

**How should  
heritage  
decisions  
be made?**

**Increasing  
participation  
from where  
you are**

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The 'How should decisions about heritage be made?' project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Connected Communities programme.



## Introduction

**Heritage is about what we value: places, buildings, objects, memories, cultures, skills or ways of life. So why can it be so hard to get actively involved in heritage decision-making?**

**Heritage becomes defined when decisions are made: what to preserve, what to show, what to think of as worth celebrating and sharing. In our research project we explored how such decisions could be opened up to greater participation.**

### A Participatory Research Project

The 'How should heritage decisions be made?' project formally began when fourteen of us gathered at Bede's World in Jarrow in March 2013. We were brought together by an innovative pilot scheme developed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Connected Communities programme. The 'Co-design and Co-creation Development Awards' scheme sought not only to enable collaborative research between researchers, policy makers, practitioners and community groups but to actively enable the collaborative development of a research agenda from its earliest stages.

While we all had a shared interest in heritage and decision-making, the team was formed deliberately to draw into dialogue people from different backgrounds, positions and approaches. As you will see by how we describe ourselves, we are all situated quite differently in relationship to heritage and its decision-making processes. Some of us are leaders and shapers of policy, organisations or thinking; others of us are practitioners hoping to do good work within structures we don't control; others of us are university-based researchers seeking to find connections between thinking and doing; some of us are activists for our own histories and heritage. Many of us fall into more than one of these categories. The aim was to use our collective experiences, perspectives and positions to create a research project which might explore how to increase participation in heritage decision-making.

### 'Participation'?

The word 'participation' is everywhere in museums and heritage. Shifts in legislation, such as the Localism Act (2011), are just formal articulations of longer trends towards seeing individual people and groups – once imagined as an undifferentiated 'the public' – as active players in shaping their culture and places.

While the word 'participation' may often be evoked, there are a number of specific challenges we've sought to engage through our research:

**What participation is:** The meaning of 'participation' is often opaque and is often used far too loosely to describe attendance at events, volunteering or consultation – we wanted to tie participation to the sharper and more specific idea of 'decision-making'.

**Where participation happens:** Participation is too often limited to a range of established practices (such as small display interventions) and to silos (for example, museum learning teams) – we wanted to think about participation systemically within whole organisations and places.

**How participation feels:** 'Participation' is often seen as hard, painful and characterized by conflict, owing to the inequalities and exclusions it seeks to breach – we wanted to draw out the human and social ways in which we can all feel more able to influence things that matter to us.

**The politics of participation:** Although celebrated in some quarters, 'participation' remains politically contested. Questions often asked are: Can direct public engagement, with decision-making, deal with complex information? Can participation be scaled to involve more than the 'usual suspects'? – we have sought to address criticisms of participation through articulating more fully our practices and through modelling alternatives.

### Political questions, practical pathways

In this project we've tried to tread useful and practical pathways through these persistent challenges – this booklet shares the collective know-how of the team. We worked together in two distinctive ways. Some of the insights shared in this booklet are derived from reflecting on innovative work already undertaken by practitioners in the research team, other insights have been generated by the research experiments conducted throughout the project. Our purpose is to show how participation in heritage decision-making can be increased from wherever you work or live and whatever your position – professional, researcher or someone who cares about your own culture and place.

# ACT

Our key ideas are:

**Act:** Make change from where you are

**Connect:** Cross boundaries and collaborate

**Reflect:** See your work through other people's eyes

**Situate:** Understand your work in context

These approaches are not meant to be seen in a linear way, nor as a simple cycle. They are more akin to different modes of being that could be taken up as and when needed: sometimes you can't see enough to situate your work without acting and seeing which walls you run into. And sometimes you can't connect without seeing your work through another person's eyes first.

### Our readers

In writing this booklet we've had an imagined reader in mind – you. You probably already care about participation in heritage and try lots of different things to make it happen. So this booklet is less about us disseminating research or telling you what we found. It is more an invitation to a conversation in the hope that we can ultimately

also learn from you as we develop these ideas in our own work and in future projects.

# REFLECT

# SITUATE

# CONNECT

# ACT

## Make change from where you are

### Don't wait for someone else to take responsibility, do-heritage-yourself.

Although many people have strong views on heritage, it often gets claimed by professionals 'on behalf of' the public, and then managed 'for everyone' and 'for future generations'. In a sense, the needs of the unknown future are privileged over those of the known present. Because of this heritage can often seem to be someone else's responsibility or, if you do want to take responsibility, it can seem as though you need to wait for people in decision-making positions to initiate, to validate or to give permission.

One thing many of the research team had in common was that they don't accept this reading of heritage for one minute. They make things happen; they don't take no for an answer, they work to stretch their institutions' expectations, they re-engineer organisational structures. Or, for those based outside organisations. They take decisions into their own hands and try to enable others to take decisions about things that matter to them.



#### Danny Callaghan, The Potteries Tile Trail

Action not words. Individuals and small groups of people can and do make a difference – sometimes a highly significant one. You really don't need permission to act in most situations. Frankly, if something matters to me I do something (usually practical) about it. Creativity and lateral thinking are powerful weapons in your battle. Your energy and passion are highly infectious - your actions may be socially contagious. You too can lead heritage decision-making in your area.



Crown Hotel, Longton (tile detail) and The Potteries Tile Trail Historypin channel [www.historypin.org/channels/view/id/43555/#!/photos/list/](http://www.historypin.org/channels/view/id/43555/#!/photos/list/)



#### Alex Hale, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland

Working with a diverse group of people within the team has enabled me to recognize how you can make little changes, 'tweaks' if you like, to your working practices. These are often through collaborative partnerships that will effect positive change to your work and could also engender greater changes from within the system that you work in. Taking colleagues 'along' is a vital part of this. Keeping others informed and telling them about the pitfalls and progress that you've made is a very important aspect of this working practice.



#### John Lawson, Storyteller, Loftus, Kathy Cremin, Hive and Mike Benson, Bede's World

'Freedom of self'... The phrase was used by a worker in the Tenement Museum in New York in describing how it felt to work there. We believe in this 'freedom of self' to be yourself within the museum workplace. Being all that you can be and bringing diversity and difference, are critical factors in how to shift democratic leadership/activism and realizing the north star of mission.

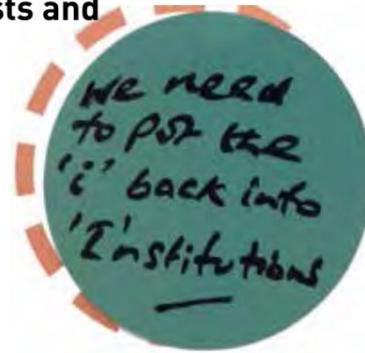


Everyone celebrates their heritage in their own way. Since 2013, over 230 musicians have performed in Bede's World, with monthly music nights bringing generations of performers together

# CONNECT **Cross boundaries and collaborate**

## **Find people who share your passions and interests – and create networks of decision makers, professionals, activists and communities.**

It's very easy to get into a 'them' and 'us' mentality. If you are outside, the boundaries of institutions and organisations are never easy to breach. It can feel like an anonymous 'they' make decisions on your behalf and a long way away from you. Indeed, this can also be felt when working inside organisations and sometimes hierarchy and structure can limit your horizons.



A DIY plaque from our Connected Communities Festival stall in July 2014

Our research has shown that these boundaries can be breached – and powerful connections can be forged. Actively seek out people who share your interests; let go a little of your own preconceptions; try to find common ground. We've thought of this as creating a 'coalition of the willing', 'humanizing decision makers' and as the "'I' in institution'.



### **Richard Brigham, York Past and Present**

We've found that networking works. There's like this magic path. You need to find one person and then they introduce you to their friends. There are two types of people in the council/organisations. The ones that want to work with people and want change; and those that don't. The key is find those that do want change and then they usually know other people who do too.

A photograph taken as part of pilot public documentation project – made possible by finding the beginning of a 'magic networking path' in York



### **Rachael Turner, Manchester Digital Laboratory**

Finding people who want to work with each other is not difficult. Finding people to work together across different sectors, from different points of view is an altogether harder proposition. It takes time to develop networks, and trust - especially with a large - and (by design) relatively disparate community, such as the one we have at MadLab. Our network encompasses city leaders, individuals in need from some of the most deprived areas in the UK, informal trade bodies, NGOs and community campaigners.

Language is key. Different communities naturally speak different languages. MadLab finds itself in a unique position as an arbiter, a connection point, between the arts, science and technology; and between communities/individuals and the resources they might need - be that a physical thing (a camera, a 3D printer), or access to an expert for advice. We can draw on our organisational resources to assist others. We can provide space, resources and tools to individuals to mobilise themselves more effectively.

Where is heritage in this? The answer is that it lives (or dies) on the same established (or nascent) networks.



### **Tim Boon, Science Museum**

I had a slow 'lightbulb moment' in the co-collecting project. In *Oramics to Electronica*, the previous collaborative electronic music project, I had stayed on the museum side of the museum-participant divide. There mine had been a role something like MC. In the co-collecting project by contrast I became much more of an equal in the group. Sure, I was still 'the man from the Museum', but the alchemy of the process enabled me to become co-music geek with the others. By the time John, Dave and Martin offered to organise the synth bingo session, a public event we devised, it really was, I think, a participation of people with equal input and status. The implications for curatorship could be profound.

# SYNTHESIZER BINGO!

Co-collecting Project  
Science Museum 'Lates'  
30th April 2014



The Synth Bingo logo designed by John Stanley



# SITUATE

Understand your work in context

**If you narrow your focus too much it's hard to see how change can happen. Seeing how people, ideas and resources connect and where disconnections happen can help you take action.**

Mapping heritage decision-making systemically proved a powerful methodology. If you can see how formal structures and informal networks fit together, then you can start to notice key people and key points for increasing participation in decision-making.

We used 'thinking systemically' as a research methodology. We also found this technique useful for reflecting on our own practice and activism and for planning action and connection.

### Thinking systemically

Systemic thinking offers a way of thinking about heritage not in isolation or fixed but as a dynamic process which is produced, and shaped, by people, ideas and things and the way they interact – and don't.

- Map processes
- Look for patterns
- Notice boundaries and disconnections



**John Lawson, Storyteller, Loftus, Kathy Cremin, Hive and Mike Benson, Bede's World**

We believe that folk engage with heritage every day probably, in truth, in spite of, and not because of, heritage professionals. If we use the metaphor of heritage as a river that flows every day then one choice is to contain the river and constrain its possibilities and box off opportunities. However, for us, it is the ecology that sustains the river, which is critical. The more streams that feed into the river, big or small – all carrying stories all playing their part in making the river flow – the better. Then the river, and its ecosystem flourishes and begins to sustain the places and spaces through which it flows.



**Lianne Bringham, York Past and Present**

Before it was like a 6ft wall with anti-climb paint on, whatever way we went it blocked you. It was only by meeting some key people that we could see a way around the wall. You've got to find a way beyond the 'them' and 'us'. We're all working for a common goal, so let's work together.



Bede's World staff and Italian partners celebrated the loan of the codex by serving an Italian meal to 100 of our volunteers and community partners. Heritage can sustain places.



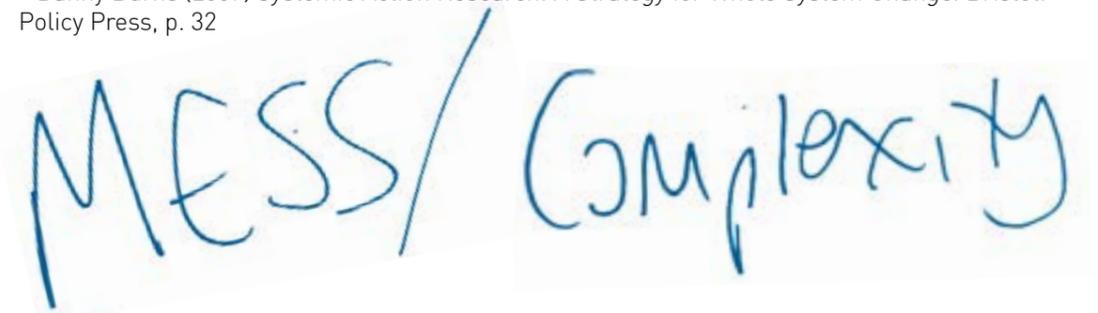
**Jenny Timothy, Conservation Team, Leicester City Council**

Working with Rebecca to reflect on one particular decision also gave me a great opportunity – through hearing about the perspectives of the other people involved – to see 'the other side' of the planning process. This is something I would recommend all local authority officers do, which would try and address the 'us' and 'them' attitude that has become so worryingly prevalent.

**Helen Graham, Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Leeds**

Taking inspiration from theories of complexity – and systems thinking – helped us design our research project. We were particularly inspired by Systemic Action Research pioneered by Professor Danny Burns in a development studies context. Danny Burns shows the importance of drawing on lots of different people's knowledge within a local system to develop a 'working picture' and to recognize that 'each situation is unique and its transformative potential lies in the relationships between interconnected people and organizations'.\*

\* Danny Burns (2007) *Systemic Action Research: A Strategy for Whole System Change*. Bristol: Policy Press, p. 32





## Research Journey

**Conversation and experimentation guided our research – we now carry with us lots of different voices in our heads shaping our practice.**



The project wasn't a conventional research project. Usually, a research funder will expect a team – led by an academic – to submit a pre-formed research question and they will decide whether to fund it or not. The money will usually go just to the academic team.

This project – under the auspices of the Connected Communities programme, which was set up to test new methods and approaches – challenged a number of conventional research practices. For example, we were funded to bring a diverse range of expertise together. This gave us the space to work out what would be the most useful questions to ask and the best ways to go about addressing them. It was also critical that the Arts and Humanities Research Council were prepared to recognise and remunerate the different kinds of expertise that were being contributed: the team of investigators included lots of people working outside universities.

**Martin Bashforth**, radical family historian and York's Alternative History  
Diversity was present in the Heritage Decisions group itself, opening up the potential for greater collective wisdom. After the first workshop in Jarrow, the event which for me most captured this quality was the workshop in Manchester, where we invited in an equal number and equally diverse range of 'critical others' to reflect and comment on our work up to that point. I continue to absorb and reflect on the intellectual impact of that workshop. Apart from that, the deepest influence has come from one-to-one discussions with team members, each of whom has helped me appreciate different viewpoints and perspectives in ways I could never have expected.

ARE WE ALL CHALLENGING THE SAME THING?  
DOES THAT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO THE PROJECT?

**Paul Manners**, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement  
Rebecca, one of the academics on the team, was talking about how the project had influenced her practice. She said: 'I'll never be able to approach a piece of work on this topic again without hearing Danny's voice in my head'. Danny is one of the 'community activists' recruited to the project. Prior to this project, neither he nor Rebecca had met – they worked on heritage in separate worlds. This project encouraged a wonderful form of 'social learning' – where different kinds of expertise and insight came together. This process is captured beautifully by the Russian psychologist, Vygotsky\* who talked about learning as a social process 'by which we grow into the intellectual life of those around us'. Not only did this mean we could think better collectively – but long term, these connections will continue to animate our practice and our ways of making sense of heritage: like it or not, each other's 'voices' will continue to echo in our imaginations and challenge our thinking – even when we're sat in splendid isolation, working back in our own heritage 'worlds'.

\*L.S Vygotsky (1978) *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, p.88



The research team mapping out early thinking about key ideas of the research

## Research design

**Phase 1:**  
Work together to  
develop questions and  
a methodology

**Phase 2:**  
Submit Research  
Proposal to  
AHRC Connected  
Communities

Testing our  
research plan: MadLab  
workshop

Bede's  
World

Discovering the  
Clyde/RCAHMS

College Court/  
Leicester

The Potteries  
Tile Trail

Science Museum:  
Co-Collecting

York: Living  
with History

Testing emerging ideas:  
Heritage Lottery Fund  
workshop

Writing up the project

# Testing Our Research Plan: MadLab Workshop

Before we entered our research phase we wanted to test our ideas with other people – our interactions really helped us to see some of the blindspots in our plan, refine our thinking and adjust our approaches.

We tested our research plan through hosting a workshop in Manchester Digital Laboratory in October 2013 and, via an open call, invited others to join us. The workshop was based around a huge piece of paper and we worked with an illustrator to help us visualise heritage decision-making systemically.

Through the image is the 'living stream', as imagined by Kathy Cremin, Mike Benson and John Lawson: 'Heritage is a living stream that can sustain the places and spaces through which it flows'.

We began with the apparently 'simple' decision-making process of a building being Listed. Then – through a stepped process – we worked together to unpack this 'simple' decision-making process and spun out from there the complexities and issues. The drawing became a shared point of connection as we went off in different directions to carry out our research.

Is heritage special and unique? Or everyday and part of the fabric of our lives? How you think about heritage enables, or otherwise, participation in decision-making.



We discussed the difficulties of understanding the processes of heritage decision-making.

We noticed challenges of working together across boundaries – which is true for both heritage decision-making and, at times, for our research team.

We came to a sense that the system – and possibility the idea of 'posterity' – is dysfunctional; the Stewardship Ship has someone being sick over the side.



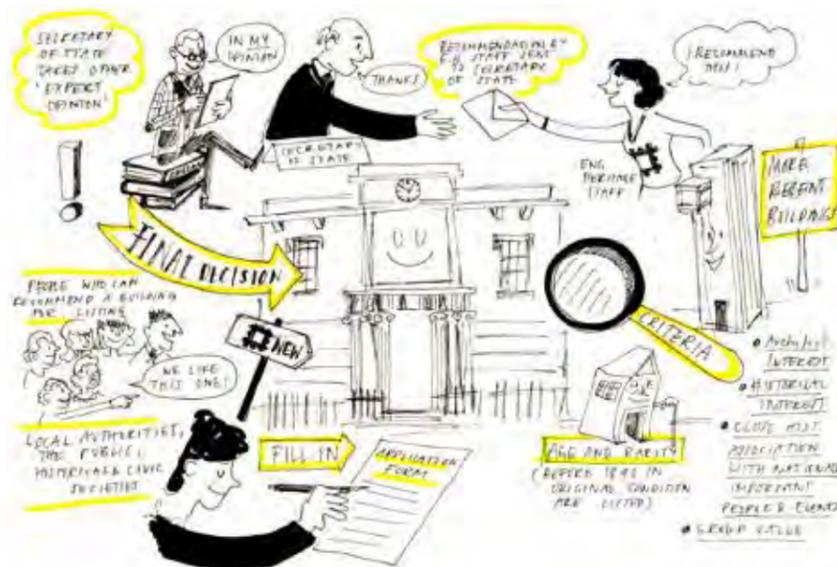
The reactions to our research design from people at the MadLab meeting helped us to deepen and nuance our interests. Two academics, Gareth Hoskins and Susan Ashley, reflected on the workshop via our project blog:

**Gareth Hoskins, Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University.**

Looking back on the workshop last week one of the main things to strike me is whether the heritage system we have right now might be better described as 'dysfunctional' rather than 'deficient'. Notions of blocking points or sticking points used to frame the workshop's remit tend to carry with them negative connotations and assume that our efforts should be in trying to 'free up' or 'streamline' heritage decision-making. This makes sense only if you buy into the idea that heritage is inherently good (egalitarian, consensus-driven, democratic) and that more of it would be better. If you hold a more critical view that heritage is something that reflects and perpetuates powerful interests in all sorts of subtle and not so subtle ways then it would make sense to conceive of sticking points as useful, progressive, even emancipatory.

**Susan Ashley, Arts, Northumbria University**

The act of making a decision suggests a frame of mind, an outlook, an episteme that emphasizes and values closure. I am forever writing papers with titles like 'ideas on...' or 'examining...' that offer little closure. This must be maddening for some seeking more scientific conclusions, and certainly the antithesis of the aims of a workshop on decision-making. Which makes me wonder whether we should stress making 'decisions' or whether to emphasize building 'webs' or 'ecologies' (e.g. Capra, 2002)? I know this sounds so idealistic, and I suppose it is. But this scenario might take us away from list-making towards processes of knowledge-building like community mapping, academic research and amateur research. This would emphasize the benefits of ground-up programmes like Heritage Lottery, or consciousness-raising through curricula, or even TV shows like Time Team more so than designations by the Secretary of State and English Heritage.



The sketch with which we started the workshop. We slowly spun out the complexities of heritage and decision making from there.

**Helen Graham, Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Leeds**

We had a really good debate about this at the time on the blog. Both Gareth and Susan's comments helped develop the way in which we then started to use concepts of 'blocks' and 'sticking points'. Rather than see 'sticking points' as repressive, I was reminded of Michel Foucault's idea that power is productive\*. In this light, thinking of something as heritage is itself a sticking point; it can change your orientation towards it. Heritage is a process which seeks to say 'this is important' but through this threatens to take the object or practice out of life somehow. In this way, Gareth and Susan helped me see how crucial it was to consciously hold together the paradox of heritage in our research practice – the very processes which enable something to become seen as special have tended to make active engagement in its management a democratic challenge.

Susan steers us away from decision-making and towards 'webs' and 'ecologies' which – along with the systems thinking we used in the MadLab workshop itself – allowed us to diagnose and articulate tactical paths forward; those of Act, Connect, Reflect and Situate we've shared in this booklet. In the end, we did find 'decision-making' useful because coming to think of something as heritage often does involve a moment of procedure, law, policy, professional management or public political appeal. 'Decision-making' also gave a hard edge to other terms often used such as 'advice' and 'consultation'. It also gave space for some completely alternative ways of imagining decision-making as localised and distributed, such as used in Bede's World or in DIY cultures. However, the crucial shift Gareth and Susan helped us make is that it isn't that the 'sticking point' can be unstuck, but that the democratic impulse of heritage lives through constant living, action, questioning and contesting.

\*Michel Foucault (1978) *History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. London: Pantheon Books: 94.



Are 'blocks' always bad?

The Scriberia image develops



## Heritage as a living stream:

### Distributed decision-making and leadership at Bede's World

**John Lawson**, Storyteller, Loftus, **Kathy Cremin**, Hive and **Mike Benson**, Bede's World

**Decision-making can be distributed across a museum. Instead of hierarchy, leadership can be passed between communities, volunteers and staff. This shifting, dynamic and shared approach to decision-making is enabled in Bede's World by thinking of heritage as abundant and constantly renewed. Sharing your own knowledge, memories and cultures enables all of us to have 'freedom of self' and be active agents in our own lives. The image of a living stream helps us see how heritage is a means of sustaining the places in which we live. But, for this to be possible, both conceptualizations of heritage and organizational structures need to be re-engineered.**

The three of us separately came into this sector as heritage activists. What we shared in common was a belief that heritage is part of everyday life, flowing through individuals, families, communities, workplaces. We also shared a deep-rooted desire that anyone's heritage, including our own, would be seen, heard and celebrated, and a fierce belief that by maximizing the power of objects through activism and storytelling, different objects could sing and tell their stories in different voices to different people.



#### Designing our research

Two key contributions in our research journey came at our first Phase 1 Co-Design workshop hosted by Bede's World. The first was a presentation on their ways of working developed at Ryedale Folk Museum and at Bede's World by Mike Benson, Kathy Cremin and John Lawson. The second was a workshop on how decisions about planning are made by Jenny Timothy, then Senior Conservation Officer at Leicester City Council. Both challenged – quite fundamentally and in productively different ways – how we thought about heritage and decision-making.

#### Ecologies of heritage:

##### Heritage activism, abundance and mapping levers for change

John Lawson's experiences as an accomplished volunteer have been a constant warning against what he calls 'the ceiling of mediocrity in museums', that lack of ambition and willing that too often starts with

what can't be done. This even when faced with the resources of a volunteer such as John bringing his expertise and love, his 10,000 hours of graft telling stories, making films, running projects with hundreds of young people, writing blogs and tirelessly campaigning for his heritage to be seen, to be heard and to be celebrated. Why would any museum close its doors to that abundance? We don't know, but it happens often.

Our shared learning and reflections have shaped a practice that strives to understand in a systematic way the ecology of heritage – looking holistically for connections, seeing the value of relationships, constantly learning and adapting what works, listening to different voices, bringing in different partners, being ambitious and optimistic that our sector can be different and better. Seeing the big picture and looking at who has the power, where are the levers that can shift gears and create changes and developing a practice that changes relationships, changes values, and nurtures new ways of working.

Central to our approach is the realisation that an abundance of knowledge, skills, passion and expertise about heritage lie outside our organisation, and that seeking to connect inside and out, to remove the barriers, can create a museum that is a social space, a shared space of individual and collective purpose, where anyone can bring their talents and skills. By working in this way, we have come to understand how effective the social space can be in making our museum relevant, loved, and well-used.

John Lawson runs a blog exploring the history of Loftus and Cleveland <http://ironawecleveland.blogspot.co.uk/>



**Talking *with* people not *about* people:**  
Re-engineering the system

As a museums and heritage sector when we talk about participation, engagement and democratising decision-making, we tend to use language to talk *about* people rather than *with* people. All too often this clutter of museum constructs remains un-examined and distorts our conversations so that the museum cannot even hear. Looking with these eyes we might more easily speak of hard-to-reach institutions than hard-to-reach audiences. Within the heritage sector, if we're serious about democratising decision-making, if we're serious about participation, then it's not a question of contorting the constructs that already exist. It's about re-imagining and re-engineering the system to make the whole purpose of museums more democratic, more responsive, and crucially, fit to survive in the future as an essential part of life.



**Helen Graham, Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Leeds**  
We'd all just met. We found ourselves as a brand new team meeting for the first time at Bede's World – waiting to hear about our host's work. As soon as the idea for 'How should decisions about heritage be made?' was hatched, I knew I wanted Mike, Kathy and John to be part of the research team. I had heard so many things about their inspiring world at Ryedale Folk Museum and then at Bede's World. To begin their presentation, Mike puts on commentary of a European Cup semi-final Middlesbrough v. Bucharest. At this point in the game, Mike says, Middlesbrough is two goals down. To go through to the final – to be held at Eindhoven – they had to score four. Mike starts mouthing along to the commentary. It's tense. Everyone is watching Mike. Then – suddenly – three goals are scored in quick succession. Then a final goal is scored. Middlesbrough has won the game! The commentator – and Mike – go crazy. The commentator says – and Mike joins in – 'Eindhoven, Eindhoven, born out of the Eston hills, forged through the foundries of Teeside, the infant Hercules, are marching all the way. It's party, party, party everybody back my house for a parmo'. Culture and heritage aren't owned by museums. Heritage doesn't need to be managed and defined by professions on other people's behalf. Kathy and John then take over with illustrations describing how they work.



**'With' not 'about'**  
These are films made by John Lawson and Mike Benson over the years. They were made with young people researching, writing and making the films.



**Re-engineering the system:** John Lawson, Kathy Cremin and Mike Benson see museums as part of a wider ecology. Through taking this perspective, levers for change can be identified and used.

### Freedom of self:

Decisions by the right person at the right time

If a north star of the mission and principles guide the museum, this will be seen across that museum in the behaviours and conversations. This social museum will pioneer decision-making that turns the triangle of hierarchical decision-making on its head, with a mission and governance informed by users and beneficiaries of the organisation's work.

Our north star mission is that which nourishes the roots of a social space for heritage, that values the expertise and knowledge of different people and that – like an spinning atom - enables leadership to shift and change according to need will be a museum where linear hierarchies are redundant. In this model decisions are made by the right person, at the right time, in the right place.

### Museums as social spaces:

'Feltness', diversity and divergence

Some say it looks messy; it's not. It takes real discipline and graft to create a space where leadership be passed through a collective community. To change heritage decision-making in our museum it is freedom of self, shared belief in the work, a collaborative culture and focus on solutions that create movement from imagined task to realised actions at any level from volunteer to apprentice to trustee. When a social space functions powerfully, people feel it. It is this 'feltness' that drives the living of values and the actions that uphold them. A park is a social space where anyone from an isolated individual to a family can encounter, play, experiment, confront. That space is not created by demographic segmenting and targeting. It is a divergent space where people find their own way. Likewise, by its very divergence and diversity the museum as social space becomes a point of convergence and true community resourcefulness.

### Nourishing the heritage ecosystem, not containing it:

Unleashing resources and potential

We have come to see the need for change not only in our own museum, but also in the sector. With every bit of work we create, we work to make that shift structural and scalable through thinking, storytelling and everyone being able to both lead and follow. At Bede's World are re-aligning our core business so that it is human-sized, human-shaped; a people-focused place that humanises decision-making and unleashes objects and museum resources to power our community.

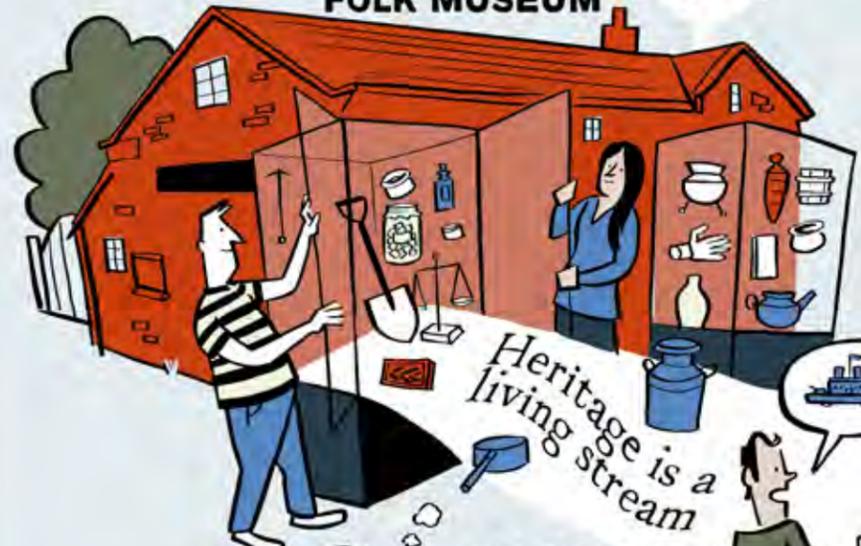
**Museums as social spaces.** Banners of the North – a collaboration between Bede's World and the British Museum – was opened by a procession bringing together South Shields Miners banners for the first time, resulting in a long term project around mining heritage and archives.



50% of Bede's World staff are under 25, and come through routes such as apprenticeship, in January we close to the public for a month so teams can work together on our mission and values and develop their business plans.

**RYEDALE 2007**  
FOLK MUSEUM

Creating a space for  
**HERITAGE ACTIVISM**



Heritage is a living stream

**A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT THE MUSEUM**



Letting people talk about their own heritage in their own voice



Growing revenues and engagement...

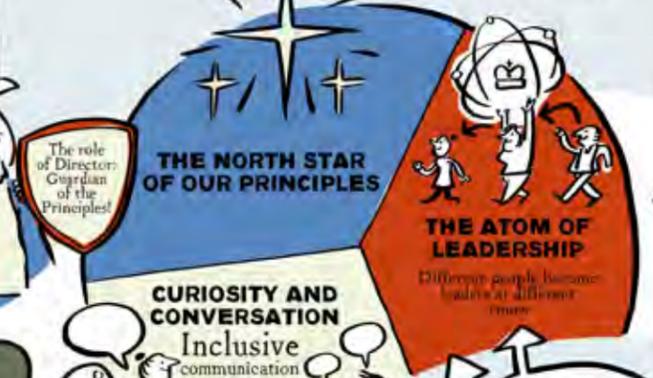
we were supported by **voices in unison!**



EXTERNAL RESEARCHER:  
"as much of a social experiment as a museum - it's great!"



**2010**



The role of Director: Guardian of the Principles!

**CURIOSITY AND CONVERSATION**  
Inclusive communication

**THE ATOM OF LEADERSHIP**  
Different people become leaders at different times

we created an alternative board: **THE THINKING TEAM**



MESSY!  
CHAOTIC!  
ANARCHIC!

Backlash from the trustees



**PLANTING THE SEEDS OF HERITAGE ACTIVISM**

**BEDE'S WORLD MUSEUM:**  
Proving our model in a radically different environment.



We identified **3 KEY LEARNINGS**



**NOURISHING THE ROOTS and CREATING A COOPERATIVE SPACE**

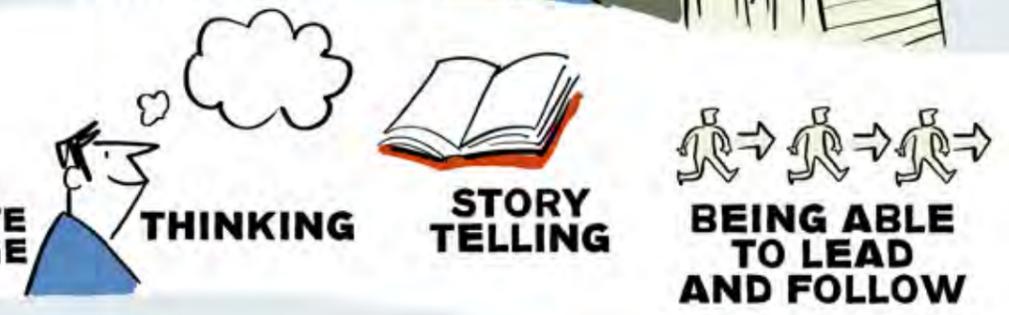
We don't want to be an **institution...**

...we want to be an **ORGANISATION**



**TO CELEBRATE OUR HERITAGE**

Our model is based on **3 SCALABLE PRINCIPLES:**



**2011**

As part of the research project John Lawson, Kathy Cremin and Mike Benson reflected on how their approaches had developed since they first started to work together at Ryedale Folk Museum.



## College Court: Processes and Rules versus Intuition and Interaction

**Jenny Timothy**, Conservation Team, Leicester City Council and  
**Rebecca Madgin**, Urban Studies, University of Glasgow

**The significance of a Listed building is often imagined as a stable and fixed part of the planning process. However in College Court the collaboration between a Conservation Officer and a team of architects and developers saw the building’s meaning become more and more explicit through the process of working together. Social and emotional dynamics underpinned an iterative negotiation, in place of rules or any simple moment of ‘decision’.**

‘They did all the stuff that you need to do for your application, so the statement of significance and the justification and what was happening (yet the building’s significance) never felt like it was explicit, it kind of seemed to grow as you went along; and it wasn’t actually until it was kind of all finished and we were stood there that people actually then started to explicitly say, actually this is really important, it’s a really beautiful piece of architecture, it’s a really nice building. But all the way along you could feel people’s attachment to the building growing, and the understanding of the significance of the building growing; and by turn, how much they cared about it kind of growing’.

Our past is governed by numerous rules acts of parliament, policies, local and national. There has been a system put in place to manage them, the planning system. But these rules and regulations are not an end in themselves, rather they have been formulated to protect things that we, as a society, consider important. But this system is often vilified and in recent years has undergone attempts to streamline and improve it through new rules and regulations.



**Tim Boon**, Science Museum

I knew ‘heritage decisions’ was going to move me onto new territory from the very first in our Phase 1 Co-design workshop at Bede’s World because of a very telling ‘worked example’. Jenny Timothy took us through the sequence of events and actions in a local authority decision-making process on whether to allow the demolition of a 19th century brewery. I started ambivalent about the buildings, but the more Jenny took us through the stages, the more I was carried along by the case for preservation. When it came to the reveal at the end – that the buildings were allowed to be demolished, I felt both disappointed and a little foolish. I saw the way that emotions that are evoked in a kind of heritage decision-making in an area far different from my own field of action. I felt conflict where I had not expected to. How rich, and complex, it was clear, are the mixtures of reason and sentiment when we are at the hinge points of deciding what from the past should be available to our successors in the future. The implications were all the stronger because of what I had felt, rather than because of what I had reasoned.

College Court in Leicester is a Grade II listed building designed by renowned architects Sir Leslie Martin and Trevor Dannatt in the 1960s. The building has recently been converted into a conference centre. It is successful, if you measure success by awards, business and Trip Advisor reviews. We wanted to interrogate the complexity behind the successful £17.5 million project and to understand the ways in which the personalities involved had navigated the planning system. This research strand explored the decision-making processes that informed the adaptive re-use of the listed building through site visits, content analysis of interviews with the key players, documentary analysis of the various planning documents and ongoing conversations.

One of the most interesting things is how little the planning system was mentioned as a driver in the process. What came across was the system as a blunt tool to help achieve a final outcome. For everyone involved it appeared to be more about working through practicalities on a personal and professional level than following ‘the letter of the law’. In fact no-one was even sure what the ‘letter of the law’ was, even those whose job it was to enforce it!

Another theme running through the interviews was people’s emotional response to both the project and the building and how this governed their responses, and their perception of other people’s responses. This is interesting as arguably the planning system was put in place as a reaction to people’s positive emotional responses to their past. But it is a system which tries to take emotion out of the decision-making process, making the subjective objective, it tries to make decision-making fair and transparent. But the biggest criticism of the planning system is that it is neither of those things.

Reflecting on this project made the team realise the role of emotion in decision-making. At times this was raw emotion at unveiling the beauty of the building during its stages of adaptation whilst at other times it was an emotion drawn out by decisions based on an unconscious feeling about the building. Interestingly these decisions were not explicit as the distinction between emotion and the rational action of a professional became blurred. One of the interviewees summed this up by stating:

'I learned about historic buildings and architecture because I loved it and was passionate about it and wanted to learn more...I've stood there and it just feels quite natural and iterative, but it is backed up by ten years of training and fifteen years of experience, and years of just general interest and reading books and doing that. So there is a definite background, but I think if I stopped and thought about it I think I would scare myself so I don't.'

The project has left the team with much further reflection to take into our next projects. We are left asking: Does this prove that the planning system doesn't work? Even when a project is judged a success is it more down to the people involved that the official processes? Or does the system give a framework to decision-making, allowing for compromise and flexibility, rather than a strict list of rights and wrongs? Is it down to how people apply the system? Who's to say that with a different set of people, on a different day this successful project might have failed? One thing is for certain though; the reflective research design has made the unconscious conscious through revealing that the emotion of working with a heritage building is a driver in the decision-making process.



College Court: the building's significance was articulated through the process of the conservation officer working with architects and developers. The research found that emotion was a driver in decision making.



## The Science Museum:

### An experiment in democratising collecting

**Most often, participation in museum decision-making is pushed into organisational silos, or focused on short-term interventions. The electronic music co-collecting project experimented with a different model: we brought together experts from inside and outside the museum. The team's discussions questioned a key tenet of museum practice; that use today endangers preservation for the future.**

The Science Museum co-collecting project was designed as a sequel to the multi-stranded participation project in 2011 that created the temporary exhibition, *Oramics to Electronica: Revealing Histories of Electronic Music*.

Inviting participation in exhibitions is by now quite conventional, although in this case the people got involved on the basis of their interests rather than their membership of a particular demographic group (co-production in museums has mainly been used as a means to enhanced social inclusion). If participation can democratise exhibitions, why shouldn't it do the same for other aspects of the curator's role?

One of the most emblematic of curators' responsibilities is adding objects to permanent collections. They are the gatekeepers of posterity, if you like. To put it rather grandly: they decide what should be selected for preservation for access by everyone in the future. In this sub-project, we set out to find out what would happen if this were opened-up to participation by people who have a passionate interest in an area that the Museum collects in: music technology, especially synthesizers.

The group of self-confessed 'synth geeks' included several participants who had been involved in the exhibition. Together we created an action research project, deciding that taking part in the Museum's acquisition procedure, and testing the principles in a public forum, would be the key outcomes. So it was that the group made successful cases to the Museum's Collecting Board, and ran 'Synth Bingo', a public event at the Museum's popular 'Lates' evening opening.

Along the way, important themes emerged:

- Enthusiasts – a 'curatorial head in the community' – have precisely the kind of nuanced understanding of cultural artefacts that is necessary to making acquisition decisions.
- That issues of 'preservation' versus 'use' are particularly well demonstrated by the example of musical instruments, where an object's meaning is in the sound, rather than in its appearance. The conclusion was that it would be to the benefit of the many in the future, as well as the few in the present, for those in the know to play the instruments. In that way, their meanings could be captured to be shared more widely.
- The public at the Lates 'Synth Bingo' valued traditional reasons for acquisition: for example the rarity of an object, or its association with a famous person, were considered more important than ubiquity. This was felt even where the big story was to do with the influence of musical instruments as mass-produced consumer goods, making electronic music available to millions.



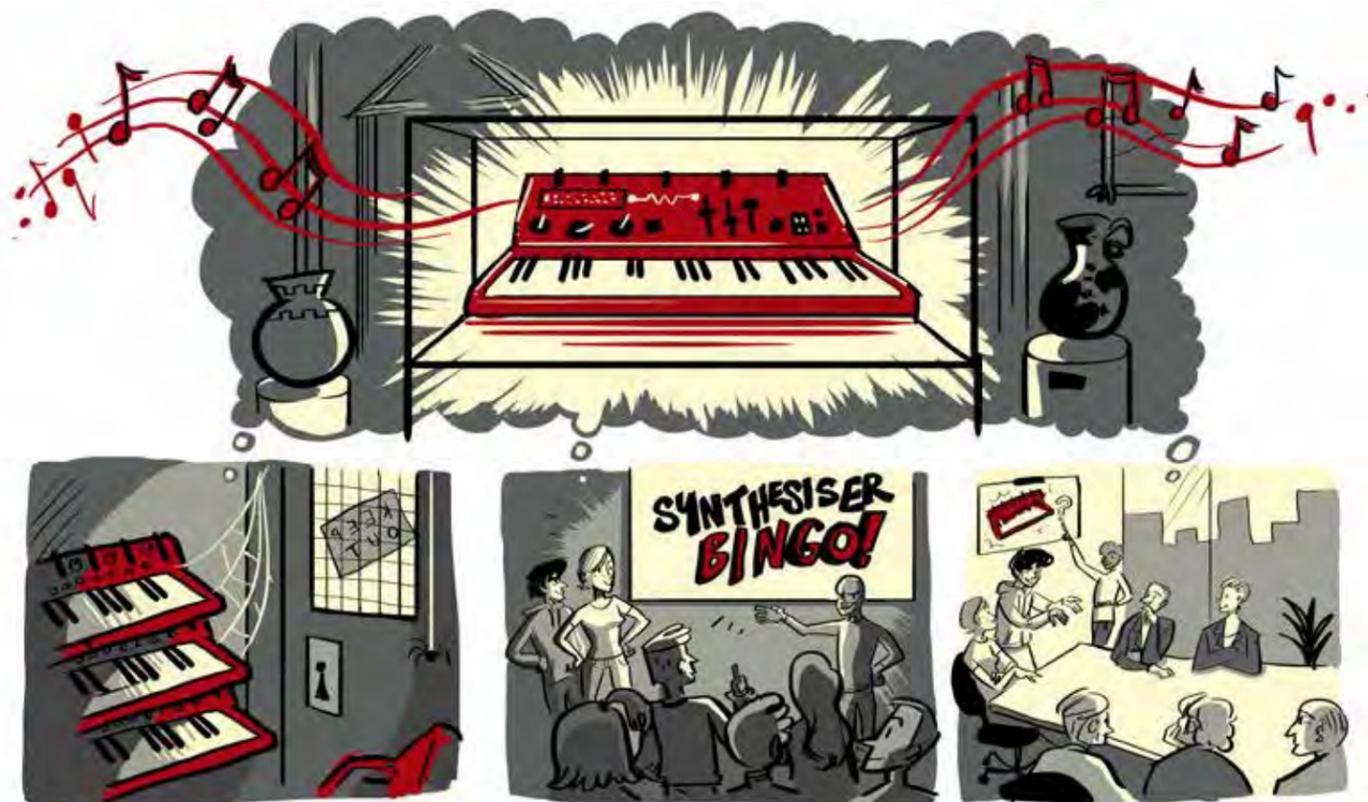
**Martin Swan, Musician and Educator**

If you engage the network of geeks out there then you create a community with 'a curatorial head on'. They will say – 'we will look for those things'. You're creating a community of curators. But as soon as you stop playing them, synths start to decay. They become less and less the thing that made them worth collecting. As they become less and less viable as instruments, they also become less and less interesting to the geeks, the very people who would want to enthuse about the objects to other people. And these are also the people who could maintain them and could get them going again.

**David Robinson, Technical Editor and Musician**

Participation was important for me as I was keen to see more of the mechanics involved in, and experience the issues that arise with, the 'business of collecting'. It was a chance to roll up our sleeves and witness first-hand the workings of an organisation such as the Science Museum – with the associated challenges that arise, such as budget, process, application of resources – when engaged with a new collecting project. And of course, it was another opportunity to indulge in conversations about subject areas which I very much enjoy, namely: music technology/synthesizers. As a person who likes structure, limits and deadlines to work to, to achieve optimum results, I found preliminary discussions in and around the subject of the 'democracy of collecting' illuminating and enjoyable but ultimately unsatisfactory, until such time as we (as I said at the time) 'stopped swimming around in the ocean and made landfall on one island or another' (where the islands represented hard – almost 'SMART' – goals/aims).

The synth lives!



**Tim Boon, Science Museum**

Inviting-in 'outsiders' to try a curatorial role proved not to endanger any feeling of curatorial expertise I might have had, but to enhance it. Presenting acquisition cases to our collecting board and to the crowd at a Wednesday night 'Lates' in the company of our 'synth community curators' felt richer, more democratic, and better justified, than many a solo recommendation. I recommend it to curators everywhere.

**Jean-Phillipe Calvin, Composer and Researcher**

Joining the co-collecting project gave me a much better and in depth understanding of museum practices and procedures about how they value, preserve, interpret and transmit histories of, in our case, electronic music.

**John Stanley, Writer and Electronic Musician**

I ended up feeling very strongly that some of the objects in the Science Museum stores, particularly the rarer synthesizers, needed to be powered on again. The longer they sit in the dark with the capacitors slowly failing, the less likely they were to ever make sound again, and ultimately, the less meaning could be assigned to them. It seemed that a limited project to bring them back to life, if that was possible and fundable, would be a excellent way of using the knowledge of interested communities, engaging with the objects and the general public.

**Richard Courtney, Management Studies, University of Leicester**

I find that the most engaging museum collections come from making visible the passion, interest, and value that people have for things, in addition to the 'things' themselves. The Science Museum strand was an innovative means to incorporate these emotional values into curatorial management. In this way, it allowed enthusiasts of a self-admittedly niche area of technological innovation the space to articulate the wider relevance of synthesizers. The 'Lates' event provided an example as to how easy it is to enlighten new audiences as to the social and cultural significance of synthesizers. The personal and emotional attachment that enthusiasts have for synthesizer history was the key means to communicate to audiences as to why they should recognise this significance.



## Discovering the Clyde: Organisational reflective practice

**Often institutional and professional decision-making processes are more subliminal than articulated and self-conscious. A series of reflective interviews conducted with key staff members involved in the Discovering the Clyde programme allowed the different perspectives on what the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 'should be doing' to be openly explored and debated.**

As part of the Co-design Phase the research team undertook 'Day in the Life' swaps. Discovering the Clyde is a five-year research programme that aims to discover our past, present and potential future connections with the River Clyde system. One of these allowed Rebecca Madgin (University of Glasgow) and Alex Hale and Neil Gregory (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland) to see how the site visits were carried out and how this informed the next phases of the Discovering the Clyde programme. Alongside understanding the context of the site from the perspective of archaeologists and an urban historian, the visit also facilitated an 'out-of-office' space in which they could explore the working cultures and institutional mindsets and priorities that were shaping the decision-making processes. Throughout the day there was a lively discussion of macro and micro issues and comparative examples brought in from existing examples drawn from community, academic and RCAHMS contexts which then helped Alex to refine and develop the programme.

### **Alex Hale, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland**

Part of the scoping phase for the Discovering the Clyde programme was to visit places along the river. This enabled us to engage with the places, people and aspects of the historic environment at different areas along the river system. At the same time this presented the opportunity to combine with the AHRC Heritage Decisions project, 'day-in-the-life' experiences. It was fantastic to visit Helensburgh with Rebecca Madgin. This enabled us to discuss topics, such as broad thematic opportunities for the programme, to specific aspects of Scottish urban renewal schemes. In particular this enabled me to consider the nuanced range of buildings, development phases and urban archaeological opportunities, that Helensburgh in particular and the programme as a whole could consider.

The 'Day in the Life' swap in the first phase of the programme ended up informing the design of the research undertaken. As part of an organisational reflective practice, Rebecca Madgin conducted



Alex Hale introduces the Discovering the Clyde project

interviews with the management team of the Discovering the Clyde programme. The interviews enabled participants to reflect on the decision-making processes that have occurred through the early development phases of the programme. This reflexive work was structured around taped interviews between the participants and Rebecca Madgin, and in one case with Alex Hale.

### **Rebecca Madgin, Urban Studies, University of Glasgow**

The interviews revealed intriguing opinions of what RCAHMS as an organisation 'should be doing'; the fusion and conflict between individuals' views of the purpose of RCAHMS and the pressure of internal agendas; the role of external agencies and agendas in shaping the origin, form and content of Discovering the Clyde; the inability in a number of cases to separate professional and innate decision-making, i.e. the awareness of making a decision was often subliminal and thus separated from an acknowledgement of the role of professional training in making key decisions and finally a reflective consideration of the traditional practice of RCAHMS in which a tension emerged between seeing Discovering the Clyde as part of incremental evolution or at the other extreme a revolutionary approach.

Crucially the methods adopted by the AHRC project allowed Alex and Rebecca to reflect through both thought and action as decisions were being made rather than after. Conducting interviews, participating in scoping workshops, testing engagement methodologies and spending a 'day-in-the-life' provided the mechanisms through which both the strategic and everyday decisions were consistently put under the microscope and future decisions informed by these reflections.





Stoke-on-Trent Skyline



## The Potteries Tile Trail:

### The role of the catalyst and DIY approaches

**The research strand in The Potteries offered an opportunity for reflection from both the macro perspective of the Heritage Lottery Fund as a funder and the micro perspective of a small project they funded, The Potteries Tile Trail. The discussions in Stoke-on-Trent made visible the crucial role of local heritage catalysts – those who can connect people and resources – and the power of not waiting for permission but just getting on and doing-heritage-yourself.**

The starting point for this part of the ‘how should heritage decisions be made?’ research was to enable three members of the research team – Danny Callaghan, Karen Brookfield and Helen Graham – to reflect on a funding programme, the Heritage Lottery Fund’s ‘All Our Stories’, from two ends of the spectrum.

The local focus for this research strand was The Potteries Tile Trail, a community and crowd-sourced virtual collection of tiles and architectural ceramics found in buildings and public spaces throughout Stoke-on-Trent and further afield. Danny developed and facilitated the project on behalf of the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society (TACS). Karen had strategic responsibility for the All Our Stories programme at a national level in HLF.

#### Karen Brookfield, Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund supports hundreds of small community projects every year, but only rarely am I able to spend time with a ‘heritage activist’ like Danny, to begin to understand how an individual’s knowledge and passion for heritage makes great things happen locally. This has been invaluable to my professional practice, particularly in stimulating ideas of how HLF might invest differently to enable people to take ownership of their heritage and realise their vision for the future.

The conversations focused on the effects Heritage Lottery Fund support has had in encouraging and enabling grassroots led heritage activity over the last 20 years. Danny, Helen and Karen – along with others in the research group – identified valuable examples of heritage activism that simply would not have happened had it not been for an HLF-funding. A key focus for the conversations was the way in which HLF money has – often without this being visible in the applications – supported a new breed of heritage activist who is often behind bidding for funding and the resultant local activity. Key characteristics include passion, energy and an instinct for taking action about things that matter (to them and a ‘project constituency’) regardless of any kind of formal permission. It could be argued that HLF grassroots grants have indirectly encouraged and supported a reasonably substantial new cluster of highly skilled – often self-employed – cultural professionals and they form an important part of the heritage sector’s ecology and economy.

#### Danny Callaghan, The Potteries Tile Trail

For years I have found myself trying to get specific people in local councils or conservation professionals interested in what I was interested in. Basically they had other priorities and looking back, I can see I wasted a lot of time running into the same brick wall over and over again. Through the delivery of projects such as The Potteries Tile Trail – and importantly, the time for self-reflection enabled by the research – it suddenly became much more clear that these alternative ways of operating are not only possible but also highly effective in delivering results. This approach enables individuals and communities to make decisions for themselves and act without ‘asking for permission’.



Minton tile backstamp



Market Street, Longton

An example of Danny’s approach to ‘acting’ and ‘connecting’ developed from very early on in the project. As part of the Phase 1 ‘Day in the Life’ swap methodology, Danny spent a day with the



Individuals and small groups taking action



COMMUNITY RESEARCH

The Potteries Tile Trail



SHARING STORIES

CROWD-SOURCED VIRTUAL COLLECTION

Turning 'virtual conservation'...



e.g. GEO-LOCATED PHOTO COLLECTIONS

...into 'physical conservation.'



RECORD AND REPAIR TILES AND MOSAICS IDENTIFIED BY CONTRIBUTORS

Heritage Lottery Fund: All Our Stories

NATIONAL GRANT PROGRAMME TO ENCOURAGE GRASSROOTS ACTIVITY



# DIY HERITAGE: THE POTTERIES TILE TRAIL

Heritage activists



A COALITION OF THE WILLING TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

heritage lottery fund

**TILES**  
& ARCHITECTURAL CERAMICS SOCIETY

**MACRO VIEW**

**MICRO VIEW**

**LOCAL and GLOBAL**

The different perspectives in the research team allowed us to think systemically and consider how national funding initiatives – like the Heritage Lottery Fund's All Our Stories – end up working on the ground.

team at Historypin, an online resource that had underpinned The Potteries Tile Trail project from the beginning. Danny was hosted by Rebekkah Abraham, Historypin Operations Director at their UK base in Clerkenwell, London and met the wider team including Nick Stanhope, Shift CEO (parent company for Historypin). This relationship has resulted in a number of practical actions and wider public engagement. Historypin featured The Potteries Tile Trail in a prominent position on their 'Profiles' page. This enhanced visibility and indirectly supported the 'repatriation' of original Minton-Pugin encaustic tiles from The Palace of Westminster to the city that made them more than 150 years ago.

The recently published Historypin in the Community 2013/14 identifies ten exemplar projects from around the world including The Potteries Tile Trail. In his foreword Breandán Knowlton, Historypin Executive Director, acknowledges that the 'positive results in these places are due to the energy and enthusiasm of a network of volunteers and partners from around the world who consistently deliver positive social change. We call these people Community Heritage Activists.'

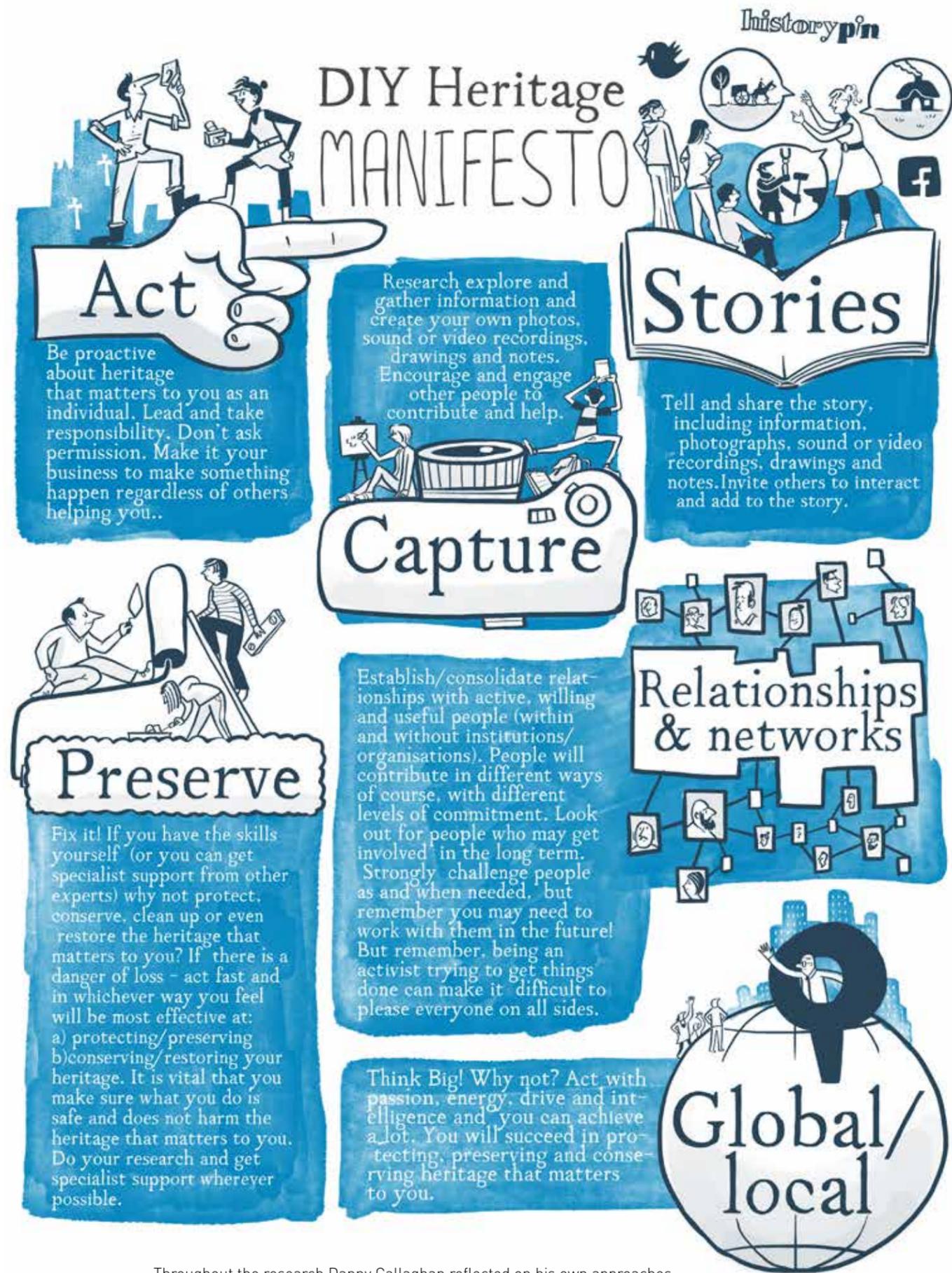
**Karen Brookfield, Heritage Lottery Fund**

Finding the right language when you're trying to create change can be hard. Over lunch one day with Nick Stanhope, Shift CEO (the social enterprise behind Historypin) I used Danny's term 'community heritage activist' to describe what I saw as our shared mission - to start with people, to support local activity, to use heritage for social good - and it clearly struck a chord. It's interesting and encouraging to see this approach and language being directly reflected in Historypin communications.

Identifying and nurturing relationships with other individuals who 'act' is one way that community heritage activists operate. Another is by refusing to wait for professional recognition – including that of funders – and helping people connect to others with shared interests. In conversation with other members of the team this way of working emerged as crucial know-how and, as part of his research, Danny has developed it into the DIY Heritage Manifesto.

**Helen Graham, Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Leeds**

I had an 'oh I get it now' moment sitting in Danny's car on a wet December day in 2013. He was explaining how he'd gone about trying to make sure doorstep tiles weren't ripped out during a redevelopment. As Danny spoke his whole way of approaching heritage, which is about small actions and local networks, suddenly became clear. Something clunked into place that day and directly influenced the design of the York strand of the research project. This thinking has now become the DIY Heritage Manifesto.



Throughout the research Danny Callaghan reflected on his own approaches, the thinking he did led to the DIY Heritage Manifesto.



## York: Living with History

Situating participation in heritage decision-making in a city's systems

**York is known as a heritage city. Mapping heritage decision-making systems and crucially how they these systems are experienced by the people who live in the city, made clear the urgent need for alternatives to traditional forms of 'consultation'. Instead the York team experimented with participative approaches focused – not so much on 'sharing your opinion' or 'having a say' – but on action and argument.**

**York systemically:** We started by mapping formal structures and informal networks which make up official heritage decision-making in the city. We then also – through lots of conversations at drop ins and on public stalls – infused these maps with the lived experience of being part of, and not being part of, these processes. There were people who were very well connected and had a lot of influence over what counts as heritage in York. But also we found people who wanted to take an active part who found it hard to get an 'in'.

**Richard Brigham and Lianne Brigham, York Past and Present**

We do Urban Exploring and all we wanted to do was go in and take some photographs of some ex-military hutments before they were demolished. We tried everything to get permission to go in. We phoned the Council. We got passed on to the Art Gallery. Then they passed us back to the Council. We were passed from pillar to post. Even to the point that we asked a security guard to take our camera and take photos – and the answer was still no. We thought we've had enough, we're going to start something new. Start afresh. That's when we started the Facebook group – now over 7000 strong – York Past and Present.

**'Us' and 'Them':** We found that the word 'them' was used a lot in our initial mapping processes to refer to council staff. This was directly linked to people's experiences of 'consultation' – the most common of organizational attempts at 'participation'. The use of 'them' revealed a sense of disempowerment over decisions: the feeling that consultation was a 'fig leaf' for decisions that already been taken. But the flip side of evoking 'them' seemed to be that it too easily absolved you of responsibility for taking the initiative or finding ways of sharing responsibility.



One of the public stalls ran as part of the Living with History project

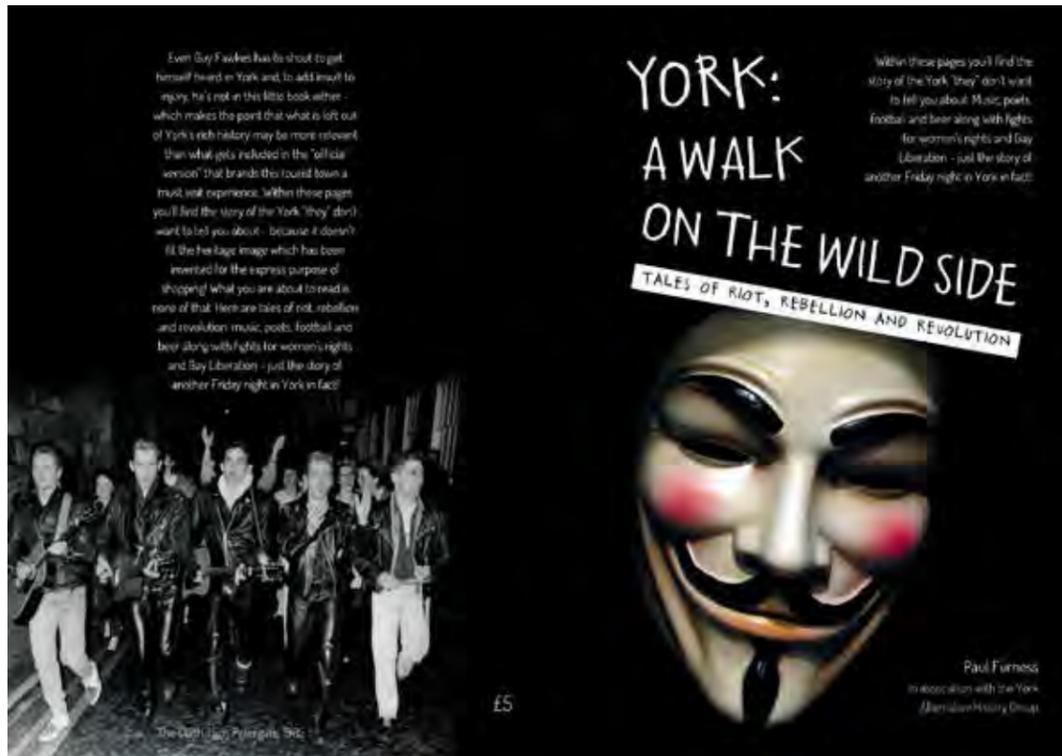
**“They” are people too!:** There was also an important 'lived experience' dimension for those in decision-making positions. Some expressed a sense of being constantly being attacked, both by central government through recent cuts and by debates in the local press and on twitter.

**Criticisms of 'participation':** Yet we also ran into a number of people in decision-making roles who just didn't believe in participation. The most common criticisms of participation we encountered were: that it undermines expertise, that the public can't deal with complex information, it can't be scaled and only attracts the usual suspects.

**Experimental action:** We devised a series of experimental public events, which aimed to model ways of breaking down the division of 'us' and 'them' by diversifying who is included in the informal networks influencing heritage in York, by 'humanising' those in decision-making positions while also addressing some of the hard-edged critiques of participation we'd unearthed.

**Helen Graham, Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Leeds**

There is a danger in writing up research that you tell a nice neat story. While Peter, Martin and I had put in place a backbone of mapping and then experimental events, almost everything that's been truly revelatory or that has shifted something has come from improvising and taking opportunities which arose as we went along – not least meeting Richard and Lianne in the first month of the project, admins of what was then a new and still small Facebook page.



The front cover of the York: A Walk on the Wild Side produced as part of the research project

**Contesting what 'York' is:** Paul Furness led two radical history walks as part of the research project. By pluralizing the sense of the city's past, we aimed to open up a space for debate about the role of heritage in the city. The walk was then turned into a book, which in turn entered the public domain with a splash through a somewhat controversial York Press article. The press reaction made visible how control over heritage and class are intertwined in the city:

**Paul Furness, Writer and Historian, York**

There was a lot of coverage when we published the York: A Walk on the Wild Side book. In York Press it was centre spread, there was a news article, an editorial and a banner headline. It certainly worked – the saying that all publicity is good publicity is true. But the news article did put words into my mouth – about York 'being twee' – and I didn't like the personal aspect of it, the number of people who told me to pack my bags and leave town. Yet I'm interested in the fact that what I wrote did touch a nerve. The controversy in the end wasn't so much about the histories, it was more about what I said about the raucous drinking culture of the York races and Saturday night, 'when York comes alive'. It was the challenge to that dull middle class mentality of a genteel city that riled people. It's good to stir things up once in a while.

**Arguments not Opinions:** In response to both the general public consensus on 'consultation' and the hard-edged critiques of participation we'd encountered from decision makers, we modelled alternatives. We used as our case study the controversial brutalist building Stonebow House and began to explore the ways

in which 'argument', instead of the 'opinions' usually asked for in consultations, might be used to address questions of scaling participation in decision-making. We also brought different types of expertise into active debate through events, Facebook and press articles and showed how to expand beyond what might be considered 'the usual suspects'. It wasn't that many people changed their minds but their engagement in the issues deepened. Through this we could map arguments and from there more solid ground for any decision emerged.



Paul Furness leads the York: A Walk on the Wild Side walk in May 2015

**Proactive Community-Led Planning:** We also explored proactive community engagement by modelling how community-initiated planning might work, focused on the Castle area.

**Peter Brown, York Civic Trust**

The Castle area meeting allowed a wide range of interested parties time to formulate a consensus on what would be the best (or at least the most acceptable) treatment of the spaces in and around the world class collection of historic buildings. Preliminary discussions with City Council officers have been encouraging and further meetings are planned.

**Diversifying networks and crossing boundaries:** Through doing these events we met some people who were as excited as we were about increasing participation in heritage decision-making, not least John Oxley, City Archaeologist who met Richard and Lianne first at one of the project's drop-ins. This 'magic networking path', as Richard has named it, both helped us understand the complexities of the city and also made possible the York Past and Present public documentation (urban exploration with permission!) of the city's Guildhall.

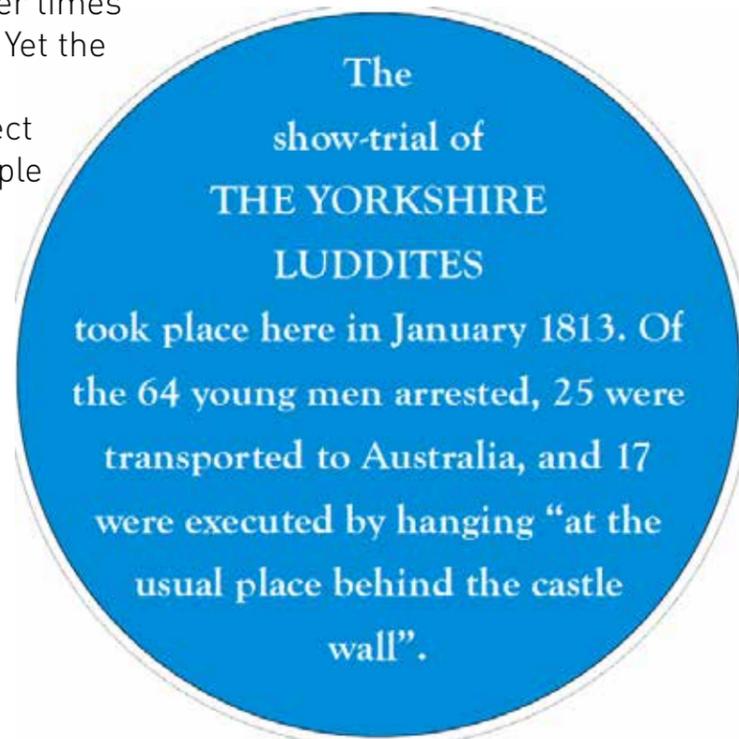


The Hutments behind the Guildhall, a pilot for public documentation – or urban exploration with permission – a key project outcome for York Past and Present.

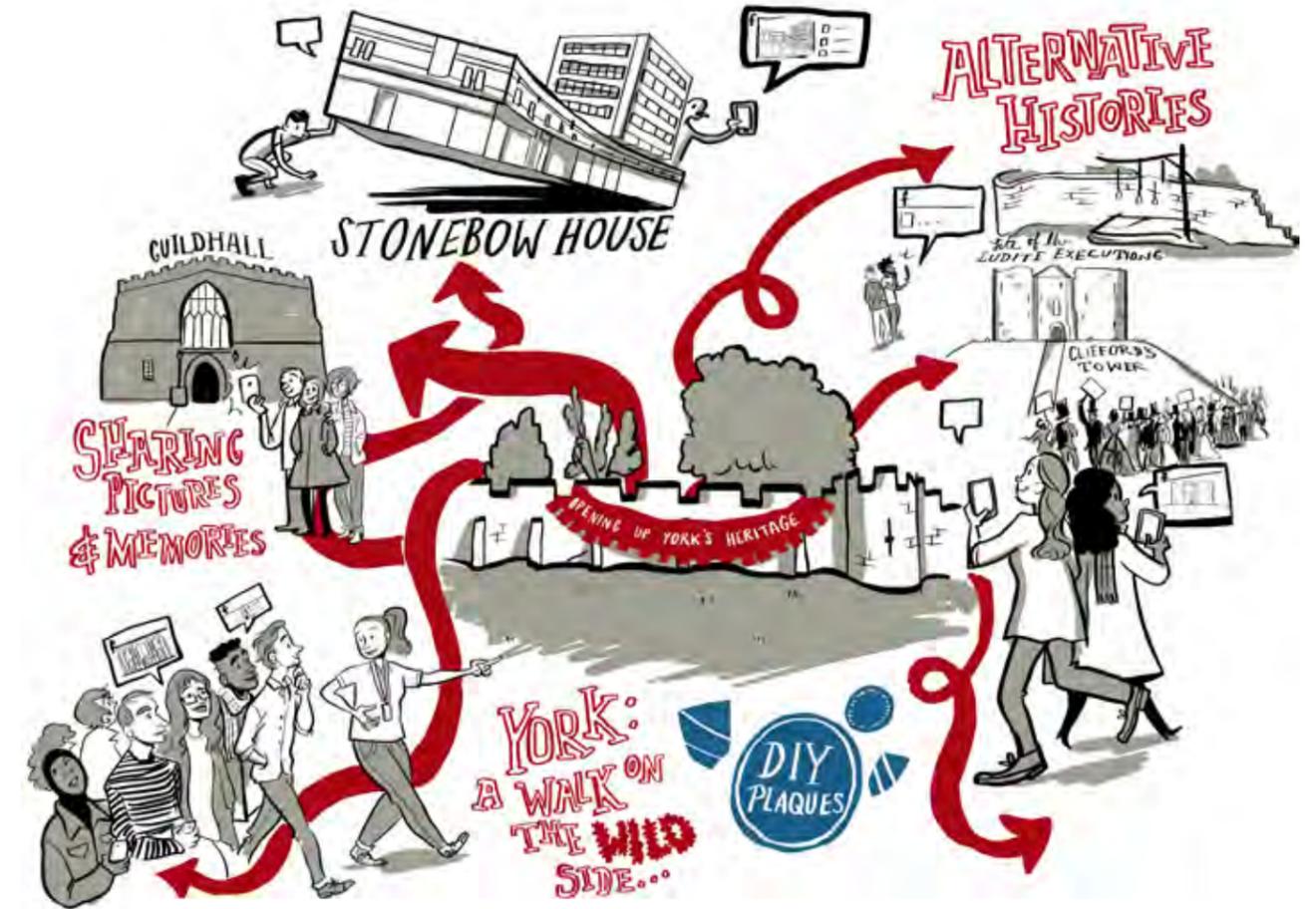
**Martin Bashforth**, radical family historian and part of York's Alternative History

The principal benefit I gained from that was seeing how effective personal networking can be in broadening the constituency of people who might be involved in public decision-making around heritage issues. That takes effort, confidence and leadership – qualities that are not equally distributed but do have the benefit of encouraging involvement and collective work across a diverse range of people. Collectives have to be built, whether from inside or outside public institutions.

**The living stream sustaining York:** Certain possibilities have certainly been opened up through our research in York, but other boundaries still seem quite intractable. Finding out what is going on is hard work and relies on people liking you or you being useful to them in some way – which isn't always easy to achieve! Sometimes offering to get involved and share responsibility has been very warmly welcomed and at other times actively discouraged. Yet the most transformative moments in the project have come when people who hadn't met before, and perhaps wouldn't usually meet, have got together and started talking. We know more will come from this.



One of the plaques contributed for our DIY Plaques Event in May 2014.



The backbone events of the York: Living with History project



Kit Heyam sticks up one of their plaques. Kit worked with Helen to co-organize the DIY Rainbow Plaques event as part of LGBT History Month February 2015.

**Seeing the issues of heritage decision-making through each others' eyes was crucial to the project – and we wanted to make sure we kept expanding the circle. Talking to people beyond the research project helped to sharpen our thinking and to decide where to highlight some ideas further and to drop others.**

Just as we did at MadLab to open our research design to scrutiny, we also wanted to do this near the end of our research phase to test our emerging insights, which we did with Heritage Lottery Fund staff from the Corporate Strategy team and from local teams in England and Northern Ireland. We shared key ideas from the project to gauge their resonance and suggested how HLF might apply some of our thinking through five 'provocations' directed specifically towards the Fund.

The provocations were:

**Jenny Timothy, Conservation Team, Leicester City Council**

**First steps: Taking decisions about heritage that's important to you**

The biggest decision anyone makes is to apply for the funding. The amount of information available is overwhelming, and sometimes contradictory. It looks and feels inclusive but when you drill down into the processes it actually isn't. How might the initial step be more open?

**Rachael Turner, MadLab**

**Give people less money, create more energy and action**

Catalysing an individual or group's interest doesn't always come from a large project. Oftentimes the sticking point is a book, access to a resource or an hour or two of an expert's time. A fast-track micro-fund would enable small self-interest groups to grow, develop and experiment without the onus/ stress that larger amounts of funding can bring. How can HLF support the networking to enable small scale DIY activity?

**Danny Callaghan, Potteries Tile Trail**

**Individual activists play a critical role**

During the last 20 years HLF investment has directly and indirectly encouraged, enabled and sustained an extensive community of heritage activists. These highly skilled and experienced individuals form an important part of the heritage 'ecology'. However their role remains somewhat hidden, unrecognised and perhaps undervalued. These independent cultural entrepreneurs often work within grassroots partnerships and provide the drive and professional acumen behind high quality proposals and successful delivery. How can HLF celebrate and develop its successful work with these independent movers and shakers?

**Peter Brown, York Civic Trust**

**Support a democratic and thriving heritage ecology**

Over the years HLF has often funded numerous projects in the same city – could the HLF enhance the connections between projects to create systemic change in local democratic decision-making? How might small scale heritage projects be linked into community-led planning and development? How can the HLF make a real difference at a 'city' level?

**Mike Benson, Bede's World and Kathy Cremin, Hive**

**A human and democratic lever: HLF as Change Agent**

We believe this group has come to some conclusions about democratising, humanising and socialising decision-making in heritage as a way of smashing what John Lawson has called 'the ceiling of mediocrity' in heritage which belongs to many of the institutions in the sector. Our provocation is how does HLF in everything it does, through its mission and values, become a lever to enable the heritage sector to work and think differently?



Lianne strings up a plaque to commemorate the dead of the Baedeker raids in 1942. How might the HLF enable DIY activity like this – and other small scale heritage projects – to become better linked to formal and city level decision making?



The role of heritage activists is often not visible – unless you look for it. A bit like some beautiful architectural features in the Potteries

Responses from HLF staff included

**Ben Greener** Policy Advisor – Historic Environment

[My main reaction] was about the emotions and interconnections generated by heritage. And the ways that we can restrict people's engagement by only thinking about heritage in linear 'traditional' ways. I think that there is a lot for us, as heritage professionals and funders alike, to take away from projects like this and to influence the existing (and future) methods of engagement that we ask applicants to think about when designing their projects.

**Anna Jarvis** First World War and Anniversaries Policy Adviser

It was good to have the space to talk about the politics of heritage and decision-making, and why we do what we do, in the way that we do it. The appeal from the Director of Hive at Bede's World Kathy Cremin really stuck with me - I remember Kathy asking us to turn heritage 'inside out'. I felt it was a very strong and valuable appeal, but that too much responsibility was given to HLF for doing this.

**Fiona Talbott** Head of Museums, Libraries and Archives

How rare it is to have so many working class/regional accents at an event of this type. And how encouraging it was to hear how they had to take on the 'official' owners of the heritage in order to get a heritage project that they were passionate about up and running. It raises a wider issue for me as to whether local authorities, when faced with difficult decisions around closures, really know sufficient about other options to maintain a service/save a building before just opting for closure or sale.

**Úna Duffy** Development Manager, Heritage Lottery Fund Northern Ireland

The 'synth geeks' as they called themselves had so much specialist knowledge to bring to the museum but they were just an ad hoc group of enthusiasts and hobbyists and could not have been considered 'heritage experts'. How would HLF deal with knowledgeable hobbyists when we generally want a proven track record and a safe pair of hands for heritage?

The responses from HLF staff were really welcomed by the research team. They showed where we'd successfully communicated certain ideas but also where we needed to hone our messages. It was especially exciting to see the resonance of Kathy's idea of turning museums 'inside out' and Martin and John's view that the significance of sythns lies in playing them, not just adding them to a museum collection. It was also clear that HLF staff will take thinking from the project into their work as they look for ways to support knowledgeable and committed individuals and groups, and to fund communities wanting to have a voice in local authority decision-making.



## Taking the thinking further

**The research project has been characterized by conversation and action and we want this to continue – and to involve you.**

We are all hoping to take something we've learnt and share it with others working in a similar way or in similar organisations. These are some of the things we'd like to share with you and we'd like to hear your sense of how greater participation in heritage decision-making can be created too.

Find out how to get in touch with the project via our website:  
[www.heritagedecisions.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.heritagedecisions.leeds.ac.uk)

### **Martin Bashforth**, radical family historian and York's Alternative History

Since 2003, I have questioned the meaning of the term 'public history' and how the general public come to understand the past. I developed a conception of family history as a kind of 'history from below' with a mass following that had radical potential to help people reshape their view of the past and, indeed, what history means from their viewpoint. I called this 'Radical Family History'. I was also keen to become involved with other like-minded people in challenging the way in which official institutions tended to shape the public dialogue about the past by joining a radical local history group: York Alternative History. The two practices came together.

Involvement in the project has provided better tools for achieving the same ends in ways that reach a broader audience and a better understanding of how one might work with public institutions and authorities. I am still working through the changes to my perspectives as well as the intellectual challenges that involvement in the project has brought. Maybe instead of sectioning myself off into groups designated 'radical', I would expect in future to work through mainstream grassroots organisations such as local and family history societies wherever I live? Maybe the 'radical' actually happens to be more effective as part of the everyday?

### **Mike Benson**, Bede's World and **Kathy Cremin**, Hive

De-clutter: take the time to work out a simple message, a simple story that you can deliver in a really human way, develop a simple approach and work hard simply to humanise what you do in an everyday way.

### **Tim Boon**, Science Museum

By bringing together people from inside and outside very different kinds of heritage organisation, this project has enabled us to see similarities which were invisible for each of us in our silos, pursuing our own business. In that sense, for those of us within heritage organisations, it has helped situate our own experience, especially in relation to issues of democracy in heritage. It is clear, for example, that the extent of the collections we hold (the comparison on another part of the map might be buildings we oversee) is often not apparent to many people outside. Our stewardship has, especially in times of financial

stricture, focussed on users in the future rather than those in the present. But the public of people outside our organisations is – rightly – becoming more articulate about their wish to access what we hold on their behalf. This project has shown some ways in which this might be achieved, to everyone's advantage.

For at least a generation, 'contemporary collecting' has featured in museum debates; every few years we rediscover this deficit in our practice. Perhaps for a while the small numbers of hard-pressed curators in the nation's museums do manage the odd initiative and collections do become a little more representative of the recent past. But this heritage decisions project suggested an alternative – or at the least a complementary – path: if we enrol the people we think of as audiences as experts, we can expect heritage decisions that are every bit as nuanced and informed as any we might make ourselves. The results would not only address our collections deficits, but also our democratic deficit.

### **Lianne Brigham** and **Richard Brigham**, York Past and Present

What we'd like to pass on is some advice for other people hoping to get more involved in heritage decision-making in their city.

- Build a community of people with the same interest.
- Meet key people based in Institutions (like in a University or in the Council). 'Be happy to give your free time because it's volunteering that makes the connections'.
- Tap into these key people's networks.
- Crossover from social media to real life events and real life events back to social media.
- You need an idea to talk about [for York Past and Present this has been public documentation].
- Communication and language – you need to speak to different people in different ways.
- Gain more and more confidence from speaking to lots of different people – and seeing that they like what you are doing.
- Be generous to people in institutions / council. 'They can shut the door, faster than you can open it'.
- Don't settle for small things, keep your eyes on your main goal. 'Be like a child, be happy with what those in decision-making positions offer but always demand more'.

### **Karen Brookfield**, Heritage Lottery Fund

The project has planted a lot of seeds. They are germinating; I hope they will bear fruit in the Heritage Lottery Fund's Strategic Framework for 2018 onwards. The research has directly provoked a number of issues I will make sure we explore. How can we best support people who make change happen locally – brokers, incubators, community heritage activists, people on a mission, and heritage professionals who want to work differently and need new skills? Will change happen if we only ever fund organisations and not individuals? How do you fund new ideas if you always demand to know the outcomes at the start of a project? What does innovation look like? Is our way of funding outmoded? How can successful projects share their learning without burdening people? How do we demonstrate the public value of heritage? There was a real and tangible benefit for my practice as a funder and policy-maker from taking part in co-designing and co-researching a complex subject with such a wide range

of academic and community partners: it was a space to reflect and be critical; it brought new perspectives from academic theories and from grass-roots activity; and it has inspired me to action, and in turn I hope I've inspired my colleagues.

**Peter Brown, York Civic Trust**

I feel that other Civic Societies would benefit greatly from engaging in proactive 'shared vision' exercises. Often the lone voice is ignored, but participation with those who have a broad ranges of interests gives more weight to local opinion, and the combined view can influence Local Authorities.

**Danny Callaghan, Ceramic City Stories and The Potteries Tile Trail**

Being involved in the project has changed my professional practice. It provided a unique thinkspace - a place to reflect on heritage practice - my own as well as others. For those of us working somewhat 'head down' on the day-to-day delivery of public activities - this reflection felt like a luxury at the beginning, however, it is important to report that this was an intense, rigorous and sometimes uncomfortable learning journey.

The diversity and difference within the team enabled a very broad range of perspectives and thinking. The research experience has changed the way I think about my own practice - why and how I deliver work. It has already influenced the design of some of my current and planned project activities. I am also particularly interested in the link between individual activism and the development of new heritage leadership models.

How do public heritage bodies encourage and invest in this disparate and diverse constituency? What are the rules of engagement? How can we ensure transparency and accountability? There are already major challenges and seismic shifts re-shaping the heritage ecology and economy. It is vital that we find new ways to include and harness all individuals with passion, expertise and entrepreneurial skills - especially those that currently operate outside (or even in conflict with) the mainstream sector.

**Richard Courtney, Management Studies, University of Leicester**

Inclusivity, participation, and access have been issues in heritage management for quite sometime. The project is a stark illustration to the fact that these terms need to be incorporated into heritage management in literal ways. This means that it is the people with diverse interests and values that need to be included in decision-making rather than an idea of excluded people and communities held by those already in powerful decision-making roles. The benefit of including actual people in decision-making is that management styles are confronted with the realities faced by those who value heritage from the periphery first-hand. In fact, inclusion seen as a real and practical activity can overturn this dualism between a central decision-making arena and those on the periphery; so that the periphery becomes the centre. Decisions made on this basis create the space for lively debate and discussion over the nature of heritage management, but it is also a real-world example as to the power of participatory democracy.

**Paul Furness, Writer and historian, York**

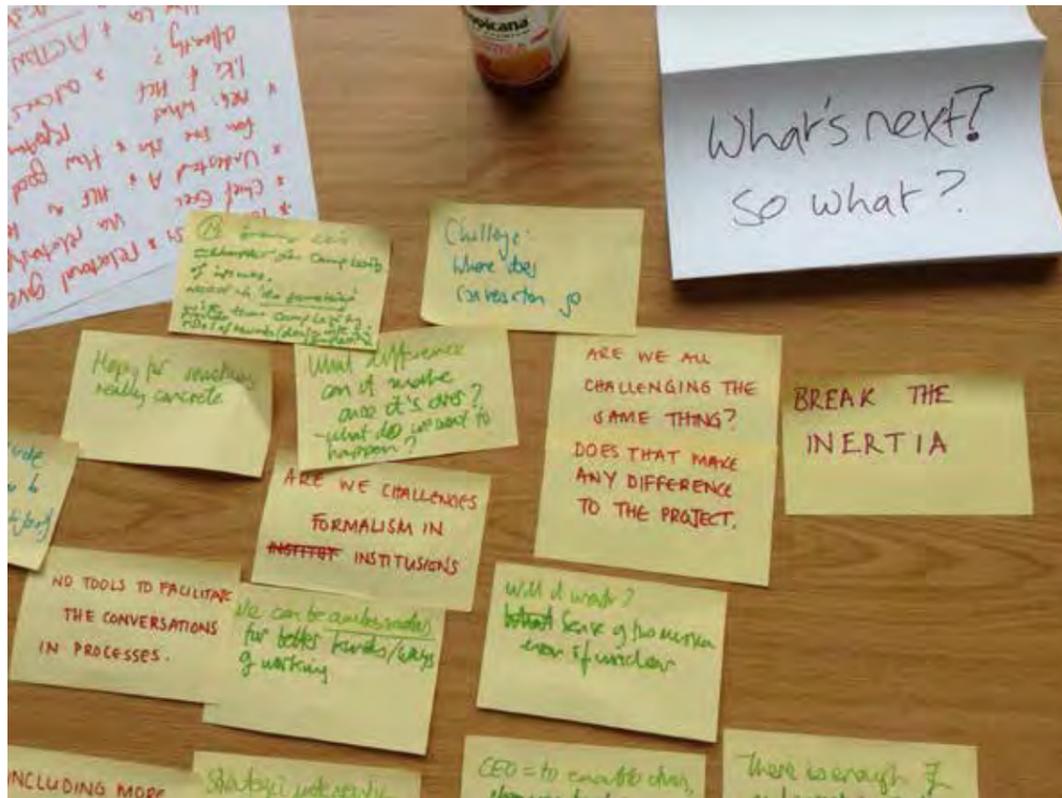
There are a lot of little cliques in York – they've got all these little arts and cultural organizations, they keep control and are stultified; they don't grow. These people don't inquire enough about the writers and artists that York has produced. They don't look at the city properly, they've got their own ideas of what York is. Poet Steve Ellis wrote a poem speaking about all the kids from the city's suburbs who every weekend get on the buses and take the city back. There would be a real breakthrough if all the other people who live in York – who are rooted here – come forward and start doing things to make these small worlds irrelevant. They'd be exciting events, things people want to go to. And it's feels like it's started to happen.



Paul Furness' book graces the shelves of Waterstones in York, alongside other histories.

**Helen Graham, Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Leeds**

Throughout the project I have been aware of a constant mirroring between our research focus, participation in heritage decision-making, and our research form, as a participatory research team. During the active experimentation phase of the project, I encountered people concerned about either the dilution of expertise or lack of public engagement in heritage. In a not dissimilar way, probably all of us at some point have been either concerned about the project's quality and rigour or whether we were being collaborative enough. Every bump in our journey together as a team revealed something for me about the systemic conditions of 'heritage decision-making' but also the systemic conditions within which participatory research take place. A question for all of us thinking about heritage and participation clearly became: Where, and to whom, do we feel accountable? Who are the voices in our heads? Ultimately for me our complex and lived web of acting, connecting, reflecting and situating are methods of quite deliberately working to pluralise those accountabilities. They are ways of making the institutional 'devil on your shoulder', that draws you too much towards



The research team thinking about 'what's next' – and more importantly 'so what?'

mono-cultures in your work, sit alongside many people from quite different perspectives and places. This method works, we hope we've shown, for increasing participation in heritage decision-making but, for me as an academic, it also offers a method for building the relationships and systemically-informed extra- and trans-institutional politics that will mean that the peers who judge the quality of my work will never only be academic.

**Alex Hale, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland**

*How do we affect decisions when we are locked into public service codes of practice, institutional protocols and organisational boundaries?* Well, to begin with the past (whatever that is) has a very evocative, emotional, messy, non-regulated, confusing nature. Given our understanding of it, this enables us to consider it through multiple lenses, disrupt the accepted tropes and develop different approaches. So, what might one of those approaches be? Can I suggest the value and impact of practice-based engagement, which I feel is crucial for all parties, even us public servants. This takes resources and planning, but it brings great insights for all partners; changes and builds relationships and can shape how we think when back at our desks. To this end, I would advocate practice-based learning experiences to be incorporated into public servant's continuing professional development plans.

**John Lawson, Storyteller, Loftus**

Make a din, even if it's just you - write to your MP, tell them why your heritage matters, write to local papers, talk to Councillors, go to as many local meetings and forums as you can, put up displays, keep a blog, go into schools, keep talking about the power of heritage.

**Rebecca Madgin, Urban Studies, University of Glasgow**

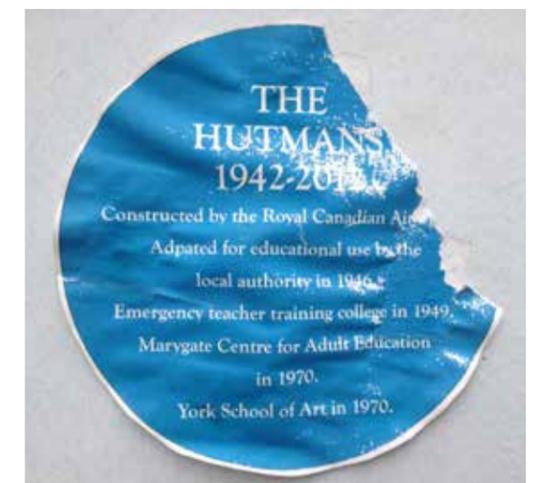
Working with the project team has shone a light on the similarities between the role of heritage in decision-making in museums and in urban planning. To give just one example, the various projects have demonstrated a tension between preservation and use. More precisely how is the relationship between the visual and the experiential managed in both the museum sector and within urban conservation? Often the historic interest of an object or building is encapsulated by its aesthetic appearance but if we maintain this focus do we negate the lived experience of playing an instrument or working or living and playing in a historic environment? Working through a range of projects within an urban context in Leicester, York and Stoke alongside projects at the Science Museum and Bede's World has sharpened the lens on the different values attached to heritage and the place for the lived experience of the past. The group workshops have facilitated this synthetic approach to research that has enabled common themes concerning heritage to be elucidated and debated by people who are each involved in different aspects of heritage protection. Crucially, this project has brought out some common issues which exist across the heritage sector and borrowing insights from museums may develop our understanding of heritage in the planning system and vice versa.

**Paul Manners, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement**

This project has had a profound impact on the ways I work. My job is all about change. I'm convinced that organisations need to become more open and 'engaged': more accountable, transparent and just plain interested in the world around them. This process is hard – especially because custom and practice often encourage 'silo' working and a defensiveness about change.

This project has given me a lot more confidence about how to influence such change. The mantra of 'act, connect, reflect and situate' crystallises what was previously implicit in how I worked. And the focus on decision-making gives a harder edge to slippery concepts like 'engagement' and 'participation': it emphasises not just taking part – but actually making something happen collectively.

One concrete example of how the project helped is the role I've played recently as part of a major change programme in a large national heritage organisation. They recently initiated a major review of advice within the organisation – looking at the role of trustees, specialists within the organisation, and the various advisory panels that they draw on. The process has inevitably been challenging – and risked grinding to a halt. A real breakthrough moment came when we re-framed the process from being about 'advice' (a passive commodity, traded between different power bases) to 'decision-making': an active process of collective responsibility. This seemingly subtle shift was



One of the York DIY Plaques slowly disintegrates



Danny sets up our stall to invite conversations and DIY plaques at the Connected Communities Festival, July 2014

transformational. The focus shifted from 'structure' to 'system' – and released much more open, creative and strategic conversations. The power of simple ideas! But how hard it is sometimes to see the wood for the trees...

**Rachael Turner, Director, Manchester Digital Laboratory**

The heritage issue in Manchester right now (and has been for some time) is the preservation of the community's assets. With the loss of public space in Library Walk, the question now is how to help support the growing numbers who wish to preserve sites such as the Cornerhouse and to develop ways in which councils and residents can engage in collaborative work.

I think too, that we are yet to see the full benefits that digital technology can bring to the heritage sector. The use of Open Data in assessing Museum collections is already underway in Manchester and organisations are creating heritage-related Apps, for example. But, to quote Richard Sennett\* again, technology is still about hierarchy and performance. Breaking down these hierarchies, and creating stronger, more interconnected communities must be the way forward.

\* Richard Sennett (2012) Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation. New Haven: Yale University Press.



'Monoculture in decision-making is counterproductive': one of the mini plaques contributed at the Connected Communities Festival, July 2014

## Research Team

**Martin Bashforth** radical family historian and York's Alternative History

**Mike Benson** Director, Bede's World

**Tim Boon** Head of Research and Public History, Science Museum

**Lianne Brigham** York Past and Present

**Richard Brigham** York Past and Present

**Karen Brookfield** Deputy Director (Strategy), Heritage Lottery Fund

**Peter Brown** Director, York Civic Trust

**Danny Callaghan** Independent Consultant (Public Art, History and Engagement) including The Potteries Tile Trail (HLF), Ceramic City Stories

**Jean-Phillipe Calvin** Composer and Researcher

**Richard Courtney** School of Management, University of Leicester

**Kathy Cremin** Director, Hive

**Paul Furness** York's Alternative History

**Helen Graham** School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies and Centre for Critical Studies in Museums, Galleries and Heritage, University of Leeds

**Alex Hale** Archaeologist, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland

**Paddy Hodgkiss** Riccall Archive Co-ordinator

**John Lawson** Storyteller, Loftus

**Rebecca Madgin** Urban Studies, University of Glasgow

**Paul Manners** Director, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

**David Robinson** Technical Editor and Musician

**John Stanley** Writer and Electronic Musician

**Martin Swan** Musician and Educator

**Jennifer Timothy** Senior Building Conservation Officer, Leicester City Council

**Rachael Turner** Director, MadLab and The Ghosts of St Pauls (HLF All Our Stories)

Big thanks to all who attended key workshops that have helped shape our thinking:

### **Manchester workshop, October 2013:**

Susan Ashley, Dave Carter, Ruth Edson, Sally Hartshorne, Arabella Harvey, Gareth Hoskins, Robert Light, Bill Longshaw, Hannah Neate, Rosie O'Neill, Jo Ward, Ruchit Purohit, Kate Slone, Sally Stone and Somang Lee (Scriberia illustrator)

All staff who attended the HLF Workshop, September 2014.

[www.heritagedecisions.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.heritagedecisions.leeds.ac.uk)



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