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The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Did you see ...?

Museums Journal

The Sep/Oct issue¹ is the first takeover edition of *MJ*, coordinated by the Museum X² team, and includes a mass of really important and interesting features, eg:

- Hilary Carty “Forward thinking”, which looks at leadership in the future and the challenges we face [pp6-7]. It also highlights three key ‘framing’ priorities:
 - Values-based leadership
 - Adaptive leadership
 - Inclusive leadership.
- Carol Ann Dixon “Out of many, one museum”, which explores what would be needed to establish an African diaspora museum, and what new approaches would be required [pp8-9]
- Liam Wiseman “Why we need a Black British Museum”, which sets out a terrific case for why this is needed now: “It’s time we put Black people in charge of describing, presenting and reflecting on our histories. It’s time we had a Black British Museum.” [p9]
- Errol Francis “Past tense”, which looks primarily at Bristol, and the responses to the toppling of the Colston statue: “Bristol will need to devise more ambitious plans to address its past, rather than risk being seen as covering it up with piecemeal and tokenistic gestures. Pressure is growing on the city to do this now before there are further social disturbances – because this issue will not go away.” [pp10-11]
- Patrick Vernon “Into the groove”, which describes how the author “[...] is preserving African diaspora heritage through a radio show broadcast from a space station in the year 2300”³ [p12]
- Lisa Williams “Covid has changed the landscape and accelerated the push to decolonise Scotland’s museums”, which briefly looks at recent developments, including the “Empire, Slavery & Scotland’s Museums” project⁴, supported by the Scottish Government, and the “Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Group”⁵ [p14]

¹ *Museums Journal* Sep/Oct 2021. There is a brief outline of what is included, plus access for MA members at: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/>.

² "MUSEUM X CIC is a Community Interest Company based in the UK dedicated to creating a museum for Black British and Pan African culture", see: <https://www.themuseumx.com/homeold>.

³ See also: <https://www.mixcloud.com/patrick-vernon/>; <https://reelrebelsradio.com/show/museum-of-grooves/>; <https://patrickvernon.org.uk/>.

⁴ See: <https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/projects/empire-slavery-scotlands-museums/>.

⁵ See: <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news/article/13127/edinburgh-slavery-and-colonialism-legacy-review-group-an-update>.

- Maureen Roberts “Home collections are being lost without a Black British Museum” [p15]
- “Vox pop” column: “How do you engage people with Black British history?” [p15] which emphasises the importance of engaging everyone with Black history and stressing that Black history is an integral part of UK history (not just since 1948)
- Samenua Seshier “Let’s seize the opportunity to explore how we want history to remember us” (“Comment” column), which asks:

“The moment I have been dreading is here – Black Lives Matter has apparently had its day in the sun. The uprising no longer captures the news headlines. We are back to Covid-19, which will probably give way to Brexit and life will trundle on – or will it?”

The pandemic will alter the fabric of the cultural sector and wider society for years to come. But how will this moment of dramatic change affect African people in the heritage sector? My hope lies in radical and visionary solutions; my fear is that we shall witness the preservation of the status quo.” [p17]

- Rachael Minott “Make your own decolonisation journey ...” (“Policy” column):

“Decolonising museums is essential. But everyone imagines decolonial practice differently, as it is an exercise in creatively reimagining the world we live in. It is a future where the colonial legacies do not stigmatise, marginalise and harm some people, while giving others power, authority and domination.

Decolonisation guidance [6] cannot tell you how to decolonise your practice – that is a journey you must take on your own and with others. But hopefully it will provide the tools to help you think about your practice, design ways forward, open closed minds and connect disparate practitioners and practices.” [p17]

- Florence Okoye “[...] how we might ‘get it on’ with digital” (“Digital” column)

“Therefore, digital must be a space to provide healing and reparation. As the US music collective P-Funk put it: “If you ain’t gonna get it on, take your dead ass home.”

Whether by creating accessible platforms, using decolonised and community-centred design methodologies, building on green hosting services, pushing for innovative approaches to database technology that provide equitable access to curators and

⁶ See: “Decolonising Practice”, MA, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/decolonising-practice/>.

community members alike, digital is a great way for the Black British Museum to critique and do things differently.” [p17]

- Tehmina Goskar “You’ve got to get your history right” [pp18-19], which looks at the years of misrepresentation of social and cultural history in museums, and argues that:

“The real change happens behind the scenes. Adopt a step-by-step approach to changing how you think, be prepared to unlearn, and develop enough self-awareness to accept that museums are not always right and are frequently very wrong. Listen and act. Prioritising research brings dividends to decolonial practice.” [p19]⁷
- Michael McMillan “Waiting for myself to appear” which “[...] discusses how decolonising museums and the education system can help ensure that Black history is no longer overlooked” [pp20-25]
- Emily Zobel Marshall “Facing up to the past”, which outlines some of the work being done at Harewood House to expose its colonial past – and points to further work that needs to be done (eg slavery research)⁸ [pp26-27]
- Gus Casely-Hayford “Look East”, which looks at his plans for V&A East⁹ [pp28-30]
- “Building the future” [pp32-41], in which “Leading voices from across the globe share their insights and experiences of their efforts to advance the world’s understanding and knowledge of Black history” [p33]
 - Lonnie Bunch “A dream come true” [pp34-35], which looks at how the US National Museum of African American History and Culture came about [pp34-35]
 - Edwina Ashie-Nikoi “Total recall” [pp36-37], which argues that, when we are researching history, we need to ensure that everyone’s voice is heard – and that there is a need for “[...] synergism across and between Black galleries, libraries, archives and museums, sector professionals and the communities we serve [...]” [p37]

⁷ The article also has an insert about the Cornwall Museums Partnership “Citizen Curators” programme, see: <https://www.cornwallmuseumspartnership.org.uk/citizen-curators/>.

⁸ See also: the “Where We Are” programme, “[...] a joint project with young people of African and Caribbean ancestry entitled Harewood is my House. It aims to select a group of 10 young people and ask them to identify barriers to engagement and create a response that addresses a local need for engagement with the house.” [p27] Also: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/people/2021/06/qa-young-people-define-arts-and-culture-very-differently-today/>.

⁹ “One of the world’s most significant new museum projects, V&A East will comprise two sister sites currently under construction in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London.” See: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/va-east>.

- Monica Montgomery “Liberation to celebration” [pp38-39] – “Creating national holidays to mark major events in Black history is an important step forward” [p38]. The article also says that museums should be “spaces of difference” and “spaces of resistance”
- Alissandra Cummins “Open your minds” [p41], which argues that museums must “[...] start recovering those ‘othered’ voices and peoples as the best means of balancing out public understanding of Britain’s imperial and patriarchal past with a more nuanced story of the right of marginalised Black communities to being present and participatory in British history and culture.”
- Chiedza Mhondoro “A cut above” [pp46-47, 49], which considers the Somerset House exhibition, “Get Up, Stand Up Now”¹⁰ and which “[...] highlighted the need for a permanent venue and reference centre that can archive and exhibit the British experiences rooted in the Caribbean and Africa – with its content not crated up and returned to lenders after short periods.” [p49]
- Deirdre Osborne “Rewriting history” [pp51, 53] “[...] looks at the writers and books that challenge our understanding of the past and pave the way for an inclusive future” [p51]
- Melanie Hollis “Success story” (“In Practice” column), which looks at “[...] how Ipswich Museum created the Power of Stories exhibition”¹¹ [p56]
- Elma Glasgow “Celebrating local African-Caribbean culture and our stories” (“In Practice” column), which looks at Suffolk’s “Aspire Black Suffolk” programme which is running in association with that at Ipswich¹² [p57]
- Charlotte Morgan “Embedding anti-racism” (“In Practice” column) [p59], which outlines Cornwall Museums Partnership’s journey towards institutional change – and lists the key actions they have taken along the way
- “Using our space for good” (“In Practice Trendswatch” column), which outlines how outside voices can help museums create meaningful change [p61]
- Nick Schlittner “Joined-up thinking extends your reach” [p63], which looks at work by Red Earth Collective¹³ and Birmingham Museums Trust to produce a series of films and a livestreaming event:

“Windrush Culture is a series of short films exploring and celebrating the creative legacy of the Windrush generation on

¹⁰ See: <https://www.somersetshouse.org.uk/whats-on/get-up-stand-up-now>.

¹¹ See: <https://www.powerofstories.co.uk/>.

¹² See: <https://www.powerofstories.co.uk/community/>.

¹³ See: <https://www.redearthcollective.org.uk/>.

contemporary artists in Birmingham. The films were produced by Red Earth Collective in partnership with Birmingham Museums Trust and will be used by the museum as an educational resource shared with schools across the West Midlands.

Based in Birmingham, Red Earth Collective is a Black-led organisation that uses the arts to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination in racialised and marginalised communities.

It works in collaboration with individuals and ethnically diverse artists, many with lived experience of mental health issues, to create new work, events and workshops that stimulate debate about how statutory services, stakeholder and faith organisations can better understand and support the wellbeing of the communities that they work with.”

Youth Library Review

The latest issue¹⁴ includes:

- Alison Brumwell “National Shelf Service: a reading response” [p8], which summarises this lockdown initiative which took place during 2020¹⁵
- Suzanne Bhargava “Reflecting Realities in the PYP Library”^{16, 17} [p12], which briefly outlines how the author worked with Grade 5 teachers to lead a year-long focus on unconscious bias.

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

“Contested heritage”

The Fabian Society¹⁸ have made an interesting and useful contribution to this discussion.

¹⁴ *Youth Library Review*, 51, 2021.

¹⁵ “The National Shelf Service is a YouTube channel featuring book recommendations from professional librarians launched by CILIP and the Youth Libraries Group in April 2020 during the Covid-19 lockdown. The videos focus on helping children and families discover new, diverse reading experiences. NSS is supported by Nielsen Book, OverDrive, RB Digital, Bolinda and Libraries Connected.” See: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPUlqJm0aieXdq-LxKdVWA/about>.

¹⁶ The title refers to the “Reflecting Realities” research carried out by CLPE: *Reflecting Realities: survey of ethnic representation within UK children’s literature 2017*. CLPE, 2018. Available to download from: <https://clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/research/reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-children>. Assessed in *The Network Newsletter*, 208, Jun 2018, pp10-12.

A third report in the series was published in Nov 2020 – see: <https://clpe.org.uk/research/clpe-reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-childrens-literature>.

¹⁷ This is “A library that supports and enhances the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme [...]”, <https://simplyconnecting.wixsite.com/pyplibrary/pyplibrary>.

In their pamphlet, Kirsty McNeill¹⁹ and Roger Harding²⁰ look at:

- What are the culture wars? In this chapter, they argue that the position in the UK is very different from that in the US or mainland Europe, and that there are problems in assuming that they are the same; they see culture wars in the UK as part of a longer-term strategy:

“Much of what is happening now, therefore, is about doing early, strategic damage to the brand of progressive politics so that the messengers are rejected, regardless of what the policy vision from Labour ends up being.” [p15]

In terms of the National Trust, for example, they say:

“[...] the ‘row’ has assumed outsized importance in the national conversation in part because history itself has become a contemporary political battle ground: ministers are positioning themselves as ‘defenders’ of history (against who and what?) and the nation’s pride, partly to frame any new attempts to expand the historical record as ‘attacks’ on history and, by implication, the nation and its people.” [pp17-18]

Finally in this section, they helpfully define further exactly what culture wars are about, saying that, previously, we had missed:

“[...] how the culture wars strategy is not really about the issues [...] the culture wars are primarily a strategy to distract, divide and demoralise opponents: if certain issues no longer lend themselves to this approach then other ones are substituted.” [p25]

The authors summarise this first section as:

- “The term ‘culture wars’ initially came from the United States and was traditionally used to describe deep-seated divides on values, particularly those stemming from religion.
- The culture wars in the UK do not fit this pattern, in part because religion plays a much less important role in our national life.
- Here in the UK the culture wars are much more to do with securing partisan advantage.
- The culture wars are therefore best thought of as a political strategy pursued by elites, not a genuine set of deep divides in communities.

¹⁸ Kirsty McNeill and Roger Harding. *Counter culture: how to resist the culture wars and build 21st century solidarity*. Fabian Society, 2021, <https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FABJ9000-Fabian-Ideas-pamphlet-210628-WEB.pdf>.

¹⁹ Kirsty McNeill is Save the Children’s executive director for policy, advocacy and campaigns.

²⁰ Roger Harding is Chief Executive of RECLAIM, the Manchester-based working-class youth leadership charity.

- The three tests of whether the culture wars playbook is being deployed are: i) are appeals being made to order and tradition? ii) are fears being stoked in dominant groups that they are about to lose out? and iii) is something minor, marginal or made-up being used to stoke division?" [p28]
- In part two, the pamphlet argues that the culture wars undermine solidarity, distracting and dividing us. This section is summarised as:
 - "Culture wars act as a kind of decoy, diverting attention from substantive policy issues which need to be addressed.
 - Culture wars are divisive in two very specific ways that differentiate these issues from topics that are merely controversial. Firstly, they exploit small differences between activists in ways that create fractures in movements for change. Secondly, they fracture the public constituency for social change, particularly by suggesting that the interests of ethnic minorities and white working-class people are divergent rather than shared.
 - Finally, culture wars demoralise those pushing for change because they render the public square toxic, especially for marginalised people." [p37]
- In part three, the authors look at who 'culture wars peddlers' are. They include:
 - Grievance-mongers: "This group is united in seeing the electoral utility of a politics of grievance but uses it to advance radically different policy agendas." [p39]
 - The perpetually outraged: "The second group are those who profit – at least in the short term – from the cacophony of the culture wars. These benefits can either be direct and individual, accruing to those who have been able to monetise their online content or develop new full-time careers as provocateurs, or indirect and organisational, building a following, readership or fundraising list that can get readily whipped up whenever there are fresh examples of outrages committed by the other 'side'." [p41]
 - Trolls: this can include people for whom "[...] the initial attraction is not ideology or issues but the thrill of being transgressive." [p44]; people who "[...] actively enjoy seeing others wounded emotionally." [p44]; and "[...] those working for malign foreign actors to promote division [...]" [p45]
- In the fourth section, the authors "[...] focus on what the rest of us should do if we want to build a stronger sense of social solidarity instead." [p47] They argue that this involves creating a concerted strategy with four 'pillars':
 - "The first pillar is building a vision of the future which everyone can see themselves in, with a positive offer for the future of the economy and a confident account of history and identity.

- The second pillar is renewing our democracy by selecting and rewarding leaders who exercise restraint, value pluralism, defend institutions and norms and are willing to regulate technology.
- The third pillar is naming it when culture wars peddlers try to distract or divide us, pulling the curtain back so everyone can see that it is a cynical strategy.
- The final pillar is building social movements that are inclusive in composition and culture so that everyone, especially people who have been marginalised, has a stake in the future we build together.” [p66]

Finally, the pamphlet has a set of recommendations for the different sectors involved:

- Political leaders: “We invite those who have been pushing for or executing a culture wars strategy to examine theirs. For those who oppose this kind of politics, doing so privately will not be enough. Political leaders will have to explain who is trying to drag us towards culture wars and why and show how they intend to deliver a fairer future for all of us instead. Wishing this problem away is not an option: only a politics of courage and conviction will see us safely to the end of a culture wars time.” [p68]
- Activists and campaigners: “[...] often have a proximity to and understanding of political power that gives us outsized influence in how our national debates unfold. With that opportunity comes the responsibility to model the kind of open, inclusive, decent world we say we are fighting for. If instead we splinter and choose to denounce one another for failing ever more stringent purity tests, the primary beneficiaries are those who oppose the progress we seek. And if we force leaders to choose between listening to us and listening to the wider public, we will never build the kind of mass support for change that true transformation depends on. Instead of working out how to ‘perfect’ our movements, we should be thinking about how to grow them and what will help them win. That in turn will require a real ‘movement mindset’, where we are each less interested in individual credit than the strength and success of the movement as a whole.” [pp68-69]
- Organisational leaders: “[...] often have a legitimacy and reach which are stronger than they know. People running charities, faith groups, social enterprises, creative platforms, businesses and research institutions can all choose to use their voice to either exacerbate or ameliorate our divisions. They can give interviews, make interventions in solidarity with those experiencing pile-ons and speak with their members and supporters about a different kind of future. They can become radically more inclusive, ensuring their organisational platform is available to those who traditionally go unheard, and create and curate opportunities for people to talk with and learn from people whose experiences and perspectives are different to their own.” [p69]
- Funders: “[...] can make a huge difference to whether the solidarity playbook is adopted.” [p69]

- Voters: “[...] which is to say all of us, have a role to play through what we reward with our time, money and attention. We can choose to keep showing there is a market for caricatures shouting past each other or we can stop engaging with content that is designed to inflame rather than resolve debates.” [pp69-70]

This is a thoughtful – and thought-provoking – read, recommended.

Arts Council England *Delivery plan*

Last year, ACE published *Let’s create: strategy 2020-2030*²¹, and has now produced its *Delivery plan*²²:

“To help us achieve the vision, we will publish a series of Delivery Plans over the next decade. These will set out in more detail the steps we will take to deliver *Let’s Create* and how we will resource them. This first Delivery Plan covers 2021-24. It will be a ‘live’ document that we will refresh and update annually.” [p4]

In its Introduction, the Plan recaps the key principles behind *Let’s create* – the commitment to excellence; and the three desired outcomes: creative people, cultural communities, and a ‘creative and cultural country’.

ACE then emphasises the ‘Investment Principles’ that they expect all applicants for funding to use: ambition & quality, dynamism, environmental responsibility, and inclusivity & relevance.

The next chapter is ‘setting the context’, which looks at the impact of COVID 19; delivering Government priorities which include providing effective ongoing recovery support for the cultural sector; “[...] working closely with the Government on delivering its levelling up agenda. This will include working collaboratively with other arm’s-length bodies to support places to respond to government place-based funds, like the Stronger Towns Fund, and ensure that they are able to make best use of resources to support the development of cultural infrastructure. We will help deliver the Government’s Cultural Investment Fund (CIF), including its Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND) and Library Improvement Fund (LIF) programmes.” [p12].

This is followed by a brief look at “Our role as the national development agency for creativity and culture”.

Finally, in this section, the Plan reiterates the five Themes:

²¹ *Let’s create: strategy 2020-2030*. ACE, 2020, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Strategy%202020_2030%20Arts%20Council%20England.pdf. Assessed in *The Network Newsletter*, 226, Dec 2019, available to download as a pdf from: <https://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-226.pdf>, pp7-13.

²² *Let’s create: delivery plan 2021-2024*. ACE, 2021, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Arts%20Council%20England_Delivery%20Plan_21-24.pdf.

1. “Building a ‘fit for the future’ cultural sector
2. Strengthening our place-based approach and supporting levelling up
3. Increasing our support for individuals
4. Helping the cultural sector to work internationally
5. How the Arts Council will change” [p15]

The next section sets out how the Plan will be resourced:

“We will resource this Delivery Plan primarily through a combination of our distributed staff team and our five main investment programmes, all focused on supporting the cultural sector to recover from the pandemic and deliver our Outcomes and Investment Principles.” [p17]

The Plan then goes on to spell out in more detail how it intends to deliver on the five Themes, setting out its intended Actions. This is a useful setting of the ACE agenda for the next 3 years – and also includes more details, for example of how they intend to develop their place-based approach, which will be ‘three-pronged’:

- “We will continue to invest in a universal offer that is accessible to all parts of the country.” [p27]
- “We will continue to work in places where joint investment in culture and opportunity is relatively high.” [p27]
- “We will work in a set of named priority places in which cultural engagement and our current investment are too low, and where, as a result, opportunities for creative and cultural engagement are underdeveloped.” [p28] (This is the set of 54 priority places about which there has already been some media coverage.)

The next section looks at ACE’s equality objectives, reiterating what these are for 2021-2014:

- “We will ensure a more equitable distribution of our investment to improve opportunities for everyone, especially those with under-represented protected characteristics and from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups.
- We will invest in inclusive cultural organisations whose leadership, governance and workforce – and the independent creative and cultural practitioners they support – represent the diversity of contemporary England.
- We will invest in a cultural sector that is more relevant to all of England’s communities, especially those that have been historically underserved by public investment in culture.
- We will become a more inclusive and relevant national development agency for creativity and culture that models good practice.” [p42]

Finally, the Plan sets out how ACE will measure the impact of this work. This includes:

“[...] a set of key indicators that we will use to track the long-term impact of our work in delivering Let’s Create. They will help us to account for our

contribution and track the cumulative impact of work across the sector to deliver our ambitions by 2030.” [p47]

This is a very important setting-out of how the strategy is to be delivered. It is quite dense, but vital to engage with, especially if we are to attempt to access funding and support.²³

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

MA = Museums Association

MJ = Museums Journal

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²³ Source: Museum Association update, 17 Sep 2021.