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Living with History in York: Increasing participation from where you are

Lianne Bringham, Richard Bringham, Peter Brown and Helen Graham

Two of us – Lianne and Richard – are administrators on a Facebook page titled ‘York Past and Present’. The title ‘Past and Present’ sums up what we’ve been working on together for the past 18 months. We’ve been trying to understand the ways in which York’s heritage, as it is understood through photos, memories, buildings and collections, affects the lives of people living in York today and, more specifically, how more people can become actively involved in shaping in decision making about heritage and, through this, shaping decision making about the future of the city more generally.

The four of us – with Paul Furness and Martin Bashforth – worked as a team on ‘York: Living with History’ as part of a UK-wide research project ‘how should heritage decisions be made?’ funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Connected Communities project. Both the Heritage Decisions project as a whole, and the York: Living with History strand we are going to focus on here, have been the product of many minds and of many conversations. In the case of York: Living with History, these included conversations which took place at tens of public stalls, drop in sessions, over many cups of tea and coffee as well as at larger scale events.

We thought long and hard about how to co-write an article for this book. The dangers of co-writing is that the person who has ‘writing academic articles’ in their job description (i.e. Helen) ends up taking on the job and the balance of voices and perspectives gets lost. Instead we decided to honour our conversational method by recording our discussions and interspersing this with sections which to draw out key ideas. In doing this we also hope we can go beyond telling you how we’ve worked together but instead *show* you – model it – through the way the article is put together. Much as with increasing participation in heritage and conservation; increasing participation in research requires different forms and new ways of holding different ways of knowing together.

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How should heritage decisions be made?

Over the last two years a team of twenty people – researchers, policy makers, funders, museum practitioners, people who are activists about their own history and heritage – have worked together to design and then carry out a research project.

The Heritage Decisions team were brought together by a pilot scheme developed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Connected Communities programme. The Connected Communities ‘Co-design and Co-creation Development Awards’ scheme sought not only to enable collaborative research between researchers, policy makers, practitioners and community groups but to actively enable the collaborative development of a research agenda, from its earliest stages.

While we all had a shared interest in heritage and decision-making, the team was formed deliberately to draw into dialogue people from different backgrounds, positions and approaches. The aim was to use the team's collective experiences, perspectives and positions to create a research project which might explore how to increase participation in heritage decision-making. One of the strands of work was the York: Living with History project.

For more information on the Heritage Decisions project see:
<http://heritagedecisions.leeds.ac.uk/>

Who was involved in York: Living with History?

A core team of us led the York: Living with History project:

Lianne Bringham and Richard Bringham are founders of York Past and Present which is a Facebook group – now with its own website – that has gone from 3-8000 members in the last 18 months. Acting as a forum for exploring and sharing photos, the group both shows the power of local knowledge and local networking and has crossed over into the real world through regular pub meetings and the 'public documentation' photography projects (which we will discuss further) at York's Guildhall and the Mansion House.

Peter Brown was Director, York Civic Trust. Peter first joined York Civic Trust to set up the Trust's Fairfax House in early 1980s. In 2011 Peter was awarded an MBE for 'helping to preserve the heritage of York', he is author of *Views of York* (2012) and retired at the end of July 2015 to complete a number of book projects, including on Georgian York.

Paul Furness is a radical historian and writer and led walks as part of the York: Living with History project titled 'York: A Walk on the Wild Side' (Furness 2014). As part of the project we made Paul's walks into a book, which now graces the shelves of many bookshops in the city. The launch of the book provoked debate about the implications of certain forms of heritage for York as a city in danger of losing its social and economic diversity as house prices spiral out of reach for anyone doing the minimum wage service jobs associated with the city's tourism industry (Lewis 2015a, 2015b; Graham 2014a).

[Image 1: Paul Furness published a book of his York: A Walk on the Wild Side walks as part of the York: Living with History project]

Helen Graham is Research Fellow in Heritage, University of Leeds. Helen – along with radical family historian Martin Bashforth – has been involved in York's Alternative History since 2012. Before working at the University of Leeds, Helen worked in adult learning and community engagement in museums and heritage contexts – in the Heritage Decisions project she was able to bring all these different professional and activist connections together.

Conversation 1: Living in York

Helen Shall we start by talking about how we've come to live in York and care about York's history and heritage?

Peter The opportunity came up for me to apply for a job as the first Director of Fairfax House, which York Civic Trust had been restoring with a view of opening it to the public. I was appointed, which was great. I said I was going to stay for two years and give it my best shot; but 31 years later I'm still here in York.

Richard I've always lived here. Nothing really more to say. I just like York. Everywhere I've moved to I've always come back here. It's too nice a city to leave.

Lianne Same with me really, although I've moved around everywhere in York, York has always been my home. I could never imagine being anywhere else.

Helen I came here in 1995 to be a student at the University of York. So, I was an undergraduate in York. But I think the city almost acted like a backdrop to the intensity of student life. So, I think it was only when I started to study for my PhD – which was on the Women's Liberation Movement in 1970s and 1980s – and, at the same time, live in the city centre that I started think seriously about the city.

Conversation 2: Getting involved in Heritage Decisions project

Helen Peter, I remember writing you an email about getting involved in the Heritage Decision project.

Peter Yes. Working for what can only be described as a traditional organisation, populated by old fogies, it seemed a really good idea to get some fresh ideas and some fresh blood circulating through my veins. And your offer to be a collaborator seemed very exciting. The project became more effective and more interesting as time went by; especially in those first engagement sessions where we were really trying to drill down to: what exactly what do we mean by heritage? What do we mean by value and all these issues? And what right does that expert have to make decisions on our behalf?

Helen Out of those early conversations – part of the Phase 1 Co-design process – we drew out a research agenda which pushed some of these questions about how to

involve more people within decision making. And out of this came the York strand of the project. We had quite ambitious research questions: about trying to understand more 'how heritage affects the lives of people who live in York' but with the aim of using the energy around that question as a way of thinking about how we could lever open space for greater participation.

In terms of first meeting you, Lianne and Richard, I'd been on Memories of York facebook page for a while, which was very popular. I think even in 2012 it had 11,000 likes; there were lots of people on there. But it was also quite a tense space. There was quite a lot of quite angry disagreements going on through Memories of York. It was only just at the start of the York: Living with History project I became aware of a new Facebook group: York Past and Present.

Lianne We first met 27th February 2014 at the Bike Shed Café.

Richard What I liked about it was you were doing something very similar to what we wanted. The point is we've got annoyed so many times with wanting to do something in York with buildings rather than change, demolish, pull down whatever. And you can't seem to break through that barrier to get through there. You say, 'I want to do this' and you're just looked at as a member of public. It's like it doesn't really matter what you want. That's something we wanted changed. We wanted to see whether we could actually get enough people involved to make an impact. It's different saying me and my wife want to do it; but when you say there are 8,000 people you are working with...

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Act: Make change from where you are

The Heritage Decisions project identified four key ideas, which we will introduce throughout this article. The first was 'Act'. Our initial research in York suggested that one of the greatest barriers to participation was the strong feeling – often based on concrete experiences of disempowerment and exclusion – that it isn't possible to get involved and influence things. One thing any of us can do to refuse this sense of powerlessness is to try and make things happen. York Civic Trust, York Past and Present and York's Alternative History are, in their different ways, all examples of this. We liked the idea of 'making change from where you are' – not waiting for someone in a more powerful position to initiate but using the agency you do have to make something happen.

[Image 2: As part of the Heritage Decisions project, Danny Callaghan who works in on the heritage of the potteries in Stoke-on-Trent developed a DIY Heritage Manifesto]

Conversation 3: Is it possible to make a difference?

Lianne When we first had the meeting at the café, although it was something that we wanted, I seriously thought that we were all just getting high hopes that we'd actually be able to get somewhere; that we'd actually be able to chip away at the Council, chip away at the authorities. So, I did come away, not disillusioned, but a bit cynical to be honest. I did think, this isn't going to happen, this isn't going to work. But looking back, good things have happened. Because for us as a group it's opened up so many opportunities that I don't think we would have been able to get. And working as a team we've opened up a lot of people's eyes that actually we're not going to go away; we have a voice and we can be heard now.

Peter You've suddenly become legitimate.

Lianne Yes, exactly. Not just two people.

Richard It's allowed us to meet people like John Oxley (City Archaeologist), Richard Pollitt (Mansion House, Guildhall and Civic Services Manager), yourselves (Peter and Helen); people we wouldn't normally meet. So, if we have a question we have these different people that we can contact. I think that's probably the most important thing is the different people you have to meet that will help you in every different direction.

Peter But it's a two-way process. There is no way that we would, as an organisation, have the resources to document the Mansion House, for example. But you have committed a huge amount of resource to documenting to the minutest detail. But you're documenting the Mansion House and its changes and you're recording them for posterity. That's fantastic.

Helen Lianne, can I just ask a bit more about cynicism that you felt? Because it wasn't an unusual reaction to speaking to me! Most of conversations I had in first few months doing the project – all with people who weren't professionals – were with people feeling that decisions were generally made behind closed doors and that decisions are often made long before they come into the public domain. There was a real sense of cynicism about the political culture of the city really. I don't think that's necessarily just about York; I think it's to do with the political culture of the United Kingdom more generally. But obviously in York it was expressed in relationship to

the Council. So, I don't think what you were thinking was unusual at all... it was a common theme in most of those conversations.

Lianne We had had a specific experience that made me feel like that. We had tried to photograph the Hutments behind York Art Gallery before they were demolished. Literally for three weeks we'd been passed from pillar to post. All we wanted to do was document them before they went.

Peter Without putting words in their mouth, they were probably frightened that you were going to mount a campaign to have the Hutments saved.

Lianne (Laughter) Possibly.

Peter Maybe a conversation might perhaps have put their fears at rest.

Richard We did try to talk to them. At one point I did talk to a person at the museum, I can't remember who it was, and I did say, 'We understand that it's going to be pulled down. We just want it documented'. But it was early days and when you don't know anybody, it's very difficult. We find now that having your foot in the door makes everything a lot easier than being completely out of it.

Lianne The issue with the Hutments behind the art gallery was before we started York Past and Present – it was one of the reasons why we started York Past and Present. So, that was an experience for us – maybe not a good one. Then when we started talking to you, Helen, you were wanting to work and do things similar to what we were wanting to do. There was still a lot of cynicism because we weren't too sure we would get anywhere.

Richard It's been like a big machine: we knew where we wanted to go, we just didn't know how to get there, and you've been like our SatNav; you've showed us which direction to go in. You have. You've pointed us in the direction of how we can do it. And all the other people we've met, just different branches, it's worked really well.

Helen But SatNav makes it sound like I knew what the direction was or had a sense of the territory. But I didn't. The map of the territory has been something we've been building together. And we needed all the different viewpoints on it otherwise we wouldn't have been able to see what we've seen. It's like we all had little vantage points on the territory; but actually it's by bringing them together that we've

developed a richer understanding of how decision making works within the city. And then also some of the potentials for opening it up too.

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Connect: Cross boundaries and collaborate

At the heart of the Heritage Decisions project from the first was the idea of diverse perspectives across hierarchies and institutional boundaries. The York: Living with History project worked to build a local network in the same way. The aim of this was both to develop a much richer understanding of 'York' and 'heritage' than could be gleaned from any one perspective. But also, through working with people with different scopes for action, we could also identify ways of creating new ways of increasing participation (in this we were influenced by Gilchrist 2009).

Richard Bringham, from the project's booklet: *How should heritage decisions be made: Increasing participation from where you are*

We've found that networking works. There's like this magic path. You need to find one person and then they introduce you to their friends. There are two types of people in the council/organisations. The ones that want to work with people and want change; and those that don't. The key is find those that do want change and then they usually know other people who do too (2015, p. 6).

Conversation 4: Mapping heritage decision making – and then seeking to intervene

Helen One of the things that was a bit eye opener for me was ... I think from the outside you can think that the Civic Trust – and it does have influence –

Peter It has some.

Helen Yes. And certainly the Civic Trust is part of the official consultees for various decisions that will affect the heritage of the city. At the same time it's not like you necessarily have as much influence as people might think.

Peter We don't have the final say.

Helen Exactly.

Peter I'd love to. (Laughter)

Helen Seeing actually how even influential organisations also face some of the same issues that individual members of the public do was part of the work that we were trying to do.

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Situate: Understand your work in context

The Heritage Decisions project used ‘thinking systemically’ as a research methodology. Mapping heritage decision-making systemically proved powerful. If you can see how formal structures and informal networks fit together, then you can start to notice key people and key points for increasing participation in decision-making. We also found this technique useful for reflecting on our own practice and activism and for planning action and making connections.

Thinking systemically

Systemic thinking offers a way of thinking about heritage not in isolation or fixed but as a dynamic process which is produced, and shaped, by people, ideas and things and the way they interact – and don’t.

- *Map processes*
- *Look for patterns*
- *Notice boundaries and disconnections*

We were particularly inspired by Systemic Action Research pioneered by Professor Danny Burns in a Development Studies context – an approach which refuses to see ‘knowing about’ and ‘change’ as separate or sequential processes. Danny Burns shows the importance of drawing on lots of different people’s knowledge within a local system to develop a ‘working picture’ and to recognize that ‘each situation is unique and its transformative potential lies in the relationships between interconnected people and organizations’ (2007, p. 32). The key point there is that neither ‘power’ nor ‘change’ is never abstract, it is a capacity of the people within any given system, organisation or locality – so if you’re thinking about a city then it’s crucial to try to develop a ‘working picture’ with the widest and most diverse set of people possible and actively involve key people in generating new insights – because it is through this process that common understandings and potential for change are cultivated (Edwards 2012).

Case Studies: Stonebow House and Castle and Eye of Yorkshire

As part of the York: Living with History project we did more sustained case study work around two areas about which future decisions might be made. One was Stonebow House, a 1960s brutalist building which provokes a wide range of reactions in the city – most commonly hatred and ire! (Graham 2014b). One of our aims with the Stonebow project was to explore how to enrich the public debate about Stonebow House – not necessarily to change anyone’s minds but to create a context where better arguments both for and

against the building might be developed. As part of this Jon Wright, freelance architectural historian and former Senior Caseworker for the Twentieth Century Society and, until 2013, Head of Conservation at the Council for British Archaeology in York, shared his position on Stonebow House, in writing and at an event, and also engaged in sustained debates through York Past and Present (Wright 2014; Graham 2014c, 2014d). Through this process the quality of the public debate did develop. People who hated the building developed more sophisticated arguments to support their position. Some people changed their minds, one participant saying 'it's a bit like the more you interact with it, the more friendly it becomes' – and we used the process to map the arguments, concluding that while there was no killer argument for keeping it, there were lots of small arguments (that seemed to add up for people) for exploring reuse and keeping it as an affordable enclave for shopping and socialising in a city becoming increasingly expensive (Graham 2014d).

Image 3: Stonebow House, an aim of the York: Living with History project was to see if we might enrich public debate through putting different people in dialogue with each other.
Credit: York Mix

Image 4: One of the Stonebow House in three word contributions generated by York Stories (2014) and at the research events.

The second case study was Castle Area and Eye of Yorkshire, a strand led by Peter and York Civic Trust.

Peter In the past, to go back to 1990 when the council had the idea for comprehensive redevelopment of Piccadilly and the castle car park they produced a development brief, which we agreed with. We thought the ideas of massing, intensity of development and the number of people living in that site seemed fairly reasonable actually. So, that was given out to a number of firms, and they all came back with proposals for the redevelopment of the site. But it was as if they threw the development brief in the bin – the designs came back with twice the intensity, to six storeys instead of four. All the schemes were thrown out.

By the end of the 1990s the city council were starting to lose the will to live, as were we, and they were desperate to try and get something happening there. York really felt it had to push on the development.

There was this sense that 'we have to get this huge department store done at the bottom end to draw people down'. As a result the scheme that was agreed was the worst scheme that we had ever seen. The city council approved it, officers had approved it; even the senior guy at English Heritage agreed with it. Anyway York

Civic Trust put our money where our mouth is and we said, 'We really want this called in for Inquiry' knowing full well that this was going to cost us a fortune. Seven months of my time, as it was, plus all my other trustees, £88,000 it cost us for the barrister, a seven-week Inquiry, and we won.

Since then the whole thing has been in abeyance. But we're now starting to see this idea creeping back in; and we just felt it was a very good opportunity to actually engage in this grassroots approach: What do we want to see on this site? What's right for the site? What's right for the city? So, we had people from 36 different organisations, some formal, some informal. We spent a day with a really good moderator by the name of Graham Bell from Northeast Civic Trust, who was then able to draw that into a sort of coherent document which can be used and can be considered by people.

Helen That history of activism is a crucial thing to remember: that it really was people, the Civic Trust, but also a whole range of individuals that stopped it.¹

Peter Yes. There were about 40 or 50 in a group. We even had CABE, the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment, and they sent a barrister up as well. The developers had one of the top QCs in the country; the city council had another top QC. They must have spent millions of pounds on it. Okay, we spent £88,000; but CABE must have spent hundreds of thousands plus. People gave so much time and effort.

Helen There is a history in York of schemes coming forward supported by the Council, which were stopped by people in York, various activists and networks. The other example is the Inner Ring Road, which would have seen lots of houses knocked down.

Peter Good houses.

Helen Within the city walls. And also lots of multi-storey car parks built as well.

Peter Four.

¹ Activists in the York Castle Area Campaign Group have donated their archives of the campaign to York City Archives in July 2015.

Helen Four of them, yes. That was a campaign. Was that York 2000?

Peter York 2000, yes.

Helen So, there is a history of people living in York refusing certain types of developments and making those cases, which I think is an important history for us to remember and gives a bit of context and tradition to some of the things we're trying to do today, I think.

Peter The shame is, of course, it's always adversarial.

Helen Yes.

Peter So, how do we devise a system where we're not always in conflict and we're not always reactive? How do we be proactive and democratic right at the beginning? Absolutely crucial.

Lianne I think the Castle Area and Eye of Yorkshire event was an eye opener for myself and Rich. We walked away thinking, well no wonder, because it was all about how much red tape you have to go through to get planning permission to even put in an application, let alone get it approved or anything.

Richard It would be nice to have more. If you could find a way to involve the public more directly in planning permissions and understanding the way they work then I reckon you'd get a next generation of people who actually understood how it all worked. I think that's important.

Peter That's a very good point.

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Public partners – collaboration is key

The Castle Area event was written by into a report by Graham Bell (2014). The key finding of the event, outlined in detail in the report, was that a project brief was needed, aimed at bringing together the three key partners (City of York Council, English Heritage and York Museums Trust) in a way that could fully address the physical improvement of the car park, the Eye of Yorkshire, the Foss and other public areas and ultimately co-ordinate management of this area. Such collaboration – with strategic and ongoing community involvement – was seen as the best foundation for doing justice to the complex and hight significant histories of the site.

Conversation 5: Personal memories / Public documentation / Political decisions: Linking different scales

Lianne Looking back it seems so long ago. At one of the research Drop In session at the Library we got talking to John Oxley, City Archaeologist. We were saying basically, 'These buildings are getting changed or altered or demolished or whichever way you want to look at it, but they're not getting documented properly'. We wanted to do Urban Exploration – but with permission. So, it was then that we came up with the idea of: why not ask the public? There are lots of people with lots of cameras; why not ask them to go in and take photos and at least then you know that you're going to get a proper documentation.

Helen You've taken 900 people around the Guildhall – a direct result of that conversation?

Lianne Yes.

Helen The aim has been that people have been able to get in. You talk a bit about each room that you're in, don't you?

Richard Yes.

Helen But then people get to take their own photographs and then talk about the things they know about it as well?

Image 5: Taken by Richard Bringham as part of the pilot public documentation projects near York's Guildhall. Credit: York Past and Present

Richard The weird thing is that the places that are of least interest, like the basements, are probably the parts that more people enjoy. You show people the main hall and they go, 'Wow!' You take them into the basements and they're like kids with new toys; they're running around all over. Because they never get to see that. And that's what it is: everybody wants to see something they've never seen before or they're not allowed to see.

Helen What's fantastic is you are building this understanding about the building, not just through books, but also through all the stories that people share on all of the tours.

Richard I think the stories, whether they be work stories or memories you have as a kid or anything that's personal to you, is significantly important to any building; much more than what's written down about its history, because now it becomes more personal. And I think a lot of people who work in buildings can tell you a lot better stories about say Guildhall, the Mansion House, the Fairfax House, than the people who write about it. You probably see some really weird and wonderful things in old buildings but nobody actually gets round to write it.

Helen Linked to that, it's interesting on Facebook how the personal and the city as a whole become intertwined.

Rich Yes.

Helen So, someone will post a photo that is a family photo, but then lots of other people will post comments.

Richard Yes, it's happened loads of times. It happened a couple of months ago: somebody posted a picture of a bunch of people from Rowntree's in about '55, '60, I think it was. And then somebody said, 'It's my dad stood next door' and the other one was like, 'Yeah, he went to work at Terry's'. Then somebody else posted a picture of him at Terry's and he went, 'That's my old...' and it went from there. All these different establishments and all these different people, it became more like a history of chocolate and people who worked for them than anything else. It was great.

Lianne We also found out, on our YouTube channel we've got a video of the railway, and one of our members came up to us the other day and said, "I really want to say thank you for that video". I said, "Why, it's just a video?" He said, "Because before I'd seen that video I'd never seen my grandad before".

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Personal contributions and political participation

If one of the things we need to change to increase participation is the widespread sense of powerlessness, then finding the pathways from personal and local knowledge and expertise and political participation is crucial. We've noticed (and tried this out explicitly with Stonebow House) how involving people in sharing memories and knowledge about a particular building, street or issue in the past – and being exposed to others' knowledge – both enables for all of us a richer and more complex appreciation of the issues, but also is a way in for more active engagement with decisions today.

Conversation 6: Legitimacy?

Helen One of the things we've been doing in York: Living with History – and on York Past and Present you've been doing it anyway – is trying to build broader networks, more diverse networks throughout the city of people. The event we held on 20th June 2015 'What has heritage ever done for us?' – which was part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Connected Communities Festival event – gave us a chance to bring everyone we've met together.

Richard Yes.

Peter I thought it was an excellent affair. You talked about all the work that's gone before that helped to legitimise the questions the project has been asking – and it's methods too. I think you had a really interesting and diverse range of people, who wouldn't necessarily have engaged in that process in the past. So, that's a fantastic first step. We just need to work out how we can keep that momentum going; how do we prevent it just fading away. How we've got to convince the decision makers in the city that there is real benefit in community engagement. That's the challenge, isn't it?

Helen You said earlier on about legitimacy. When you say that what kinds of things do you mean?

Peter I mean for example I wouldn't have thought that [everyone who spoke] would necessarily have been involved in this meeting if they hadn't been involved in other components and parts of the build up to that meeting. So, that's really what I mean. I wasn't suggesting that we were illegitimate before. I'm suggesting that there is now more credence – more veracity.

Helen And we've done that through conversations – and building relationships – with one person at a time. You're right, by building a broader group network then you do grow and become more recognisable and, in a sense, more legitimate. And you can tell you are growing in legitimacy by the fact that a wider range of people are prepared to speak to you or take part in events you're doing.

Peter Yes, when they realise that you're talking sensible words rather than... You can be radical and still be sensible.

Lianne It's about people feeling empowered to know that they can speak up. We have a valid opinion.

Richard I think there must be loads of people out in York who think: my voice doesn't matter because what am I going to do, I'm just a person? We've all done it; we've all said we can't make a difference. But by joining everything together we are making differences. It might be small and small steps but it is a change. And if you can keep that going and progressing then...

Lianne It's exactly what you were saying Peter about not letting it just fall. We've had so many highs, we need to keep going. We need to keep going so it doesn't become stagnant; it doesn't all just fall down and end up being for nothing.

Peter Return to the status quo.

Lianne Yeah.

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Reflect: Seeing your work through other people's eyes

One of the most powerful outcomes of the wider Heritage Decisions project – and its collaborative design – was the chance for us to reflect on our own work and become more self-conscious about our approaches and choices. This was made possible through individual conversations between team members and the powerful effect of seeing our work afresh through other people's eyes. In York this was even more intense as we were constantly having to adjust our understandings as we saw issues from different perspective. As part of the project Helen has kept a Social Network Analysis of all the people she spoke to. This was a way of capturing conversations and tracks how some relationships develop and gather pace and others falter, it was also a way of checking the diversity, or otherwise, of the networks the project was developing. The question has clearly become – how to embed this methods of reflection and diversity in the political culture of the city?

Conversation 8: Beyond an adversarial political culture

Helen Peter you said earlier on about it always getting adversarial. I think that's a really crucial point.

Peter Yes.

Helen The worst thing about that is not only that there might be the loss of something that lots of people care about – such as a building – but then actually, yet again, people feel like: I can't make a difference; there's no point. So, there are all these negatives in terms of the effect on political culture, and the cynicism will just grow if people's experience of getting involved in something like that is they don't get to be listened to and can't make a difference.

At the 'What has heritage ever done for us?' event there was a sense that we need to be proactive about getting people involved in what's important to them about the city – but also that we could maybe use history and heritage to enliven and create more fun and dynamic ways of people engaging in decision making about the city anyway.

Richard Being proactive is partly about confidence. I think each group grows as well, the more of networks you are connected into. Each network you're with seems to give you a little more confidence. It's like when we first talked to you I didn't really want to say too much because it's just me at the end of the day. What do I know? You're all professionals. But as we've gone forward and met different people there's that build-up of confidence as well that you have got a voice and you will be listened to. And that's important.

Lianne You can argue your case to us; we can argue our case to Peter; Peter then can argue his case to you – but you can argue your opinion with each other politely and still walk away at the end of the day and go, do you know what that was really fun, it works. It's taken in a more productive way that says, yeah, you feel more empowered; you feel more able to take out these points of views and put it forward and say this is what we want.

Richard Everybody thinks their point of view is right, till they hear somebody else's point of view that is actually better than theirs, and then it's an agreement.

Peter For the strategy for the future I think somehow all these various tentacles need to come together but still retain their independence. *How* do you do that?

Inset text box:

As part of the project Lianne and Richard developed some advice to other community groups starting out:

- Build a community of people with the same interest.

- Meet key people based in Institutions (like in a University or in the Council). ‘Be willing to give your free time because it’s volunteering that makes the connections’.
- Tap into these key people’s networks.
- Crossover from social media to real life events and real life events back to social media.
- You need an idea to talk about [for York Past and Present this has been public documentation].
- Communication and language – you need to speak to different people in different ways.
- Gain more and more confidence from speaking to lots of different people – and seeing that they like what you are doing.
- Be generous to people in institutions / council. ‘They can shut the door, faster than you can open it’.
- Don’t settle for small things, keep your eyes on your main goal. ‘Be like a child, be happy with what those in decision-making positions offer but always demand more’.

Still Living with History....

One thing we’ve learnt from the ways of working we’ve used in York: Living with History – and in the Heritage Decisions project more generally – is that, unlike traditional research projects, it won’t ever be ‘over’ as such. It is often said in Heritage Studies that heritage is a process (e.g. Smith 2006). Equally, democracy is often described in the same way. Not a tick in a box ‘every five years’ (to paraphrase Tony Benn) but as a way of living together that needs to be constantly nurtured and nourished through working together across inequalities and boundaries (e.g. Dunn 2005). The Heritage Decisions project has tried to find a way of working which is adequate to both these conceptualisations. We’ve approached research and knowledge production in a way which is itself living and adaptive – always changing as it seeks to create the social conditions and capacities for participation in decision making in York to be increased. All of the four key ideas from the overall Heritage Decisions project – Act, Connect, Reflect and Situate – always need to be maintained and are never completed actions. You always need to add and enrich your understandings of the complex contexts you are working in. You always need to diversify your networks. What we hope we have shown is that it isn’t helpful in the debates over Heritage and Communities to create and reinforce polarisations. It is not always helpful to think about professionals and communities. Or an inside and an outside. Instead we can all grow networks of people across boundaries who can constantly challenge you to think differently and refuse to let you off the hook and think that nothing can be done.

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