

HERITAGE FOR TRANSFORMATION

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Last year on the Day of Archaeology I was just deciding to set up a new social enterprise using heritage resources to support community and organisational change. I didn't have a name, I didn't have a plan, and all the money came from my redundancy payment. Spoilers: this is neither a story of triumph or despair, I'm still building the company, I've done some good things but I have a long way to go. This post seems a good time to reflect on the year, think about how my work articulates with archaeology, and give a flavour of what this kind of work involves.

But first a little background...

I joined English Heritage in 2001 in the belief that it was a Public Heritage body. Having come to the realisation that my own interest was not enough to sustain a satisfying career, even if I could convince people to keep paying me, I thought that working at English Heritage would put me at the coal face of a socially engaged archaeology. Really.

Amazingly, this was indeed what motivated many of my colleagues, And while my own work had less public engagement than I might have liked, it was a core function of the organisation. But the review of Quangos in 2011 identified a 'duplication' between English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund and recommended that public engagement be left to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

It seemed like a good time to leave, and the cuts following the CSR changed my role further and provided an opportunity to take voluntary redundancy. Seed corn for a new venture, so much luckier than most.

Where am I now?

Well, my venture has a name, Heritage for Transformation. It has a blog <http://heritagefortransformation.wordpress.com> It has had both paying work, and voluntary engagement. And I have a huge stock of ideas for new projects, not quite matching the funds to do them.

I developed a heritage programme with Goldsmith Infant school in Portsmouth, to support their merger with Brambles Nursery. The programme is designed to help the process of change management by providing perspective and a place for reflection. I worked with the school to conduct archival research, building recording and oral history. I developed and ran a successful after school club for students building on this work and created display materials for school events. Working in concert with the reconstruction schedule associated with the merger I will be developing interpretive displays for the new entrance and events associated with key moments in the building programme.

I contributed to a Linnaeus University project on attitudes to the Future in Heritage. This project is commissioned by the Swedish Atomic Energy Authority to establish how archaeology and heritage can contribute a long term perspective that will help them understand the long term thinking required to manage nuclear waste. I investigated and reported on what notions of the future are operating within English Heritage through documentary analysis and interviews with key staff.

Collaborating with Flow Associates (<http://flowassociates.com/wordpress/>), I have led a project for the RAMM (Royal Albert Memorial Museum) in Exeter (<http://www.rammuseum.org.uk>), to scope and test the market for a new online research tool for encouraging research use of their collections derived from archaeological excavation. I've drawn on my understanding of excavation and post-excavation resources to help shape access to resources within the museum.

Now I'm developing an HLF bid to develop a smartphone App drawing on the WWI memorials of Portsmouth. In this project I am working with historian Tim Backhouse (<http://www.memorials.inportsmouth.co.uk/index.htm>) and local schools while co-ordinating contracts to reinvigorate the public engagement with the substantial body of memorials in Portsmouth.

For the first year of a venture I'd have to say its a success. But there have been and are challenges beyond the financial.

Firstly, there's identity. When I worked for EH I never had to explain. Most people didn't know what I did, but they knew who I did it for. I had voice. I had locus. Even deciding a name took the best part of 6 months. One year on and I'm proud of what I'm developing and I'm beginning to enjoy explaining.

Then there's the business development. I've done enough management to be confident with the admin, but marketing, sales and development are all new skills. Luckily, I've had the support of <http://rubystarassociates.co.uk> who specialise in accidental (and even reluctant) entrepreneurs.

What does my Day of Archaeology look like?

Mostly writing, I have a report to finish and another to edit. A fair amount of thinking, about how I can turn ideas into projects, about how to work with more partners, and about how archaeology can support change. Finally, enjoying a huge range of posts from colleagues around the world. Lovely to be part of the Day of Archaeology, it really shows the breath of work that archaeology informs and how exciting even the everyday can be.



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