

Appendix Q

Jessica Lewis- Curator at *Cutty Sark*

Q1

DN: Thank you very much for letting me come and interview you today. I was wondering if you could start by talking about how the Cutty Sark engages with audiences?

JL: One is the self-lead engagement, in the sense that a visit to the ship is very much designed as a self-lead visit. I think the interpretation, and what we've tried to achieve, is an invitation to engage with the structure and to explore the ship. To really engage in that sense. Also, because so much of the ship is original it has a sense of authenticity that goes with it. You are actually touching the 1869 structure and I do think that's a very important part of the visit and makes it very much an immersive visit. Our visitors are engaging inside a historic object, that is the ship. The other side of engagement is through our programming. So we have facilitated school sessions, we have family sessions on the first weekend of every month. We also have, and this a programme that everyone loves, we have our actors who are here weekends throughout the holidays. And they are not volunteers in costume or just people in costume, they are actors delivering scripted or ad hoc but informed specific content relating to their stories. So our actors are two members of the crew, we've got our figurehead and Jock Willis (sp) the owner. So it's a very nice broad representation that were chosen because they could tell different parts of the story. We've also got engagement in a more informal way, as we have explainer volunteers on the main deck which we introduced about a year ago as something that came out of a lot of visitor research we did a few years ago which identified a few key stories and themes that we needed to emphasise or work on a bit more. Partly it was that life on board story that everyone wanted to know a bit more about. What was it like? But also, people wanted to know about the authenticity of the structure. We're not a replica, everyone knows the story of the fire, how do we explain that in the most appropriate way? And so the explainers are great because on the main deck, where the ship needs to look like the ship and we don't want interpretation everywhere or boards or anything like that, there are opportunities for people to talk and engage and ask questions. We've also found that many of our visitors are not maritime history experts, although we do get quite a few people who are really into ships and ship models and the Cutty Sark and sailing, but the vast majority of our visitors come knowing very little about our ship and sailing and maritime heritage. So having someone they can ask is really very important, particularly on the main deck where people have the most questions. Things like "what does this do?" and "how does that work?" and "how did the crew use this?"...people ask that sort of thing. Does that answer your question?

Q2

Q2 DN: Yup, that's perfect. Do you think the challenges of providing access to maritime heritage on a vessel like this dictates how you design engagement activities?

JL: So the challenges of access in terms of physical and other access?

DN: Exactly. So the issues of getting people around a ship like this and also how you set the tone for things and the stories.

JL: All of our interpretation has been developed with the social aspect of the visit in mind. Basically people come here as a group, mostly as families but sometimes as couples or as part of a big group. And so the interpretation has been developed so that no film is longer than 3 minutes, all the captions are 50-100 words. It's all very piecemeal so that people can engage with the story in a way that suits them. But that influences the general engagement with the ship because it creates opportunities to have a conversation as a group and to explore things together. And I think that's very important because it allows people to explore the ship and for it not to be a linear narrative. That's part of the fun, exploring the ship, and I think we've tried to develop something that encourages that type of engagement.

Q3

DN: Do you think that education and entertainment can work together?

JL: Absolutely. It's crucial. I think what we promote and what we try to protect here is the sense of the personality of the Cutty Sark. We see that a lot in our visitor comments. People give us really good ratings on customer service and the friendliness of our staff, but I think that's because people have got a very physical but personable ship that they can engage with. Our staff feels that and so our visitors feel that as well. And that's something sentimental. People care about the ship and so that's also why people have such strong feelings about it. People either love what we've done or hate what we've done, but regardless it always promotes a strong reaction because people really care about this ship. And I think that in terms of engagement, having that personality of the ship and the personality of us as a site enables us to bring that through in our programming. So I think absolutely, it's important to have humour and entertainment as part of our learning programme. It's very natural that that sits alongside. In the summer we're launching a family trail, which will be a free trail for everybody, across all parts of the ship. And that's got games to play, things like Sailor Charades, it's got jokes and tongue twisters with all the cargo the ship carried, and this just reinforces learning in a very fun way. We have a very strong and varied schools programme as well. And it's part of a day out as well, and I think that's something that we really need to acknowledge, that it's got to be worth it for schools to come out to. Kids have to have fun while they are here, it has to be part of that whole circle.

Q4

DN: What role do you feel technology plays in helping or hindering engagement?

JL: In terms of the permanent interpretation we do have a quite a bit of AV in the exhibitions, but we've made a conscious effort to make sure those stories are available in a different

format as well if digital isn't your preferred style of learning. Also, it means a back up for when a power cut happens, which it has done, or the inevitable happens *laughter*. For me, what we offer here and what we are trying to develop is that range of an offer so that people can choose how they want to engage with the structure and stories of the ship. I've mentioned that we've got a family trail, but we also have an app that's triggered by different portions of the ship. So you are invited to be an apprentice and told to go find the ship's bell and that triggers an animation if you ring the bell.

DN: That's so cool!!!

JL: But you can do things like unfurl the sails on the main deck. And I think that's the biggest challenge that we have, is that we don't have the sails. So you are asking people to make big leaps of imagination to see this static ship, which isn't in water and can't have sails because obviously wind propulsion and that would be disastrous. So there are lots of leaps of the imagination that we are obviously asking people to do. Whatever way we can do that is good, and for me digital is one of the options. I wouldn't want to hang everything on digital, but also we made a conscious decision to not have audio guides because they can isolate visitors and discourage conversation and we wanted to have that social engagement aspect of the visit so that's why we don't have them. I think there are pluses and minuses to that, but that's the way we've gone.

Q5

DN: Do you think, broadly speaking, maritime heritage in the UK is being represented proportional to terrestrial heritage?

JL: Oh, that's interesting! I think maritime heritage is the history of Britain and we forget that we are an island. We have to work quite hard, depending on what museum you are in, sometimes you have to work very hard, to remind your visitors that we are an island and we have a long coastline and we rely on the sea even today for our imports and exports. You notice when you go to museums in other countries that they are already ahead of the game because their starting point is that everyone knows they are an island nation. You go to Holland and this isn't an issue because everyone is really aware of that maritime heritage. And I think in the UK that awareness is less, certainly not for everyone but for a lot of people, so we have to work a bit harder for that. I don't know if it's proportional or not. What's tricky is that if we look at historic ships they are expensive to maintain, they are difficult and we've seen the number of historic vessels decrease over the last 30-40 years because they are hard to maintain. You sink money into ships and I think that is an issue.

Q6

DN: Do you think when the public comes to visit they come with a preconception of what they are going to see and what they expect?

JL: I think they do. For us, I think a lot of people come to tick it off the list, because she is an iconic ship and she is well known. Likewise, a lot of people don't come because they came years ago and think, "well, she'll always be there" or "It's just for tourists and school groups". So I don't think people often come with an accurate perception, which is something we need to change which is to show people how much there is to do here and it's more than "just" exploring a historic ship. A lot of our visitor responses are things like "I spent so much time here" or "There was so much more than I expected here". I think that's more about how we convey our messages here rather than what they're expectations are. We could do a better job of managing their expectations, because they are usually delighted.

Q7

DN: Do you think it's possible to change the public's perception of maritime heritage through engagement?

JL: Yes, I think so. I think that Tall Ships last year was a very good example. We used it as an opportunity to showcase what we do, so we had everything that we normally do but on one weekend. So we had a family activity down there, we had shanty singers, we had riggers aloft, we had our volunteers in costume, we had our actors we had everything. We also did a special ticket offer, which probably made a huge difference as well, as removing that price barrier also made it so that people would think about coming in. But also having that activity outside of the ship, with actors outside and people aloft, is not direct engagement but that kind of activity bring people in. I think post-visit, something we are not really aware of, absolutely adds to peoples perceived value and education. So we have people who come and say "we didn't realise there was a family thing on, and that was great" or when they came they met an actor or a volunteer. So I think post-visit it does have an impact.

Q8

DN: What sorts of messages do you want people to leave with after they visit the Cutty Sark?

JL: Messages as in content?

DN: Ideas. What do you want people to leave with?

JL: I suppose it's really top level in terms of the ship. We want people to know that she isn't a war ship and she isn't a pirate ship, that she's a cargo ship that was built for speed that became known as the fastest ship in her day. That's what we hope people would leave knowing. As an aspiration, there is very much a reputation that we would want to foster as ambassadors for the ship because we know from experience that we can't be complacent. Our visitor numbers before the project were so low, less than half the numbers they are now, they were so low no one saw a sustainable future for the ship. Now our visitors aren't thinking about a sustainable future, they are thinking about becoming a member or bringing friends next time and having a positive experience. To me, the most important part is having

the long term preservation of this ship. So if we can safeguard our representation and ensure positive word of mouth then that would be perfect.

Q9

DN: Do you, when you are thinking about the curation of the museum, look at any of the academic theories behind engagement or is that something that passes by?

JL: I think in the development of the interpretation, very much that it was involved. I came more into the implementation then development strategy point, but those sorts of theories about how people go around the ship and how much time they would spend and how they would behave as they go around the ship ultimately did inform the interpretation. We did conduct a lot of research in 2013-2014, which included family consultation and exit surveys but also tracking studies and detailed focus groups. And that was interesting for finding out behaviours. So, not academic but certainly research informing how we understand our visitors. It informed us on how they moved around the ship and what changes we wanted to make to the interpretation to help our strategy move forward.

Q10

DN: How do you think the practicalities, funding and staffing and national policy, affect the level of engagement that you are able to offer?

JL: Well, when you say practicalities I would think first and foremost, about the practicalities of the ship as opposed to a building. Because, for us, that's the thing that dictates the nature of the visit. The physical access and the route around the ship is dictated by the ship itself. I'm constantly trying to protect that structure. And it does present challenges. The deck isn't 100% watertight and we are, though not 100%, a somewhat open air museum. The weather affects our visitors. So I think the practicalities are informed first and foremost by being a ship and a grade 1 listed building. And being sensitive or constrained or limited by that does set out a certain way of our behaviour. In terms of funding, that is a challenge in the sense that we have to fund ourselves. The long term practicalities is that we need to save money every year to look after the long term preservation of the ship, as the current conservation plan conserves the ship for 50 years. So we need to build up those reserves for the long term maintenance of the ship. Funding is always going to be a challenge and it does impact on engagement programming because the vast majority of our programming is done by external freelancers, we do have internal staff who deliver the schools programme. Some of it is delivered by our front of house team, some of it is delivered by volunteers. Naturally, funding has an effect on the level of programming we can deliver.

Q11

DN: Do you think that basing the museum on and around the ship...do you think the benefits out way the downsides?

JL: I don't think we had much of a choice, really. I mean, our footprint is basically this dock that we are sitting in. We are limited in terms of the fact that we don't have space to have a museum alongside to cover the stories of the ship. It does have a fairly direct impact in the sense that we can't guarantee the environmental conditions, so there is a lot of our collection that we can't put on display as it's not ideal conditions for a lot of objects. So, that impacts on the stories we can tell and we have to tell them in different ways. We can't have temporary exhibits down here (below the hull) because of the conditions, but what we have done is have different sorts of installations. So last year we had the steampunk tea museum down here, which had no environmental conditions to be worried about. So we just have to be a bit flexible, really. We are where we are, and the ship is the most important thing. We need to be sensitive to that but also support the visitor by not saying "the ship is sacred we can't put anything in it" because we need to support their learning as well.

Q12

DN: What do you think makes engagement successful?

JL: I think it has been a success if it gets people talking and provokes a response. You know, again I think if we look at measures of success and we look at the comments, that would say that we have been successful. I'm taking engagement to be those extra parts of the visit, not the ship itself...

DN: Yup, that's fine.

JL: But, also, I'm very aware that we are a paid for attraction. It's not cheap for people to come onto the ship, so the quality of the experience is very important in terms of public engagement and we have to support and understand that. If we do it right, we can get a really high quality experience. Also, for me, with programming and public engagement in a very personal way means that we can take people on a person experience. We can take people on a curators tour or to meet the actors and they've got someone they can ask questions too. We shouldn't make assumptions about what peoples knowledge is before they come onto the ship. Lots of people have questions about lots of different things, even if they know a lot about ships, and sometimes they want to share that knowledge. I think Cutty Sark is a very personable place. There are lots of people to talk to. And people love talking, and that's a huge part of engagement is the conversation you can have with people.

Q13

DN: How do you think your background has helped prepare you for the role you find yourself in now?

JL: I've just been here a long time....

DN: That's fair. *laughter*

JL: I've been here since 2003, so when I first started I was working for the collection. Seeing the ship, the size and condition of the ship, and the size of buckets we had to use to collect the water from the leaking decks just got bigger and bigger. Seeing the before, the during, and the after...for me, personally, was a bit of a trip. I feel like I've gone on a journey to get to this point. I think over the last ten years, and particularly through the fire of 2007, you are very acutely aware of what this ship means to people. And even if people haven't come to visit the ship in a long time they would still rather it was here. Obviously that isn't going to pay our bills and we need to do our marketing, but I think the fire highlighted how important this ship is to a lot of people and how many people don't want to lose that. I would never, ever say that the fire was a good thing. A lot of people said "Oh, a nice bit of free publicity" but it did reinforce how close we were to losing this ship, and what people thought about that and how they didn't want that. So I think the fire was certainly part of the process in terms of raising awareness of what the ship means to people.

Q14

DN: How do you think engagement has changed in the ten years you've been working here?

JL: Well, it's been a bit tricky. Because obviously we were closed for a lot of that, for six years, well, five and a half, years of that. But engagement at Cutty Sark has changed a great deal from before to now because then it was very old fashioned. You see it a lot even now on other ships, with old sea dogs dressed up. And that absolutely has a role to play in engagement, but it can be so much more meaningful with the right training and the proper support network to make that really work. So having well trained volunteers and having the actors who are very well briefed can support that experience. Whereas before, we did some programming that kind of worked. I think it's a lot better now. We have a lot bigger and more ambitious schools programme than we had before. We have new spaces, that enables us to use the space under the ship. So we did a reminiscence, sort of a tea party last year, to celebrate the sixty years since the ship had arrived in Greenwich. And we've got spaces to do that now, so there are new opportunities. Also, a project like that would extend off site to all our social media channels. So, sixty years since the ship arrived in Greenwich, that's a brilliant story. People came and were sharing their memories of the ship over the last sixty years. So social media and engagement, that's a key part of it all.

Q15

DN: What do you believe your role is in heritage management? Is your role the benefit archaeology and the ship or the public and their understanding of it?

JL: For me, the most important thing is the ship. But I think those two things are inextricably linked, since the ship isn't going to be here if people don't come across the threshold. In my role here, I do a lot of work with the learning team, we look at the overview of our public offer and make sure we are identifying the types of audiences and making sure their needs are met. I probably spend more time involved with engagement than I do with traditional curatorial roles. Having said that, it's a very small collection and a lot of it we can't display.

But then a good chunk of my time is also spent supporting the ship team and the grounds team, making sure it's not going to be painted the wrong colour and maintaining the integrity of the ship. So, it's a balance.

Q16

DN: Why do you believe that people that people working in heritage are engaging with the public?

JL: Personally, I think it's a pre-requisite. I think we've moved past the time where the institution or the museum just gave out the information and the public just received it. I don't think we can be that complacent anymore. It needs to be more than that. And I think we have a duty to make our offer as accessible to as many people as possible, and reducing those barriers as much as possible. And public engagement on ships like that Cutty Sark really lends itself to that. It's very active environment and I think that goes hand in hand.

Q17

DN: So, finally. If you could design any sort of maritime based engagement activity, anywhere in the world, any budget, any context, what would you design?

JL: That's tricky! I think one of the challenges is that all weather, high seas, experience which most people won't have. Very few people have even gotten on a ferry to France these days. So I do think that kind of understanding of being at sea, something that could bring that to life would be brilliant. We have talked through a few ideas here over the years, and they are all very much cost driven or vetoed by the engineers or that sort of thing. But yeah, I think there is a presumption that we are aware of our maritime heritage but there are quite a few leaps that we are asking our visitors to make to get them to imagining what life was like on the ship. Anything we could do to help them would be good.

Q18

DN: Is there anything else you want to add before we end, anything you wanted to talk about?

JL: Only a bit about the tactile nature of a ship as compared to a museum, because the ship really makes such a difference for us and for our visitors. You can touch the structure, and with certain volunteers you can do activities like knot tying. You can do all these very physical activities, which really lend themselves to our aim of supporting the visit. So we are very lucky that we've got all these immersive activities. It has it's pluses and minuses, we don't have the archives and we don't have everything on display. But we have the interpretation in the spaces to try and facilitate people understanding those spaces. And hopefully some of that works! But yeah, the hands on aspect is really important.