

Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Jenny Hurkett

Role: founder/manager

Museum: Blue Town Heritage Centre

Location of interview: upstairs office, BTHC

Date: 19/10/18

Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

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The project is based at Birkbeck, University of London. The interview recordings and associated materials are archived at the Bishopsgate Library, London.

For readability the transcript has been made using 'intelligent' transcription (removing ums, ers etc).

[00:00:46]

TB: Let's just start of by – just introduce yourself and say what your role is here at the museum, and then just take me back to the beginning and how it was all set up.

JH: I'm Jenny Hurkett, and my role is founder and manager of the Blue Town Heritage Centre, Criterion Music Hall and Cinema.

TB: Thank you. So take me back to the beginning...

[00:01:16]

JH: Well it wasn't a plan. My husband used to run a kitchen showroom business and we needed a building quickly that would house our warehouse, offices and showroom. And we found this building, it was derelict, completely boarded up in the front and something about it we fell in love with. So we bought it. Then we are asked to show a history film in the back where we now, which is now the music hall, we didn't know it at the time; we had our bathroom and bedroom displays in there. Very basic, concrete floor, nothing at all – we wanted people to look at the displays. We put a piece of paper on the wall to show this film, and a hundred people turned up. We expected about ten. And then that got me thinking, 'why are people interested in Blue Town?' And then we were asked to show it again and again, and we were getting about a hundred each time. People were travelling from Leeds and Wales to see this half hour film on Blue Town. During this process I was just amazed at how much history there is in this area. And the docks had restored two figure heads and had no-where to put them, so they said would I like them? So we had figureheads amongst the bathroom displays. Then people started bringing bits and pieces in. So I had a mini-heritage centre – my husband indulged me, I had this in the back of the kitchen showroom. Then unfortunately he took ill, late 2008/9, and had to give up the business and I just retired, and I thought I'd like to have a heritage centre here, so we downsized. I converted the offices into an apartment, so I could look after him, rented out some of the space and had a mini heritage centre in the back.

[00:03:16]

Then discovered it had been a music hall, and I thought, 'I would like to restore a music hall'. So I met up with someone called Paul Harris, who was on Radio Kent at the time, and he had started life as a music hall [entertainer], and he came and advised us on what it would have looked like. You had to have a lot of vision because it was just a derelict building. So our stage is the same size as the Leeds Variety, and then the community centre had got the community cinema, in the leisure centre up there. But people weren't going to it. So they said would I like it. So that's how we got the cinema down here. Still no carpet on the floor, still the chairs were all higgledy piggledy, I was the receptionist, the projectionist, made the teas, sold the ice creams, it was a one-man band.

[00:04:09]

Then I started getting a few volunteers, more artefacts, and then we couldn't attract funding from anyone. Nobody believed us, that this was a project worth doing. I am in the local Rotary Club and asked some of the guys if they would help me, so they became trustees, I became a registered charity in 2010 and we earn our keep. We don't get any large grants because people don't understand having a theatre and a museum in the same building. So how has it gone from then really (sigh) – we hadn't had a plan. I had a vision, that I want to see Blue Town as a heritage hub for the island. It just lends itself to it. We want to be a heritage and cultural hub. We use hub because we think things spin off from one place to another. So using the cinema and the museum we can engage with people and make history more interesting.

[00:05:27]

We were then – we did the music hall, and we thought we would earn our keep doing music hall shows. Then about six years ago now, Roger came in for a cup of tea, and Roger was a session musician in the sixties and he put on a fundraising show, so we now have a house band that come from all over the UK and you are talking top quality musicians; Alan's played with Elton John for 20 years, he was at Live Aid; another one started the Foundations; they are our house band. So Paul does the music hall, all professional artists; Roger does the Rock and Roll; then Rick came into our lives, he had retired early from the BBC, his dream was to run a cinema, so he took over doing the cinema and has now got it up to a fantastic quality that we can now do live streamings; so we had the Cliff concert, Andre Rou, you name it; as well as La Boheme and all the different National Theatre things. So I have just got a really good team of people. Then Malcolm came in, he wanted to be a researcher, he is now our archivist, and we have over 10,000 items in our archives. People just seem to like what we do; everything that is here is donated, including the chair you are sitting on, the tables, the cups and saucers, the whole community has got behind this project. The music hall brings in two coaches a day, so a six week season, three times a week and they come from as far afield as Surrey, Sussex, you name it, they come over.

[00:07:16]

It is all word of mouth. We work with all the schools on the island, it has taken us five years but we have got Sheppey's history on the curriculum at last. We have worked with universities of Kent, Southampton and Greenwich; and we have been working with Kent now for, right from the beginning, on a wide variety of projects so researchers take us seriously; but we also do singalong a Mama Mia with fish and chips; so it's very hard; it works for us, we have evolved into becoming a community hub because people feel comfortable coming in here and if they can't access mainstream theatre or cinema they can come in here. We do a lot with dementia groups, with singalong films, with items on the table to stimulate memories; MS, Stroke Society, Blind Society, they all come in here. We have an ADHD conference, second time we have held this, and international speakers. We have also got the first Rotary radio station in the UK, and that was launched on Saturday. I don't know how it happens, it has just evolved.

[00:08:37]

TB: that's astonishing; going all the way back to the very beginning, and as you say it started off with a few objects; you said later on that you had this vision that it would be a hub; what was your vision for it right at the beginning? Or how did you imagine it might be?

JH: Right well first of all Sheppey has a very negative perception from people around the area. I live here, I love it, chose to live here and you get fed up with people saying 'blow the place up'; 'wouldn't live there', 'what on earth are you doing' and all of that. My husband and I went down to a cruise ship terminal exhibition, and there was stands there; and we went to the one on Swale and we said 'have you got any leaflets on Sheppey?' And they said 'no, there is nothing there, just a few caravans'; and that was from our council.

[00:09:51]

Then we went to Visit Kent. 'Have you got anything on Sheppey?' 'No, no there's not a lot there'. Right, OK, now I'm getting angry. Picked up a leaflet about maritime on this coast and the French coast, and the Isle of Sheppey didn't even have a name on it, we had no maritime according to this, at all. So I then wrote to the council, I said what's going on here, why; and just, they don't know what to do with Sheppey. So I was fired up, and then with all these other bits that were happening at the same time, the more people kept telling me that we were rubbish and we couldn't do it, the more determined I was that we were going to do something, and make people see Sheppey with different eyes. The phrase I use all the time is that if we said we were from Stratford upon Avon people would assume that we were one sort of person; if we say we are from Sheppey people assume something else. Neither are correct. But it's not fair on our young people to have that stigma.

[00:10:58]

And Sheppey history hadn't been told; we have no brown signs saying anything about our history; and we have got so much here. And so yes, really I was just fed up with people saying we were crap.

[00:11:14]

TB: Right, so it's about perception and about identity I suppose; in celebrating a little more of what's here. You said that you weren't born and bred in Sheppey itself

JH: No, I'm mainly from – I moved to the Medway towns when I was I three; I grew up there but used to come to Sheppey a lot and then finally moved here about thirty odd years ago, like most people because housing was cheaper. But then fell in love with the place. I mean we have got within five minutes the beach, or you out in the middle of nowhere; yet you have got towns, you are close to London, you are close to Europe; I think we are just you know, why don't you love it?

[00:12:13]

TB: At the time there was a there was a Heritage Centre, I wonder if was established when you first arrived, perhaps not, but still there was the cottage

JH: The cottage was there but it was hardly ever open.

TB: Do you remember visiting ever in those early days?

JH: Yes, and you weren't made to feel welcome.

TB: I was going to say, what was it like?

JH: The lady would say 'I'm going to have my lunch now, you have got five minutes, don't touch anything'. The place was dirty, it was not welcoming at all. I didn't know anything about Sheppey's history and I was amazed that I didn't know. When I started researching I would think, why don't I know? There was the Gatehouse Museum that I had taken my children to when we first moved in, but again at that time it was more of a hobby museum and it was someone's hobby, you felt as if you were being a bit of an intruder.

[00:13:06]

One thing I started when we first started this was to do tours of the island, because I think the island is the destination, not one particular place. So we used to do tours of the island, mini-bus tours, and the dockyard used to let us go in there as well. And we would take people round to all the museums, so that is how I got to know everyone in the other museums. Some liked us, some didn't. 'Who is this upstart setting up a new museum?' But we have grown. So there are now five; well so also from here a lot of our work has been done by prisoners, so we got to know all the governors quite well, and we said, 'you realise that the site that you are on is the site of British aviation? Any chance of having a room?' So they said, 'well I've got a small room you can have' and then if you take the wall down, I could have a bigger room, being a bit cheeky with them, and they gave us this room, and one of our volunteers went and we set that up. So they are an annex of ours, so that's a new museum on the island.

[00:14:24]

TB: this is the aviation museum? OK, this in the middle of the prison?

JH: Yes.

TB: I must go and see it, it sounds amazing.

JH: Yes, so I am really proud that we kick started it and they are now independent. Then Rose Cottage, where they are now, that closed down there, they asked us if we would like to take and it and I said we couldn't, I haven't got the energy to do another museum. And it has become Rose Cottage that is more art focused. And we are this fusion of heritage and entertainment. Our aims are to educate, entertain and enthuse.

[00:15:04]

TB: Did you have any model at all, or did you know what you wanted it to be like in terms of interpretation, the exhibition itself and the feel of it, or did you have a strong idea of what you didn't want it to be like?

[00:15:28]

JH: I didn't want it to be unwelcoming. I didn't want it to be everything in glass cases. We wanted people to pick things up, we wanted them to experience it. This sounds very – we wanted it to be clean, tidy; we may be voluntary but we are not amateur.

[00:15:58]

I had a vision of being able to tell the story of this area because I just think no-one knew about it. I didn't want to tell the story of Sheppey, I just wanted to – Blue Town is my passion, and the dockyard. But we did start doing a bit of everything because everyone started giving us stuff, and now we are having to go back to what the original vision was. So we are giving people things back that should be in their museums or say 'no we can't take it', because the story that we have got is too important to try and dilute it into other things.

[00:16:43]

TB: I see, so you have still got that Blue Town focus very much in the exhibition haven't you, which is great, and the Second World War takes broader aspects of it, but what is it about Blue Town that you love so, why is it that subject that lights your fire as it were, can you put it in words?

[00:17:03]

JH: In it's heyday there were 7,000 people here. There is a hundred now. We have a dockyard wall that is equal to anything in Greenwich and in Chatham; yet the perception when we first started was 'knock it down, it's an old wall' just because it is Sheppey. In the dockyard we have had some amazing buildings that have been just destroyed. Wouldn't have been allowed to happen anywhere else but it is Sheppey so it doesn't matter. Why doesn't it matter? You walk in Blue Town and the potential... you sense the history. We do walks of Blue Town, and every time we do it, 'why don't we know these stories?'

[00:17:58]

The more that you research it, all the stuff that is happening in our dockyard, I mean the Royal Navy invested in Sheerness dockyard to get the best apprentices, so they built an amazing school to do that. This is the first and only time that worldwide anchor trials have happened, and that was here at Sheerness. World War I, all the aviation activities, because Royal Naval Air Service started here, from Sheerness Dockyard, does anyone know it, two major explosions, nearly a thousand people died; never mentioned in anything. World War II, the little ships from Dunkirk, did as many from here as they did from anywhere else; never mentioned. Why? One of the buildings still in tact in the Dockyard is the boat store. The first skyscraper in the world. Blue Town; the co-operative movement

started here 30 years before Rochdale, and you think, why don't people know this? Why won't our council put a brown historic Sheppey sign up?

[00:19:14]

TB: Let me ask you that question, why is it do you think?

JH: I have no idea, and I have been banging on for twelve years to get a brown historic sign. We know when the dockyard closed in 1960 there was no investment, Sheppey went into decline; prior to that there were six cinemas, four theatres, full employment, this place was thriving. So why has it got this undeserved negative reputation. We are an island, we are not a town. Highways won't let us have signs because we are an island, we can't have signs for the Isle of Sheppey. We have no identity; just signs to Sheerness.

[00:20:05]

TB: I see, yes. For the last year or so I've been working on a project in the Royal Docks in Silvertown; people there call it the island because it is kind of cut off, with river on one side and docks on the other and Brick Lane Music Hall is there as well.

JH: Exactly, I have just been down to see them!

TB: They had dozens and dozens of pubs and of course when the docks shut one after one they disappeared and historically almost every trace has gone or is going and the last thing is opposite the Tate and Lyle factory there is a working men's sports club that was given by the Tate's at the same time they gave their art collection to the Tate gallery but even that is owned by the council and they are talking about building flats on it. It's huge a big hall, lecture rooms, billiard rooms, they had hot baths and so on. But it's a similar kind of thing, isn't it strange how, it has also gone through all sorts of social problems since the 1980s, when the docks were shut down, but anywhere else you would think this is a hugely significant building here. But even amongst the local people; it is almost like they have been beaten somehow, I don't know how to describe it

JH: Yes

TB:, there is that feeling, not of failure, but that the world has somehow dealt them a terrible blow which they have never quite got back from, do you feel that here?

[00:21:42]

JH: We get promised this and promised that, and nothing ever happens. We do feel our council doesn't care; they say it's perception rather than reality, so I took pictures of the toilets in Faversham and Sittingbourne; vested with flowers, both of them, ours is a dead pot plant. And that's how we feel.

TB: Yes, unloved and ignored.

[00:22:16]

Yes. We are an island, not a town. Swale doesn't... Swale is a borough, with Faversham, Sittingbourne, Sheppey you can't merge all those three things together, so treat us all separately. Most of the people that make decisions come from Faversham; Sittingbourne has become a giant urbanized area and they're putting all their multi-millions into the regeneration of Sittingbourne. They don't really know what to do with Sheppey. We have three Blue Flag beaches, there are 40 Blue Flag beaches in the UK, 3 are on Sheppey and our council won't let us have a brown sign to show that we've got Blue Flag beaches, five museums two bird reserves, because they say brown signs don't work, yet every other place around us has got brown signs. I've been asking for leaflet stands in the council offices and stuff that we can put our leaflets in, all of us small museums. No. I've just got an email back from them, who's going to pay for them, who is going to do the upkeep. It's for your people, it is to promote the heritage and attractions in the area and you won't support it? So you tell me what I've got this flat bit on my forehead because I don't understand why.

[00:23:52]

So that's why we rebranded the Swale Museums Group which was; we met, it was organised by the council but it was ineffectual; it was a networking group but really nobody really spoke to each other. And then Decided we needed to make this more relevant. If we were giving our time out we needed to make sure that this was happening. So I was asked to be chair and we now all talk to each other; I got a Heritage Lottery Bid, we had a consultant, we are now Historic Swale CIO; and then the council just pulled the rug on us as soon as we got our charitable status. The idea was that we would have a transition.

TB: in terms of funding you mean?

JH: No, that they used to administer it; so we had no administrator; but we are all running businesses. So we collect data, we are just trying to make ourselves now; there are 15 museums at the moment, possibly 17; that's a huge amount of museums in one borough. And no-one wants to support it.

TB: So how long has it been going in this new format, it is quite recent?

JH: Very recent, in the last few months.

TB: so it is early days in that respect

[00:25:22]

JH: yes.

TB: How do you hope - how is it going to transform from what it was?

JH: Right, well we want Historic Swale to be; we are rebranding the heritage of the area, so it will be historic Faversham, historic Sittingbourne, historic Sheppey, all part of historic Swale so each one

will involve its own identity, but under the banner of historic Swale. So we're not trying to make us all merge into one thing; so there's a Sheppey story, there is a Sittingbourne story, the Faversham story but we are all linked together, so we could do some national events as well. One of the things we've got is a conference in Faversham in March; the next meeting is in here and we are going to talk about data collection; what's relevant for us, not what the council wants, not what anyone else wants, what is it that we want to collect that will help us and how do we do it, how do we manage it. Then another one is looking at how we can share our resources, you know, if one of us has a great big superduper photocopier we can all use it, do you know what I mean? It is working informally but effectively.

[00:26:46]

TB: Yes, absolutely. And in terms of marketing I guess?

JH: That's the whole idea, marketing

TB: so you can have a leaflet for the whole area

JH: Exactly. We are also part of the wheels of time

TB: Which is a great website

JH: Unbelievable; we were one of the first ones to be involved in that and then, to me it's a no brainer, so all the museums in Swale are in that because we encouraged them to; it makes Sheppey relevant. People come in; 'I didn't know you had all this, I wouldn't have dreamt to come on to Sheppey. But they have done. Sots of tiny little bits to make this jigsaw puzzle work.

[00:27:32]

TB: And is there enthusiasm from the other museums, are people up for it?

JH: Yes, all the Swale museums are in it, they work closely with all the other museums because we need to. It is pointless – I say that, you always get some people saying I don't like this modern way of sharing stuff but I can't see why not. The Island is the destination. And also we are all run by volunteers. If your volunteers aren't having fun, what is the point of them being here. So we do lots of things to make it fun.

[00:28:28]

TB: what kind of things?

JH: Well we have volunteer parties; we invite, Tipperary to Flanders Field, inviting all the museums involved in WW1 to come and see the show; then you can talk to each other as well. Trips to each other's museums, because your best ambassadors are your volunteers, to talk about what they do.

TB: Organisationally here, do you have any staff or are you all volunteers?

JH: We are all volunteers, we have some paid technical support for the shows and stuff like that, and paid book keeping. But they are ad-hoc, as and when they are required. I am still a volunteer.

[00:29:22]

TB: Are you really, wow, that's amazing; is there enough coming in?

JH: We can earn our keep, which is hard work, we earn our keep but we don't have any money for projects, and we don't have money to have paid staff, so we are in a catch 22. This week we would have had 600 people in the building.

TB: Do you have any sense of annually, how many?

JH: Last year we had 25,000 people.

TB: Crikey, that is astonishing, right, so you are not short of visitors.

JH: I'm not short of visitors, I have got 33 volunteers, ranging from 10 to 85.

[00:30:15]

TB: What year did you start?

JH: We became a registered charity in 2010, and it was about a year before that that I had these ideas kind of floating around.

TB: Was that the moment it opened to the public properly?

JH: We started 2009, but we, yes.

TB: In terms of governance you said it was a charity; in terms of trustees, were they volunteers?

[00:30:55]

JH: Yes, some are people who were in the same Rotary Club as me, they are still with me, and someone who used to come into the centre, I asked him and he is still with me, a lot of my volunteers have been with me for donkeys years.

TB: The Rotary is interesting; I was in Round Table and discovered a whole world of support and networking and that kind of stuff that can happen around a community from it, it's really quite powerful, isn't it? So has that had a role, you mentioned the radio station, but has the Rotary been useful to you?

JH: Yes, they paid for the downstairs bit, the new area. But it's an island you see, so you say you want something... I said I want a grand piano and chandeliers; and someone phoned up and said Jen I think we have found you your grand piano, it is in the art deco house that has been derelict, it is

going to auction in two days time, but it is going to cost you £300. Well I hadn't got £300. Then a visitor heard and he said I'll buy it for you. And it turns out that it's a Beckstein(?), it is an 1870 Beckstein and the only other one like it is in the Royal Opera House. And I got my chandeliers that way. You haven't been upstairs to the Maritime Room, there is a cannon in there, there is a most beautiful ship, a three masted ship that is 6 foot tall by 6 foot wide that came in last week.

[00:32:32]

TB: Wow, so people are actually walking in with this stuff

JH: Every day.

TB: My god, that's incredible. So do you think it's sat in their attic and they just think at last there is somewhere to put this on display?

JH: Yes. And people, with the cinema every Friday, so you get your regulars in coming to that, we do all the different shows as well, we had a gentlemen in for the Rotary launch, he had been in the Navy all of his life, he told us some fantastic stories and said, 'I've got some bits and pieces, he said I'm going to bring that – he is from Orpington. So; the American speaker, he goes, 'you have got the same cups and saucers as my nan, when I come over I am going to bring some over. People want to be part of whatever this is.

[00:33:26]

TB: Why do people want to do that, what is it, there is something here isn't there, there is something quite extraordinary that is going on in terms of its appeal to, not just local people but to people that have a connection to this area, but can you help me out?

JH: They like being here. The hardest bit is getting people out the building. There is something about it. We can get people coming in on their own, widows and widowers, they feel comfortable; I've got a group of volunteers that are very friendly and make people welcome. That is what I said at the beginning, I wanted it to be a welcoming place, so we are all geared up for that. If someone comes in they are not ignored, they are always chatted to. We go out of way with; we are all quite passionate about this place and what we have achieved, and that comes through. And if you have got thirty odd enthusiastic people, whoever they got to speak to is enthusiastic about the place, that rubs off. And then people want to be a part of that. We do laugh a lot here. So people come in and say, 'I only came in to buy a ticket and I've come away laughing'. We say they come in to be abused, because we, you know, it's banter. And if you are stuck at home all day and you don't see anyone, it is quite nice to come out and...

[00:35:04]

TB: yes. And what about for you? I don't know if your husband is still alive?

JH: yes, he is resting today, when he is fit, he will make the walnut and ginger scones and all the amazing models he has done and stuff like that. So everyone uses their talents, or latent talents, to do stuff.

TB: Yes, do you still live on site?

JH: Yes, we live upstairs, yes.

TB: So it's amazing that this is your home as well, isn't it?

JH: Yes this is my home and that is why I have got a roof garden upstairs now as well. But they got used to me now I think. Everyone dreads it, 'do you know I had a dream, I think we could do this' and they go Oh God. We could make the upstairs like the deck of the Victory, because the ceiling fell down, we found beams. So I say none of you have to follow on this journey with us, it's alright (laughs). But if someone comes in and asks if they can do something we say yes first, and then work out how we are going to do it.

[00:36:20]

TB: So that way whatever they can do, they can be a part of it – that is the important thing, not necessarily what they can offer

JH: A young lad downstairs, a 15 year old lad, he just asked if he could volunteer.

TB: That's interesting, it's not just older people. One of the things, talking to the Cottage here, all their volunteers are retired age now and that is a problem for them. They need younger people to step in and do things. But somehow that is not an issue here, or is it?

JH: Well most of us are retired, I mean I'm 70 next year so I'm just like...

TB: Really? You don't look it!

[00:36:58]

JH: Thank you, but you know I have an exit strategy. We would love to get apprentices in, that's our dream, so that we can pass on the skills. But you have to have

the money to be able to do it that's the bit that we can't get funders to understand us. We're not just a straightforward Museum, and we're not a straightforward theatre. We are this mix, and a community hub as well.

TB: I see, so that makes it a bit more problematic in terms of which funding body to go to

JH: Yes they don't get it, 'no no, you don't fit it', so we roll up our sleeves and do it ourselves.

TB: It sounds like you have some appeal to younger people

JH: Yes, we work with all the schools, the colleges, the colleges raise money for us; we work with everyone.

[00:38:08]

TB: You said you have an exit strategy; do you mean in terms of what will happen to this place when you decide to step down?

JH: Yes, as long as it get used for the purposes that we set it up for as a charity then it stays within the charity. When that changes, then it reverts back to the family. But I don't want to be opening up and closing every single day. I want to keep the vision strong, but I don't want to be doing the doing.

TB: And also living here makes that slightly problematic doesn't it, I'm sure.

JH: Yes

TB: So you are looking presumably for, or have some people in mind, that perhaps could step into that.

JH: Yes, my 10 year old grand daughter is definitely going to do it, she runs it now anyway. It's a mixture of everyone doing what they can do. We have got 500 friends of the centre; we have got a friends forum of about 20 people; 33 volunteers so it's an active place.

[00:39:15]

TB: Also quite a lot of organisation, how does that work? Do you rule the roost here, what you say goes, or is it more devolved in terms of decision making, how does that work?

JH: We get together, we will be doing our new forward plan, I hate all this jargon, but we will sit down with all the volunteers and they work in the groups; different people come in different days, so everyone to do with our menu will work together. So what is it that we need, where to do we see ourselves in the next five years, so everyone puts their bit together and then my job is bringing it all into a plan. But no it's not just... there are some things, yes I; they will say I am fussy, I do like all the cups [the right way]. Attention to detail is what I am. And the welcome.

TB: So you have got your troubleshooting role, or keeping an eye on standards or whatever you want to call it, making sure that things are up to scratch.

JH: Yes. And everyone knows me.

[00:40:48]

TB: Are there any high points for you, or best moments for you of doing this, anything you have been particularly pleased with?

JH: The trouble is, there is so much that happens all the time here. I think a few weeks ago we had Roy Hudd came down and he opened the floor downstairs for us. But he and his wife were so impressed they gave us a £200 donation, and they want to write about it in the, he writes for Yours Magazine. Now to get an accolade from someone who knows theatre and music hall inside out, to think that what we have got here is special, gave us all a big boost, to think it is not just us dreaming about it. When you get performers coming down, our house band as I say, they come and do a summer singalong, so there were seven of them on the stage this time, they had had 20 number one hits in the sixties; they set their diary around coming here in the summer. Like, really?! When you get school children bringing their parents in and telling them all the stuff and you are thinking, they actually listened. So I don't know, there are so many, so many bits. My biggest thing is that I don't have time to reflect.

[00:42:33]

TB: I was going ask about down sides

JH: Down sides are that my feet ache, I've been on the go since half seven this morning, I'll be laying up for the music hall now, and we'll do a music hall, I haven't had a day off for the last 14 days, because it is music hall season and we have got stuff going on. I don't want to work so many hours. But how do we get from where we are to that next phase, that's the challenge for us, and that's the challenge that we are setting all of ourselves up for, how can we do it.

[00:43:19]

TB: So that vision of the next five or ten years, you've said a bit about that you would like to see apprenticeships and, what would you call it, would it be totally volunteer led, or would see some role for paid staff?

JH: We need some paid staff, we can't keep; we need an events team to run a theatre. The amount of theatrical events we are doing now, you need somebody to run the theatre. And you could possibly need an archivist or a museums manager too, because the amount of work we do in the schools now, and all of that. We have got a great team, they are retired people but they have got an awful lot of energy, still to give. So I don't have a problem with having retired people, as long as they have got the energy to do it. Because you retire at 60/65 you don't watch Cash in the Attic all the time do you, you want to get out and do stuff. And OK one might have a bad right arm and one may have a bad left arm, but the two of you can do a job, and that is how we think of it here. So I wouldn't discount retired volunteers at all, I think they are the backbone of society, but it is nice to get different ages coming in as well. And we have prisoners as well.

[00:44:57]

TB: That's fascinating – I don't know how involved, or how involved you can get with prisoners that come and work

JH: Well some of them come for 28 days, in and out; some last two days and I've got rid of them, but others will be with us for a year. And when they are released they bring their families to see us, because they are proud of what they have done.

TB: Have any stayed in touch afterwards?

JH: Yes, they pop in. I don't know what this is. But it works.

TB: You seem to be comfortable not knowing, which I suppose it gives you that wonderful luxury that it can morph into other things, can't it

[00:45:49]

JH: Yes, and I think life should be like that, people say well what is your audience development plan. Well we sit down over a cup of tea and what do we like to go and see? Or someone says can we come and perform here and we're thinking, well shall we give it a go. It is much better than me thinking, I want to go for that demographic, and I've got to do that, and I need to do this; no, why spend our time trying to bring in an audience that we, chasing an audience just because a funder says we should be doing that, let's do what works for us.

[00:46:30]

TB: Sure. You mentioned universities; have you had any help or support from the museum world?

JH: We just got a small grant from the museums development fund to get someone to help us with accreditation, because I just got completely bogged down in all the forms, I don't understand all the jargon, to help us with that. And part of that would be looking at our archives because we've now built the new space so we have created this space and it all needs to be organised. Stuff like that, we tap in when we need to; we're amateurs, but you tell us what we need to do and we can set up the systems and we can follow them. We have all had professional lives before.

TB: Thank you, I'm so inspired, I'd love to look upstairs.

[00:47:49]

Some small talk about music hall; JH mentions that she is in touch with Brick Lane Music Hall (built inside a disused church in Silvertown) and notes they are the only two organisations running regular music hall. She says that in 1868 the Criterion was built as music hall; and it was the first cinema on the island, and they painted the back of the stage white in just the same way. The British Music Hall Society are supportive and are going to give some exhibits to put in it. 'Wiltons as had millions pumped into it, but we are on Sheppey you see (laughs); but we are getting there.'

[00:50:53] Ends

