that. Certainly for the North West part of the Arts & Heritage Context North, we did that development programme and then worked with six properties over there and developed, did workshops how to do it, took them to see artists, galleries, curators, discussed art, everything. Took them to see the Arts Council, talked about funding and so on and then scoped out what they could do. At the end of that, the National Trust employed [NT3] who took over for the North West and developed some of those ideas and things into actual commissions. So that happened over there. But that structure we have refined but we're still using a very similar structure, so much so that we had that structure and the National Trust advertised for an arts development coordinator in London and the South East.

We applied for it as Arts&Heritage which I think they were a little bit taken aback by but we were contracted to do it. So we worked with properties in London and the South East and that must have been '14 to '15.

I: **So was the Trust New Art...?**

R: It was part of the Trust New Art programme. It was before [NT4], it was [NT1]. It was really because I think London and the South East were saying, "Look at all this stuff that's happening up in the North. Look at the stuff that's happening in the Midlands. Why aren't we doing anything?" I think [NT1] also thought, "Why aren't they?" They wanted but they didn't really know how to do it. So we had the unenviable task of working with eleven properties, which was a lot, not all of them really progressed. Sorry, I've jumped around a bit.

**I: Then you more recently applied to be a strategic support organisation?**

R: Yes. We applied to be an NPO the last round and our feedback was that we were nearly there but there was too much competition. So in the final national moderation we didn't get it so we just carried on. So we applied to the Museum Resilience Fund, we got the contract in London and the South East, we continued to work with Fountains Abbey. We worked with Compton Verney, National Railway Museum. So we got separate contracts as well. Then when the last NPO was announced, which was somewhere in 2016, we applied to become an NPO and were told we had to apply to be a sector support organisation because we didn't deliver, we actually supported others. So that's why we're a sector support organisation.

**I: So is that like another three year thing?**

R: Four years. So we bid in January, the application went in January 2017. We heard in July 2017 and are awaiting next week hopefully the funding agreement for 2018 for four years.

**I: So that's 2018 to 2022?**

R: Yes. That means we will be core funded and that's why we can recruit an executive director and actually our staff will be paid employees rather than freelance contractors.

**I: Let's go back a bit further because obviously I've got [A&HO's] story but this adds some more detail to that, I think and that timeline for Arts&Heritage. So you first were working with [A&HO] at 'Living at Belsay' which was the first English Heritage Belsay project. That's around 1996. You were, at that time or before that, you were arts officer for Northumberland County Council, is that right?**

R: I was visual arts officer for Northumberland County Council from 1991 to 1995 I think. First visual arts officer they'd ever had.

**I: Then you moved from that to Northern Arts?**

R: I moved to Northern Arts to be the craft coordinator on a three-year contract in 1995. The first thing I was told was I had to do a big craft project.

**I: I mean I'm quite interested in 1996 because it seems to be, well there was 'Living at Belsay', you've mentioned Berwick Gymnasium but there was the Berwick Ramparts project as part of the Visual Arts UK thing. There was also the thing at Durham Cathedral, obviously that wasn't your...**

R: Bill Viola.

**I: There was one other thing which I can't remember but anyway, there were...**

R: (unclear 00:19:17).

I: **There were loads of things, weren't there, in the North East.**

R: There was rather a lot I think. It was the Year of Visual Arts in a way.

I: **It was the Year of Visual Arts. It wasn't just the North East because it was Cumbria as well, wasn't it?**

R: It was, yes.

I: **But I'm quite interested in that pre-history because obviously we're building this, adding to what you've done in terms of the audit and adding some new projects to that. But looking at that 1996, and it's difficult because I've got that history as well so I don't want to be too skewed by that but I'm wondering whether that was actually an important year for this field of practice.**

R: Well, I think it was important for this field. I think it was just important generally. If I go back to when I first... I mean before I joined Northumberland County Council, I worked on the craft programme at the Gateshead Garden Festival.

I: **1990.**

R: 1990, well done, with [O]

I: **Festival Landmarks? I know this stuff because it crosses over with my PhD about public art. So you were the crafts...?**

R: Well no, I was the craft shop manager, so organising retail with [Name], I can't remember [their] surname, doing the craft commissions. Anyway, I joined the (unclear 00:21:00) and worked with [O], who is fantastic, and so on. So I then went to Northumberland County Council. One of the first things I was tasked with by [NCC1], who was the chief librarian. In those days the librarian was in charge of culture. [They] wanted an exhibition of James Hugonin's work in Northumberland because Hugonin lives in Northumberland. The Fruitmarket Gallery were doing a partnership with the Laing Art Gallery, Mike Collier. The Fruitmarket was, what was his name? A great guy. Anyway, it will come to me. So [NCC1] says - there is me, a bit wet behind the ears - an exhibition space for Hugonin's work. So the first thing I go and do is go and meet Hugonin, which is great, and look at his big paintings and think, "Right, where are we going to put these?" So I go back and I'm talking to people. There is nothing. There is a little information place in Corbridge.

There is the Queen's Hall, that's about it. So I talked to the deputy librarian there and he said, "Go and see the planning officer in Berwick." I was thinking, "Why on earth would I go and see the planning officer in Berwick?" So off I trot. Again, it was a two-tier authority, so Northumberland with the districts underneath. So my

strategy was to work with each of the districts because there was no budget. I actually had to raise part of my salary.

**I: They didn't have their own arts officers?**

R: No. So my idea was to work, in each borough, to develop something. So I went up to Berwick and met this planning officer who was wearing a craft hand knitted tie so I immediately thought, "He's an okay sort of guy." He was called [NCC2}. He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I'm looking for a space to show James Hugonin's work." He displayed almost non-interest in this. I said, "I thought maybe the Berwick Museum might have space, maybe," I say in my innocence, "they could move the Burrell Collection out and move Hugonin's work in," because I'd been to the museum and it just about could have squeezed in. He said, "No, no." So he said, "Do you fancy lunch?" so he took me out for lunch and he said, "I'm going to show you something." He took me into the Ramparts and into the back entrance of the gymnasium. He said, "Would this space do?" In there English Heritage stored their lawnmowers so it was a disused space but big, you know the gymnasium. I said, "Oh yes." He said, "Right, we'll convert this into a gallery," and that was it.

So we then plotted how we could do it. He said, "Well I'll add strategically to make this happen. We need to go and speak to Northern Arts." He said, "Safeway," in the days of Safeway, "want to build a big supermarket on the edge of Berwick. We'll make them invest in this gallery as part of the planning game." So he negotiated £10,000, which in 1992 was quite a lot of money. We'll persuade English Heritage to renovate it, redo the floor, paint it and so on and make the entrance the other way. We went to Northern Arts and they said, "Gallery in Berwick, you're not going to get the visitors in the winter." I think it was Alan Hayden said, "Well why don't you create a residency there in the winter months and then let the artists have a show in the summer months and then do other things as well?" and so that's how that started. We won the National Art Collection Fund runner up to the Tate St Ives for doing it. So that started a relationship with English Heritage, which was really important. Actually my relationship with the districts was also important because I did a show at Seaton Delaval Hall called 'Alfresco'.

**I: I don't know about that one.**

R: No, you wouldn't.

**I: Seaton Delaval Hall? So that wasn't owned by the National Trust then, it was in private hands?**

R: It was private and it was Blyth Valley. Again, it's talking to the officer at Blyth Valley, who was [Name], and [they] said, "There is this wonderful hall in Blyth Valley where we could do something," so we decided to do an outdoor sculpture exhibition of regional sculptors, completely mad really when I think about it because we had no insurance. But we had Gilbert Ward, Colin Rose, Neil Talbot, all that sort of group of sculptors loaned works and we displayed them in the gardens.

**I: When was that, do you know?**

R: Well that must have been about '93.

**I: Do you have any images? Do you have any documentation or images or pictures of this thing?**

R: I might have somewhere. It was called 'Alfresco' because it was outside. You know where it is. I mean when I look back, my complete blind, what I know now, I would never have done it. I would never do it now. But it was just a confidence thing. People came and enjoyed it, looked round the garden. It opened up the place. So yes, I did that. Anyway, leading up, I was still Visual Arts officer so the Gymnasium set up the fellowship. We had an amazing first exhibition. Well we had an exhibition of Hugonin. There again in my innocence, I go to James Hugonin, "Who would you like to open this exhibition." He said, "Oh, Grey Gowrie is a very staunch supporter of my work." He must have bought one I think. So I said, "Okay. Do you have a contact for him?" and he gave me his contact. So I contacted him. He'd be delighted to. Immediately he accepted, he was (unclear 00:28:22) practically the week after at the Arts Council, well it wasn't the Arts Council, it was the Arts Council Great Britain in those days in London.

So we hit everything all in one so that was good. James Hugonin wanted just a vase of white freesia, very minimal, at the opening. Trying to get white freesias was really difficult I can tell you. So yes, I did that. It was very last minute because English Heritage were finishing the floors when we were trying to hang the paintings but we did it.

**I: But that was immediately a discussion about it being a permanent gallery?**

R: Yes. So having set it up as a gallery with the opening and the exhibition of James Hugonin's work, which then went down to the Mappin in Sheffield, the Laing. It had started at the Fruitmarket so it came through Northumberland.

**I: The Fruitmarket in Edinburgh, just to clarify?**

R: Yes, the Fruitmarket in Edinburgh. Then I think it came to us second and then it went down to the Laing I think and then to the Mappin. That was when I first met Mike Collier and he was fantastic because I was really green in those days, talking to me about how to display works and sight lines and things, really good, making a little model of things so that we could actually work out how to display them. A really good mentor he was to me.

**I: Around that, because obviously I mean it was an English Heritage property and the fellowship idea as well so getting back to the Arts&Heritage theme, what was the discussion? Was it just that they had a building and it wanted to be refurbished for something new or was it a response to the Barracks in Berwick...?**



R: The fellowship was very much set up for an artist to be there for three months or whatever in the winter, over the winter period. I think there was some notional three month's pay. The mayor of Berwick provided his holiday let cottage for the artists to live in, certainly in the first year, if not the first two years. We set it up as an artist to respond to the context of Berwick. So it was very much that they would produce site specific or context specific work. This was really interesting. They could choose what they wanted but we set the artist brief as Berwick as a border town. So afterwards people took that as a subject, the fishing industry. The first exhibition was Carol Drake and she took the fact that it was a gymnasium and also, during the war, was a dormitory for injured soldiers.

I: **I remember that show. It was a good show.**

R: I think that was a very powerful show actually.

I: **Is there documentation of all this Gymnasium projects?**

R: Yes, there's a book about the Gymnasium projects. I've certainly got that catalogue. Then we set it up as a fellowship. We called it a fellowship because it wasn't about an artist working with a community. If they wanted to work with the community, that was a bonus. There were people like Mike Nelson. It had a really good, strong application. It was a partnership between Northern Arts, Berwick, English Heritage and Northumberland County Council. So there were four partners, some putting in kind, some putting in cash. So Northern Arts put in cash, Safeway had helped do some of the development work, English Heritage kept it up and I think staffed it.

I: **So the work in Berwick with English Heritage had started and then in '96 there was the Ramparts project, which was international artists invited to make work.**

R: Well, how that came about was because I was still at Northumberland County Council and Northern Arts were saying to me, "What is Northumberland going to do for the Year of Visual Arts?" It was just me. I was thinking, "What on earth could I do that's of the scale that they were envisaging?" Already there was talk about Viola and Durham Cathedral and so on. Then, in a slightly patronising way, they said, "Would you like to work with somebody to scope out what you could do?" So I said, "That would be really nice." He said, "Well we've got the names of three people that we think might be suitable." One of the people was [O], who I'd worked with. So I said, "I'd love to work with [O] So [O] came up and I took [them] around. [They] said, "This is ridiculous." [They] said, "You can't do this, one person covering this whole big county, absolutely ridiculous." [They] said, we'll go back into them, tell them you need four people working with you to deliver a programme for Northumberland," because I think what they wanted was a big thing and they were going to put their money into that.

So we went back to Northern Arts and said, "Basically we need four people in each of the four districts working with me and we will deliver a programme in Northumberland," to which they went shock horror. Eventually they saw the logic in it. I mean [they] can be quite persuasive, [O], and they said, "Right, well we'll

not do four but we could do three." They set up what they called visual arts project officers that were I think funded by Northern Arts. The condition was that one was in Berwick to run the fellowship programme and something in Berwick. One was in South East Northumberland, being where they wanted to engage with the community, Blyth and Ashington together. The other was in Tynedale. So we appointed visual arts project officers. [VAO1] was the one in Berwick, [VAO2] was Tynedale and [VAO3] was South East Northumberland. So [VAO1] came. [VAO1] and [VAO2] were both from the RCA curating course, which [O] was teaching on with [s.l. [Name] 00:35:58].

[Name] said, "You've got a bit of experience. You can manage them. But they'll be young and enthusiastic and they will know their stuff." So [VAO1] came up and [they] managed the programme and [they] set up the Berwick Ramparts project. So that was[their] baby.

**I: For Visual Arts?**

R: Yes, for Visual Arts UK so that was the Berwick project, along with the fellowship. I can't remember who the fellow was in that year but it's in the book. [VAO2], developed the Art in Kielder project. This was forerunner to the Art and Architecture because [they] did some fairly extraordinary things actually. You'd need to ask [them] about that but I can remember there was one artist doing something along a hedgerow. I can remember it being very wet and grey but very difficult because Kielder, actually it's a much more sensible programme now but they were temporary projects in the landscape. [VAO3] worked more with community in the South East, so it was a more community-based thing. Then that left me and the Belsay Hall thing came because I was in a train from Berwick with a member of English Heritage. We were just talking about this and I was saying, "We're trying to develop this programme," and he said, "Well have you been to Belsay Hall?" I said, "No." He said, "You need to go to Belsay Hall, it's empty." So I thought, "Right, that's it. We'll furnish it."

So that's how that one started. They were a willing partner because we'd already, I think through the Berwick Gymnasium gallery, were starting to bring a few more people into the museum, which didn't really have a lot of people in. It was more attention to what was going on in Berwick.

**I: At that time, obviously we're talking a North East, Northern Arts context, were you aware at that time working, what you were doing here, that there was any other of this sort of thing, contemporary art in heritage sites happening anywhere else? Or you were just so focused on the north and we were doing here anyway?**

R: I was focused. I had four children, basically holding down a job. I don't think I visited much elsewhere. Because I had then a craft specialism, I think I was on the Crafts Council, one of the committees so I might go down to that or I'd go down to something. I read a lot, all the magazines. But going to see stuff, no, I wasn't that conscious. Actually, setting up the Berwick Gymnasium as a fellowship rather than a residency and calling it a fellowship, what we wanted with that was for artists to take it seriously, nationally known artists to take it seriously, which they did

because it offered them time and space in response to this strange beast on the edge of...

**I: Whereas the idea of a residency sounded, at that time, a bit more...?**

R: Residency always had the local artist connotation of working with the community in a... yes, more community focused than focusing on the artistic practice, whereas the fellowship was definitely set up to focus on artistic practice but in response to a context. So I suppose for me, it was the first time that I saw how an artist could respond to something like that. I don't think I was probably conscious of it before, to be honest.

**I: Let's talk a bit about, because I'm quite interested in this craft specialism and obviously 'Living at Belsay' was a craft, you said, "We would furnish this empty house." My impression of the Berwick Gymnasium fellowships is that that's quite fine-arty.**

R: It is. It's definitely fine art. [VAO1] was definitely a fine art [s.l. grant 00:40:37].

**I: So I'm interested in that and obviously then as Arts&Heritage and the work that [A&HO] has done at Belsay is developed, it's been a merger of design, fashion, architecture, fine art. I'm quite interested, from your point of view because you came with this interest in craft, about different approaches in terms of responding artists, in a broad sense, responding to a heritage site, is there a difference or a special way, differences to be drawn between how craft makers might respond and how somebody who is a more fine-artist type person might respond?**

R: I ran a craft gallery for ten years, which is where my craft knowledge and specialism, and in the days when people didn't do it, so it was quite pioneering. Then I went into the Garden Festival as a craft, it sounds awful, expert but knowing a bit about it. I suppose Northern Arts, because that's where my background was, wanted a craft big thing to compliment Viola and whatever. That's where 'Living at Belsay' came in. Also, it was an empty house. It was just ideal for furnishing in some way. With 'Living at Belsay' what we did was we borrowed a lot of works but there were several that were commissioned in response to the house and its previous occupants. Without looking at the catalogue, I can't remember. There was a John Mills (unclear 00:42:20), there was a Tim Stead table, there was... I can't remember her name who made the three-piece suite. They took the context of the house and where they were commissioned, they responded to the house.

The other things we had to borrow from existing works that we knew people had. Looking back, it was a bit of a mismatch but we pulled it together in a very, very short space of time.

**I: Was that the first time that Belsay House had been used in that way and the garden bit?**

R: Yes, definitely had. That presented challenges because I can remember going to a meeting. We were given [B], who was a curator, to sit on our selection panel and [Name of head of design], who was head of design, dean of design at Northumbria University and (unclear 00:43:28), so there were four of us, [A&HO], me, [Name of head of design] and [B]. [A&HO] and I would present things to them and we would decide what was going on. But having [B] there meant that we could have a discussion about what we could and couldn't do in the property. We wanted to hang things on the walls because you just do, you need to make it look a bit more homely. I can remember a discussion going round and I said, "Well what are those rails up? Are they picture rails?" and [they] said, "They would hang tapestries on there." I said, "What sort of weight would those be?" [They] said, "Quite heavy." I said, "Can we find out if we can hang things from those rails?" So off [B] goes and yes, we could so we did. The library had shelves. We were allowed to place things on shelves.

So we got around the constraints that English Heritage had. They are quite constraining, even though [A&HO] managed to get round them even more since. We got round them. So that's really how we did it. Then we decided we had to auction stuff off at the end.

**I: Did that work as a strategy? Was there public interest in that?**

R: Not enough. It was before its time. It would work now but no. We did sell quite a lot but we didn't sell quite a lot. Then we had some of the artists who commissioned or loaned works because, if you know how an auction works, the hammer comes down even if they're not sold, thinking they've sold the work because they were there in the orders and they haven't sold it so they were a bit upset. But we got an auctioneer in to do it.

**I: I think there's a bit in the catalogue, isn't there, about that process?**

R: Yes.

**I: Well maybe drawing up the two parts of the conversation we've had so far, so we've talked about the present day and what Arts&Heritage is doing and then we've gone back to the 1990s. What do you think has changed or hasn't changed between these early projects in '96 and what's happening now in 2018 in terms of this contemporary art and heritage field?**

R: I think a lot has changed. I think people realise that it's an interesting way to engage people in art that wouldn't necessarily go into art galleries.

**I: Who has realised that?**

R: I think curators. I think artists as well. (unclear 00:46:21) into a major art gallery, it's very, very difficult for an artist to show work in a major gallery. So I think people have realised it offers more opportunities. I think for some artists it represents a really interesting context to make new work rather than just making new work that is developing their practice in a certain way because they have to respond to a story or a narrative or a context or people, which maybe, if they're just making

work for a gallery exhibition, they don't have to. I think some artists really like that. Some just don't get it and we find that when we're selecting. They still just see it as a vehicle for showing their work, whereas the really good artists actually take that context and really drill down some aspect of it and make something interesting and exciting. So I think one is more places to show work. I think National Trust needs to tell their stories in different ways, needs to develop their audience in different ways. I think they have moved from being an agency that was homogenous.

I think Helen Ghosh shifted things into each property being more self-reliant and responsible and different so that there's a member, every property is different rather than just going to a nice place to have a scone and a cup of tea and a walk round the garden and see some paintings and a nice house or whatever it's got to show. So I think they've understood that each property is special and how to bring out that uniqueness. Sometimes an artist does that. Not always but sometimes they can. So I think they've seen that. I think the museums we're working with have really understood that they can tell their stories, they can bring their stories alive in a different way. Small museums tend to be a bit static. This is not a criticism at all because they're completely understaffed, under-resourced, everything but one in particular we work with, he suddenly said, "It's bringing the story of what we're about alive so people can understand what it might have been like then." That's just through an artist doing work. You think, "Well yes, I think it is. I think people are seeing other things." Sometimes I think it's really slow and I think, "Why aren't they quicker at grasping this?" but I think it's resources actually that it isn't.

But also it's beginning in curatorial courses I think, people are starting to talk about it. [Name], who I think is still at Lincoln, well actually [they] approached us and [they] said, "Where is the textbook about this area of practice?" I said, "What do you mean textbook?" "How to do it," I said, "There isn't one." [They] said, "We need to have one. I need to introduce my curatorial students to this is an area of practice that's interesting."

**I: To your knowledge, has there been a textbook about that?**

R: No. The trouble about the textbook... well we did, we started talking to the University of Newcastle about this but it was going to become in a way I think too focused on academic research rather than a how to do it. So we thought we can do some how to do it stuff on our website, which we tend to do. It's more practical this is how you do it.

**I: Best practice sort of thing.**

R: We need to update those but yes, that's there.

**I: Just thinking about the scope, you did it in the original audit and I think it's come out very strongly in what we've done, now we've got a similar database, Excel spreadsheet with about 500 projects so far. Since those early ones in the early '90s, it's rocketed in terms of the activity. I don't know about the scope, whether it's a more... well it obviously is. Now it's got a**

**strategic support organisation to support its area of practice, it's got best practice, it's got case studies and track records and those sorts of things, which it didn't have before. So the shape of that practice has changed.**

R: Thinking back to doing that audit, we were filling things in that we remembered but you couldn't always find anybody that was involved with it so it's quite different historically if there isn't any documentation on it. So we (unclear 00:51:52) Bill Viola because it was actually seminal. For me, seeing that piece, it just opened my eyes to what you could do in a big historic building. I mean I can still see it now. Then Anish Kapoor, do you remember that?

I: **In the empty BALTIC, which then was a heritage building really, wasn't it? It was an industrial heritage building.**

R: So going to see those, they are still lodged in my head. I can still see them. Thinking that if they had that sort of impact on me, and I see an awful lot of art, they must have impacted on other people as well. So we put those in because we felt that they were real markers. They were very North East based because that's what our knowledge was. So as we got nearer to the time we were doing that audit, clearly we were able to contact people and talk to them.

I: **You can Google things and things are online which those older things aren't, like the project you mentioned (unclear 00:52:57).**

R: But having said that, I think they were ground-breaking. I'm not sure there was much, I don't know.

I: **I mean apart from these early ground-breaking 1996 projects...**

R: There were things like Art Trans Pennine. When was that?

I: **Later on was it?**

R: Was it later on?

I: **I'm not sure. I'll find out.**

R: I can't remember. Because that did specific, because I remember going and seeing Alison Wilding in a church, that definitely was actually context specific works. Then there was Anya Gallaccio in Hull in the water, the pillar that Locus did. Locus did actually and now...

I: **Now they're doing Anya Gallaccio at Lindisfarne.**

R: They are but they did Elizabeth Wright in the Metro. So they do a lot of commissions. They were context specific really, probably before their time. That was projects, what were they called? Projects UK before Locus+ and before that they were called something else.

**I: The Basement Group.**

R: But I don't think they were doing so much stuff with Basement Group. I think it was when they started Projects UK and then when they became Locus because Locus [s.l. are about sight 00:54:40].

**I: Are there any other, in terms of thinking about that audit in terms of other major real milestone projects, apart from ones we've already talked about, that come out of that research or your knowledge more recently of things you've seen, any kind of...?**

R: Well the milestone things I think are largely where somebody has taken a risk. Take Compton Verney with 'The Clearing'. We were involved with Compton Verney, helping them write the art strategy bit of their HLF bid and then in selecting the artists for 'The Clearing'. They could have gone down the route of something much more normal. It is extraordinary. I think it's worked really well for them. So I think it's where people are prepared to take a risk. It's a calculated risk, it's not a completely off the wall risk. Suddenly it becomes exciting, I think. I think if things are too tame, blend in too well then nobody really pays a huge amount of attention. So Bill Viola again in Bishop Auckland Council, I thought it was better than it was in St Paul's, absolutely stunning, the 'Martyrs'. I think it's risk actually because another thing that I think was really, there was the Michael Landy 'Saints Alive' in the National Gallery. Now that was a very risky thing for the National Gallery to do.

**I: I don't know that one. What...?**

R: He did these sculptural works taken from... they were weird but they were taken from old masters. So you would get St Sebastian, is he the arrow one? So you would have this thing and then it would just... they are just extraordinary. You go into National Gallery and it's full of - well I've just been last weekend - fabulous paintings and things and then suddenly you've got this jarring weird sculpture. But it's so obviously linked to the paintings, it all made sense. But that was a residency that he had there. I think there have been others, the V&A has done some residencies that are quite... they're being prepared. I think where people are prepared to take risks are where things are temporary. I think that's really important.

**I: There is obviously another strand of commissioning of permanent which means it's not really what we're talking about.**

R: I think you should because I think it's a very different commissioning head you have on. I mean you'll know from Commissioners North. Because it's going to be permanent there you've got to be more sensitive I think to the whole community of people who are going to experience this. Whereas if something is temporary, and actually, this is an argument we use with heritage organisations, that if they don't like it, it's going to go away. Actually just provoking a reaction is really good because then people start talking about things. So I think temporary is really important in this because I think otherwise it becomes a bit dumbed down.

- I: Before when I was asking about whether there was any distinction or difference between somebody coming from a craft approach to this or somebody coming from a fine art approach, is there any difference in terms of those in these venues or this context, the idea that you've got the National Gallery, which is a historic art museum, you've got an empty house like Belsay or you've got Durham Cathedral. Obviously they are really different places.**
- R: I'm going to say something about crafts people which is terrible of me to actually pigeonhole them as well, but we've had some experience where we've put forward people who are really very well known in the craft field. A lot of them don't respond to a site in the same way as a fine artist does, which is quite interesting.
- I: In what way? What's the difference?**
- R: They're more focused I think on their practice of making whereas a fine artist tends to, certainly in this sort of context, thinks of the idea and how they will realise the idea. So what is driving it is the context and the stories and the narratives and yes, their practice may be, I don't know, use a lot of film or glass or whatever in it but it's the idea that drives what happens. Whereas I think a lot of the more established makers, for want of a better word, they think it's an opportunity to make more of what they make. We've found that a few times where we've put people forward. Now, this works in some ways. Was it Blenheim Palace with Kate Malone? They did an Ai Weiwei, which I went to see and that was a risk. It must have cost a huge amount of money. That worked. I didn't go and see the Kate Malone but I imagine it was much more... I mean her pots are big and sculptural and they probably would look fantastic but I don't think they would have interrupted your sensibility in the same way as an installation from a fine artist would.
- I: What about somebody else, just thinking about Belsay again, obviously there have been makers, there have been fine artists but there's also been designers of various different kinds, where do they fit into that? Do they have a different...?**
- R: Well I think what [A&HO] did with the subsequent Belsay ones, which had a focus on fashion designers or architecture or whatever, is give them the opportunity to respond to the house. Some of the responses I think worked and some didn't, in fairness, in each of them. Some of the responses I think were better than others. I think where it really works is where an artist is prepared to actually push their practice in response to the opportunity rather than just see it as an opportunity to show their work. I'm being very cruel to artists and I don't mean to be.
- I: No. I mean it's difficult to pigeonhole and make these definitions and lines between but just trying to think about the shape of it, it's quite interesting to think if there are any variations.**
- R: Sometimes with a project, we see it as necessarily architectural and that's quite interesting because architects, especially the smaller practices, and sometimes even the bigger ones, really like a chance to play. I would say for them it's play



because I don't think in realising, certainly in a lot of things we do, that they will probably be remunerated in the same ways they would be if they were building some sort of extension building or whatever. But it gives them a chance to experiment with their design ideals and materials. I can think of one who nearly got a commission that we were involved with and I can remember him saying, "I'm not going to make any money out of this but it's just, with that material being able to experiment how far I can take it and make it do something which I couldn't do if I was building something for a client."

So I think it tends to be the smaller practices rather than the really big commercial ones that actually see it as an opportunity to do something more playful. I think they enjoy that. I think [A&HO] with the fashion designers, again, I can't imagine Stella McCartney needed whatever she was paid. I don't really think she did but I think it was just like that's a bit quirky, that's a bit unusual. Sometimes we get people involved in that way. It's not necessarily the money. It's the persuasion that we're giving them a really special context in which to work. We've advised National Trust Standen on their winter tree for three years running. The first year Zandra Rhodes, well she didn't need the money either but she did it because it was interesting and unusual. [A&HO] had worked with her before. She knew [A&HO] was okay to work with and did it. Then Kaffe Fassett the second year, we went to see him and said, "How about it?" "Well why not?" So there is a difference between those where it doesn't matter about the pocket.

**I: It's a career stage type of thing.**

R: Where it's just doing something different and extraordinary that fires up their artist creative juices or it's somebody who wants to develop their practice in a different way and wants to be seen in a different context. Sorry, I'm thinking aloud.

**I: No, it's great. Well I'm thinking we've been talking for about an hour and I probably could ask you other things but I think there may be other opportunities to come back to some of these other things so I'll just ask you now if there's anything else you wanted to say that we haven't...**

R: No. Sorry, I should have been more in a timeline.

**I: No, it's good because it's good to make those over times and those comparisons and try and draw out some other things in terms of the mapping thing we're doing. We're trying to think of not just where things happen but what are these differences or what is this field in terms of... but we can come back to that.**

R: It's interesting because I think we're particularly strong up here because there are things like Folkestone Triennial, which is context specific but it tends to be driven by theme. I'm not saying that's wrong but there is a theme to each triennial and the artists respond to that.

**I: Is that (unclear 01:07:16) thematic, don't they, or they try to?**

- R: I think sometimes it works. I think it's actually really difficult and I think it was difficult when [A&HO] was doing the Belsay ones, the big group shows, getting it to hang together, it's a really difficult thing to do.
- I: **Maybe that's a difference as well, we've got big group shows and we've got more or less individual commissions, haven't we, and things in between.**
- R: Even we're working at Fountains at the moment, three different commissions. It's really difficult, and I'll wait and see when I go and see it, but how they hang together.
- I: **Actually, we've inadvertently created that in a micro way in our project by having two artworks at Gibside responding to a very specific brief, which has just come about through the project. We didn't necessarily plan it that way. Okay, I'm sure we could go on for another hour.**
- R: I think that's a challenge everywhere because I think where you've got one artist responding it's much easier for something to be cohesive than two or a group of artists because inevitably, you've got different ideas.
- I: **I went to see the Karen Guthrie piece in Cumbria, it's called Acorn Bank which obviously is a very small site. That was one art and that came out more a residency type model. So there were two works, obviously a more major piece and then a more residency installation, which was quite interesting, very different to even going to somewhere like Craggside and going round the site finding things.**
- R: Was it Lux?
- I: **Yes, Lux or some of the odd ones. Okay, let's stop there, [R]. I'm sure there's loads more that we could...**

**[End of Recording]**