

- Debs Thank you Susan, anyway, for allowing me to do this.
- Susan Pleasure.
- Debs Yeah it's really good to see you. I have a load of questions for you, but really they're guidance only for me to prompt me in case the discussion doesn't flow. I'm sure it's going to. First of all I'd like to ask you about your background and how you came to be where you are now, if that's okay?
- Susan No that's fine. I've got a history degree and as part of my degree course I did voluntary work in archives and when I was looking towards finishing my degree, I looked at whether I wanted to do teaching or archive work. I decided, in the end, that I quite fancied the challenge of teaching so I did a postgraduate certificate in education.
- As part of that postgraduate certificate and also during some of my holidays I did vacation work in archives again and I did various courses while I was doing my PGC to do with archives and local studies and that sort of thing and I continued to do that when I was teaching and I used archives and local studies collections quite a lot in the teaching as well so I was keeping that interest with it. The teaching jobs that I had were fixed contract ones so I was always looking at the papers and I saw an advert for a job which was called heritage education officer and archivist and I thought, "That sounds very interesting." So I applied, was interviewed and I got the job at Beaulieu.
- Debs Excellent. Well done you.
- Susan And I've been here ever since, yeah.
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- Debs Wow. That's really good.
- Susan Yeah so right place, right time.
- Debs Yeah it doesn't happen often does it?
- Susan It doesn't happen often and they've never had a heritage education officer here before and always previous to that they'd had a part time archivist who was usually a retired gentleman. So a 20-something young lady was a bit different all ways round ((laughing)).
- Debs Yeah, but it must have been marvellous. It would be one of my ideal jobs. If I wasn't teaching it would've been really something that I'd enjoy, yeah.
- Susan Yeah and it combines the two things that I enjoy and it's one of those jobs where I've always said I don't know whether I'm an introverted extrovert or an extroverted introvert, but both elements of it combine the spectrum if you like.
- Debs It's a good mix.
- Susan Yeah and I always say that interpretation is the bit where the education, if you like the archives, meet and being at both ends of it I find very helpful in terms of interpretation because when I'm researching, I know what I want the end product to be and when I'm at the end product, I know what I'd like to find when I'm researching, if you get my drift? ((Laughing)).
- Debs I do, I do because that was partly what I was doing with the Beaulieu project and I knew what I wanted to research and then researching that spurs on other ideas doesn't it?
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Susan It does and also when you're researching you find things and you think, "Oh!" Because you're at the sharp end as well you think, "Oh that would be really good because we could do that with that." Whereas if you don't have that sharp end experience, you might not realise that what you discover is actually quite helpful or quite useful and, again, when you're at the sharp end you think, "Oh it would be really good if we had so and so" but because you're not used to the research process, you don't realise that that's not feasible or it doesn't work like that. So yeah, really good.

Debs Yeah, yeah. So you must have seen quite a few changes here then, in the time that you've been here with the way that the interpretation is done around the site, yes?

Susan Yes probably, although it's always been pretty good here because it's something that the family have always been interested in, particularly from a design sense. So it's always been very high quality, good standards and then obviously as thinking within the interpretation world has developed, we've tried to embrace what's relevant to Beaulieu and also tried to include all the various elements to make our interpretation as successful to as many people as possible without excluding anyone or making it difficult for one group to the exclusion of others.

So yeah it evolves I think is the right word, but obviously everything that we do is related to the various constraints that we have on the sites that we use. Also to budgets, availability of different things at a particular time. Sometimes you can do something and you can make an allowance for something that you can add to later. Sometimes you know that what you do now is going to be there for the next 10 years so you won't have provisioned to put something else in so

you've got to decided, "This is what we want and we're happy for it with the next 10 years."

Debs So how do you go about the process? Who is it that actually initiates an interpretation here? Is it the family? Is it the estate? Is it a team of people?

Susan It can vary in terms of sometimes it can be the family who are the driving force between something being done. Sometimes it's because we've been offered something and we think, "Oh yeah great. Let's use that, let's do that." Sometimes it comes from Beaulieu Enterprises Limited, which is the commercial company here, in response to visitor feedback and market research and then they can assign a particular person or team to do that. So yeah it's varied. There isn't one route, it's a varied option.

Debs So, for you, are you involved in all the areas? Are you involved in the house and the Abbey? Because I know the motor museum is a kind of different area isn't it?

Susan That's right. Basically with the interpretation I get involved with all the areas except the motor museum. So at the moment that's Palace House, Beaulieu Abbey, Secret Army Exhibition and Buckler's Hard.

Debs That's a lot of research.

Susan So that's quite a wide historical period shall we say?

Debs Yeah it is yeah.

Susan Which is great because I like variety. So that suits me as well rather than just being responsible for one part of it, it's nice to have all the

different areas to research and go into and then also with Palace House it's not just the house, we do small exhibitions in the house on particular subjects. So something which relates to the Beaulieu estate so that widens it even more.

Debs So in choosing one of those events in Palace House is it like a centenary or an anniversary or something that makes you do that?

Susan The ones we've had recently, the first one we did was in relation to the centenary of the spirit of ecstasy mascot on the Rolls Royce cars, which I know is motoring, but it's a story which the Montagu family are very involved with so hence why it was Palace House.

The second one we did was Ralph Montagu, Lord Montagu's son, asked the Beaulieu Camera Club to make a photographic record of the year of the life of the Beaulieu estate. So that was an exhibition of their photographs and the new one we've done is because Ralph Montagu wanted to display the family coronation robes.

So we decided to do it this year with the 60th anniversary of the coronation. So we've got what we call the royal pageant, which is links between Beaulieu, the Montagu family and royalty. So, yeah it's not really one common theme with that and at the moment we're thinking about what we might do for the next one and there's all sorts of things which could be done and they all fall into all the categories that you've just mentioned. What we do is we tend to talk through what there might be available and not available or what we might like to do and then something evolves from the discussions.

Debs Okay. I was curious on my part to understand, okay so an interpretation is put on, but actually how did it come about? Who

made the decision to put that particular thing on at that time and then how that feeds through? Are any of your events put on from visitor feedback? I.e. from the surveys that you might do they'll be suggesting, "Oh we'd like to see this or we'd like to see that"? Does that ever come into it?

Susan

I think from my own experience from the areas that I look after, it's not that it's specifically a whole exhibition, but it's when you look at doing something new like when we did Buckler's Hard, is obviously over a number of years taking children round, just being down there and working when visitors are around and talking to people and get individual things or things that people have suggested and they come up several times, "Oh we'd like to know more about X or we'd like to know more about Y" or somebody just asks you a question and you think, "Yeah that's a really good idea. I can do something with that."

So it's not that they've asked specifically for one thing, it's just getting a feel for what people want by talking to them just generally, not asking what they want, but just generally having a chat with them and then obviously as archivist I also answer enquiries from people who have visited and they've seen something or they want more information about something and when you research it, you think, "Actually that's a really interesting story. We could do something with that." So you put it in the file and you think, "Well when we do that, we'll bring that out." So in that sense they do, but I don't remember me personally being involved in actually putting something on because somebody's said, "Can we have that?" Whether they've done that in the museum, I'm not sure or I wouldn't know.

- Debs I don't think it happens.
- Susan No, I don't think it does.
- Debs I'm not just saying here, but in the research that I've done it's often coming from the top and down through rather than coming from the visitor and up, but bearing in mind the feedback that you've gained as you've just said.
- Susan So that may be where it's actually coming from and it may be that something, when you think about it, you think, "Yeah actually I remember someone talking to me about that" or it's so long ago that you don't remember it, but something somewhere has sparked that from something that somebody's said.
- Debs It's interesting though isn't it?
- Susan It is very much so.
- Debs In your study and education and stuff, was there anyone who really influenced you in the archivist area? Is there anyone you kind of like thought, "That's a really great person. They're doing a really great thing. I'd really like to be something like them"? Do you have any influences in that way, if you see what I mean?
- Susan Probably the nearest I would come to that is one the teachers I had when I did A-Level history because part of the reason I wanted to teach history is because, by and large at school, it was taught so badly you weren't interested in it, but outside of school I liked going places, finding out about them, that whole sort of why are things like this and that curiosity, asking the sort of questions and one of my A-Level history teachers was also like that and she made it really interesting and yes you did the work that you were supposed to do,
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but she turned it on its head and approached it in a completely different way, which I have to say, worked for me because it engaged your interest in it and I think that's partly why I thought it would be great, "If she could do that for me, wouldn't it be great to do it for others?" That sort of idea of doing it.

Debs So your family, did they take you out and about to these, obviously when you were younger they must have done? Did they have an interest in that?

Susan I think yeah probably in the sense of that whole...

Debs Cultural interest.

Susan Yeah and that sort of curiosity about things and going to see different places to widen your experience of things or maybe going to places that you thought, "Oh do I have to?" I was one of those children that used to say, "Why does that do that? Why is that like that?" And then both my parents would explain different bits and pieces. So yeah probably, that's part of it, but then I don't know if they took us because we were interested.

Debs They were interested and they took you along anyway.

Susan They took you along and then we found. That I don't remember, don't know.

Debs No I'd be the same. I think because I grew up in London early years and we were taken to all sorts of places and I think it was for our benefit, but I don't know ((laughing)).

Susan No I'm always conscious of my parents wanting to give us opportunities and I'm guessing that that's probably part of it.

Debs Thank you. No that's good. So for the Abbey, the vision for the Abbey, we know because we've spoken about it, about the fact that you've got the fantastic place, it was the cause of Beaulieu and everything else and yet the bulk of the visitor comes here to go to the motor museum.

Susan That's right, yeah.

Debs How can that be changed? ((Laughing)) Big question.

Susan It is a big question.

Debs If you had the wherewithal, no budget restriction, no limitations, what would you really like to see for the Abbey?

Susan I think short of rebuilding it ((laughing)), which is probably something that you would never get permission to do is because I always think that the thing with the Abbey is, because it's a ruin, people don't realise what was there. As soon as you say just the church part is like a cathedral and you say to them, "Where do you come from? Oh Salisbury. Have you seen Salisbury Cathedral? Yeah? Well that's what's here. That's what that building would've been." And then like Salisbury I say, "You've got the cloister. So you'd have the cloister or coming in Winchester, well that's the size except you'd have the cloister." And they sort of, "Oh wow."

So what I would like to do is to give people some idea just of what this building community actually was because then I think they appreciate the experience more and because I do the same myself when you go to somewhere where there's not a lot lying around and you think, "Oh yeah, right."

Debs Yeah I suppose my 3-D brain builds it ((laughing)).

- Susan And then, like you say, you build it and then I'm thinking, "Oh well that's that so that would come..." because of the work obviously that I've done, that's part of my job is to do that and that's what I would like to do, but I haven't got any ideas about how you would actually go about doing it.
- Debs Because it would make a real living history event, wouldn't it, to actually rebuild the Abbey as they built it?
- Susan That's right.
- Debs So you've got all the skills, so your traditional skills, so you're bringing all that back to life, recording it and then you have the Abbey in place, but then you don't have what we have here now ((laughing)).
- Susan That's right and that's more questions and various sort of things. So it's almost a way of, not virtual reality, but you need a way of conveying, rebuilding it in a non-physical sense to give the idea and sometimes you can do that with plantings, but that's difficult on a site like Beaulieu Abbey because it's a scheduled ancient monument so roots and all those sorts of things are a no-no because obviously that causes issues with that.
- You can do it like you do 3-D, but that doesn't connect in a way that it does if you stand there and you look. So I guess what I'm thinking is you want some sort of technology in a funny sort of way that allows it to almost be, not hologramatic, but that sort of idea. So as you're looking and you can see it, but it's not intrusive or anything and because it's outside.
- Debs Yeah there's an augmented reality isn't there?
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Susan That's right.

Debs So you can look at it, what it is, put this up and then see what it was.

Susan I think nothing that's out there at the moment fits the bill. Whether technology in the future will be able to produce something, well maybe, I don't know, but no.

Debs It's a shame isn't it?

Susan Yeah, no it is.

Debs Because even though having built it in 3-D and therefore it's a real size object on the computer, when anyone's looking at it on either a kiosk or a plasma screen or whatever else, it's still not the size it is.

Susan No and that's the difficulty that people have is equating what they're seeing there with what's outside. Particularly when you see things in plan, it always looks much smaller than it actually is. It's like if you go to a housing estate when they're building houses and they've just got the floor plan, you've got the concrete and basically the foundations and you stand on there and you think, "Gosh that's not a very big room" but it's enormous. It doesn't look very big when you see it.

Debs No it needs that 3-D dimension to actually understand.

Susan To actually give you the idea of the size, which I think is a big obstacle.

Debs It's a shame isn't it?

Susan It is. Henry VIII knocked it all down.

- Debs Yeah because I can remember the 3-D thing that I did and you had the actual monk sitting on the pews and therefore being, for the first time, truly able to see the scale of it even though it was on the screen.
- Susan That's right yeah.
- Debs And you being quite delighted with that in some ways and it would be nice to be able to do that over there wouldn't it? But, as you say, holographically.
- Susan Yeah or something that allows you to do it outside in an outside space rather than an inside space because a few weeks ago Mary and I went to, as part of our research for re-doing the Abbey, we went to Cleeve in Somerset, Tintern Abbey and Hales, which is a daughter house of Beaulieu, obviously Netley and we also went to Titchfield and we went to Waverley as well and we did it all in a very short space of time and what I found quite instructive about that was, I knew it anyway, but visiting them, each abbey has its own, if you like, well preserved pieces and obviously if you put them all together it looked really good, but Tintern and Netley have very good remains of the church and it just makes such a difference to a perception of the building and what you're looking at is to have those high walls and yet go to Cleeve and they've got a fantastic refectory and day room and dormitory and it just gives you the real sense of the monks living there and everything and it is those actual spaces that give you the sense of what happened in the buildings rather than the ruined parts.
- Debs Because I suppose if you're wanting to build something that's visual that gives an ambience then the ruins will do that, but if you're wanting people to understand the life that was there, the
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community that was there, then the likes of Cleeve would be that kind of space wouldn't it? It's having those built in spaces.

Susan

Yes very much so because although they haven't got very much of the church left, they've got a fantastic (sacristy?) still with some of the paint and everything that's on there and it's incredible and round the cloister they've got a lot of the (corodian?) rooms, the little rooms where the people that would go and pay for the Abbey to look after them, the areas where they would live and one area of the cloister is carved, is a little what we would call a smiley face and that was done all those centuries ago and we don't have that level of detail on what we've got left here. Unlike at Cleeve, a lot of their walls, they've got the render on the walls. You go to some of the other Abbeys like Waverley and they don't have that many ruins and basically it's the core of the walls which are left.

So what people are looking at, they tend to think that what they see is what was there and actually it would've looked very different. You're just left with how your particular ruins are and yes you can still talk about them as ruins and that they're the romantic idea and people like (Gilpin?) and that sort of thing, there's a place for that, but I think that we really need to interpret why it was there in the first place, what it did and what the lives of the people were there because okay they were monks, but they were still human beings and they still, if you like, exhibited all the idiosyncrasies and ideas that modern people do, all the things like jealousy, greed, piety, because we still used to have that type of thing and a strong religious belief or you can get the whole businessman, you know, that whole thing.

- Debs Yeah so the Abbott Salbury was much more a businessman in a lot of ways wasn't he?
- Susan Yeah because the church in medieval times was one way to forge a career. You didn't have to be particularly religious to find that's a way forward.
- Debs It gave you an opportunity to earn pennies.
- Susan That's right. It's sort of explaining it because a lot of people think that they're not interested because they're not religious when you don't have to be religious, to me, to find that community, because it's about life in times gone by was one aspect of it.
- Debs The characters really do help to bring all of that to life don't they?
- Susan That's right, the people, and then what they did and how they lived and the whole idea and calligraphy. Most people understand that the monks wrote and then, okay they might know that they wrote on parchment and vellum, "Oh yeah it's some sort of animal skin and they wrote with ink." Yeah, but what sort of ink? How did they make the inks? How did they get the colours?
- Debs And breaking it down, yeah.
- Susan Yeah you break it down, which I think people find quite interesting.
- Debs Yeah. If I could do my whole career again it would be about plants.
- Susan That's the thing isn't it? And also lots of the things which the monks did in their way of life are things which have come back into fashion.
- Debs Yeah it's cyclic as well isn't it?
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- Susan Yes that's right. People are interested in using plants for different things and people are interested to go back and get the wool from the natural sources and do it. So lots of these things which they did people are interested in, not because they want to do that for themselves.
- Debs They want to understand.
- Susan Yeah or they don't want to do it for themselves, but they would quite like to buy a piece of cloth that's been made in the traditional manner and that's important to them buying it rather than just buying something else.
- Debs So will you put some of that back into the Abbey do you think? So like the apothecary to do with the plants?
- Susan Yes, probably, yeah.
- Debs And then maybe the inks and how the inks were made?
- Susan Probably and sort of how they actually built Abbeys in terms of the actual building techniques when you don't have all your modern earth movers, cranes and all that. How do you physically do that? And also you can also bring out some of the fact that the way they did things was quite sophisticated in terms of geometry and all the mathematical and all that sort of thing and non-standard measurements, which fascinates kids because you get into the whole thing of, although they do the metres and lots of them know about feet and inches so you say, "Well how big's a foot?" "Oh I don't know because we do metres and inches." So I say, "Think about it. A foot." "Oh is it somebody's...?" Yeah and then you can go on and you do the cute bits and all the, "Oh" but then suddenly it

engages them. So you say, "Okay so you're building an Abbey. Right your foot's going to be the measurement for our foot. So we take everything from you, from that person." And then I say, "But then you get crushed by some falling masonry and we've only built half the Abbey." "Oh right. Are your feet the same size? No they're not." And then you say, "But it doesn't matter. Maybe you don't get crushed by falling masonry. Maybe you live until your 67 years old, but this Abbey's taking longer than that to build so what happens? Do we look for someone with your size?" You know, that whole thing brings it home to them, the fact that things they take for granted like there is a standard measurement that everybody uses, it hasn't always been the case and also makes the case for why that was quite an important step forward, is the fact that you've got standardised weights and measures and things.

- Debs And that's something that's interesting to adults now as well because adults in their 30's, 40's, do they know feet and inches?
- Susan No.
- Debs I'm showing my age ((laughing)).
- Susan No because decimalisation was '72. So a lot of them know metres and various sort of things like that.
- Debs It's like the off track. When I did measure the cloisters and the big arches, they were pretty spot on metres.
- Susan But that's why Beaulieu's quite interesting because there is a theory that the master mason for certainly a large part of the time when the main building of the Abbey, the cloister and the church, was French. So that might explain why they're spot on in metres because

the style of the church is a French style and I think there's a couple of records where it refers to Durand as the master mason. That could explain.

Debs Yeah because he's one of the characters isn't he?

Susan That's right. So that could explain why it does match up because he's using his expertise. It would be interesting to compare wouldn't it, ones that they know were supervised by an English master mason with those that were supervised by a French? Because Beaulieu was founded directly from (Cita?) so maybe that's partly why French were involved.

Debs Yeah I think they were French monks that came over.

Susan That's right it was the French monks that came over and therefore if you take like one of the houses that were founded by an English ((?)) to see where they're the same as a comparison, what they're actually building in or if different sections of the Abbey vary or if you've got enough left, different sections of the Abbey vary.

Debs Yeah. So you ought to look up Hales then because she's the daughter isn't she?

Susan Yeah she's the daughter. Interesting.

Debs So ultimately you would perhaps re-build the Abbey and then have artists in residence if you see what I mean? That's the phrase isn't it? For showing the skills in order to do that maybe if no budget.

Susan Yeah I was going to say, yeah it's a difficult one isn't it? It is a difficult one. I think it's probably because anything that is too

intrusive or very expensive, even if money is no budget, is not normally something that is an option.

So you can have flights of fantasy but you always try to scale them back into what is pragmatic or reasonable or likely, although I think sometimes it is quite good to just think without constraints because sometimes from what seems an outlandish idea, you do actually get something that's useful and practical from that that you may not have thought of if you hadn't thought of, "Oh yeah I'd really like to do that, but that's not practical so could I produce, not the same thing, but something equally good that is workable?" And sometimes you can do it. Sometimes you can't, but sometimes by coming at it that way.

Debs And it must be good working with Mary because she understands all of that as well doesn't she?

Susan Oh she does very much so, yeah, and she's very practical, which is very good as well. Yeah, no I was going to say, she's practical, but she has that creative side as well because some practical people aren't creative and vice versa so you can get people who are creative, but they can't see that, yes it's a great idea, but it won't last five minutes once you've had three French groups through. ((Laughing)) So therefore the fact it's constantly broken, it's not very helpful because it's not fit for purpose. Yeah it would be great if you put it in a museum or somewhere where they don't have high volume of people trying to use it because it will last, but it's not practical here, but she understands that, which again is good.

Debs So what do you think you will be doing?

- Susan We're concentrating on re-displaying the display in the undercroft, which we want to use to tell the story of Beaulieu Abbey and particularly the monks, the history of the Abbey specifically, and then also part of it will be monastic life.
- So it would be a combination of the two and whether we do that as, one part would be the history of Beaulieu Abbey and then the other part would be monastic life, or whether we weave the two together, we haven't decided which we're inclined to at the moment and within that we want it to be quite visual. Whether that's probably using a mixture of contemporary illustrations with modern reconstructive illustrations, objects and to have some interactivity within that as well, things for people to do.
- Like with the different building materials that you use so people can look at them so they can have a good old feel of different things because interactive doesn't have to be something that's all whizz and bells and singing, it can be just as simple as having the different types of stone so that people can see them, but they can touch them as well because people like touching ((laughing)).
- Debs They do. Yeah ((laughing)). It's very difficult to stop them isn't it really?
- Susan Yes I was going to say.
- Debs "Don't touch this."
- Susan Yeah please touch this bit, but not that bit.
- Debs Very difficult. Will you have anything in the external space or will it all be in the ((?))
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Susan I think as part of what we want to do, we want to extend interpretation in its general sense into the ruined area, but again we haven't decided specifically how we might do that. We've got several ideas, but the one thing that we don't want it to do is to intrude on what you're looking at. Like you go to some outside places and you think, "Wow" and then right in the middle of it is a socking great information board and you think, "That doesn't work because the board takes away from what you're actually looking at."

Debs Yeah very much so.

Susan So it's a way of doing it where it's informative, but not intrusive. So the interpretation you have enhances your experience because it's helping you to interpret what you're doing and it may be that we put in things like ((?)) or various bits. We have a problem with issues, as you know, in this area because of where we are in terms of reception for various forms.

Debs If you're Orange it's good.

Susan Yes the reception for various things, but they're hoping to look at that, but even then, you see, you can't just stick something where you get the reception because, again, it may kill what you're trying to do and I also think at the moment just relying on ((?)) is not particularly helpful for people that don't have the use of it. I think that's then excluding people. Maybe the day will come when everybody's got it and you can do that. I think that things like that are great, but I still think you need to have something for somebody or the people that haven't brought it, don't have that particular network, all that sort of thing because I think that is frustrating for

people to think, "Oh well if only I had that or I brought that or I was on Vodafone or Orange instead of on O2."

Debs They'd have had ((?)) experience.

Susan Yeah I would get something.

Debs Yeah because although smart phones and stuff are fairly widely used, they're still not everywhere and even our digital media students, there's quite a few of them that don't have a smart phone.

Susan Yeah so I think, "Ooh, er" sometimes and yeah I think maybe the day will come when that's the way that it all goes, but I don't think it's quite there yet.

Debs No I think that and also, as Mary pointed out, you don't always want to be looking at screens for most of your day.

Susan That's what I was going on to say.

Debs And then you're having to look at another screen.

Susan And also on a day like today, the screen isn't actually that visible.

Debs Yeah it's very difficult.

Susan I was just saying, so you have to go somewhere in the shade where you can see it and that maybe not the right point and yeah the whole thing I think is great, but it's not the bigger answer to everything. In some areas it will be appropriate.

Debs And even though I've been a great promoter of technology like that, I do understand that seeing somebody physically doing something is

a far more enriching experience than actually looking at it through the lens of some description.

Susan Yes that's right or even if you've got someone then doing it and says, "Here have a go" you get much more insight into what people did by actually having that opportunity and also it's something that you don't have the opportunity to do at home. It gives you a reason to come to a place in order to be able to do that rather than just sit at home and read about it and look at some pictures or watch a film about it.

Debs It's taken me a while to realise, I didn't realise.

Susan But I think it's a combination of all of it because each type of interpretation has its merits and it's suitable for different areas.

Debs It's tools at the end of the day. It's using the right tool in the right place for the right thing.

Susan That's right, yeah.

Debs It's those three different things. So how do you then decide exactly? Is it yourself and Mary or do you bring more people in to make that final decision as to what's going to go ahead?

Susan Yes Mary and I between us come up with some various ideas and then we have a designer that we work with as well and we will involve him from a design point of view, although obviously both of us have our ideas.

Debs Design hints as well.

Susan Yeah what we like and what we don't like and Ralph will usually be involved as well because obviously he's a graphic designer as well,

but he usually comes in a bit later when we've got an idea and got a plan of something and he will comment on it, but yeah mainly I guess initially it's Mary and I and then bring a designer in when we've got together our idea of how we want it to work and then there will be obviously this fine tuning and when you get down to it and you think, "Actually no that's not going to work there, it would be better somewhere else" because something's come up that you couldn't have predicted like X will say, "Well we can't put a socket in there. If we move that there's the domino effect, then we've got to move that" and that sort of thing.

It's great that Mary is a member of the family, not to put too fine a point on it ((laughing)) and I think it works. If Mary was just another employee then there would probably be another layer on top of that, but because Mary is part of the family and, although she's part of the family, she can also do it, it works and they're quite happy with the result and she's a director of the company anyway.

Debs It helps considerably.

Susan Yeah I was going to say, she's operating at director level. So when Mary says, "Oh I think we can do this" it's not that you then have to apply to somebody to say, "Well we'd really like to do this and it's going to cost X amount and blah-de-blah-de-blah" because she knows what the situation is, she knows whether, "Are we looking at X this amount or this amount?" As a director she knows which it's likely to be so you go with that.

Debs So it's a really good place to be in that sense isn't it? Because I had a meeting with the Royal Green Jackets.

Susan Oh yes, yeah in Winchester.

Debs And it was the chair of the museums group there that we were talking to, Christopher I think it was and then Christine the curator, and they were wanting to re-do some of that and they're having to put in an HMF bid and so it's whether they get the money or not as to what they can do and what design company they can use and things like that and part of this PhD is really a case of what the visitor doesn't get because of all these other things. You can come up with this wonderful idea and actually what actually gets to the visitor is this idea and if you've got a designer that you work consistently with, they know you, they understand you, they know the way that you work, but if you're having to go out to an external designer then you've got how are you going to work with that designer? Are they going to be telling you what you should be doing? And so on.

Susan Yeah well it's a sort of partnership team work thing. So I think in terms of Beaulieu it works well. It wouldn't work for everywhere, but it works well here.

Debs And so I suppose in some ways you're a sort of micro-organisation.

Susan Yes.

Debs National Trust is the same in a sense because they have their designers usually in-house.

Susan Yeah they have in-house people don't they? Yeah.

Debs So they can do the same thing, but on a much larger scale as you're doing here.

Susan Yeah.

- Debs Quite nice.
- Susan It is. No it's great ((laughing)).
- Debs I can't think of anything more disappointing than having a great idea and then having it knocked, knocked, knocked.
- Susan And then what you end up with is nothing like where you started off.
- Debs And also obviously your educational role and the fact that you take the children round and escort groups around. You're talking, you're observing, you're seeing what they engage with and what they don't engage with so you're building up all that visitor experience in that sense aren't you?
- Susan That's right, yes. Yeah.
- Debs As then the person who is putting the interpretation in place.
- Susan You're dealing with the people who are in effect a part of your audience when you're doing the interpretation. So you're seeing how they react to different things and you've obviously got the children themselves, but you've also then got their teachers who also have ideas about what they want the children to get from the experience. So you've got their views and their input in doing it and because quite often when I'm out and about and around, because obviously it's quite a wide site so you're always walking around and doing things in different areas, you hear people talking about different things and, again, that's quite instructive to listen to people and sometimes just watching visitor flows, "Okay they're coming, but where are they going? Oh that's interesting, they're doing it that way round" or it's completely haphazard, it doesn't

matter, people just go there, there, there and there and then you think, "Well if they went that way" and it gets you thinking about, "Well what is it? Is it something to do with our signage? Is it the way they approach something? Is that why they always go?"

I suppose that's one thing we ought to do in the Abbey is we ought to get an entrance. At the moment people can go from all sorts of different ways in, is to actually direct them to a particular entrance because then we can interpret it slightly. I wouldn't say better, but you can guide what people are looking at or doing.

Debs John was saying something similar. In most manor houses or anything like that, historic places, you do have a route normally through the house don't you? How is that run?

Susan The entrance and exit is the same door so basically people have to go in and out the same way, but once they've gone in they can go anywhere round.

Debs Because it's not usual is it? Most places that I've been to anyway you have a pre-determined route.

Susan Within the house and part of that I think is because where the house is not enormous, if people all went round the same way, you'd end up with bottlenecks at the bottom of the stairs. So you just leave it to people to, "Oh there's a lot of people down there, I'll go up there or there's a lot there I'll go there." Somehow it sorts itself out.

Debs Yeah because Dunster Castle was big enough for that not to occur so they had a route around. So having built it in 3-D I was able to change that route and put it in reverse because my thoughts at the

time were the fact that, okay you see something you're walking that way, when you go back that way you see something different. So even if you make the same visit, but you go in a different direction round you see different things, yeah.

So that's why I did that and also then it was able to give access to the disabled visitors to allow them to see the things they wouldn't normally be able to see, but also the abled users to see the areas that was only there for the disabled, if you get my point?

Susan

Yes, no I do.

Debs

So yeah so it was the 3-D tools that gave you that opportunity to see more, but it's not the same as being there.

Susan

No and also with the Abbey, apart from during the season, it's not staffed. If you can direct people to the main entrance you can give them some basic information and then they can decide how they want to do it, but they've got that basic information to start with, whereas at the moment you can wander into the ruins and think, "Well okay what's this then? What are we doing here?" Whereas at least if you direct them to somewhere where it says, "This is Beaulieu Abbey. This is the plan of where it is and where the different bits are." You're giving them information that they can then decide what they want to do. Whereas in Palace House it's staffed all the time so they've always got someone who you can say, "What is this?"

Debs

And the living history element? John was saying about people dressing up and being little stage sets almost.

Susan

Yes, yeah.

- Debs Animated stage sets ((laughing)).
- Susan Yes I was going to say, we've got costumed guides in the house and then during the busy periods we also have costumed interpreters in the Abbey, which is usually a monk who will talk to people and we also have the Faulkner in the Abbey cloister talking about the birds and the various bits and pieces, which again enhances the experience for people going in there and also it's a Faulkner, "Oh yeah but it's an Abbey" "Yeah but the abbot used to entertain people here in the falconry."
- Debs Yeah big pomp and circumstance the lot of it.
- Susan Yeah exactly and you get royal visits. There were entertainments and events and bits and pieces. Yeah so whether they'd have done it in the cloister, but then the cloister wouldn't have looked like it did then, but it's a great space to use for that.
- Debs It's a really lovely site ((?)) and obviously I know so much about it ((laughing)).
- Susan I was going to say ((laughing)). I could interview you.
- Debs No ((laughing)). I haven't got much more. Are you alright for time?
- Susan Yeah that should be fine.
- Debs Interesting. The talking walls for Beaulieu, it was different to the Dunster Castle one because there wasn't so much architectural history over so many centuries. Although the characters in the Dunster one became very important to the Beaulieu one because they really did help to tell the story I think and then there was the fact sheets and the lifestyles and there was a lot of content basically
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and my concern was wanting to give too much and there's always been this element of how much choice do you give a visitor and how much time you want them to engage with it and moving them on basically so that other people can take part in that bit as well? So have you got any thoughts on the content and choice?

Susan I think, from experience, looking at similar things that people have had in different areas is that the majority of people will not stand there and go religiously through everything. They will pick something, sometimes at random, just to see what it does or they'll look at it and pick something that's of interest to them and then they will do that bit and then they will move on.

Most places where I've looked I'm not aware of people standing there and religiously going through absolutely everything that's on there, but I think that some of the things which for some of our visitors, particularly with my education hat on, teachers and people like that, if there is a connection to something that they can then get to at home or at work with the school if it's relevant, they will then go onto it there and use it as a resource, but they will do that externally. They won't get their groups using it while they're necessarily here, but they will use that externally and visitors say with families or people that have their interest, as I said, I think they do a bit and then they move on.

Debs So kind of like the website, which is how I planned it, for all the information to be there for people to access in that way, i.e. they came on a visit and they got a code to enter the website to then access more information or whatever. That's what I was doing it for rather than a kiosk in the museum, if you see what I mean? So that it needs breaking apart a little doesn't it? It's very much like you've

done it at Buckler's Hard so you get bits of information at different points that you can dip into.

Susan That's right, which we got from the naval museum at Portsmouth. We got the interactive game there for Illustrious where you have to load the thing. I can't remember exactly how long that is, but that's about the right length of time that people will stand.

Debs And engage with it.

Susan And engage with it and that is because they're following something on. So I think they'll stay there slightly longer than they might do if it's what I call an information idea, which is what they perceived it as as being there in the Abbey, "Oh yeah what does that do? Oh that's interesting. Have you seen that? Oh yeah" and then go on and look at something else or I did notice when it was in there a couple of times, because I was down there doing other things, people looked at it, did a bit and then they obviously went out and walked around and they came back again afterwards to look something, to find something on there.

Debs So they did actually look it up?

Susan Yeah and went back. That happened on a couple of occasions when I was down there. So they'd obviously seen something somewhere in the site and either wanted to know more or weren't sure and went to see if there was anything on the thing. So that happened a couple of times or I'm guessing that's what they did because they were there and then they moved away and then they came back again having been outside.

Debs Again, going back to the sheer physical size of the things, all the fact sheets and everything else was really there as a resource for the school children or people in their interest to delve deeper away from here, but the images of the building being built at different stages, of how it was built, the scaffolding and everything, trying to bring the size to life, but it's difficult isn't it in the domas in and out?

Susan Yeah that's right. That's what I was saying before about you need it to be there, but I did notice that even people didn't use it, because it had the big screen, people would stand and look at the screen without actually using it themselves. If they went in and someone was using it, they would look at it and stand and look at it and then move on. Whether some of them came back, I don't know because when I was down there I wasn't particularly monitoring that. So yeah I did notice the big screen worked.

Debs Moving. Something moving always attracts doesn't it? Yeah.

Susan Yeah that's right, it sort of attracted their attention.

Debs "Oh what's going on there?" Yeah. Okay, yeah. So when you're laying out your interpretation boards and your information bits, how do you choose what's going on there? Obviously it's relevant from all the stuff that we've been talking about, but how do you know how to limit the information, the amount of text, for instance, per image? Do you see what I mean?

Susan Yes I do. What we try to do is the information that we put on a panel, the opening paragraph is something which, if you take the subject of a panel, we usually try to have one subject per panel or one story per panel and if somebody doesn't have a lot of time, if

they only went round the exhibition and read the first paragraph of each panel they would have an idea of the subject.

Debs So it's almost like an abstract?

Susan Yeah.

Debs It gives you an overview crunched.

Susan And then the rest of the panel is if you've got time and you're interested in that subject you want more information about it, but it doesn't repeat what you've said before because you don't ever have enough words and most people don't want to stand and read for a long time.

We've probably got more words than we might otherwise have on the panels at Buckler's Hard because a lot of our visitors at Buckler's Hard, they've gone to the maritime museum because they're interested in the subject. So that gives them a lot of information that's there and other visitors who have gone because they happen to be in the area, there's lots of visual images on there with captions and the first paragraph, again, they don't have to stand and read the rest of it, but they're not put off by it. Because we've got lots of illustrations on the panel, they're not quite as put off as they might be if it was lots of text and just one thing and then deciding what, in terms of the number of words, quite often it's not a specific word count. It's what story do I want to tell and what is the minimum number of words I need to be able to tell this story?

So sometimes it's a really interesting story, but it's just too wordy to get the story across then sometimes it's better not to use it because you can't tell it. You have to give people so much information so

that they can understand the story that they won't ever get to the story because they'll have switched off. So although it's a good story maybe telling it on a panel, it's not the most appropriate way of doing it and sometimes you can tell the story by using a series of pictures with captions or a series of drawings with captions like building a ship because that could be so wordy to get every single thing, but if you've got a series of illustrations which show some of the things, you can do it in other ways.

Debs Picture, thousands of words and all that stuff.

Susan Definitely.

Debs There could be too much to choose from to go and see, to engage with, well what do I do? But then it's still making enough information available that's going to be of interest to such a wide number of people that visit.

Susan That's right, yeah because if you take Buckler's Hard, somebody that goes down there may have a passing interest in ship building, but be really interested in the social side of things. So they can flip through the ship building bit and then spend longer doing social side of it or vice versa or people may go and they're not really sure what they're interested in, but different panels will spark their interest for different reasons and they'll just pick and choose and then you get people who go down and they read everything and they work their way along.

Debs Yeah just soak it up.

Susan Yeah they just read everything and look at everything. So I think you try to appeal to as many of your visitors as you can by using a

variety of techniques, which is what you do when you teach. People learn in different ways so you provide lots of different ways for them to learn so that you provide something for everyone.

Debs So the educational aspect of your career has really helped?

Susan Yeah well find that it does in terms of the graded learning and the graded text. As I say, it's the same kind of thing really.

Debs Yeah for me it's certainly helped and, as I said to a couple of previous people, that if I hadn't have done the amount of jobs that I've done in my career, being involved with so many different things and then the teaching aspect with the design aspect and my interest in history, I would never have started off with anything like this ((laughing)). It's so consuming, it really is because you really want to know more. So I've got to step back sometimes when I'm doing something because I've got to think, "Well I don't need to know all that."

Susan No that's right, but sometimes you need to know all that in order to be able to then, in effect, précis it or turn it into a form which people can pick up really quickly and sometimes you need to write everything out so you end up with 400 words. You're never going to use 400 words, but you can give it to someone and they will say, "Oh that bit's really interesting, I really like." So you think, "Right, fine" and so then you incorporate that within it and you've also got all that extra stuff there if somebody does come back and say, "I'd really like to know more about..." And you think, "Oh right, yeah."

Debs Exactly, yeah. Okay one last question then. You've kind of answered it really, but if there was anything out of all the different areas that you touch upon, which is the one that you would elevate above the

rest as in terms of personal interest, enjoyment and you get the most from?

Susan I find that difficult because I like all of it and I like the fact that it's varied so it's not always the same. So you've got different elements of the different things and it's the variety of it that I enjoy rather than one particular aspect of it and it's the way that you can be doing one thing, but you're also doing one of the other bits at the same time.

Debs It all feeds in together.

Susan Because they all fit together really well. To me they do anyway. So yeah, sorry ((laughing)).

Debs No it's perfect because most people have said that as well so far ((laughing)). Andy said that and it was probably what I would say too, the fact that actually I like all of this, there's not one part of it, because it actually jigsaws together.

Susan That's what I say, it all works together and I think that's why it's enjoyable because you don't have to do one part of it and then hand it over and then you don't have any say in what comes later. So no that's what I like.

Debs Excellent. Thank you very much.

Susan That's alright.