Communities & Crowds Volunteer Discussion – Transcript

# Alex Fitzpatrick

So, I guess we’ll start with kind of the beginning, which is, ‘What actually drew you to joining the project?’

# Rebecca Smith

Well, I’ll start. So, you know, I don’t feel I’m presently representative of what made people want to join the project, but I’ve had a long standing affinity with the *Daily Herald* and my study had come to an end quite abruptly. But I still felt I owed the *Herald* something as an entity.

So when Geoff said that there was going to be a new volunteer project, and would I be interested in being involved in it, given that I already knew about the *Herald* a bit, I said yes.

So it was really when he said about the groups that might be interested in being involved. I wasn’t sure how my experience would fit in with the group. But I wanted to give it a try and see how it was and, for me anyway, it’s worked really well.

So that’s a very long way round of saying thank you for including me in the project and I’ve really enjoyed it and I’m sort of ready to stop it now myself for my own ends and I don’t feel like I owe the *Herald* anything anymore. That’s been a really positive thing for me, as well as being involved in the project and doing what we did.

I might be involved less as we go forwards, just because I think I’m done with it and I’m sort of done with the access stuff with the museum, which has done my head in.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

Yeah, understandable.

# Rebecca Smith

And so yeah, anyway, that’s sort of like my sign off, really, isn’t it? Rather than anything else. So my reason for getting involved was to do specifically with the *Herald* and what I felt I owed it.

# Lincoln Anderson

And think what drew me to the project in the first place, because I’ve got an interest in photography overall and I felt it would be a way to learn about archival photographs and photographs that perhaps weren’t widely on display anywhere in any museum that I’ve ever visited. And I didn’t have an interest in newspapers at the age of ten, so I wasn’t aware about the *Daily Herald* collection. So you know, I didn’t know that those photographs existed.

So in one sense, it was an eye-opener for me to uncover some of these photographs with the rest of the volunteers. And I think I’ve benefitted from covering these photographs because I feel that I’m a lot wiser now and have a greater understanding of how the medium would manipulate the situations.

Yeah, that’s been a good eye-opener for me, and I can also say thank you to the person who sent me the email to say, are you interested in joining this volunteer group. I really benefitted from being a part of the group. So, that’s me.

# Sandra Rowe

I’ll go next then. The project was brought to my attention through my sister, Maureen, who’s also part of the volunteer group, and we previously did some work with the museum.

Before we worked on the Sound and Vision, and that was to do with photographs, we were notified by a friend and former and work colleague who tells about this project and I think also because we’re interested in museums – we’ve got a long history of museums, arts and I just thought this sounded a really, really, really good opportunity.

And also we went to the Bradford Literary Festival and we saw Linton Kwesi Johnson and another spoken word artist called Ray Bernard. And they were just talking about how, you know, accessing archives and how they are able to use them in their own works as well. And it just sounded really interesting, and archives have that access was sent through the New Cross Fire in London.

And I just thought it would be a really great opportunity. I love learning new things as well, so that’s another thing. And then I had the opportunity to work with other people and also gain some new skills and also some more information background about the media and how people are perceived in the media as well. So it’s been a really great opportunity.

# Maureen Rowe

OK, so for me…everything that my sister said, I don’t think I could add anymore to it because her story is my story in terms of how we got back because we, you know, I’m interested in museums, I love photography but years ago, and I mean many, many, many, many years ago, I am got involved in a project…where a photographer from the museum came and took photographs of myself, my mom. So, my mom, myself, my daughter and my grandson and granddaughter. It was in the museum and exhibition and so from there, you know, I’ve always been interested in museums. Always.

You know things that are on display, things that you can learn about, you know, not just from the South, from the wider community and the world out there. And then when we did the Sound and Vision work, it’s like I’m back at the museum again. And so for me, that has always been a focal point in terms of the arts.

You know, like my sister said, you know, literature festivals, we’re always there. Anything to do with the arts, spoken word. Amazing.

And then I go back to the old Linton Kwesi Johnson visit and I was interested in how people use archives. I didn’t know all that stuff was there before. So by the time a friend of mine who’s done a lot of work with the Nigerian society in Bradford, you know, she texts me with this information, that there’s gonna be this project. I think it’d be great if you guys go see what it’s about and in the event, you know, I didn’t have no preconceived value of what’s gonna be all about.

But when it got there and, you know, listening to Lynn talk about the project and Geoff, I was like, yeah, I’m up for this, you know, and I’ve learned so much and it just widened my appreciation for all the people that’s been in that photograph. That’s moved forward. That’s, you know, that allowed us to have an opinion and about what went on all those years ago, and to be able to let others know about. And I didn’t know nothing about the *Herald* at all and to see the massive archive of photographs, it’s just amazing.

And for that, I’m grateful. I’m grateful for the museum saying, “Come along. Come on up on that boat again, you know,” and to be able to let the world see those hidden treasures. Yeah, for me, that’s gotta be the best thing.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

That was a really nice way to put that.

So we’ll move on to the next question, which is what were your…some of you might have answered this already I guess, but if you have any other thoughts, basically…what were your original expectations of the project and do you think we’ve ultimately succeeded in those expectations?

# Maureen Rowe

I didn’t have any sort of…I didn’t have, you know. I just wanted to go and hear what’s, you know, what’s good? What it’s all about. And the more information I got, the more I’m excited about the thought. So I didn’t have no preconceived idea about what we’re going into. All I know is we’re gonna go, we’re gonna do some volunteering, and hope it turns out okay.

# Lincoln Anderson

I went along purely as someone just to try and learn new skills as it were. Because I hadn’t done much Photoshopping in the sense of the technicalities of working on Photoshop so I thought to myself, you know it’s an interesting project to be involved in because it’s all about photography and it’s all about photographs that you’ve never ever seen before. And you know, why not give it a shot and see how it pans out.

So yeah, I felt good that I was really, really involved in it and I felt also that I learned so much from looking at these photographs that people have taken over the years and they were on manual cameras as opposed to digital cameras and some of the results are just absolutely outstanding. And I don’t think I would be as competent with my digital camera than some of those guys with their manual cameras, you have to say from a learning perspective that that was really, really interesting for me.

# Rebecca Smith

I think my hopes, such as they were, I mean, I don’t think I had any particularly well thought through hopes, but it was about getting photographs out into the world and to people who might be interested in seeing them and people who they might resonate with.

And I feel in terms of what we wanted to happen in that way. I feel that’s been really well achieved in terms of getting the stuff out there for people to consider, like to look at but also to think about to provoke thought and memory, which I feel is a great outcome. So yeah, that’s me.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

We’ll, we’ll go on to the next one, which is, ‘Was there anything about the project that surprised you?’ It could be, you know, something you’ve learned about a particular photograph or something you experienced during volunteering. Anything that may have surprised you that you didn’t think you would come across while working on this project?

# Maureen Rowe

For me, it’s the backstories of those pictures. I think it, you know, I look at them and I think yeah, but when you read the back of it, you’ve learned so much about that era, what happened. If you look at that photograph, you will just see with naked eyes. But when you read the stories at the back of it, it tells you so much more.

And for me, when it looks at the archive, and especially Cuba, for me, that was just an amazing collection…just, you know, it tells the story, a long forgotten story. We think of the Cuba now, but what we forgot [was] that there was this amazing country with amazing buildings and infrastructure…

And so for me that’s yeah, it’s a bit of a…and the Zooniverse, that’s a surprise. That was a surprise.

# Lincoln Anderson

I think…one thing that I’ve discovered is the difference in narration in terms of looking at the photograph and what’s written on the back. Because sometimes the front of the photograph is skewed to present a certain narrative to whoever’s reading the newspaper. But when you turn the photograph over, you actually get the truth of what was happening, whereas on the fronts it, it’s manipulated to suit their readership, you know?

Just gonna be a little bit more careful as to how you conceptualise looking at the news, and then that’s an image and then finding out that your initial thoughts were incorrect. Seriously, you know…sometimes a little bit of critical analysis is needed when you looking at an image, to be honest with you.

Because initially you say to yourself, ‘Oh, man bites dog’ [but] when you turn over the photograph its done by man. Alright, so you yeah, you just got to think a little bit more carefully, you know, being judgmental.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

But yeah, I guess I’ll move on to the next question. So, ‘While volunteering, do you feel like your opinions and perspectives were heard throughout the project? Like were you able to make decisions, were able to suggest things or actually impact the way the project was done?’

# Maureen Rowe

Yeah, I think that we have the opportunity, but I have the opportunity too, you know. I have my voice heard. My voice is a bit bigger as well sometimes!

And there was never a time during that project where somebody said, ‘Oh, no, we can’t do that.’ It was like an open book, it was there for you, to think about it, change, how you feel about it. So yeah, I felt supported all the way through, even in the most miniscule part of it.

Yeah, we were always listened to. I was always listened to. Like once again, my voice is big, so I guess I’m the personality. So there you go. But it feels like that and it was nice. It was comforting to know that your voice was heard as well, yeah.

# Rebecca Smith

Yeah, I agree. I feel like our views were sought at every step of the way and that we had a certain amount of control over what was being done and how it was being done, so I never felt excluded from the decisions that were being made and I felt we got a fair opportunity to say what we thought, and shape the project. So I felt well satisfied with how we were basically supported to shape the project. I thought so. I felt that Alex and Lynn and Andrea basically supported us to try and move things forward. And so I never felt it was being done despite us. It was always us helping guide it. Really. That’s what I thought.

# Sandra Rowe

I was just gonna say, I agree with them. The rest of the volunteering group and our views and opinions were always valued. And I just think it felt safe and comfortable as well to express any views that we have.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

So yeah, this one is very broad so feel free to answer however, but ‘What did you enjoy most about volunteering and also what did you enjoy least?’ Feel free to be as honest as possible. I can take it!

# Lincoln Anderson

I think for me, we had good leadership and also the people that were volunteering were very, very nice to me. And we all got on, which was what was quite important, you know. Yes, there weren’t any sort of animosity or hurt feelings throughout the project, you know, so I think I felt really comfortable with it, the environment that we were working in.

# Maureen Rowe

What I enjoyed is the learning process. I enjoyed that a lot. You know, new things…and every volunteer came with a different skillset and I think, you know, learning from each other. I enjoyed that.

You know, Rebecca had a knowledge of the *Herald* was just amazing. Lincoln, photography, Sandra and Haiti – just beyond. And I guess I just bring the talk. I just bring the talk to the table, but I enjoy it. I just enjoy just being around the volunteers whose interest is deep as well, you know, and committed as well, you know, so I enjoy that.

And Lincoln said ‘leadership’ and that is so important that you know everyone that was involved. You know, had a strong affiliation to the project and to me, I think that was just amazing.

And least? Oh, that’s got to definitely be…and what’s it, digital? No, when you, I don’t know. There’s a word, whatever it is, not putting it on. Yeah, there’s one bit I didn’t like – it’s very computer based. Very finicky. That didn’t do me well. I need to go back and do some more to get a bit more comfortable with that little part of the project.

# Rebecca Smith

I think my favourite thing was actually being part of the group, so it was the sort of discovery of the material as a group and then the chats we had about the photographs, but also the wider chats we had anyway about everything. So for me that was the highlight really.

So it was partly about discovering the photographs, but it was partly just the sort of hanging out, really. I really enjoyed it and obviously as you all know, my least favourite thing would be the accessibility to Insight. But in a way that’s not really helpful to anybody coming along behind us from another venue. But yeah, that’s what it would be.

# Sandra Rowe

Yeah, I agree with Rebecca. I mean, my favourite part has been meeting up with the group – like minded, same vision, social element as well, and like your thing…I mean, I do like ICT. I love doing over and digitising and I’m very like that and the outlook. I love structure and all that, but the scanning part I wasn’t so keen on that section.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

So the next question is basically, you know, ‘How did you feel about the in-person sessions versus the online sessions, and which did you prefer?’

# Lincoln Anderson

Yes, I definitely preferred the in-person section. Online I always have problems with…I’m working on this slowest computer in the world. Oh, I’d get so many pop-ups and I can’t seem to block half of these. Never mind all of them. So yeah, I’m logging in and all that sort of thing and you, you know, you put in the wrong code in and it can be a nightmare? So I preferred in-person session as opposed to online.

# Maureen Rowe

I prefer them people, you know. Yeah, I prefer in-person. And like Lincoln, sometimes the IT stuff has me held down. So it annoys me when it’s not working, but in person it feels much more comfortable. Yeah, I feel so much better sharing amongst ourselves in person. Online, it just feels a bit artificial. Yeah, it hasn’t got the same energy as in-person, and that for me…Yeah, that’s me.

# Sandra Rowe

Yeah, I agree with Maureen and Lincoln. I’ve definitely prefer the in-person sessions once again, obviously face-to-face social human contact. Not technology. So yeah, I do prefer the in-person sessions.

# Rebecca Smith

And so do I, for the same reasons really. But it’s, I think in person you’ve got time to just let things be a bit baggy and go down a route that you follow, whereas online you’re sort of following a structure, you know, even if we have a meet-up, it’s almost like everyone’s gotta take their turn. You’ve gotta, you’re sort of answering particular questions, whereas in person it’s a lot more organic. It just goes where it goes.

Even if you have certain things you have to do, so I much, much prefer – as well as me constantly battling with Teams and swearing when I’m here on my own and things like that. It’s much nicer in person for loads of reasons.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

So, the next question is ‘How well do you think you were supported while you’re working with, you know, potentially challenging or upsetting images within the archive? And is there anything that you would have done to improve the support you got ,at least specifically with upsetting language and content?’

# Maureen Rowe

I felt supportive, well supported and you know, there was also a bit about where if we needed help to speak to someone about those upsetting images then there was a space there for us to, you know somebody would help us with that.

And for me, I think that’s so important that the offset, you know they say this is you, you might see some images that might be really upsetting, but if you need some help to process those and you know those images and whatever, we’ve got help for you and for me that is was so important even though I didn’t need it. The help was there, and you know. Yeah, to me, that was OK.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

So we’ll go to some questions on Zooniverse. ‘How did you feel about Zooniverse before we started working on it? And how do you feel now after we’ve completed all that?’

# Rebecca Smith

I think I vaguely knew about Zooniverse, so I was aware of it as a thing, as you know. So it didn’t sort of freak me out, but I just thought, how’s that gonna work and how I mean that, when we were talking before about support, I think we had really, really good support to help us shape Zooniverse. And then obviously a lot of people did an awful lot of work as well to make it work.

And to be honest, with the final product, I was completely ecstatic about it. I thought it was marvellous. I really thought it was great. And did far more than I’d expected or wanted. From my perspective, I just thought ‘Oh wow, that’s brilliant.’ So I was so happy, and still am. I just wish we had more photos to share with the world, yeah.

# Sandra Rowe

I think the induction that we got from Sam that came across, I think that induction about the Zooniverse and how it works, I think that was really, really helpful. So I mean, I didn’t have no knowledge of what the Zooniverse was. So I think the induction sessions were really, really, really good and obviously the end result was it’s been more than what I could have expected, really just absolutely amazing how. Yeah.

# Maureen Rowe

I agree with everything, yeah.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

Yeah, I mean the next question is basically, you know, ‘How did you all feel about the reaction we got on Zooniverse? ’Cause, you know, literally no one could even predict how fast that got done.

# Maureen Rowe

It was wow. Just wow.

# Sandra Rowe

Yeah.

# Maureen Rowe

All of it was just wow. I just can’t believe it. I can’t believe I was part of that process. It’s like having a baby. It’s like being pregnant for nine months and then you have this baby and you’re all this baby up and you think, oh, God, this is mine. I produced that baby, you know, it’s mine. It’s when you walk down the road, you can say this baby’s mine. I’m part and parcel of what they did. That’s how I feel about it.

And you all donated towards this baby, from Alex to Geoff. Yes, and this baby’s like…and to me, that’s the only way I could describe it. And just to see it out there in the world, so the world to see what we saw, you know, amazing.

# Lincoln Anderson

Well, yes, obviously I was surprised that we achieved so much. But the one thing that I was really pleased with is…the images weren’t turned into any sort of political arguing points. You know, there was no such thing as a backlash in terms of wokeness or, you know, and I think people just have accepted the photographs were what they were.

And sometimes it can be, it’s a right wing ideology and a left wing ideology, and I think it would most people just sort of, you know, accepted that this is a part of history that was interesting to them. And you know, they just sort of kept politics out of it altogether. That’s what I felt anyway. I could be wrong but so far I haven’t seen any or heard any negative reaction to what we’ve done, so I’m generally pleased with the outcome.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

But yeah, so I guess this is kind of somewhat related, but yeah, is there anything that you wish the project was able to cover or do that we ultimately weren’t able to do?

# Maureen Rowe

One thing: every photograph to be digitised. We couldn’t do that. Unfortunately, we didn’t have the time to do it or I would have wished for everything in that cabinet to be digitalised and be out there. Cause for me, what I gained from those photographs is world knowledge.

You know, just taking it back in history, it’s taking it back in time and see it, and it allows you to see why we’re doing what we do now. And for me, yeah. So just everything out of that. We can’t do it, but I wish we could have done that, yeah.

# Sandra Rowe

I agree with you, Maureen…so much untold stories and rich history.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

Alright, so this is a big question, but ‘What do you hope the legacy of this project will be?’

# Lincoln Anderson

My hope is that it won’t be hidden away again or archived away. You know, it would still be accessible and out there in the community as opposed to being in the archives. That’s my hope.

# Maureen Rowe

Yes, I think yes, because for me it’s got to be a platform for more of the projects to follow suit.

# Rebecca Smith

Oh, now I’m probably going to say the same thing really. I’d like it to go almost in two directions.

I agree with Lincoln about it not sinking back under into the swamp basically, but also part of me wants our project to be made bigger, but I don’t know how likely that is and the other part of me hopes that it starts other parallel projects that, you know, maybe you’re taking a different route or looking at a different area of the archive and of history.

But I sort of wanted to do both. I want more of our stuff, but I want more of other stuff as well. But yeah, it would be great if we could just go, ‘Yeah, let’s digitise it all!’ But more of it, free and breeding more projects.

# Alex Fitzpatrick

So yeah, the last question and I know like, you know, Rebecca, that you won’t be volunteering further in like other things, at least in the near future. But putting that aside, just to speak, you know generally, ‘What would you like to see from future volunteering work and community work from the museum based on the experiences you had on this project?’

# Maureen Rowe

I would like to see different communities doing the same thing that we’ve done, for me more than anything else in the world is, you know, it doesn’t stop with us. There’s so much stuff in the archive that everyone can have a go at highlighting, and celebrating their communities, and at the end of it, when we go to the museum, you know, we’ll see so many different things there.

Not just one, but a variety. A choice you know, of exhibition around different communities, and we learn also from those. Even people learn from what we’ve done now. We can also learn from what other people are gonna do if the museum carries on doing that same kind, not perhaps in the same model, but think of ways of ensuring that other communities are represented in some shape or form. And for me that will be a job well done.

Just participating in this project and the supervision, the management, this stuff, even though we’ve had different leadership from Lynn to where you are, Alex, it’s been a smooth transition for us as well. For myself, there was no great big gaps in there, where we are to wait, you know. It was smooth and with that in mind, it made it even more worthwhile.

You know, there was no interruptions in between all of that and so to come to the end of the project and the whole factor that you know you guys have brought, so we can enjoy. It’s been amazing and thank you to the museum and to Sam, that you know, she put in the Zooniverse part of it, let us understand, we didn’t know anything about Zooniverse. You know it’s that understanding and now I can say to people that’s there’s Zooniverse and there’s this and there’s that.

So the knowledge that I’ve gained, it doesn’t stay with me because I would always encourage others to use it to, you know, participate, volunteer because there’s so much benefit, especially your mental health as well.

# Sandra Rowe

I’d just like to say it’s been an amazing opportunity and it’s been a journey of learning new skills, working with a great group of other volunteers and also the project workers, and all. There’s been several, like Maureen said, but they’ve all been supportive and it’s just been a really great, just a great experience.