

Appendix P

Martha Burns Findlay -Senior Manager, Learning-National Maritime Museum

Q1

Danielle Newman: Can you tell me a little bit about your role and the aims and objectives you have when you're working?

Martha Burns Findlay: The learning and interpretation departments sits as part of Royal Museums Greenwich, which is part of four different sites located within Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site. Those four venues are the Royal Observatory, Queen's House, the Cutty Sark and the National Maritime Museum. Now the learning and interpretation department is responsible for programming at the National Maritime Museum and Queen's House, so there is a separate Learning Team at the Observatory and Cutty Sark. It worth noting that. So we are a big organisation that employs over 600 people. In our department our main objectives to create an inclusive and accepting learning programme for our audiences. We prioritise local audiences and audiences that maybe wouldn't feel that they could normally accessed museums. While I say we prioritise audiences, I don't mean to say that we exclude other audiences, with a higher level of cultural capital. My specific remit is the strategic management of schools and adult learning programmes. Again, that is often a local audiences.

Q2

DN: Thinking broadly about the uniqueness at the maritime contact within museums in the UK, do you think that access to maritime heritage is broadly being offered or could be offered at the same level as terrestrial heritage?

MBF: Ohhh. Well, that's an interesting one. I think it's a matter of opinion depending on where are you are located within the country. Are we talking specifically about the UK or on a global context?

DN: We are talking specifically about the UK, even more specifically if you want to keep it to England.

MBF: Yes, I think it really does depend on who you ask. Last year we took the maritime memories machine on the road, which was essentially a converted ice cream van. That went the areas across England with low cultural capital to really engage with communities about maritime heritage. On the side of the van, and I need to go away and check the exact numbers, on the side of the van that says something like " you are only ever something like 72 miles from the sea". Because Britain is an island, it is a maritime nation. But it's quite easy to forget that if you're not located somewhere on the coast. I think for some people who live in England, maritime heritage is there heritage. They very much see it as their heritage of their nation and part of their conscience identity. For other people, who are living in inner city London or the Midlands or wherever, actually that is very very far from their mind. It's not something that they're actively aware of on a day-to-day basis. So when you think about if maritime heritage can be offered at the same level as terrestrial heritage, I think it's important to understand that the some people maritime heritage is

their heritage. If you're at a coastal place than everything is about the sea. Whereas it's flipped if maybe you look more inland. So I really do think that it's just a matter of perspective.

Q3

DN: What do you think is the perceived effect of the public fascination with treasure hunting on their perception of maritime heritage?

MBF: The first thing to say, which isn't directly related to this question, is that the word maritime is actually a massive barrier. Most people don't know what that means, and I truly believe that. I've worked here for 3 1/2 years now and often when I ask people what maritime is they really struggle. So I think that can be a barrier with people engaging with the maritime museum or maritime heritage. But I think if we use words like treasures of the sea, so explain it using a different language, then people are much more likely to engage with it because they can really find a way in and a way to relate to it. But back to your question about the fascination with treasure hunting, I think what is popular culturally impact people's fascination and interests and curiosities. So I'm the generation that grew up at the cinema watching Titanic seven times. At the beginning of the film there's that underwater camera that goes down and explores the wreckage. So exciting, and it really captures the moment. Where's there's maybe another generation that grew up watching The Mummy, and for them the terrestrial heritage has really captured their imagination. I think it really depends what bits of popular culture are there at that moment to inspire people that to look a bit deeper. Things like The Little Mermaid or SpongeBob SquarePants, all of these things influence people's fascinations. I think that for some they will link treasure hunting with certain films and things that they see, whereas if that wasn't part of their era then maybe they just won't ever have a fascination with what's under the sea.

Q4

DN: What do you think is the most effective way of changing public perception of what maritime heritage is?

MBF: I think this is where it goes back to that word maritime.

DN: Yeah.

MBF: It's a very archaic word. People don't use it in day to day life, unless you are real specialist or enthusiast. I think that is challenging and we have to think carefully about the language that we use, how we talk about our programs and how we talk about our offer. I think that in terms of cultural engagement, the sea can relate to everyone. But you have to start with people before you start with the topic. You have to work out who it is we want to engage with and understand their experiences and there needs and interest and motivations. Once you know that, you can figure out what aspects of maritime heritage are going to most appeal to them. I would say for us at the National Maritime Museum we take a very broad approach on maritime heritage. We look at different eras and themes and

topics relating to the sea, and importantly it's about our relationship with the sea. Because when it is about our relationship with the sea that's when it becomes about people. Again, I think that as a public programs producer you are an ambassador for our museums and for a heritage site, but first and foremost you are an ambassador for those audiences. That should be your starting point and then you can work backwards and think about what their relationship might be with the ocean and heritage and how we can create program that is going to be meaningful to them.

Q5

DN: Completely off-piste, but if you could rename this museum what would you rename it.

MBF: *laughter* Interestingly, and maybe controversially, it has been said in the past that we are the British Museum. You go to the British Museum to learn about the world but you come to the Maritime Museum to learn about Britain's history with the world. I think that to some extent that is true. We have a tagline but we used internally which I guess is more of an ethos, and it's "Exploring the world, discovering yourself" and I think that's it. If there was some title that could embrace that ethos, here at the National Maritime Museum, that the sea connects us and a shaped our identity and our relationship with the wider world. So I don't know. The Migration Museum has now been established so we can take that one. It will take a bit of thinking. Sea Museum doesn't sound quite right, it sounds like an aquarium. So it's a challenge but I don't know that maritime works. It feels outdated for audiences. For the sector that's a very different conversation, because we are the world's largest maritime museum and we are part of a global network of other maritime museums. Obviously, I'm speaking from the point of view of a learning specialist and an audience specialist and I just know it doesn't work for a lot of audiences.

Q6

DN: That's a really interesting comment. How do you think that the messages being delivered by access initiatives are being perceived and received by the public?

MBF: At the National Maritime Museum? There used to be an approach by the National Maritime Museum, but also across all museums, which was very much Build It And They Will Come. We are a hub of academic learning and we are a tower of knowledge and are here to impart wisdom on our audiences. And it was our own version of what museums are supposed to be, like libraries and schools. And therefore, there was this idea that we will build a program and it will fit the needs of our audiences because surely everyone wants to learn about maritime heritage. The difficulty here is that whilst that might work with some audiences the reality is in the past, and to some extent today, museums are often made up of a staff demographic which is quite homogeneous. People come from a very similar life and come from very similar educational backgrounds and career paths and because of that we run the risk of having a very narrow and one-sided program that only works for other people that reflect our staff demographic. So what that means is that there are a huge number of people and a huge number of communities which aren't represented. Not just with our, programming but also in the objects that we have and the stories that we are telling. We are not being an inclusive museum. Now I would like to think that we have

turned the tide, trying to use a little pun there *laughter*. And that we've tried to move away from that. And the thing is that it's not just the National Maritime Museum, this is a movement that is happening across museums. This has been going on for the past 20 or 30 years but we are still learning and for us at the National Maritime Museum we have really implemented a new way of working. It's very much not about Build It And They Will Come but instead it's about building relationships with our audiences and listening to them and consulting with them and collaborating with them and helping them curate programming so we bring in new voices. This brings in new perspectives and that brings new audiences. So how are our programs perceived? I think once upon a time we were seen as an institution for middle class and upper-class white people as we celebrated the white Admirals and the white British heroes and a certain type of person. And therefore that appealed to only a certain type of person. That meant that many, many people found it offensive or at least a turn off. They wouldn't come. It was outdated it was archaic, it was exclusive and alienating all of these words. About 3 years ago, well a bit longer than that, we started the Endeavour Project which is the capital redevelopment project. We are creating a whole new museum wing called The Exploration Wing. This is resulting in four new galleries. But rather than this being building and development project, which of course it is, we have taken it as an opportunity for organisational change. So these ideas that I'm coming out with about the perception that people have all came out when we did a huge amount of audience consultation work a few years ago. Over that time, we have really gone out of our way to map which audiences weren't engaging with us and make a targeted and dedicated effort to bring those audiences into the museum and to give them a platform. Rather than us assuming what they might want, we gave them a platform to build their own content and I think as we approach the end of this project and of the galleries we have these fabulous relationships. They have not only helped us to diversify our audiences but have helped us understand our collections in a new way, and understand the idea of maritime heritage in a new way. Pacific audiences and Caribbean audiences, LGBT audiences.... Lots and lots of different communities. It has really shaped how we talk about maritime heritage in the last few years and the stories that we tell. It has changed our practices and allowed us to build programs that we would never have built before. That in turn is changing the reputation that we have as an organisation, and changing the perception that our audience has of us.

Q7

DN: Oh yeah, we could talk at length about in the museum as a social space in all sorts of things like that, but maybe afterwards when we finish our coffees. What do you think of when you hear the term heritage models?

MBF: I don't even know what that means!

DN: That's fine!

Q8

MBF: Do you ever read about the current theoretical models that people have about maritime heritage engagement or pedagogy or anything like that?

MBF: So I come from a background of community learning development, and I guess the pedagogies that I use are very much around radical learning and social movements and engagement. In terms of heritage learning, that isn't something that I put into action. I'm not from that school of thought. It's not to say that other people in the department... We are fortunate in that we have a large learning team, we have artists and special education backgrounds and literature backgrounds, ex-teachers here, so we all draw from a different backgrounds of learning. So personally I don't know if I do in the way that you're meaning it, but it would be interesting to hear more.

Q9

DN: Don't worry not many people do so you don't have to feel horrible about this answer. How do you guys go about organising an engagement project? Or designing one even?

MBF: So our learning and interpretation strategy is not just a strategy it's a live document for us to deliver and evaluate all about work. As a department we are all encouraged to use it as a criteria for how we work. Are we including multiple perspectives? Does it include collaboration? Is it inclusive? All the different points that are in our learning and interpretation strategy, that's how we really do our work. Now the strategy has been designed by all of us and we're all from quite different backgrounds but it is a live document so we are constantly feeding into it and evaluating it and making tweaks so that it always remains relevant. We're also looking at the wider museum environment around us, so something that is used by lots of museums is generic learning outcomes. They've been around for a really long time now, I want to say about 15 years. And to be honest they still really work and I think that's why people are you still using them. They are super simple but they are absolutely encapsulate what we want to do and it's important for us to look at this as a museum in the when you're designing a program we wanted to have real meaning and what it be impactful. Because of that we try not to stretch yourself too thin. I think sometimes with GLOs and with our own learning and interpretation strategy you might look at it and think my god, I have to do all of this? But no, no you don't not at all. It's kind of picking the priorities for that program and working out your aims and objectives. For us as a museum, we recognise that people learn in different ways and want to engage with us in different ways so therefore we have to be flexible and adaptable to that. For example, in our youth program there isn't just one audience because young people aren't just one homogenous group. With others programs we've created multiple ways of engagements offers that people can dip in and out at different levels and can also progress through our different offers. So, it's not about doing everything in a one hour but rather it's about mapping out of progression that we think is holistic and will really work for multiple needs and multiple audiences.

Q10

DN: How does the practicalities as it were so things like target audiences and funding and staffing affect the aims and delivery at the programming here?

MBF: I would say that actually it does in practice a lot at the moment. The Endeavour Project I was talking about which is all about organisational change, that was funded by the

Heritage Lottery Fund. And the Heritage Lottery Fund, as with other funders, like the Arts Council are massive influences within the sector. And they have a lot of power. But also what they do is underpinned by a really rigorous body of research and so we do trust them and therefore if they're going to give a museum money, including ourselves, then they are going to expect to see certain outcomes. Throughout this Endeavour Project they really have acted as critical friends. They have supported a lot of our innovations, but they also have been very critical if they thought that we had pushed things too far or needed to be more radical in our approach. I think that has been really valuable, because sometimes not all organisations are that critical of you but you need that to really examine yourself and reflect on your practice. So I think at the moment HLF have had a huge impact on way in which we work as a museum. But I would also say that as the learning team we already shared a lot of those values and principles, and for us having HLF on board with a lot of funding has been really helpful as a department to then advocate for audiences to be at the centre of everything. So then learning really isn't just siloed off to the side as just a little function of the museum but instead it's actually a core part of the program. We exist in order to provide a public service, and we are publicly funded, so therefore we need to be responsible about how we develop a public program. So I would say that HLF partnership for us as a department has been a really positive experience and allowed us to make our voices heard so we could really advocate for those audience and educational needs within the organisation.

Q11

DN: What do you think makes engagement successful?

MBF: What makes engagement successful... Honestly I think it depends on what the objectives were for the programme. Some programs are about skills development and some about knowledge development and some are about creating inclusivity or promoting social inclusion. So I think that you have to think and measure each program on what the objective was. Success looks very different depending on the different programs and also in very different organisations. I think again if we go back to the GLO's, sometimes it is about enjoyment and inspiration but other times it's about creating space for critical enquiry or a deeply emotional response. Other times it's about simply learning something you didn't know before or learning employability skills. It really, really does vary. I don't think there's an easy answer to that but I think that that very question, what makes engagement successful, is by being conscious of that question. It's not about just churning things out over and over without knowing why you're doing it and without having a system to evaluate it. As a learning department if you're not learning to learn then you're in the wrong business! I think constantly being critical and constantly looking to learn from your audiences by understanding how successful was is very important.

Q12

DN: How do you believe that your background has helped you prepare for the role you are in right now?

MBF: My personal background? Hmm..So. I consider myself an art educator, which is why I love this department because this is the largest department that I've ever worked in and we have all have such different backgrounds and skills. It's really, really healthy. I think if you have everyone who comes with the same skill set or knowledge base then it creates a very bland and one-sided content. For me as an art educator, my background is theatre, and I think that museums have the power to be an immersive environment and a lot of the stories that we tell can very much be character-driven. Ultimately, I do believe that museums are incredible places for storytelling. Now it's not always museums that are telling the stories it is also about using the museum as a platform to invite others in to tell stories. I think there are lots of crossovers with the theatre and performing world in some shape or form. I think I mentioned before that my masters was in Community Learning and I really do believe that museums are part of a wider community and should not be isolated pillars within a landscape. We need to know the communities that we sit in because we are publicly funded and we have a duty to serve our local audiences and for people to use the museum for a range of different purposes. And if sometimes that is just as a social space then so be it. If it's a place for learning that's great, but recognising museums can have multiple functions and play multiple roles. The other thing that my community learning background has taught me is that our society is a game of power, and museums are very powerful institutions in terms of the public narrative that we tell. We have the ability to shape the national identity and we have to be really conscious of that power and who we choose to represent through our expressions and our programs. That is a lot of weight and we could very easily actively exclude and isolate and scapegoat people. We could be part of the problem. Or we can use our power to help build a more cohesive society by including those narratives at lots of different levels. I do think that we are at a point across the sector of museums where we have to think very carefully about how we take this further. For some museums there is this question of neutrality, were they won't comment on something, like Brexit for example. I get that argument about museums not having an active political voice, but at the same time there are certainly certain circumstances where if we don't say anything or if we are too neutral we are essentially siding with someone. And audiences will distrust us for that. So it's a question of how active museum should be within the political landscape and I don't mean party politics but I means big societal adjustments. Anyway, that can go on and on but for me with my background I am really interested in that power that museums hold and it's something that I'm still trying to work out for myself as I suspect many people are.

DN: Hum, I think we may have answered the next one.

MBF: Oh but let me just say personally, me and maritime heritage. I think what I find interesting is that I'm the only, and I'm worried about saying this in case I'm wrong, I'm the only non-English person in our learning team. So as mixed as our Learning Team is there are no Welsh people and there's no-one from Northern Ireland and no one from Scotland. And I do think that London based museums can be very London-centric and that's can be a problem. But within maritime heritage context I think, and I think because we have a remit to cover British history, I think it can quite easily become very England centric. England and Britain get used interchangeably by lots of people but it's not the same. There are four Nations that make up the UK. For me, I guess I think about that a lot with are programming and what it means to be British and how our maritime narratives are really quite

different. What you experience in Scotland can be very different to what you experience in other places in the UK.

Q13

DN: Do you consider yourself an educator or a heritage person?

MBF: Definitely an educator.

Q14

DN: Do you believe that your work is for the benefit of heritage or the public?

MBF: Both! I guess within my professional environment I'm an advocate for audiences in learning, but equally when I'm working with young people in schools and in the community I'm also an ambassador for the organisation. I do truly believe that in order to understand yourself and where you want to be and look towards the future, you have to look back. I think it's so important for people to understand the journey that we've been on and the impact, not just as a nation but internationally. I think history is fundamental to shaping the world really. I do what I do because I believe in the power of education. I could have been a school teacher, but have fallen into museums because I also have such passion for heritage and believe it so powerful. Watching ISIS rip down all of those statues was just.... There was something so inhumane about that in terms of our collective understanding of what's been before. And once that's been eroded than your own sense of self starts to be eroded. I do believe that heritage is just so valuable and it's such a privilege to work in a World Heritage site and to be part of a much much bigger team which helps to preserve this.

Q15

DN: That leads very neatly into my next question which is why do you believe the we are engaging with the public as people who work in heritage? Why do you believe that museums have learning departments?

MBF: In our case we are a publicly funded organisation. It's public money and it should be for everyone. We should make it possible for anyone to access it. Also, we are stewards and not gatekeepers. We hold these collections for the public and that is a duty and it's a public service. There is no higher service than public service. But if I were working for a private collection or gallery, I still think I would be just as passionate about bringing things to the public. It goes back to these bigger ideals about what heritage is. It's something that has been crafted by humans and tells the story about where we come from and what we can achieve. There is a duty to share that with others and to allow people the chance to be inspired by it and to learn from it and enjoy it. It's a very values-driven sector, working in arts and heritage, because everyone really has that belief. But I have to say I chose these words carefully to allow people to change. It's not about forcing content down people's throats. I don't enjoy cricket, I just don't like it. And if I had someone constantly trying to drag me along to do watch cricket despite saying I don't like it...when you start forcing people to do things in a certain way it fails. I think with museums, and sports and music, the

world is here for us to pick and choose from but in the western society but there are lots of unseen barriers. I think that working in heritage we have a role is to ensure that as many people as possible have that opportunity to engage. But you also have to respect to some people might just never want to, it's not what floats their boat and that's ok. As long as there's that opportunity that's what's important.

Q16

DN: We are now onto a very exciting bit which is the blue sky thinking aspect. If you could design a public engagement initiatives without any concern over any mitigating issues starting funding allocation funding anything what would you design?

MBF: Within a maritime heritage context? I think that's funny is that we are very unlike lots of other maritime museums because where we are located you cannot see the sea. We are within a 2 minute walk from the River Thames, and you can see the Thames if you crane your neck, but you're not near the sea. So I think what I would try to do is bring the sea a bit closer. I know I talked about the maritime memories machine but I would love to give that a wider reach. It would have to be something around coastal tours and maybe even... I like music. I like really intangible heritage. I think that mixture of the tangible and intangible is what really create something very human. I think some musical boat tours collecting folk songs. There is another project that's been going on where we have been lending out objects to museums across England. It's basically a bit of object research to see how the other museums interpret them and engage with them. So something like a relay where you have a boat and you almost tag in other people. You swap and share objects and just something that is really human and also something that's really cross-cultural. There is the danger with maritime heritage for it to be quite white English and folky rather than seeing the global perspective. Maybe the boat can go all over the world, who knows. I think something about connecting with the sea, with objects and intangible heritage that would have a global reach. Food as well! Food is always something that is a good connector with people, and I mean food in the UK really is connector with people from all around the world. We have a skills session called The World for Breakfast that we do with really little ones and they find out where in the world the food is from. There is something so human about it because it is our everyday experience but it gives everything a bigger picture. Essentially that's what we're trying to do with the museum. We have our Transatlantic gallery, the East India Company gallery, the Pacific gallery. We are telling big stories from different parts of the world but we are trying to bring that down to human level. That's always the challenge with these big national and international narratives is how do you make sure people understand the human centre of it.

Q17

DN: That pretty much covers what I want to say but is there anything you would like to add?

MBF: Can you just summarise what your thesis is on that might generate something for me?

DN: Basically I'm looking at public engagement with maritime heritage and what's being offered and who is doing the offering and what they think the role is. Also looking at the different ways to people have access.

MBF: It might be useful for me to summarise how we program for a different audiences. Young people is first and foremost not lead by knowledge, so it's not about teaching them history but rather it's led by the idea of creating more the social space because that is a priority for our local young people is to have a place that is fun and safe and inspiring where they can hang out and enjoy time with their friends. Our program is very much themed around skills development because unemployment is huge amongst young people in London, particularly from our borough. So we use the museum as a workplace and give young people volunteering opportunities and work opportunities. Sometimes we run debates and get young people to look at modern issues using more historical ideas. Of course the school program has to be geared around the national curriculum, and that is a lot more knowledge focused depending on what's in the curriculum at that time. But again, we need to also ensure that their skills are being met, and we do that through teacher consultations and keeping up with the current curriculum. Our adult program is usually more knowledge-based because our audience often want to know stuff and learn stuff and often they are slightly older or retired and have a really interest in the subject. Also trying to do more skills options and opportunities for them, thinking about different types of adult audiences he wouldn't normally engage with the museum. Families, the focus is on intergenerational learning, so that's very much experiential learning. Again it's weaving in the themes of the museum but not going in with that as the first line. With communities the focus is on representations and how these communities are represented in the museum. Sometimes this results in a program or display which revises how different community groups are represented within the National Maritime Museum. We need to take a different approach to a different audiences because they have different needs. In terms of maritime heritage, for the learning team our skill set isn't maritime heritage, our values and way of learning and ethos could be taken to any museum. Where the maritime heritage comes in is that we work very closely with the curatorial team. So whilst we might not be number one maritime gurus, we also have to acknowledge that that is our unique selling point. We do have to protect that as a museum and because of that we work very closely with our curatorial team and archive team as well. They are the ones who will bring that specialist knowledge in. And they are the ones who will help us to relate stories to audiences. So, for example when I had a Youth Group come in to ask about doing a session on drug use, I went knocking on the door of the curatorial team to ask if we had anything that covered that. And yes we had stuff related to the Opium Wars, so we can find that bridge between contemporary issues that relate our clients with historical issues. But we as a learning team are not expected to be an expert in that feels that's why we have the research team.