

Transcribers note: There was some difficulty transcribing due to background noise and the speed at which the participants spoke. These factors may have an impact on the depth of the transcript.

Mary           Where because we-, that museum also in the case of the abbey isn't a trust and national motor museum again, I'm very much the role, playing a role of all three of those and the Maritime Museum doesn't have a specific curatorial theme, it just has me and Susan-, Susan and myself. So it's marvellous because I have full kind of authority to do anything I like really and I'm also a stakeholder as part of ownership structure. So it makes it very-, a joy to do because we're not constrained by issues of particular ownership or trusteeship or legislation or millions of layers now that you get often, particularly when you have grant application funding for museums where you are so constrained then.

And, with HLF and things like this it makes it all quite a nightmare so it's very nice to be able to work outside of that independently, because you're much freer really to be creative-, to be more creative and particularly in cost terms it's so much more cost-effective not being bound by the obligations of the fund makers, the grant givers which is great. Which is applying on the abbey as well, so with the Maritime Museum I've just shut-, we've shut one section of it this winter, refurbished the visitor space, we've rewired and new carpet and redecorated. Took all the old graphics off, they were last done in 1979/1980 and you know, we're re-writing the story in a more modern way.

Lot more colourful, updating the storylines to bring it up to modern times because it stopped in like well about 1850 I think, so we're now bringing up to 2012 and brought into the storyline lots of new

topics that we weren't covering at all like smuggling which is very popular. Stories of the twentieth century about people who lived in Bucklers Hard and bringing it much more into to be a people's story which is of how people relate to people much better.

Debs            Yeah, in all the research I've been doing it's definitely the narrative that visitors can relate to, so that's perhaps why they're coming.

Mary            So and that's really fun and so at the present time we've got about ooh under four weeks now until the opening, until the official opening and I've a meeting this afternoon or certainly on Monday with the designer to sort of sign off to go into production for most of the graphic panels. So it's, it's been fun but I'm also doing all the picture research and done a lot of interviewing on to originate new research with people who've lived there in the twentieth century.

So I've been trying to find the descendants of the shipbuilders who built-, who were there until the 19-, the last people really of that genera-, of the generations who'd lived there successive generations moved out in the '70s. So there's two still alive who were born there in the '30s and spent their whole life up until that time there and they're the only two left. So I've been interviewing them and also getting all their memories and photographs and scanning them and getting them then into our archive. So it's been quite fun and I'm still-, I'm still on that, on that, sort of doing that now and then trying to incorporate that into the new displays.

But it is unusual here at Beaulieu that I have that privilege really, because being able to be able to work right across from the design side and in the sort of archive side and research side and it's probably unusual.

Debs Yes, I certainly felt that when I was doing the ((03:36?)) application, I was doing research and then Susan was verifying and then the designing and the building and it was really enjoyable. The bit that wasn't enjoyable was the crunch of time.

Mary It is very satisfactory if you enjoy the process which I do, because it's-, and also it's a thing you love isn't it, you get to love a subject so much and become so interested in it, so it's very, very, it's very good fun. We are working also on a much bigger redesign in the motor museum ((04:12?)) and that's a sort of five year project to redisplay everything, re-caption everything, represent the history ((04:18?)) I could show you briefly because we've already started that phase and I'm on the design team for that.

But there, it is run by Trust of course, that's in the National Motor Museum Trust. I'm a trustee of that trust, so I sit on their advisory group for the project and also wear a designer hat but I'm not involved day-to-day with that process, neither the research because of course the Trust employs eighteen people in the building there who are the researchers, the curators and so on. So, it has a big professional staff and we have employed a professional museum designer to do the museum design which is great because actually it's great, I really like working with them but it's a very different sort of process but still works well.

Debs Yes. Is it the five year aspect, is it because the size of the motor museum or is it because of...

Mary It's a combination of being able to do it without closing, one of the criteria we set right at the beginning was we didn't want to shut the museum because to do the whole thing would require shutting it for six months which was-, we didn't feel that was-, and we'd have big

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storage problems, we'd have additional cost and also, from a marketing perspective, if you phase your refurbishment, you have a marketing hook every year for five years. If you do it once, you do it once and that's it and so you spread out your stories, your marketing stories through that longer period.

You reduce risk in a lot of ways I think because you're phasing it and, you probably enable you to do it possibly better because you're under less pressure. You know, doing the whole thing in one go is a higher risk isn't it? You could make mistakes by doing it-, trying to do it too quickly whereas this we're doing slowly, paced, from a finance perspective you have longer to raise money for specific areas, so it's benefits to doing it in a phased approach.

Debs                   And also, you can see how the users-, visitors are engaging with what you've done so far.

Mary                   So we did test panels for the new graphics, for the new captions for the-, you get time to see if it really works, before you go and do it for the whole thing and it's-, I think in our case, on a big museum structure like that, I think it is the way to do it. So it's working quite well at the moment so there we are.

Debs                   Because you get a huge amount of visitors coming to Beaulieu and it's mostly for the motor museum isn't it?

Mary                   Well, it's, it's, that's a bit of a myth.

Debs                   Oh is it?

Mary                   In a way, it's true but people-, we won't-, we market Beaulieu as Beaulieu we don't market the word National Motor Museum okay? So it's very curious that the link of wordage in terms of marketing

and we really attract a family day out market. It isn't a specialist market at all. The car collectors and the car fanatics will come anyway because we're the National Motor Museum, that's a given that if you're a car fanatic, you'll come here. But actually, the core market isn't those people at all. It's the people who are on holiday in the forest or within an hour and a half of here, you're trying to put a day out package together; that's how we market ourselves, it's not a specialist museum.

Debs                    No, no, I suppose what I was trying to say is that most of the people that come here go to the Motor Museum, go to events that are being held here and to Palace House and sometimes the Abbey gets kind of left out of that equation doesn't it?

Mary                    It does a bit, yeah. We're looking-, well I'm looking to do a project in the next few years that will really help to redress that in the abbey, not only we will re-do the redisplay which now before finishing Bucklers Hard, I'm going to start on the abbey re-display of that main room and take the stripped out but also we're going to try and address a lot of the access issues. Because there are some structural access issues that you can't physically get wheelchairs and pushchairs through the site.

Signage, access, landscaping and I've just written a brief, we're going to go to specialist conservation architects because unfortunately we need to go for scheduled monument consents for any changes. Whilst the changes are very small, or relatively, they all need permission and therefore we're writing initially a holistic access plan for the full site-, of the whole abbey site.

And we've just made it-, I mean that's sort of after next month I'll be moving on to the abbey again to start work on that in April and

May to put together a future parade of architects to choose someone to work with the consents for the architectural elements and then move towards a phased plan to improve access there.

Then the whole project of re-doing that abbey exhibition which we've pencilled it in, it's going to happen in fourteen, twenty-, it probably will be closed in January 2015. So I'll be working on it through this year and the whole of next year and get it in place to install in January. So that's the sort of vague outline I need to get permissions in place for scheduled monument and planning issues.

Debs It will be down to what they allow you to do won't it as well?

Mary To some degree and how we yeah, how we set the case out really. I feel we've got about five or six strands to the case rather than going to one thing, I want to go to them with the big plan and then we'll have a bit more flexibility if we have to have sacrificial elements of the plan. But I think when they see it as a holistic thing, they'll un-, they'll give better understanding of the whole.

Debs Are you having to write this plan yourself?

Mary Yeah, I am writing that plan. I've written the architects' brief, researched the architects, so I do do that as my stakeholder hat really and I will definitely be writing the brief for the architects and I've written designer briefs. I quite like writing briefs because I've been a designer I'm really, I find that-, and I know in the past when we've interviewed ten design companies for the Motor Museum and I wrote the brief and I-, it was one of the most satisfactory things was that when we interviewed all these design companies, they all walked in the door and said 'that's one of the best briefs we've ever had.' I smiled at our managing director who was with

me and because I'd written this brief and he'd helped me, between us we felt that we really knew what we were after and it helps to refine the process and make it easy for everyone.

Debs            So, your background. Can I ask you a little bit about your background then? Was it in design?

Mary            In design yes, so I actually went from ((11:12?)) College to Southampton Art College to do a foundation course which was useless okay, but that wasn't-, that was just the way it was at the time. I then went to the Central School of Art in London to study theatre design, set and costume design and-, which was fantastic because when I moved on from that I did work in the theatre but I did so many different things. Model making, scenic painting, exhibition design, museum restoration work, I did a whole br-, wide range of design things because although theatre design sounds very specialist, it's incredibly broad.

Because you have to design the programme for the theatre, you have to do the lighting, you have to do the costumes, you have to do the historical research; you have to do all those things. So I absolutely loved that field, but I found that actually the reality is, that it's very difficult to make a living doing that, so I quite soon moved into doing more commercial work, doing interior design and doing museum or exhibition design. So I did set up a design company called Mary Montagu Designs which I then ran as a design place in London for fifteen years. So I did primarily do, well all sorts of things, I really did a very wide range of different things but the bigger jobs I was doing were interiors.

Debs            And at the foundation degree was-, because I found that in design there are elements that cross over various aspects if you see what I

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mean, by aspects crossing over various areas. If you have the foundation of knowledge then you can apply it

Mary It applies across. I mean a good example of that of course is all the technology that's needed. So, once you've learnt to use CAD for instance you can use it across the board on everything. Or use of Photoshop or whatever it is, and how critical those-, learning those skills are.

Of course I went to school before the computer age and I never had a computer until, well a few years into my working life. I think that was when I first got a word processor and then-, so it completely passed me by any training-, formal training in computers which I sort of regret-, I mean I don't regret, it's just that's the age I am and I'm very envious of my kids who it is just so natural to them because they've been brought up with since birth and it's, it is different. If you're a bit older and you miss that bit in your education you have to work a bit harder.

Debs Although I found that of our students, they'll automatically jump on to the computers to design something, whereas I and you were probably taught how to construct your letters, how to write the alphabet, draw the alphabet, how to do perspective drawing, how to do all those technical routines that actually translate into a computer.

Mary And often-, I judged a competition fairly recently of design students to design a donation box for a museum. And, they were 'A' level students doing design and technology type courses and in their project work they had to present them. Some had done more computer aided-, computer generated stuff and some had done drawn stuff and often the translation from the hand drawing was



very poor to computer. They actually did much-, they actually had a better understanding of the concept through hand drawing than through computer because their limitations of their skills on the computer, so if they wanted to draw a tree for instance, they could draw a tree freehand really quite well and give it con-, lots of texture but as soon as they tried to do it on a computer, it failed. So, actually, it's so important to retain all the hand skills.

Debs Yes, it is. Well you keep saying this. It is really important.

Mary For me, I can sketch really well and I find that-, and for most people they can read-, technical plans are quite hard for them to read, architectural CAD plans; but they can see a three dimensional visuals even if they haven't much more ((15:22?))

Debs Yeah, no I've long been envious of that.

Mary Yeah, it's hard, you have to be good at everything don't you? That's the trouble in this field. It is very much a multi-, a multi-tasking, multi-skilled field is museum design, and theatre. It's very similar actually, is exhibition design, it covers so many design areas that it is very much a multi-skilled area.

Debs Why did you leave London?

Mary Oh, fundamentally, because I had children and I wanted to bring them up here, not in London and as my father has got older, there's been I guess an opportunity here to come and help with the business more and more and so, I made that decision to-, and I already had a home base here, so I came-, moved here to bring up my children here and then naturally that progression happened and I took on lots of projects here because I was here.

- Debs            Are you able to continue with some of your work?
- Mary            I've, I've made the decision probably not to. Because I'm so busy here, I really can't, I can't ((16:28?)) with that.
- Debs            Do you miss that?
- Mary            No.
- Debs            No. ((Chuckle.))
- Mary            Not at all. I get involved a little bit on some of the properties on the estates sometimes which I love because I find it very easy to do, like falling off a log really. I can do it and there are of course a lot of building projects going on, so at the moment I'm working on doing CAD drawings for a marina building so I do still do that kind of work, but I do it for Beaulieu rather than – so yeah.
- Debs            Okay, so you keep your hand in then.
- Mary            I keep my hand in, in everything possibly I can.
- Debs            Do you sometimes feel that as a stakeholder owner designer curator that there is a conflict between those roles? Or do you find that it works really well for you? Does that make sense?
- Mary            Yes. Probably the conflict that arises is in your-, you probably get sort of perhaps over-bogged down in detail, not detail but the subject because you know too much. You are-, if someone comes in from outside to a new subject you will draw out of it, the strands that are really key. Whereas I will be over burdened by my knowledge, my historical context. So doing anything here, I have a lot of baggage in my mind of how things were in the past perhaps, and how I-, yes, I suppose that's one disadvantage you don't come
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at it afresh. You come with lots of historical mental baggage. That would be the disadvantage.

Debs Yes, yes, because I kind of almost proposing the fact that every single person that starts on an interpretation of design concept comes to it from their own angle. But they-, in their cultural background, their upbringing or just their personal interests and is has a-, it biases what they do.

Mary Well my bias would be in the instance here, is also you can see it as a positive thing that I have the historical baggage in a way because as we're dealing with historical subjects primarily, say let's take the history of the house for instance, it is my family history. So, yes I may be biased, but I also would bring to that a lot of passion and a lot of perhaps insight that someone else couldn't possibly have when you're talking about essentially a family history, or even the history of the abbey although that's obviously much further away in historic timeline. It still has a sort of-, there's still a very strong connection, so I suppose that could be read as a positive or a negative. Either way.

Debs Sorry, would you be able to do the job that you're doing without that knowledge?

Mary You could do it, you could farm it out, but it would definitely come out probably quite-, a little bit differently. It may be that the-, whether you would maybe have a bit less-, I probably over word them-, not wordy but I try to put too much in because I'm so excited and passionate about all the stories, I want to put them all in because to me they all seem exciting. Whereas a designer might-, another independent person might filter that more.

Debs Yes. Because certainly when I was looking into the characters for the abbey and it was just the case the ones that existed you were much more passionate about, because there was something about them whereas the ones that were made up they are fabrications so there's...

Mary ((Over speaking Debs.)) And that's very true at the moment at Buckler's Hard where I'm writing the text panels for that and researching that with Susan. We've got all these stories of real people and photographs of them and you know all about them and it's exciting, you want to tell their stories and people relate to people better than objects.

Debs Yes and I think the narrative is very important isn't it really? The family life and to bring those family visitors in really.

Mary We're just refurbishing a room in the house at the moment, which I'm leading and, it's a room for years I've been very dissatisfied in the way it's been displayed and it, I'm very interested in how we display Palace House in the future because what is interesting is that we're sort of second generation stately home owners who have been only known the house open to the public okay because this is a new thing in historically.

So my father opened the house in 1952, he converted the house so that the rooms became public rooms or private rooms and they re-, sort of re-did the house so that he had an apartment and then there was the public side. So all my life, I've only ever known it in that format and now, it's second generation and you can look back and you go 'but why did they do that, or this' and 'isn't it odd how that's presented.' You sort of see it again with different eyes and I'm very

interested in how we can take that forward again so that it doesn't become too corporate or too staid in its, its sort of feel.

Debs Like a show-home.

Mary Yes, too museum like, because it no longer is a home. When my father did it initially in the 50s it was very fresh, he just lived there, but now, sixty years on, it hasn't been lived in for sixty years. So how do we present that story to keep it so that people are still interested? So that's an interesting thing?

Debs So do you think you'll move those rooms back to being lived in?

Mary No, I think that's highly unlikely because I can't see anyone wanting to live in them and they are large, quite large public rooms unless you shut the whole house and it would be impossible. But I am interested in how you could present the story moving on and my brother and I will have interesting debates ((much background noise 22:41?)) there's a function here later which I've got to go to. But it is interesting and I will hopefully own a part in discussion how we move that on. That's an interesting one.

Debs Yes. What would your-, what is your vision for the abbey then and in how that engages visitors.

Mary With the abbey I, I think it has a lot of potential to be a lot better in many, many ways. I, I would very much like to see some re-landscaping, to enhance the understanding of the structure of the shape of the buildings and so on. Also re-landscaping to create much better access because at the moment it's got very serious access problems because there's lots of steps and levels and I'm looking to resolve all those issues.

We would like to completely re-do the exhibition obviously. I'd like to re-do all the orientation to the building so that's again signage orientation, in order to try and encourage more visitors to the abbey. Many people when they visit we know they go to the museum first, they often then ride the monorail because that's always seen as a prime thing. They then tend to go to the house and often people-, less people go to the abbey than anywhere else because it's sort of on the side route. And-, but we can make that a lot more appealing to people in the way that we sign that.

In the summer we do things in the abbey which draw a lot of people in and that is falconry displays and they are very, very popular and it draws people in twice a day into the abbey and the cloisters and it's fantastic and you'll get two or three hundred people watching us every afternoon. They'll all sit in the cloister and it's wonderful and things like that to draw people in there to enhance their understanding. We also have living history, so there's a man dressed as a monk in the summer who stands there and that draws people in. But improving access-, all of these things together combined will improve that including much better interpretation.

We're also, you'll be pleased to hear, it's taken a while for us to get to this point, getting a free Wi-Fi across the site, hopefully this year. At the moment, we don't have it currently but we do have an audio tour you can download in the abbey but there's no Wi-Fi to get it. So at the moment, when you come in, it says 'download the audio tour' but unless you've got-, if you get the free Wi-Fi and it goes to it and says 'now download the tour' we feel that will also enhance the visit. So there's quite a lot that we hope we will do in the abbey, signage, it all relates to how you interpret things.

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- Debs Yes, it does, doesn't it? How much time have you got? How much time have you got? Do you have to rush off?
- Mary Oh ages. No, no, no. I'm only going to that room over there. Not very far.
- Debs Oh that's okay. What would be in your understanding of interpretations at the motor museum or all these places? What has been the normal way or normal process? Because I know you've just said about yourself being ((26:10?)) Buckler's Hard and as having free rein to do that and then it's very different at the motor museum. So would the abbey and that be free reining with you again?
- Mary Broadly, yeah because in that instance, it's not controlled by any independent trusts or higher level authority, it's unlikely to have grant funding that we've set a requirement for it to have or to other consultants. So the most effective way of doing it for us, and in cost terms and in every kind of terms is to do it, in-house in effect, using our existing team which is very good. And as it's entirely an historical subject of which the history won't change, of which we have extremely good knowledge already, it's just how we then present and interpret that.
- I will be the lead project manager on it in effect and probably, well I've already written the brief, and that brief goes to our board. It's not that there isn't anybody because we have a management board and our managing director doesn't like me going off, it absolutely it terrifies if I go off and so it's all quite controlled, we set the budget, we write briefs, we set budgets, I try and stick to budgets and I report back to him and to the board on the progress of all these

projects all the time. It just so happens that I, because I have so many hats, I do take a very big sort of project management role.

Debs Yes, I've been planning to speak to Stephen about sort of marketing and visitor engagement...

Mary That-, he would be very good

Debs ...which I will.

Mary Jonty's excellent.

Debs And then Susan about the creative aspect but you kind of cover all of those areas ((28:04?)).

Mary Yes but in different ways, so I don't really get involved in marketing. Susan's role is very education and real archive and she's fantastic, her memory's amazing and her knowledge is fantastic. She will write text and then I will take that text, add to it, build on it and I do all the picture research always and so that's why I'm talking about pictures, putting all of those in, illustration side, project management do all the design of the actual physical structures and so on. If I wasn't here, they would employ a museum designer, I have no doubt. That would be the only other route you'd have to go down is to employ a museum designer and to do what I do but it would be-, it would put more-, it would be a lot more expensive and you might not-, you'd get a slightly different approach.

Debs I think you would. Only because whoever you did decide to choose to be the museum designer will have their own package as well, so.

Mary Absolutely and it would be different.



- Debs            Yeah, so have-, has-, I know you've enjoyed museum designing for here. You-, I think you sent, it was the video wasn't it, a video in for the abbey which was also externally done?
- Mary            That's right, yes.
- Debs            How did that go?
- Mary            I think that turned out very well in the end and I was less involved with that. That happened probably ten years ago, Rafe took more of a lead on that than I did. But there's no doubt, that having an AV in any context is a really important communication tool. People are always drawn to TVs and even if someone only sees one minute of that, they'll probably learn more than they would looking at a panel. Because lots of people won't bother to look at graphic panels really if it's got text on it, so I think it's really good that we've got that.
- Debs            Yes, animated visual and people get drawn to ((30:05?))
- Mary            It's really well placed in the building physically apart from our physical access issues, so I don't think we're likely to change that, it's still current and works well.
- Debs            Are there many different interpretations in the abbey or have there just been sort of...
- Mary            ((Over speaking Debs.)) No there've been-, well the main one that's in there now was done in 1977, prior to that there was-, well my grandfather-, my great-grandfather put in an abbey museum in 1911 I think it was and so it was very early on we've got photographs showing that abbey exhibition and that was sort of as a result of archaeological digs that were done from about 1900. Because he did a huge restoration and archaeological sort of work in
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about 1900 – 1908 and following that then built-, put a room with all the bits in and made a sort of museum. What happened between that date and actually 1977 I-, it's a bit of a blur but undoubtedly there were probably not that much, because so much focus at that time if you remember was on the motor museum. And then now, we've got to the phase again where we've got to refurbish again to take it to that next level and for us it's all about building the quality and then interpretation of that.

Debs                    So how would you like to see an interpretation? I know I've asked you about your plans and visions but what kind of thing would you like to see in there and a way to gauge visitors. What kind of information? Would it be interactive, hands on?

Mary                    Not all interactive, I think that it's difficult, the subject can be as-, we try and have some interactive elements but I'm not sure that the story which is a broadly historical one, and about a way of life it's quite hard to make it very interactive. And actually just being in the place and getting people to understand the spiritual aspect of what it was it probably better to sit in the cloisters and to think and meditate is probably the best experience you can have, to get an understanding.

Whereas I can't really see that doing an activity that the monks would have done, a physical thing like combing wool or I don't know, there aren't that many, or trying-, we do do calligraphy for living history and for education, so they can do-, be a monk for a day and they do things like calligraphy. But actually, there's quite a limited amount of things you can do interactively of that period. So I think it would be broadly information based with pictures and illustrations and try to show people about the life of the monks and

tell them about the history of the abbey but actually just being in the physical space is probably...

Debs Best?

Mary ...yes, poignant.

Debs I used to feel that when I was down there.

Mary I mean like a lot of religious buildings you just have to sort of walk into an abbey-, a huge cathedral and you just feel it don't you? You certainly...

Debs And the shame is that the height of the abbey has gone.

Mary That is a tragedy and when I visit other abbeys of which there are many knocked down-, partially knocked down Cistercian and other abbeys I feel if they have more walls than we have, I get very jealous. So I go to Netley Abbey which is marvellous, which is a daughter abbey of Beaulieu and I always get very jealous because they've got one end wall that goes up with a lovely tracery window and I think 'oh if only we had one wall' like that.

Debs Yes, because it gives you the height.

Mary Because it just gives you the height and I've thought of lots of ways to introduce interpretation on height with posts and trees and flagpoles and things and they're all kind of valid but at the end of the day it's quite difficult to do something that really works well and people really get an understanding.

Debs There was a question there – oh yeah. How do you go about finding out whether something is successful or not ((34:29?))

Mary            Okay, in the particular instance of Buckler's Hard we've introduced a new comments book and actually that's been very revealing, we've never had one in the past and we refurbished we introduced a comments book and we also monitor very carefully things like Trip Advisor, because you get a lot of feedback through social media sites and now we have an additional marketing person who can monitor this. So we noticed that in particular at the motor museum since that, we've had a lot of very positive feedback on the displays.

And it's reinforced my approach because so many people have commented on the fact that I haven't done down the subject and I'm always very pleased with that because quite a lot of museums you visit now that have been recently done are quite done down. They've reduced text to the minimum, it's all based on a child's level of thinking and understanding and actually, that's quite unsatisfactory for quite a large percentage of visitors, particularly for something like the abbey or Buckler's Hard because they are mature things. So I'm quite pleased that I've been complimented on not doing it like that.

Debs            It's a difficult path to take isn't it to decide what is coming down and what isn't?

Mary            And you always try to produce text because text is-, too many words on a page puts people off, however if you do want to know about something, it's really annoying not to have enough text. So you can always not read something, so long as your overall expects are still good. So you need to layer your information if possible so that you still provide that specialist knowledge in some form but it's not always easy.

Debs           Is there a way, obviously it's been good from the feedback it's working quite well at the motor museum, would you add the sweep QR codes or something for people who wanted perhaps to know more?

Mary           We would certainly-, we've looked at QR codes and I've seen it used in a lot of other museums and a lot of other places. I'm not sure that I've seen it this year being done. I know I saw a lot of it last year because I think it became very fashionable. However where I have seen it used it's not always been that effective partly because of the speed of the connection of the Wi-Fi and where I've seen and tried to connect it almost always isn't fast enough and also the device that I carry.

The other thing that I do have a real qualm about is that my friends have an iPhone, fantastic, but when I go to a museum I don't want to spend my whole time walking round with my head like that. Because my life is spent anyway doing this and all children are very, very prone to spending their entire day like this, right. So if you've got QR codes in museums, what will they do, they will just spend their life looking like this, they won't look at the things and actually, I've now come around to not having QR codes because I think you can do it when you get home, but what you want while people are actually out interacting on a site, you want them to go out and look at things and touch things and see things, not spend their time looking at a screen.

Debs           As a designer ((37:51?)) application own idea, I certainly research whether people might use these things and the kiosk because you would get stuck in one place and you'd have to use that to find out

information which as you say get home, get engaged in the experience which is better ((38:15?))

Mary Yes, it is good but doing it and actually walking around. The only one that I think is an exception is an audio tour because you can listen, download an audio tool and you can listen to it as you are looking and I think that is still is an acceptable-, good use of technology but actually having a screen that makes you do this rather than look at something maybe I'm not-, I'm great for additional information after your visit or.

Debs I suppose what could, you've got a website that gives information ((38:51?)) and then they can go back and do their research

Mary Absolutely got all the content anyway, absolutely or you have it in a printed form in the shop or whatever, there's many ways of giving out that additional information but.

Debs Because I think in the motor museum you've got some little kiosks there ((39:12?)) came last year I think and immediately my other half goes straight to them.

Mary Yes, you don't look at the thing, you look at the blooming screen. I love the use of screens with moving historical imagery, I think that's brilliant, film footage generally is hugely enhancing but actually having interactive screen ((39:36?)) I'm moving away from in my mind because I think kids today, it's so different, are just brought up with it so much of the time that actually anything just to get them away from them for half an hour is a fantastic thing. It's not-, there was a time when it was special and new and everyone went 'ooh must have these new exciting screens' and now they're just not put on.

- Debs ((39:58?)) certainly teaching you don't see their faces, you just see the tops of their head.
- Mary Yeah and so anything to stop them doing that is actually a good thing and they can actually look at something. The best form of interpretation of all is a human being telling them something and we have a huge number of our volunteers in the motor museum who interact with visitors. Many comments also come back particularly in the motor museum about how good the staff are and that is by far the best investment in terms of interpretation is having a visitor who says-, goes up to a good member of staff whatever engages with the visitors and shows them things and talk to them. That is the one fact that they'll remember today is the man that told them that-, open the bonnet of the car and show them something. So the more you can invest in these people the better.
- Debs Yes and a need to invest in the right people don't you think? They need to be a passionate person ((40:50?))
- Mary Yes, will be good communicators really, fundamentally it's a communication thing. So yes, the investment and if you look round the site at Beaulieu we are very very strong on that. There are guides in Palace House, you know they talk to you as soon as you walk in the door, the guys at the motor museum will also do the same and we have increased the number of-, particularly in terms of interpretation guides in the motor museum through the use of volunteers.
- Debs Do they get trained?
- Mary Yes, absolutely, but we have about fifty volunteers now working in the motor museum trust, in a combination of roles in the motor
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museum and in the curatorial aspect and in the collection centre.  
So that has been a huge enhancement to the interpretation and the experience of the visitor.

Debs So, do you think for the abbey that you'll increase numbers?

Mary If possible, that would be good, obviously at this time of year, January and February there's not that many of them around but it does really bring a place alive. You get one person who's just there talking about it, it's such a draw.

Debs I certainly know when we were doing the marketing for the launch a group of our students said that ((41:54?)) getting a lot of students to come along and be there at the launch and I said ((42:00?)) won't know what they're talking about so someone will get them confused with the living history people and they were quite distressed with me ((42:06?))

Mary Yes you have to train people of course, but that is absolutely the best thing you can have is a person. If you are looking to invest to an expensive hand held PDA for every visitor or people, it's a no-brainer you go for the people because technology tends to be very expensive and short shelf life and I'd rather have the people.

Debs Yes, exactly I've got a tablet in there and I bought it probably a year and a half ago, two years ago and I now think it's now too slow and need something faster and that's the issue you're going to get into if you start providing these things.

Mary So it's just-, yes, we sort of thought about it, we did discuss it intensively in the motor museum in particular and we've decided no, we'd stick to people and that sort of technology.



- Debs            And moving imagery ((43:00?))
- Mary            Moving image, big screen and enhancement of the displays with more inferior and social materials to put the cars in social context or ((43:11?)) context which you'll see.
- Debs            Yes, so with the abbey maybe you could have another screen with a 3D abbey maybe, a touch screen so that you can move it round and ((43:26?)) yourself.
- Mary            That would be good, definitely. I mean anything that can draw people in is a good thing but layering the information is important I think.
- Debs            ((43:42?)) just want to ask you how it went. Yes I've asked you most of this in the talking. Yes I've put here 'I remember having difficulty with technology many times and require skill sets to achieve the application needed and therefore had to change it so things I really wanted to do, I couldn't do' and has that happened here ie when you start to do something is it the fact that you're kind of limited you don't have skill sets?
- Mary            Yes I personally don't have the skill set. Generally I will ask someone else who does and I work with an independent designer, a graphic designer, we also have an in-house design team so I can ask their advice, I can ask a number of people who are museum designers, professionals or independent designers. I will definitely go out and ask for help.
- Often these things are more financially constrained than anything else. I mean if you're working as we are in an independent sector without grant funding you're working on a very small-, or relatively

small budget whereas if you work on an HLF bid, I'm working on another one at the moment somewhere else, huge bid, you know it's just a whole other level of funding which I find simply depressing frankly.

Because the consultants involved, there are so many of them and they-, I've been to a lot of projects recently in museums where they've really over specified things in museum refurbishments and they've put in so many touch tables and they've put so many things and they cost an absolute fortune to put in. They break down on day one probably and certainly by the second month they're not-, only 50% of the things are working, they are very labour-, time intensive in terms of managing those technological things so that the cost of-, the overhead of running the display goes up intensely, by using a lot of the modern technology things and they don't necessarily, as I've said, add to the core. I mean actually a good example-, good and bad is SeaCity which I'm sure you've been to.

Debs I haven't ((45:46?)).

Mary Well I'm going to have to slap your wrist because that is really bad if you haven't been to that. Okay, you must go because it's very interesting and I'd be interested to know what you thought of it. They've had a huge-, quite a big lottery grant to do it, a lot of money and they've got two strands, they've got the story of the city of Southampton to cover and they've got the Titanic story which they've majored on oh and they've also got a temporary gallery.

They had a lot of money to do it and in the story of Titanic and the story of Southampton they have used quite a lot of modern museum technological applications like big touch tables and so on. Some of them are really good, but every time I've visited, every time

I've visited, there's always been some not working at all, out of order, even right from the start. I don't think that's acceptable and when I went round both of those things, I didn't meet or interact with a single person. So when you walk around the galleries there, there are no guides, it's self-guiding but I just wish they'd just actually had a few more people on the ground.

Debs To humanise it.

Mary Yes, a little bit. There are elements of SeaCity that I absolutely love and one of the best things and go and see it, is the use of the court room, because what they've done is they've converted, because English Heritage wouldn't let them take out the court room because it's a listed building. So what they did was, they've made the court room into the Titanic enquiry room and they've recreated the court of-, and it's brilliant, and it's-, and you-, we stayed twenty minutes sitting, and the original furniture's all there, the judge's chair it's fantastic. Really, really good.

Debs Is there any narrative there?

Mary It's got film, it's got the whole thing running all the time, it's absolutely-, do go and see SeaCity because it's a really interesting, very recently completed, local project that's really good. I like it but like it worries me that where's it going to go? It's-, once you've been to it, I mean I've been twice to visit it and I'll go again, because I love going and I think it's great, but it's difficult, it will become very static-, quite what are they going to do with it in another five years because everyone will have been and I think well what are you doing about that?

- Debs Yes I know because at Intech they've-, because we've done some student projects with Intech and they've had this sports thing on didn't they for the last year for the, obviously the Olympics and they've got all these extra staff in order to engage the slightly older...
- Mary We've been a couple of times with the kids
- Debs ...and they've got a few technology things but they weren't working when we went even with the students and that was at the beginning and I know from my own experience when I've taken things to do with technology and they've not worked.
- Mary So you know it's such a big investment and if you look at the total budget of a museum refurbishment yes it says a million pounds; they might spend a quarter of a million on these technologies that then don't work. And you think 'oh I wish they'd just done, tried a bit less hard and did just some of the really well tested-, tried and tested things and-, but go and visit SeaCity, it's really interesting.
- Debs ((49:26? Too much background noise to hear))
- Mary Oh gosh, that's a long way. Anyway that's an interesting one to visit though but often I...
- Debs Do you think, the thing is with the technology it's nice as a wow factor when you first arrive, but then if-, as a repeat visit you probably won't use it anyway so ((49:55?)) that experience.
- Mary Yes, because you're looking at things in more depth and often the use of technology to get information is very slow. If you go through a touch table experience or a touch screen experience you have to stand there for a long time to get to the page you sort of want.
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Whereas if you look at graphic panels, you just-, well you can read it so much quicker.

Debs            You can scan it through.

Mary            You can scan it through and then you can go 'oh that's an interesting picture, and let's read that bit and that's with that and you look. With a touch screen you've got to stand there and you've got to do this or you've-, if it's a touch table that's even worse because they hardly ever work well. I've seen some of the biggest touch tables in Europe because I've visited a lot of museums in Europe in the last couple of years where they've got them eight metres long by three metres wide. They're just enormous and completely mad and have cost like a million pounds and you think well what was the point of that? Because you don't get the information out from it.

Motion sensor tape-, I've seen another exhibition in Cherbourg that I went to see on Titanic-, they've got a Titanic-, I-, in fact last year I went to three, four Titanic exhibitions, went to Belfast to see that one there, one in Southampton and one in Cherbourg, amazing. The one in Cherbourg which was in the original dock building for transatlantic passengers, beautifully done, very French, very sort of alternative but had lovely elements.

I thought it was really super actually but they'd used motion sensor technology with information so that you stand and it's projected on the wall, very big and you have to stand on the spot and wave to make things happen. But the information that was being given was things like about passengers on the Titanic. Also it was so slow it was like wave here if you want to hear about the woman who whatever, so you'd wave up there and then it'd scroll to the next

page and you'd stand there doing all this like this and actually I'm not sure I learnt anything about anything other than I had to wave.

Because it was quite difficult to get the technology to work, because of the different height of people like my son tried to do it and he was too short, and he didn't wave in the place, okay or you're too tall, or you don't understand. Getting to understand how to access it was complex because it was a new technology. I've never seen-, it was my first time I've ever seen motion sensor interpretation where you had to stand and wave at something because normally it's either touch screen or shadow, or but this was a whole new thing and nobody could understand how to make it work, it was brilliant, but it must have cost a fortune to put it in. And just the information-, just the creation of the content must have taken forever, but then at the end of it I don't think I came away with a single fact.

So I'm not sure, although it's very impressive, but the thing that was really good there was they had a speeded up time line on a cartouche screen where you sat through the experience of the boat leaving Cherbourg to the point of sinking. It was a speeded up timeline and it was from the bow of the thing so it was basically an eight minute film of the ship going up and down as it crossed over the sea and radio transmissions and all sorts of things, but you didn't ever see the ship because you were on it, looking out and it was fantastic. And it was totally French in that it was so sort of imaginative it was all about imagining yourself sitting on a ship.

Whereas the Belfast was all much, much more about presenting an experiential thing I mean it was amazing what they've done there. I mean you really need to fly to Belfast, it's phenomenal and I can-, it's an example of how to spend money, very, very, very much and I

mean that's-, and some of the things are excellent and some things don't work and it's completely uneconomical, and unsustainable but it's lovely to visit.

Debs Do you think there would be or you may have done this, put up some form of screen or something in the abbey space and do one of these projection mapping things about ((54:24?))

Mary Well I think a screen is quite an obtrusive to the physical space that's the problem. Introducing a lot of physical technology...

Debs Just for an event maybe.

Mary Oh yes events yes, definitely I mean we've done in the past quite a lot, we've done sound and light shows before yeah which are so lovely, particularly if you can get Gregorian choirs and music and poetry and I've-, we've done two or three events in the recent ten years and they've been a huge success because it's so atmospheric, it's such a good performance space.

Debs And it can ((54:53?))

Mary It's very, very good. I mean if we didn't have a motor museum we probably would be doing amazing things in the abbey but because it's sort of second fiddle, it's been-, but we're going to address that in the next few years and it will become hopefully come alive a lot more.

Debs ((55:13? Background noise))

Mary I'm sure you've got a lot more questions, I'd like to answer some more, just think of some more.

Debs            Some of them we have talked about already, in discussions-, but these are the areas I wanted to cover with you. So that each one of you has got your own view of it, the different areas I'm talking-, I've been talking to you with. It's just been so ridiculously silly trying to get hold of everybody.

Mary            Susan's on holiday this week, she's in Wales, so unfortunately that hasn't worked for you today, and it means more trips for you.

Debs            No, I don't mind coming down at all actually, it's wonderful to be here anyway.

Mary            Anyway, just to go back to your content, we...