

Interview Date:	24-09-2020	Interviewer:	Tom Crowley
Interviewee:	Tate Greenhalgh	Organisation:	National Trust
Position:	National Specialist for Interpretation		

## Interview Between Tom Crowley (University of Cambridge) and Tate Greenhalgh, National Specialist for Interpretation of the National Trust. 24-09-2020

Tom Crowley 0:02

Excellent. So, we are recording. So, this is Tom Crowley from University of Cambridge Heritage Research Centre speaking to Tate Greenhalgh on the 24th of September 2020. And Tate could you just remind me of your job title again?

Tate Greenhalgh 0:20

Yes, I am National Specialist for Interpretation of the National Trust.

Tom Crowley 0:25

Okay. Brilliant. Thank you. And Tate, as we've just discussed, you're speaking in your professional capacity, of course, but that will, no doubt also be inflected with your personal perspective. That sounds okay?

Tate Greenhalgh 0:42

Yes, thank you.

Tom Crowley 0:44

Okay, brilliant. Thanks. So, the first question is: has your organisation done anything which engages with the legacy of slavery, or colonialism in recent years, and that's prior to this summer's Black Lives Matter debate and movement?

Tate Greenhalgh 1:07

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Transcribed by: Tom Crowley

Participant permissions to record given

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## The Summer 2020 Debate on How Britain Commemorates Its Past



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We have done a bit. So, I think our most impactful programme has been something called Colonial Countryside, which was a partnership with Leicester University that brought together poets and worked with primary school children, to respond to colonial connections at our country houses. And the children, explored the collections and then produced their own poetry that is displayed now in those places, and they were children with mixed heritage, say, and there are about 100 children involved in that.

There are a number of our properties that are very closely connected with colonial histories. They've been exploring that over the last few years. So, one is Kedleston, which was home of Lord Curzon, and has an Indian museum as part of its displays. They've been undertaking a year of listening to engage the public with the histories, before deciding what to do in terms of presentation and interpretation of those collections. Similarly, Powis Castle in Wales, and that was home of the Clive family, Clive of India, his son, and his daughter-in-law. They also have a museum of Indian artefacts, it's the largest collection of Indian artefacts outside of India. And they're also considering how to display those objects in future. So, the approach taken there has been much more research focused, looking at the provenance of the collections, and starting to understand them from an academic perspective. And they're planning to do more public consultation. Starting now, really.

Also Quarry Bank, which was a cotton mill in Manchester. Their money was based on the slave trade, quite largely, and the family had shares in sugar plantations in the Caribbean. And the cotton that they used in their production was the product of slave labour. So, they've got a new display, they did a complete overhaul of their presentation and interpretation, starting in about 2014. And that just came to fruition last year, with displays on slavery connections that were developed in collaboration with the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool.

Then there is Durham Park near Bath. That was the home of Thomas Povey and William Blathwayt who were major players in the early colonialism project for the UK. And pretty much everything that you see there including the wood that is used in the construction of the interiors of the building is connected to slavery and colonial trade around the globe, which the men involved were setting up. So, they've been researching that and are about to launch a new presentation, new display of the property with that in mind.

Tom Crowley 5:36

Was the wood from the Caribbean? Sorry, just as an aside.

Tate Greenhalgh 5:43

North America, largely black walnut. There's a lot of mahogany in places that we've started to look at as well. And some of that would have come from the Caribbean. And we're acknowledging the dangerous conditions that enslaved people were

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working in to harvest mahogany especially. We did an art display at Nostell Priory last year for the Chippendale anniversary, recognising the use of mahogany in lots of the Chippendale furniture and that's one of the big centres for Chippendale furniture. There is a poem and a video artwork, performance, dance performance, addressing that.

Penrhyn Castle is a big one. That's north Wales again. Also family wealth derived from slavery in the Caribbean, and exploitation of workers in Wales at the slate mine, that they owned, so that just in order to engage at all with the history and their community, they've had to really lean in to those histories. Lots of the local population wouldn't go anywhere near the place because of historic maltreatment of the workers, it had the longest industrial strike in history. I think it went on for about three years. Families were starving. Really broke up the community and is still resonant today. Sorry, what was that?

Tom Crowley 7:55

Very quickly. When was that strike? Roughly?

Tate Greenhalgh 7:57

I think it was the around the turn of the— Gosh, was it the 20th century? Maybe? Yeah, I think it was. So yes, then they've been working with contemporary artists a lot to mediate the relationship between the property and the local community. There's artwork on display in all of these places, that makes it very clear. So, the material culture demonstrates these connections.

And so there are paintings figuring enslaved people, statues, figurines, throughout our properties, even we're finding instruments of enslavement, so shackles and chains, and also weaponry used in colonial violence, medals that people associated with properties have received for conquering other countries. So that it's really deeply embedded in a lot of places. And so, the ones where it's most at the fore, the history, they have been starting to explore how to tell that. Clendon Park is another one which burned down a couple of years ago, and then they're now reassessing how they present the shell of that building and really engage with the history of colonialism, every everything about that property, I think, was funded through slavery.

So that's individual properties. And properties in the National Trust tend to operate reasonably independently with guidance and support from the centre. But we do have some overarching programmes of work, orchestrated by the centre. So we started in 2017, doing some national public programming, where we were specifically looking at marginalised histories and how we can support properties to start to bring out these hidden histories, things that we were less aware of, we're less comfortable talking about. So, we started then with 2017 looking at LGBTQ histories, 2018 we looked at women's histories and women's suffrage, and we were planning to do a season on colonialism. But we decided

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to, instead of making that programme, really embedded it into our day to day work, so we started at a national programme called Stories of Everyone to really get to grips with all of these marginalised histories and people who are marginalised still, today. We changed our motto, from for ever, for everyone to for everyone forever. Because we started to— as we were going through this process of interpreting marginalised histories and engaging with marginalised communities, we realised how important it was that we instigated core institutional change for the whole organisation. And this time last year, we commissioned a research report into colonial and slavery links at all of our properties. And that's just been published this week. And as part of that work, we've put in a funding bid to really expand that to make sure that we're working with good sound knowledge, getting some really robust research.

I'm also involved in a research partnership with the Tate Galleries, and the Imperial War Museum, and the University of the Arts London, looking at the language that's used in our collections, documentation, and therefore interpretation, making sure that we're finding and addressing particularly racist language. I think that covers most of what I can think of that we've been doing.

Tom Crowley 13:30

Thank you very much. I've just got a quick follow up question. So, it's a bit one sided because we just want the transcription to be what you say, so I'm trying to keep myself out of these interviews. So, the follow up question is, um, in fact there's two. One is: do you have or are you kind of thinking of bringing together a lot of what you've told me, and having an online presence, saying, this is what we're doing now about various questions. And the other question is, so yeah, there's obviously a lot of things happening. They've been happening for some time. Is it possible to gauge roughly when the kind of things you're talking about began to gather momentum, began to come together, be less sporadic and more consolidated? It seems like there's been a lot in the, I don't know, past five years the past 10 years. Is that fair to say?

Tate Greenhalgh 14:37

Yeah, more the last five years. Yeah, I'd definitely say that. And I think it has come with the national public programming, where we've really got to grips with our processes as an organisation. How we deal with press, for example, which has been pretty negative about us doing this work. And so, building confidence and also seeing the benefits that it has for the public. So, we're very focused on the public benefit purpose that we have. And as we've been exploring these histories more fully people have been telling us how transformative it's been to them. And that's really— that's why we're here. So even though some people have been upset, and we have lost some membership, actually, the balance has been the other way, which isn't really reported in the press, and the press focus on the negative, the loss of membership, but we're getting more members and reaching a more diverse cross section of society. And we're here for all of society. Yeah, I think 2017 which was a hard year, doing it for the first time and looking at the queer histories in our places. Stories that really,

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we hadn't spoken about at all previously. We've been building our confidence and seeing how important that is, since then.

Tom Crowley 16:38

That's very interesting. I'm aware we've got quite a few questions. So maybe just quickly, the people that are leaving, they're resigning their memberships, what I mean, maybe this is impossible to say, or to summarise, but what reasons are they citing? Or are they even citing reasons?

Tate Greenhalgh 17:05

Yeah, they mostly say that we're being too political, that it's not our place to preach about things that start to touch on identity politics. I think its history is that people aren't comfortable with, they're not taught in school really. And so, it's challenging a lot of people's understanding of what they believe to be the truth of the past, and how that makes them feel about themselves, their country, their place in the world. It's uncomfortable.

Tom Crowley 17:53

Sure. And we might be slightly getting ahead of ourselves with the questions to come. But, in terms of the press coverage, has that been— I guess, the critique of that press coverage, has that followed a similar line?

Tate Greenhalgh 18:17

Yeah, and we've got a public consultation running currently. So we published the report into connections to colonialism and slavery, and all of the places that were we're aware of, and we have good research into so far, we published that on Monday, no, on Tuesday, and we launched this public consultation. So, there's a link on our website, you can click on and fill in your response to the report. Most of the comments so far have been not actually in response to the report and its content, but in response to the press coverage. So, it's not an accurate reflection of what we're actually doing and saying.

Tom Crowley 19:13

And so, you've received this criticism from I'm guessing I can kind of broadly generalise as the right-wing press. Have you— Presumably you haven't received any support from the Left of the press spectrum, the social media spectrum?

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Tate Greenhalgh 19:35

It's yeah, it's hard to say. I haven't analysed it very clearly, but we're in the process of doing that at the moment. What I've anecdotally noticed is that we get a much more balanced report from more left-wing press. So, you see a lot of emotive language used in the right-wing press. And that's much less so in the left-wing. But where we do get direct support, it's where individuals have been invited to comment, rather than the voice of the newspaper or a journalist specifically, it's an individual with their own take.

Tom Crowley 20:25

That's very interesting. Thanks. Let me just see what the next question is. Um, I mean, you've covered much of this, but I'm going to go through them anyway. Just to be consistent across interviews. The next question is: has Black Lives Matter, and by that, I mean, what's happened this summer, influenced your policy going forward? And if yes can you expand on why you made these decisions?

Tate Greenhalgh 20:58

Yes, it has, it definitely has. And we were committed to doing this work beforehand. I think what the surge of awareness and popular support for the Black Lives Matter movement has demonstrated is that it's so important that we do this. And we haven't been doing it quickly enough. So, we've really accelerated this work. So, I came back from furlough leave at the end of June specifically to work on interpreting our places and putting in information and contextualization of colonial and slavery histories. So now as every property reopens a condition of that is that we're assessing that history and putting in interpretation, directly addressing it. So that's happening at every single place now, so that there won't be any National Trust place that isn't addressing that history.

We had a direct threat from people supporting the Black Lives Matter agenda to a statue that we have at Dunham Massey, just outside Manchester that came through on social media saying it shouldn't be there, it needs to be removed and if you don't remove it we will come overnight and dump it in the canal. So, we did have to respond to that, in our capacity of a conservation organisation and looking after these places and these artworks. So, we did remove that statue. We haven't decided what to do with it yet. And that's partly what I'm working on now as well. So, I've developed a discussion guide that will just help us to talk about the issues around displaying racist statues. This Dunham Massey statue was of a kneeling African man largely naked, holding up a sundial and kneeling directly in front of the front door of this mansion. It is very symbolic. And obviously, some people find it extremely offensive, which is completely— it's obvious why. And we have to really fully understand different perspectives on that, how it affects people viscerally today in the context of

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racism, in today's society, responses to historic racism, and also the importance of telling the stories. And acknowledging the history and making sure that we were able to learn from it. So, it's not straightforward by any means. We haven't made a decision what to do with that statue yet. But I think what the Black Lives Matter protests have shown — they've really focused our attention and made us think much more carefully about how this material culture that we care for, how that affects people. Its importance to society. We're looking at critical race theory much more seriously. But it's expanding that as well to all sorts of stakeholders and points of view. And that's happened. That's what happened very, very quickly, which is a really good thing. But we're still very aware that we're new to this work, and we need to build our confidence and our capacity and expertise in this work and work much more in collaboration with other people. So, we're not necessarily the best people in the employment of the National Trust to make these decisions, we can't do it on our own. This is the Nation's collection.

Tom Crowley 26:03

Well, one thing that's been coming across in quite a lot of the interviews I've done, is that those things that have been in the pipeline, or maybe lost momentum, perhaps, in some cases due to bureaucratic inertia, you could say, and the events of this summer, really, I guess, open the doors and allow those things to go through. Have you experienced that in your work for the National Trust?

Tate Greenhalgh 26:40

I think with a big organisation, there's always a process. Process is always something that slows things down, often for good reason. We try and do things using best practice and making sure that we're bearing in mind a diverse range of opinions. We've had to work in a completely different way to work at the pace that we've needed to. And with the combination of the Black Lives Matter protests and the closure of places through COVID, leading to the decision that no place will reopen without this interpretation. We've just had to do it as quickly as possible. Not all that confident that we're doing it as well as we might want to, but doing it as well as we can, in the circumstances with most of our teams on furlough still. So yes, we've abandoned the usual process. And that has meant that we've made massive progress very quickly, we will need to go back and re-examine the work that we're doing at the moment to just appraise how well it's done, how effective it is for audiences. So, it is a mixture. I think we need a bit of the process, but by abandoning it initially we make change very quickly.

Tom Crowley

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Thank you. So, the next question is kind of the same, but it's about the particular impact of the Colston statue being pulled down in Bristol. Has that had a particular influence?

Tate Greenhalgh

Well, what that instigated the threat we had to the statue at Dunham Massey. So that I think was the main influence that the Colston statue had. But it also, I think, really highlighted the meaning of heritage in this debate and heritage in identity politics. I don't think that's something we can avoid. That's something that we get criticised about a lot, that we shouldn't be engaging in identity politics, but I think that in heritage it's inherent, we can't avoid it. And in the UK, the Black Lives Matter movement had a focus on material culture and heritage and that it all came together with that statue shows us that we're not exempted from this work. It's really crucial. So, we're getting involved.

Tom Crowley 30:14

Thank you. Yeah, again, so this time it's Topple the Racists has that— was the Dunham Massey state on their list?

Tate Greenhalgh 30:27

Yeah, it was on that list. So now it's showing up as removed.

Tom Crowley 30:36

Okay. Anything else on Topple the Racists?

Tate Greenhalgh 30:40

I don't think so, I haven't searched through. The Dunham statue is the only one where somebody got in touch with us directly said this is on the list, it needs to go. Yeah, it has made us aware though, we do have more of these statues that could have the same effects on people. And we need to be treating them in the same way as the one at Dunham.

Tom Crowley 31:27

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Thank you. I'm just going to run the next couple of questions together and you have certainly covered them to some extent already, but they're really about who you consult going forward. The first, I guess, is with regards to things like the reinterpretation you're talking about rolling out in every property which touches on the legacy of slavery and colonialism. And the other is about recruitment within your organisation. So, who do you consult in these two processes?

Tate Greenhalgh 32:13

So with the interpretation, I think one of the things that we would have done differently had the Black Lives Matter protests not catalysed work with urgency this summer, we would have really invested more time and thinking about who needs to be involved and who we need to consult. And we're starting to look at our ways of working in terms of partnerships with other people, other organisations. So, beyond consultation and actual and co-creation, co-curation. We haven't done that work as much as we would like to yet. So, we're starting to think about that some more as a part of our response to this summer, and our awareness that we haven't set up those relationships yet. We've got a working group who are offering peer review for what we're doing, and they will issue a report to us at the end of the year, which will then influence how we budget and allocate resources to this work over the next year. And these are people who are working in the heritage / museums, sector, historians, academics, who are deeply engaged in this work and can give us some really robust feedback and advice to make sure that we're doing the best that we can. So that's currently our main source of professional help.

But we've also got this public consultation happening, which is going on for the next two weeks. But we were constantly listening to members and the public as they respond to us. We're monitoring social media. People are writing in to individual properties and to the central National Trust. We're running some focus groups and particularly for People of Colour, because our membership, and our visiting body is so massively wide. We were trying to make sure that we're hearing voices that maybe are not even aware of us, and don't normally come to us and maybe don't feel comfortable talking to us as a predominantly white organisation. So that's where we're starting from, and I think we will see how it goes and learn from that and build on it.

Tom Crowley 35:25

Thank you. And with regards to recruitment, have you done anything to try and diversify your workforce and your volunteer body?

Tate Greenhalgh 35:35

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Yeah, there is a team focusing on that as well. I'm not close to that. And that's more in our HR people team. And, yeah, one thing that's happening at the moment is that we're going through a period of major redundancies, so we're also monitoring that process to make sure that we're not disproportionately losing our diverse workforce.

Tom Crowley 36:19

The last question on my list of questions, and then we're going to ask one more, if I may. But the last question is about commissioning research. So obviously, the National Trust commissions a lot of research anyway. So maybe it's more just from your experience? And yeah, I'm asking this question coming from a research institution, from Cambridge. But if you could commission research, or if you've identified any areas where you think that research is necessary? What might that be?

Tate Greenhalgh 36:57

And so well at the moment we're looking at the provenance of our collections. So, finding out where they came from and how they came to this country. Sometimes that is legitimate, purchase or gift, sometimes it's looting. So, we need to know the sort of legal basis of how these collections have come to us. That's something that needs attention.

We're going to need more research support from external bodies because we're losing so many staff. So, we have much less capacity to do that ourselves now. And really, our capacity has been quite limited already, because we're so focused on the operational side of keeping the doors open. So really, our research staff is fairly limited, anyway, and will be less now. So yes, there's provenance, there's— something that we've recently done as part of this work is, we have a partnership with Oxford University. So, we work very closely with them. And they have a series of micro-intern opportunities. So, we took on 10 to 15 micro-interns a couple of weeks ago, so they've just spent a week working on research question for us. And so, with the interpretation work, we're identifying where there are People of Colour, either in histories or places, or represented in the collections. And there's such little documentation about those people. So, we really want to start to flesh out those histories, find out where possible who they were, try and get names and follow their histories.

This work has opened up so many questions for me. We're looking at how Black people have been represented in Western art over centuries, and how that's evolved and how that then affects popular opinions of race, the politics of it. So, it's understanding the material culture and what that tells us about society and our places, specifically, and how that relates to people's experiences today.

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Tom Crowley 40:21

Thank you. The last question which just occurred to me when you were talking first about everything that's happened and particularly loss of membership over the past few years, as you've tried to, I don't know, consciously change your message and encourage fresh demographics to join. The people that you've lost, and maybe this is an impossible question to answer, but the people you've lost, do you think, um, some of that was avoidable? Do you think that everyone that you lost was kind of unreasonable? Or is it possible to go forward with this kind of work and maybe bring those people who might otherwise leave on board with you?

Tate Greenhalgh 41:18

I hope so. Yeah. I think as we build our experience, doing this work and our understanding of our current audiences, and future and potential audiences, we will be able to refine the conversations that we're having so that people feel less alienated. I'm looking into critical heritage studies as well at the moment, which starts to explore how to bring together people with different values, knowledge, identity, connected to the past. And so how you can establish a conversation with people with very different perspectives and start to bring them to some mutual understanding. So, I hope and I do believe it's possible, but I don't know that we really know how to do it yet. And I'm not sure that anybody does really. There're some examples of really good practice across the sector around the world. I think it's still an emerging field.

Tom Crowley 42:38

That's a really interesting answer. Thank you. Is there anything else you want to add for the record to be recorded before I stop recording?

Tate Greenhalgh 42:46

I don't think so. I think you've exhausted me.

Tom Crowley 42:51

Yeah sorry. Sorry, it was a bit of an interrogation. I'll stop recording now.

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Tate Greenhalgh added the following by email later on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2020:

Having reflected a little bit more on your question about further research, I can add some more thoughts.

In interpreting the objects representing slavery, colonialism and people of colour at our places, I'm asking questions about key points in the histories of those objects. Often we don't know the answers, and so need more research.

For example, the meanings we find in objects vary with the context we consider when we look at them. When interpreting emotive objects, it's helpful to think about the following contexts:

Original creation, for example:

- Provenance: Made by? For whom? Why?
- Artistic intention - meaning of design
- Material - were materials ethically sourced? Were they products of empire?
- Fashion/appeal in Britain at that time

Placement at this property - when, by whom, why?

In my role, I operate more in the social sciences, understanding how people engage with heritage rather than the historical research. Therefore, in the longer term, I'm interested in heritage and identity, what heritage means to different people and how the National Trust can support a diverse range of people to make use of heritage, both natural and cultural. This is where our conversation about bringing together people with different perspectives comes in.

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