



Storytelling for the Planet: a place-based approach for museum audiences

Inspired by Scotland's storytelling traditions and following on from Scotland's Year of Stories, on the 26th and 27th March 2024 we gathered to share best practices, experiences and learning through case studies, workshops and talks. Storytelling is a unique tool to enhance understanding, translate

abstract or complex concepts and to navigate entangled social and environmental histories, it therefore plays a crucial role in communicating the planetary emergency to our audiences.

Our Broken Planet: Community of Practice supports practitioners to come together, share learning and network around how museums can respond to the planetary emergency through exhibitions and programming, with a focus on engaging and empowering young people.

This Our Broken Planet Community Gathering was delivered by Natural History Museum in partnership with National Museums Scotland and Museums Galleries Scotland.

If you'd like to get in touch or find out more you can email us at nationalprogrammes@nhm.ac.uk

This is a summary of the workshops and talks with links. Apologies if there are any inaccuracies, please just let us know and they will get amended.

Day 1: Hosted at the National Museums Scotland

Welcome Director of Public Programmes and Sustainability Lead for [National Museums Scotland](#)

Tour and workshop Rising Tides Exhibition [National Museums Scotland](#) and [Granton Youth](#)

Workshop Creeful of Climate: storytelling, museums, and climate [Museum Galleries Scotland](#) and [Storyteller](#)

Talk Engaging with Place [2050 Climate Group](#)

Talk Talanoa: curating stories about climate change in the Pacific [University of Edinburgh](#)

Talk Story of the Whale and the Steam Engine [Amateur Ancestor Project](#)

Day 2 : Hosted at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh

Workshop Building Narratives for Climate and Biodiversity [Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh](#)

Stories from the room: Waste Stories [The Devil's Porridge Museum](#)

Stories from the room: Experiences from the Whalers Memory Bank Project [South Georgia Heritage Trust](#)

Stories from the room: 3D Scanning and Printing as a Tool for Storytelling [The Watt Institute](#)

Welcome

Ruth Gill, *Director of Public Programmes and Sustainability Lead* [National Museums Scotland](#)

Ruth welcomed the group and introduced the powerful opportunities to be realised through storytelling. A good story can create an incredible moment; a good programme can start to shape meaning, and if this is supported by organisational strategy and values, then you have the makings of a movement.

Referencing Yuval Noah Harari's book *Sapiens*, she reminded us that "nothing really exists without common agreement built around collective imagination" and it is fiction that enables us to collectively imagine. All storytellers bravely transcend time and place, rummage in stores amongst old and forgotten things to help us imagine what comes next.

National Museums Scotland Tour: Rising Tides Exhibition



Tour: Rising Tides Exhibition

Dr Alison Clark, *Senior Curator Oceania* [NMS](#)

Declan Duffy, *Exhibitions and Displays Officer* [NMS](#)

Overview

The Rising Tide exhibition opened in August 2023, it highlights the vulnerabilities of Oceanic countries to climate change whilst showcasing the strength and resilience of its communities. Sustainability is strategic priority for National Museums Scotland, which is reflected throughout the exhibition. They used local contractors to keep emissions low, reused as many elements in the build as possible and graphics are printed onto recycled wood, and cardboard panels. More information about sustainability is in this [blog](#).

The exhibition shows a contemporary response to climate change and waste by Indigenous Australian and Pacific Islander artists. The museum worked with communities in the construction of the exhibition, and this is a great example of how this engaged people in environmental issues. Highlights from the gallery:

- Human resilience and acts of protests. The start includes a 12min film to show human desire to remain where you are, by a woman laying on a beach as the tide comes in.
- Spear points from the Kimberley region of Western Australia made by Aboriginal men from discarded glass bottles, this is historical material from National Museums Scotland's collections.

- Bark cloth. This was chosen for the imagery of a tsunami, and symbols of resistance like the coconuts floating and surviving.
- Graphics of a protest group with the slogan 'We are not drowning we are fighting'.

'Bottled Ocean 2123' set 100 years into future, this is the 19th version of an installation by the artist [George Nuku](#). 400 people were involved: staff, youth groups, adult volunteers, students, and charities. NMS found the act of making was what helps to change the mindset of people. This challenges the traditional behaviour change model. They also took a leap of faith to hope visitors don't destroy it, and they haven't. Creating this exhibition has changed how the museum operates between participants, the level of co-creation, use of the curatorial collection and working with the Learning team.

Links

[Rising Tide Exhibition](#),

[BLOG Reflections on rising tide NMS Strategic plan 2022-27](#)

Artist [George Nuku](#)

Dr Kris De Meyer Tex talk on [Why there's much more to climate action than reducing your carbon footprint](#)

Rising Tide Case Study should be appearing in this resources pack, keep an eye! [Climate resources bank - Museums Association](#)

RISING TIDE

Art and Environment in Oceania

Oceania is a diverse region made up of Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

People have lived there for thousands of years, developing a deep relationship with the environment, particularly the ocean.

The region now faces the double threat of plastic pollution and rising sea levels due to climate change, which may see some low-lying islands disappear altogether.

Rising Tide celebrates the resilience of communities in Oceania through their responses to environmental challenges and innovative uses of plastic in art for urgent climate action.













Workshop: Rising Tides and Granton Youth



Workshop: Rising Tides and Granton Youth

Ashley Mackenzie-White, *Engagement Manager* [National Museums Scotland](#)

Ryan McGlone, *Youth Worker* [Granton Youth](#)

Overview

'Bottled Ocean 2123' is the 19th version of an installation by the artist [George Nuku](#), 400 people were involved: staff, youth groups, adult volunteers, students, and charities. One of the groups was Granton Youth. Granton Youth provides a variety of opportunities and support for local young people aged 11+ and their families. NMS initially approached Granton Youth asking to bring some museum objects to the youth group, but it was decided that it would have more impact on the young people to instead get them involved in the collaboration for a big art piece on gallery with George Nuku.

The young people worked with George to create the exhibition out of plastic bottles, they also attended the opening night event- even doing a haka dance to open the evening! It was a last-minute surprise to the young people that they would be doing this, but they got involved. The young people felt intense pride at their involvement and loved seeing their names in the exhibition.

Ryan had some tips for approaching youth groups:

- Be flexible and proactive. To help the young people feel confident agreeing up to a museum activity such as this, Ryan invited Kate to a separate youth event first, so that when he says 'next month we'll be doing a project with Kate' they have a frame of reference and a person to the name.

- Young people love an expert and direct dialogue. If you can involve a scientist or researcher, bring them and allow space for the young people to question them.
- Focus on young people's passions and make your topic adaptable to this. For example, climate change effects football or touring musicians.
- When engaging with the young people, 'ask before you tell'. Ask them how they are, how their day has been etc, before telling them information or about yourself.
- Operate on the basis that everyone already thinks the topic is great! It helps with engagement.
- Enable the young people to do the welcoming at the opening, this is essential for their feeling of ownership and pride in their participation.

Links

"Our youth groups website www.grantonyouth.com details our full provision, team, and posts regular updates on what we're up to - we love collaborative projects, particularly with museums and so are open to working together to engage young people in Edinburgh, and beyond with almost anyone who wants to do this!"

Artist [George Nuku](#)







Workshop: Creelful of Climate: storytelling, museums, and climate



Workshop: Creelful of Climate: storytelling, museums, and climate

Lucy Neville, *Climate Officer* [Museum Galleries Scotland](#)

Erin Farley, [Storyteller](#)

Overview

Throughout this workshop Erin told us an amazing variety of folk stories, which included fascinating characters such as Cossack Jack and the crab and Mally and the trowel. Lucy spoke about how as museums we are trusted experts who hold millions of years' worth of data. We are free, welcoming spaces in our communities and most importantly we are story tellers. We connect the past present and the future through these stories.

Lucy had brought some locally relevant historic items, such as a creel (a willow basket for collecting curling stones), smells, shells, photos, and lyrics to songs. Then challenged the participants to think of links and stories from these objects. We spoke about how we can inspire audiences and take these ideas to the local communities around us. For example, if to local sports clubs- start by thinking about how do they use nature, football pitch maybe? How would you cross over with them to create a narrative that connects your collection, their local environment, and their relationship to nature. Could you create a mural mixing your museums collections, local history or the landscape they play football on?

Links

"You are very welcome to join the Scottish Museums Climate Network. Museums Galleries Scotland also has a range of climate based advice guides on our website:"

<https://www.museumsgalleriescotland.org.uk/case-study/from-coal-to-climate-change/>

“Hosted by Museums Galleries Scotland, the Scottish Museums Climate Network is a space where museum staff and volunteers can discuss all things climate and biodiversity. Designed to encourage conversation, it is a space to share ideas, challenges, events and support. The network is on Microsoft Teams with channels dedicated to specific themes. To join please email our Climate Officer at” Climate@museumsgalleriescotland.org.uk.

Smell boxes <https://aromaprime.com/>

Online resource dedicated to the presentation and promotion of audio recordings of Scotland’s cultural heritage <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>





Talk: Engaging with Place



Talk: Engaging with Place

Laura Curtis-Moss, *Director* [2050 Climate Group](https://www.2050.scot/)

Overview

The 2050 Climate Group is a youth-led, volunteer-driven charity, whose mission is to empower young people from all backgrounds across Scotland to lead the fight against the climate emergency and drive a just transition. Their flagship programme is the [Young leaders development programme](https://www.2050.scot/yldp), it's an intensive 6 month long programme which is free for the young person to take part in. Laura spoke about how important it is to be connected to your place and how that doesn't limit your scope to talk about much wider issues. Such as how nature itself ignores country boundaries; like how after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, radiation impact on nature was felt as far away as Scotland. We can find links to these global issues for our audiences whilst keeping our connection to our local places. There are different ways to look at location as well, Laura showed a map of the oceans from a polar angle and how it would look 'to a fish', with all the oceans as on big connected space. 2050 Climate Group's work within climate change politics includes connecting with parliament to give the youth opinion, approaching ministers, putting local pressure on councils and respond to policy. A main mission is getting young people to feel that politics is something we all can do, that it is important and possible.

Links

<https://www.2050.scot/>

<https://www.2050.scot/yldp>

<https://bdmlr.org.uk/>

<https://www.rowanbank.org.uk/who-we-are>

<https://www.earth-in-common.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMIIYxcHdzI>

Talk: Talanoa: curating stories about climate change in the Pacific



Talk: Talanoa: curating stories about climate change in the Pacific

Michelle Keown, *Professor of Pacific and Postcolonial Literature* [University of Edinburgh](https://www.ed.ac.uk)

Overview

Michelle spoke about her research and about reframing the narrative on Indigenous cultures affected by the climate crisis. Talking us through a Epeli Hau'ofa, a Fijian anthropologist's, quote "There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as 'islands in a far sea' and as 'a sea of islands.' The first emphasises dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centres of power.

Focussing in this way stresses the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships." Going through the history of the Pacific islands reveals to us why we have this narrative, as it was born out of the colonial history from the period of 18th century exploration.

There are two main stereotypes about the Pacific, where it is either a beautiful paradise or all climate refugees. There are many groups doing work to resist this and Michelle shared examples which are linked below. One is a group which are also referenced to in the Rising Tides exhibition (previously mentioned in this document), with the slogan 'We are not drowning, we are fighting' they are a Pacific environmental youth organisation called [350 Pacific](https://www.350.org/pacific/).

Michelle spoke about how Indigenous people are resisting the common tropes of 'victimhood'. The Marshallese poet and environmental activist [Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner](#) in her poem 'There's a journalist here' showcases an assertion of Indigenous "survivance" to counteract the prevailing stereotype of Indigenous communities as only ever the victims of disaster.

Links

<https://seeingthewoods.org/2021/01/28/resisting-climate-change-apocalypticism-environmental-justice-activism-from-the-south-pacific/>

<https://www.kathyjetnikijiner.com/blog/>

Carrigan, Anthony. 2014. "Dark tourism and postcolonial studies: critical intersections." *Postcolonial Studies* 17 (3): 236-250

Hau'ofa, Epeli. 2008. *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Hooper, S., 2009. "Curating Pacific Encounters: Showing Respect to the Ancestors." *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 21: 12-38.

Jetñil-Kijiner, Kathy. 2018. 'Dome Poem Part III: "Anointed" Final Poem and Video', <https://www.kathyjetnikijiner.com/dome-poem-iii-anointed-final-poem-and-video/>

Jetñil-Kijiner, Kathy; Leora Kava; and Craig Santos Perez (eds). 2022. *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literatures*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Keown, Michelle. 2020 "'A story of a people on fire': nuclear archives and Marshallese cultural memory in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's Anointed'." *Art and Australia Online*
<https://www.artandaustralia.com/online/online/image-not-nothing-concrete-archives/'-story-people-fire'-nuclear-archives-and-marshallese.html>

Solomon Enos, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Alson Kelen, Michelle Keown and Rain Senight. 2019. *Jerakiaarlap: A Marshall Islands Epic*. Micronesia: Island Research and Education Initiative.

Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rastogi, Pallavi. 2020. *Postcolonial Disaster: Narrating Catastrophe in the Twenty-First Century*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Tunbridge, J.E. and G. J. Ashworth. 1996. *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*. New York: Wiley.

Vizenor, Gerald ed. 2008. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Well-Off-Man, Manuela (ed). 2022. *Exposure: Native Art and Political Ecology*. Santa Fe, NM: Radius Books.

Whyte, Kyle P. 2018. "Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises", *Nature and Space* 1 (1-2): 224-242.

Talk: Story of the Whale and the Steam Engine



Talk: Story of the Whale and the Steam Engine

Justine Boussard, *Creative Curator* [Amateur Ancestor Project](#)

Overview

The Amateur Ancestor project runs tours which are designed to practice thinking like good ancestors, as by using long term thinking, humans should then act better in short term.

The goal is to connect our present minds and hearts to future people by using museum collections to do so. Every museum has a story through time. Justine then told the story of Hope the whale who hangs in the main hall at the Natural History Museum, linking the story of the whale to the invention of the steam engine. As [Roger Payne](#) said ““My whole thought was if we can build whales into human culture, then we can save them””.

The mindset of being a good ancestor is about expanding your sense of time to better feel your place within the cycles of history. It aims to learn from the traditional wisdom of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and their Seventh Generation stewardship principle. It is important still to keep stories connected to a place as every place is special, it has been for centuries and will be for more. It can be a challenge to fight against the mindset that human influence is always and only ever destructive, and exploring the ideas of [‘Possitopia’](#) can help counteract this.

Links

key concept of Possitopia at Climate Museum UK - opening up the spectrum of possibilities:
<https://climatemuseumuk.org/2020/10/15/explaining-possitopia/>

Hans Rosling, author of [Factfulness](#), wrote: "Practice distinguishing between a level (e.g., bad) and a direction of change (e.g., better). Convince yourself that things can be both better and bad." His legacy website, Gap Minder, is a great resource of up to date data that practices exactly that: <https://www.gapminder.org/>

"For those interested in exploring Long Time thinking a bit more, I wholeheartedly recommend to check out [The Long Time Project](#), in particular [their founding article](#) which inspired the amateur ancestor project, and to listen to their stunningly produced podcast series [The Long Time Academy](#). It's just 6 episodes, and 6 practices, and it's truly life changing."

Climate Museum UK, Bridget McKenzie's blogpost on Categorising Museological Responses to the Earth Crisis is very good: <https://bridgetmck.medium.com/categorising-museological-responses-to-the-earth-crisis-c9449a1ea42a>

Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh Workshop: Building Narratives for Climate and Biodiversity



Workshop: Building Narratives for Climate and Biodiversity

Bethan Jones, *Community Engagement Manager* [RBGE](#)

Paula Nino Uribe, *Community Engagement Officer* [RBGE](#)

Eve Armstrong *Education Outreach Officer* [RBGE](#)

Overview

Eve asked us to picture a dandelion using all our senses and to recall a memory. She revealed that the word 'dandelion' was going to be taken out of a children's dictionary because it isn't used by children anymore. A book called Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane talks about this phenomenon. Without the words to describe nature, what do we connect to and want to protect? RBGE runs outreach programming from nursery age to secondary and weave stories into these interactions with nature to help bring about change.

Paula spoke about how our individual memories of nature can vary a lot between people. We have both individual and communal memories of nature. It is what connects us all with our past or present relationship to nature. RBGE have created a paid traineeship programme called Biodiversity Ambassadors to help people gain knowledge and practical experiences about the world of plants and how to protect them.

Bethan spoke about Estuary at Firth and Forth, the industrial history of the area and the local love for the area. There is a project called [Restoration Forth](#). This is a 3-year project in its final year, with the mission to lead societal change to enable the recognition, recovery and resilience of seagrass ecosystems globally. They work in partnership with their local community and stakeholders with a narrative based on collective action and impact.

They also focus on restoring European flat oysters. These oysters grow sustainably and live in the intertidal zone. In the past these Oysters were a major part of local economy and diet. Their shells are even found in walls of buildings! But they went extinct 100 years ago and are now being restored by volunteers.

We are moving away now from seeing oysters as a food source and more as an important role in their ecosystem. Both seagrass and oysters; improve water quality, store carbon, support biodiversity and provide nursery habitats for fish. They also act as a connection between people, past, future and community.

Bethan then showed us a tool called the [Schwartz values map](#). It maps human values, and we can use it to see how our values effect the way we work. It's important to remember that values guide behaviours but are not a prediction. It was acknowledged that it isn't perfect, and needs updating to reflect indigenous point of views. If using this tool for effective storytelling- then to create a compelling narrative you can use complimentary values that are near each other on the map. When narratives try to draw from whole map it creates confusion, is ineffective and feels disingenuous.

Top tips

- Intrinsic values are universalism, benevolence self-direction and tend to lend to environmentalism. So if we do actions and have narratives that activate intrinsic values, we can create future pro environmental action in the audience
- Extrinsic values are self-interest, external value system. It can be easy to slip into extrinsic values but is worth it to keep going back to intrinsic.

It was mentioned in the discussion that the language we use and the values we pull on, are different between funders and visitors.

Links

<https://www.projectseagrass.org/restoration-forth/>

Global Action Plan- young people, values and wellbeing:

<https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/generation-action/united-in-compassion>

Common Cause Handbook: <https://commoncausefoundation.org/resources/the-common-cause-handbook/>

Common Cause- values in a museum setting:

<https://commoncausefoundation.org/resources/discover-and-share-ways-to-promote-positive-values-in-arts-and-cultural-settings/>

<https://commoncausefoundation.org/resources/the-values-map/>





Stories from the room: Waste Stories



Stories from the room: Waste Stories

Mónica Ramírez López, *Youth and Community Engagement Officer* [The Devil's Porridge Museum](#)

Overview

Mónica ran an immersive, interactive activity where the audience took on a role and 'discovered' historic artefacts and then wrote a page about it as a story. She set the scene, whereby the audience are future archaeologists, palaeontologists and historians. The audience then choose together how far into the future they are in, what it is like and any major events that have happened.

Then the audience is presented with a suitcase from the past (the modern day). Inside the suitcase, it is full of modern artefacts all made of plastic, such as a yellow duck and some Halloween vampire teeth. The audience discusses what they might have been used for by our ancestors, and why they had been stored like that. We were then asked to write our 'findings' out and share it at the end.

It is a great example of a creative way to engage with plastic as a topic, human impact and generational thinking.

Links

<https://museumsofthefuturenow.org/the-solway-hoard/>







Stories from the room: 3D Scanning and Printing as a Tool for Storytelling



Stories from the room: 3D Scanning and Printing as a Tool for Storytelling

Noel Griffing, *Digital Learning and Engagement Officer*

[The Watt Institution](#)

Overview

The Watt Institution holds collections which represent both a unique record of Inverclyde and broader national heritage embodying some of the most important themes, events, industries and experiences that have helped shape modern Scotland. The Inverclyde Archives holds over 300 years of records, material, ephemera, photographs and items relating to the local history of Inverclyde.

Community groups want to borrow specimens and it is not always possible. Noel creates 3D scans and animation techniques to extend the reach of the collections to these audiences. For example a 3D printed [polar bear skull](#), was scanned on a phone and then 3D printed and painted to then be used as part of the handling collection. A scan of a [Peppered Moth](#) was then reanimated, to tell story about habitat change and adaptation. Noel uses all free tools to do this, and for one of the projects had a local youth LGBT group fully involved in the project learning these skills themselves.

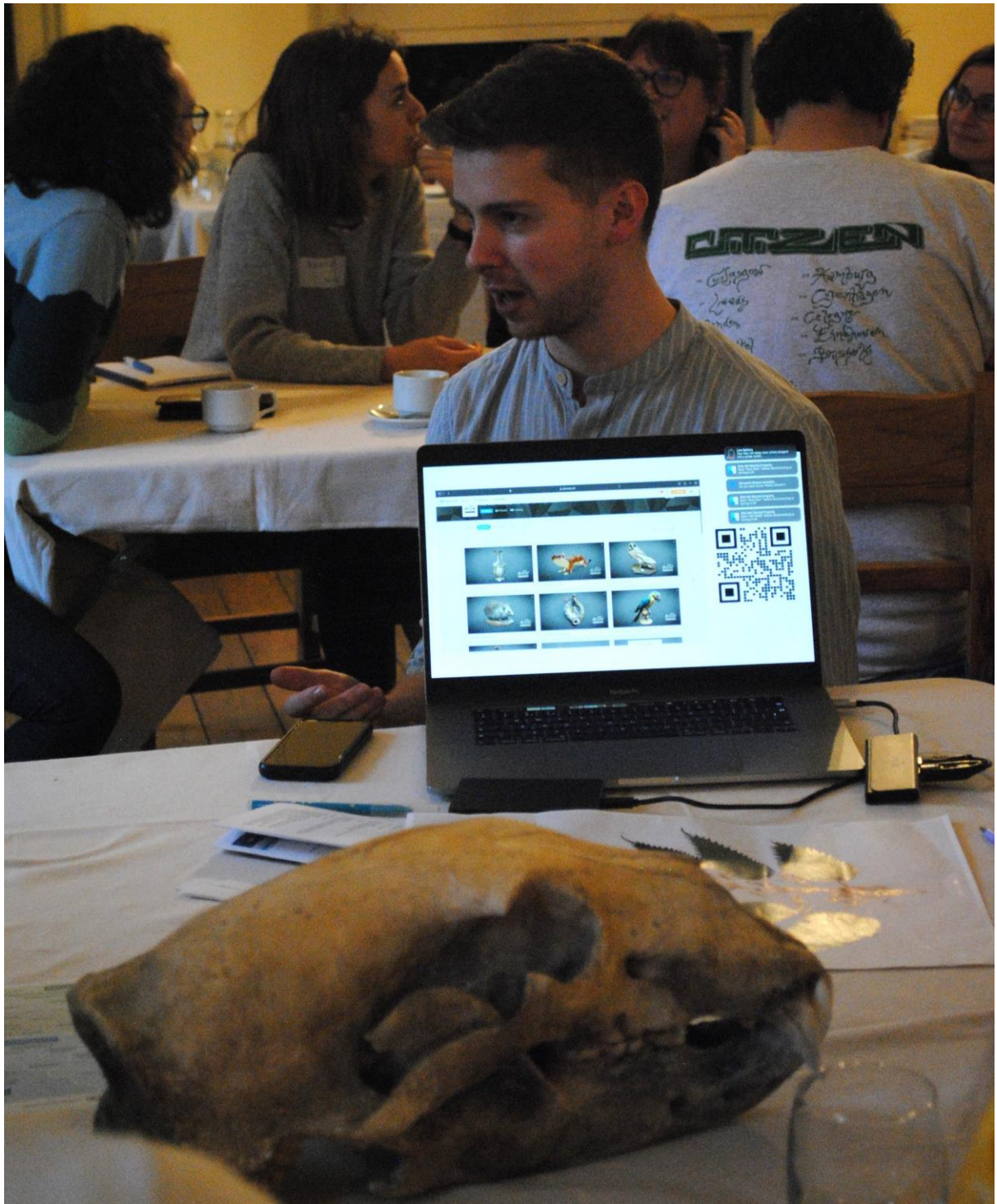
Utilising digital techniques like this allows you to keep a traditional display and please curators but also be very interactive. It is fantastic as a visual impairment addition. Positively, the object not being the 'real' one doesn't seem to stop people being enthusiastic about it or want to visit the real one less. If your museum collection was an industrial collection- you could reanimate the objects to show functionality and allow a visitor to 'use' the object virtually. Or for archeology, the visitor could feel the thumbprint on a piece of 3D printed pottery which is inaccessible as the original object.

Links

<https://sketchfab.com/wattinstitution>

<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/polar-bear-ursus-maritimus-skull-968a7f335b7848f29747cce7a0a7ce71>

<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/peppered-moth-biston-betularia-67fb9bcd3bc94bd89089430e0590a3d4>





Stories from the room: Experiences from the Whalers Memory Bank Project



Stories from the room: Experiences from the Whalers Memory Bank Project

Jayne Pierce, *Curator* [South Georgia Heritage Trust](#)

Overview

The South Georgia Heritage Trust's main purpose is to help the indigenous fauna and flora on South Georgia and to assist efforts to preserve the historical heritage. The sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia was a principle location for all land-based whaling in the Southern Hemisphere between 1904 and 1966. It has been estimated that 175,250 whales were killed in factories across South Georgia. The British industrial whaling companies had a largely Scottish working class-men workforce. They would have 8 weeks training and then be at sea for 8 months.

As this happened within living memory, there is a strong interest from ex whalers and their family members to access the collections and resources, but there have been barriers to access in the way. The Whalers Memory Bank Project is a 2-year project to create a content bank for everyone to access with the goal to capture first hand memories from whalers. Initially they put an advert out for information across 40 local newspapers in Scotland, and 100s of people got in contact. This will create a way for communities to connect and share their personal collections and stories.

There exists a connection between narratives on climate change and these historical events. The story of the blue whale can be interpreted a humanity induced situation which we then choose to intervene in and have managed to start to reverse, as we are seeing an increase in the population of blue whales today. An important story to tell, that humans are a part of the solutions.

Links

<https://sgmuseum.gs/>

<https://sgmuseum.gs/memorybank/>



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Thank you!



Thank you for reading this summary of the workshops and talks. Apologies if there are any inaccuracies, please just let us know and they will get amended.

If you'd like to get in touch or find out more you can email us at nationalprogrammes@nhm.ac.uk