

Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Chris Easton and Linda Higgins

Role: Trustee, Chair and Trustee

Museum: Perranzabuloe Museum, Perranporth

Location of interview: sitting area in museum display area

Date: 14/3/19

Interviewers: Toby and Butler and Jake Watts

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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).

[00:00:03]

TB: Could I just ask you, in turn, just to say your name and your date of birth if you don't mind?

LH: Linda Higgins. XX-XXX 1946.

TB: Lovely.

CE: Chris Easton, Mr Easton. XX-XXX 1948.

[00:00:22]

TB: And Linda, just tell me your role in the organisation currently?

LH: I'm a trustee of the museum trust and chairman of the management committee.

[00:00:32]

TB: And Chris, same for you, what's your role?

CE: I'm a trustee of the museum, and also on the management committee.

[00:00:37]

TB: Okay, fantastic and can I just ask, were you both involved from the beginning or have you come into it at a later stage?

LH: I was slightly after Chris, but not by very much, I don't think.

CE: No, you were pretty...

LH: Yes, I can remember swinging from these up here when we were painting and cleaning and stuff.

TB: Yes.

LH: So, it must have been the early days, yes.

CE: I was right from the start, involved right from the start.

[00:01:03]

TB: We're particularly interested in the early phases because we're trying to figure out why was it that so many local history museums started when they did. So, just take me back, starting... sorry, my microphone's... just starting, timewise, we're going back to the... when was it the idea first emerged?

LH: Was it '80?

CE: '87, probably, wasn't it?

LH: Yes, I think so.

TB: Okay, great.

CE: Yes, 1987.

[00:01:36]

TB: So, just start off with the idea and how it came about, if you could?

CE: Okay.

TB: Thank you.

CE: Yes, well, there was a factory in this building, and I think that was part of the... there was a lady called...

LH: Betty Pitman.

CE: Betty Pitman, thank you very much. Betty Pitman, who was quite a mover and shaker, not very well organised, but one, somebody who thought of ideas and she was older than all the rest of us, who she gathered together in this building and said we think we should have a museum. We said, well, yes, maybe, yes that's a very good idea, but... anyway, and so basically it was her idea and she set it up and then we took it on and ran it. Then she sort of fell by the wayside a bit, probably because of her organisational, I was going to say skills, lack of skills probably.

TB: Okay.

CE: Yes.

[00:00:33]

TB: Yes, but it was her idea in the beginning?

CE: Yes, it was, yes.

[00:02:39]

TB: So, tell me a bit more about Betty then. So, was she a long-term resident or was she a newcomer?

LH: I don't think... I think she was a newcomer, but one of those that threw themselves into everything. She was tied up with the surf club, wasn't she, very much.

CE: Yes, she was big in the surf club, and the rugby club.

LH: Very boisterous lady. [Laughs]

TB: Okay.

CE: A forceful woman, right to the very end of her life, actually, she was rather forceful. Yes.

[00:03:05]

TB: And what sort of age was she roughly, do you think when she came up with this meeting? Was she retired?

CE: Oh, yes, she'd be retired, I should think, she was probably in her sixties, seventies, probably.

LH: Yes, sixties, I would have... yes.

CE: Sixties, I should think.

[00:03:20]

TB: So, you came to that first meeting?

CE: Mm.

[00:03:23]

TB: Okay, so just tell me, was it well attended? What sort of people turned up?

CE: It was, all the people she told to be there, were there, we had no choice. [Laughs] She knew where we lived. Yes, so, yes, she pulled together people who I think she felt had an interest in local history and who had a longer-term history in Perranporth and the parish.

[00:03:54]

TB: **Right, okay, yes. So, obviously, you can't speak for her, for her motivations, but for you, why did you think it was a good idea to develop a museum here?**

CE: Well, because I think, and particularly at that time, Perranporth was very much viewed, on TV, Perranporth was very much viewed as a holiday place, bucket and spades, there's not much else here. Even other areas of the parish really were looking at Perranporth as being sort of just a holiday destination really and people were ignoring the history of the parish and I suppose, growing up here, I was very aware of that and thought it's just being lost, or there's a danger of it being lost. I mean Betty was one of those people that moved in who had that interest, but there were lots of people who moved in who were just interested in running a café and making as much money as they could.

LH: They didn't know the history was there for most of them, did they?

CE: No, you're right.

LH: I think, because we lost a lot of our buildings during the war, they blew up engine houses and things, so they couldn't be used as spotting for the planes and things.

TB: **Oh, really.**

LH: Whereas you think the bay would be big enough, big headlands and things. But I think part of it, I don't know if that was part of it with Betty's idea, but I think also it was part of trying to keep this building, because we could see it disappearing and it was the Oddfellows Hall before the museum rented it from the Oddfellows. Before it was the factory, it was the department of Labour, it was the dole office, basically. The signs are up there, yes and then when they made it into a factory, they put the floor in and made the two floors, but it was one of the few old buildings left in Perranporth. And that was part of it, just to try and retain the building as much as the history.

[00:05:55]

TB: **Oh, I see. So, it was potentially under threat of dereliction?**

LH: Well most places, it's worse now than it was then, but they'd probably knock it down and put a block of flats in or something.

CE: There was a lot of good buildings went, didn't they? It was that sort of time, oh well, everything was going to be knocked down and it was basically...

LH: All new and shiny.

CE: New and shiny and for tourism as well, that was, so things were being lost.

[00:06:23]

TB: That's really interesting. So, one of the products of that tourism boom, when I imagine it was massive, was a threat to buildings and also, I guess, the population was changing quite rapidly and so, was there a feeling that maybe some of the, I don't know, people that were dying, had had some knowledge which needed to be kept in.

CE: Yes, that was it. Yes.

[00:06:47]

TB: I see. Okay. Linda, so for you, was it a similar kind of instinct, to be involved with the museum?

LH: Yes, I mean, it was the same thing, when there were a lot of language bards around, a lot more now, but there was a feeling amongst some of the bards, oh, they just come in, learn the language and then they're a bard. They should be doing something else for the history and the culture, and I just thought this would be a really good project, so that was a little side annex to it, really, I thought it was mainly for the building and for the history, but there was that little thing there, I ought to, I should be doing something about this to sort of justify my bardship.

[00:07:30]

TB: Okay. Well, it would be lovely if you could just explain, although you did explain to me earlier, but just for the recording, but just tell me what a bardship is and how, yes...

LH: I'm not very active, I must admit in it. I wanted to know what all these place names and things meant, so I thought, I took an evening class in Cornish language and learned it and like I say, they said, oh yes, you can do three years of it. So, I thought that sounds quite nice, so I kept it up for a while, and then they... I mean, they have meetings through the year as well, but it's mainly the Gorseth in September that people go to different areas of interest, right from Penzance. I don't think I've ever been to the Scilly Isles.

CE: I don't think so, no.

LH: I don't know, it would be too much of a hassle to organise it but from Penzance up to England, up to the border. So, they meet, can meet in any place, although it always seems to be a bad time for me, so I haven't been to very many. Very remiss but yes, they had the grand bard in the same way, that they do in Wales, but not quite such a big thing in Cornwall as it is in Wales.

[00:08:46]

TB: Right, so at these meetings, is there readings of poetry and song and dance?

LH: They have competitions through the year, for reading Cornish language stuff and things about Cornwall in English as well. There are various prizes that are presented at the Gorseth and they have people, bards, coming over from Australia and all sorts of places. They've come from all over the world.

[00:09:14]

TB: Yes. That's interesting. Were you born and bred in Cornwall, or did you come here later on?

LH: We moved down here when I was in my early teens.

TB: Okay.

LH: So, I've been down here a long time.

TB: Yes, yes.

LH: I'm almost naturalised now because I married a Cornishman.

[00:09:31]

TB: Oh, right, okay. Sure. But that's interesting. You were obviously interested in, you said, the place names.

LH: Mm.

[00:09:35]

TB: And then, I guess, that sort of unlocks folk culture and other things?

LH: That's right, yes, it sort of leads on. I think if you've got an interest in the past, then it sticks with you into all sorts of different areas.

[00:09:46]

TB: Yes and just explain the old Cornish societies. Is that linked in with that?

LH: Not really, it's a separate association, isn't it?

TB: It's a separate thing.

CE: It is, but the Old Cornwall societies were formed almost 100 years ago, so they were formed and from them, the Gorsedd stemmed, actually.

[00:10:08]

TB: Oh, okay. So, are either of you members of the Old Cornish societies?

CE: I'm an Old Cornwall society member, yes.

LH: Chris' wife is president, isn't she?

CE: She is, yes, she's president.

LH: Of the Cornwall Association.

CE: Of the Federation of Old Cornwall...

LH: Federation.

TB: Okay, brilliant.

LH: Because each different villages and towns have their own Old Cornwall society, in fact, we've got two in the parish. We've got one in Perranporth and one in Carnarvon, which are very active, and they have a federation when they all get together.

CE: There's about 42 societies throughout Cornwall.

[00:10:41]

TB: Right. And so that came about in the 19-teens or...?

CE: The Old Cornwall societies?

TB: Yes.

CE: Yes. I think the earliest one was in St Ives and that was formed in 1920.

[00:10:54]

TB: **Right, okay, gosh. So, just tell me a little bit, forgive my ignorance, but we're interested in obviously local history museums are reflecting culture, so it would be lovely to hear about that. Okay, so is it basically a local history society, there are regular talks or is there something more to it?**

CE: Yes, local history society, regular talks and the idea really was to collect, I think the motto is 'gather the fragments' and it's fragments of history, oral tradition and so on, and some of our quite interesting oral, well, now they're written, records were collected by the Old Cornwall society. The one in Perranzabuloe was formed in 1957, I think, and so they went around and collected things from elderly people in 1957, and of course, now, it's really, really interesting.

[00:11:54]

TB: **Oh, that's lovely. And so, did the membership of that feed into that, quite a few people involved in that ended up being involved in the museum? Was it a crossover?**

CE: Yes, there was a bit of a crossover, yes, and there still is a bit of a crossover, in an informal way, really. Just because people have got the same interests, I guess.

[00:12:15]

TB: **Yes, absolutely. Okay. So, let's go back to the story of the museum itself. So, back to the late 80s, '87 was it, where that meeting came about. So, lots of people came together and there was enough support thinking, yes, this is a good idea. So, just tell me what happened next? You got a building, which I presume was owned by somebody. So, you've got some struggles here?**

CE: The building was owned by the Oddfellows, who we met, and Betty had met before and they were quite happy for us to rent it from them. So, that was pretty good, and we had a few meetings with them.

LH: They came down from Manchester or something?

CE: Well, no, there was a local branch in Redruth and actually, there's still a building there.

LH: Because most of them have gone, haven't they?

CE: There is still an active branch in Redruth. So, we met with them, they were happy for us to have the building and the rental seemed reasonable. We were... and then, what did I do then? One of the people who was involved with this in the early days was also on the, I can't remember exactly, but we had a pretty close tie up with the Cornwall County... no, sorry, at that time, the District councillor and he managed, he got us a grant for £2,000, I think, which was quite a lot of money then and that gave us a kickstart really so we could afford to buy all the things you need to set up a museum, like display boards, which we did, pretty much on a shoestring.

LH: Yes, it was bits of melamine boards, if they had melamine in those days.

CE: Yes, they did, yes.

LH: Anything we could put...

CE: Conti board it was.

LH: That was it, Conti board.

TB: Yes, yes. Sort of pinning things on.

LH: Yes.

CE: That's right, yes, we sort of hooked it from the top, yes.

[00:14:18]

TB: And so, was that in here?

CE: That was here.

[00:14:20]

TB: Right, so you've always been in this building, okay, yes fantastic?

CE: Yes, we've always been in this building.

TB: Fantastic.

LH: Always been on this floor, because we decided we needed to get some income, and workshops.

CE: Yes, that's right.

LH: We had a...

CE: Yes, we set up craft workshops, so we built these things and a local company, Frame Homes, helped us, well they provided us at a very reasonable rate, with partitions to partition this off, so that there were six craft workshops, I think, and then me and another chap who was on the... Dave Hancock, who was on the early committee were both carpenters, so we both knocked it all together really and we made sure the floors were safe. I mean there was a floor in there but there were things like where the windows were, there was a big drop down through and things. It wasn't safe enough really for...

TB: Oh, I see, right, yes, yes.

CE: ...for the general public, so we tidied it up and made the stairs a bit safer, all that sort of thing. We were lucky. We got a lot of local support.

LH: Absolutely.

[00:15:29]

TB: So, when you say workshops, volunteers were coming in to restore the building or were you running...?

CE: We ran workshops.

LH: We leased them all, yes, they paid rent in the end.

CE: We rented them out, that was the idea. Craft workshops and the museum upstairs.

TB: Oh, I see. So, this was downstairs. I've got you, okay.

LH: Trying to provide places for people to set up their own little business or whatever. But it never really took off that well.

CE: It never really worked that well.

[00:15:53]

TB: Okay. Why was that? Was there no take up?

CE: We had the take up, but we just didn't get the rents as well as we liked really. [Laughs]

LH: We're still chasing one. [Laughs]

[00:16:06]

TB: I see, right, so it was quite hard to run a community business in that way?

LH: It was more trouble than it was worth, basically, wasn't it?

CE: It was.

LH: Then we had the opportunity to get the library in there, and Cornwall Council.

[00:16:18]

TB: So, when was that? When did the library move in roughly?

LH: [Laughs].

[00:16:23]

TB: Would it have been a few years after the set up?

LH: It wasn't long after. I was looking at some papers before I came just to try and refresh my memory. I found a letter from John Rabie who did all our legal work for us free of charge, bless him. And that was a lease for three years in 1999, but he was a bit worried because they didn't say anything about renewing it after the three years and they're still there. [Laughs].

CE: It was before that. Way before that.

LH: Before that, yes, so it must have been the early 90s.

CE: Early 90s.

LH: Well, not long after we started really.

CE: No, that's right.

LH: Because the craft workshops didn't last very long, did they?

CE: No, they lasted a couple of years, something like that.

LH: So, it was round about 1990.

[00:17:13]

TB: I see. So, the library service approached you saying we need somewhere for a branch library, is that how it works?

LH: Yes.

CE: Yes, I think so.

LH: They were in a very small... I mean, it's not big now, but they were in a very small place over near the car park over in Wheal Leisure, which was just like a very small shop really and they needed more space really. So, they sort of said, did I work there then?

CE: You might have done.

LH: I might have done.

CE: I think you did.

LH: I think I probably did. I might have said something to somebody [laugh].

TB: Ah, right.

CE: There's quite a bit of that sort of thing.

LH: There's quite a lot of it goes on.

[00:17:52]

TB: You worked for the library service for a bit?

LH: Yes, I was a library assistant in there. Actually, I did work here as well for a while.

CE: Yes, you did.

LH: And then I went over into Truro.

TB: **Okay.**

LH: I think it just happened and it sort of grew.

[00:18:12]

TB: **Also, for you, as far as the finances go, it's a really reliable tenant, isn't it, who's paying you some rent, so that's awesome, I'm sure, keep you ticking over?**

LH: Oh, absolutely.

CE: Yes, predictable rent.

INT2: ***Easier than the workshops.***

LH: Yes and the two complement one another, trying to hang on to them downstairs because they do, people come up from the library and things.

[00:18:40]

TB: **Yes, that's brilliant. Just a little bit about the organisation. So, at what point... you started off with a committee to set the thing up, but at what point did you become a constituted thing rather than a few people that...?**

CE: Fairly early on, didn't we?

LH: Yes, it was all done pretty early on, wasn't it?

CE: Because Linda, I think through your connection, I'm not sure, John Rabie joined a committee, and he was a solicitor and he advised us well and he advised us about becoming a charitable trust, which we did pretty quickly, and Linda was really good at doing all the paperwork, and still is.

LH: My brain's gone now.

CE: So, and then we had to get 12, we had to get a number of trustees and I think we got 12 to start with, I think.

TB: **Wow, that's quite a few.**

CE: It was quite a lot, but the thing is, in the early days you were financially responsible for it. I mean, you always are, but things were a bit, will this work, won't this work? And we had to sort of prove our viability really, didn't we, and so on.

LH: But we wanted to be a registered charity, because it opens up so many doors for different things, doesn't it? It was something that John recommended as well. So I was looking at some old minutes as well, the committee, one died a few years ago. She was cracking on a bit, Pam Taylor and another one has left, but apart from that the committee is still the same.

TB: Oh, really?

LH: We're all there, which is a bit worrying.

TB: You're getting older.

LH: We're all getting older and there aren't really any young people. We've got one youngster on the committee, but it is a worry about our legacy.

[00:20:43]

TB: Pass it on, yes, yes. So, how old... I mean, roughly how old were people when they first joined the committee then? Were these professionals, were they in their fifties?

CE: No, younger than that.

TB: Forties?

LH: Yes.

CE: I suppose even thirties, forties, late thirties, early forties.

[00:20:43]

TB: Oh really, so that's interesting, so, mostly working people then, not retirees?

CE: Yes, we were. Yes.

LH: That's one of the reasons I dropped out for a few years because I've worked full-time as the parish clerk here and there's just no way, I could do the two. I was secretary up until then and then somebody else was foolish enough to take it on and I dropped out, but I came back in when I decided to go to the HLF and extend the building.

[00:21:28]

TB: Can you just give me an idea of what kind of professions or jobs people have in the committee, you mentioned you were a postman at one point. Was it a variety of people or did they tend to be from...?

LH: Teachers.

TB: Okay.

LH: Although Karen didn't come along until a bit later, did she?

CE: We had, I'm trying to think. Somebody who ran a caravan site.

TB: Yes.

LH: Richard was a BT engineer.

CE: BT engineer. But Richard wasn't there at the beginning, was he?

LH: No, he wasn't there at the beginning.

CE: There was Dave Hancock, we were both self-employed builders then, carpenters at that time. I became a postman later on. It was part of my retirement plan, was that. No bills, no collecting money. Great, yes.

LH: Graphic designer. Judy was a teaching assistant wasn't she, yes so there were business people.

TB: It all sounds pretty broad.

CE: It was pretty broad. District nurse.

[00:22:33]

TB: Right, okay. Yes, sure. It was interesting there was a real interest in local history, if people are busy right, but still they're prepared to devote some time to it?

CE: Obviously John Rabie is a solicitor as well.

TB: Yes, that's very useful, I'm sure, okay, at the beginning you managed to, with your building skills, managed to make it safe.

CE: Yes.

[00:22:59]

TB: So, just tell me about the collection. So, you've got the building. You've got your £2,000 for some boards but now you need objects and images. So, how did you find those? Where did it come from?

CE: Some through the Old Cornwall Society. They shared a lot of stuff with us and families and people who we got stuff from that.

LH: It took a while, I think people weren't sure if we were going to be here for long.

CE: I mean we were lucky in that one of the people, yes, I think Dave Humphrey, could copy photographs, because in those days you just had to take a photograph and copy it and he had quite a good collection of photographs himself. He was a postcard collector and so on, and he copied some and then other people lent us things to copy. So, we had a lot of images, really, to start with and less objects. We've probably still got more images than objects.

[00:23:59]

TB: But I guess it's a safer thing to give, isn't it? If you just get a really good picture of it and it's great. Sure, lovely and so, the early displays it seems to me, they were probably fairly picture heavy and board based.

LH: That's right, yes. We had the Manpower Services people here.

[00:24:19]

TB: So, just tell me about that. So, this is a scheme where people could get work experience, is that right?

LH: Yes.

CE: That's right, yes.

LH: We had one, I can't remember her name now, but she went off to get qualified as a museum person after that. She really enjoyed it and she was very good. But because everybody was busy, we needed somebody in here to keep the place open. We had to build our volunteer base up. So, they were very useful. I'm not so sure about the documentation side of it.

CE: No but they went through a lot of documents for us and some was better than others, as with Manpower Services, things tend to be, yes, I mean but within the kitchen, that we've got there, the display, they renovated the range and they renovated the mangle over there. So, they did things like that as well.

LH: It was very useful to have them here at the time.

CE: It was.

[00:25:28]

TB: So, how many people did you have working from that source, would you say?

LH: It wasn't a huge number.

CE: I think about sort of three or four at a time, something like that.

[00:25:38]

TB: Okay, and how long would they come for, would it be for a few months?

CE: They were here for a year.

TB: A year, oh right.

CE: Well, the person in charge, there was a project leader, he was here all the time, and the others came and went.

[00:25:50]

TB: In one-year stints. So, that's a good amount of labour, wasn't it?

CE: Yes, it was a very useful amount of labour and of course, it meant we could stay open all the time, which mean that people could come in and we seemed...

LH: Established.

CE: More established, yes, thank you.

[00:26:06]

TB: Yes, lovely. So, just tell me about the opening hours and did you charge for people to come in and tell me about the practicalities of it?

LH: We never charged.

CE: No, we've never charged.

TB: Okay.

CE: We really did never want to charge.

[00:26:16]

TB: Why was that?

CE: I think just because we felt that the history should be open to everybody, accessible to everyone.

[00:26:27]

TB: That's great and obviously, I guess, with the money coming in from the library, you've been able to meet yours costs?

LH: That's helped us too.

CE: That's helped us, that's right, yes.

[00:26:36]

TB: And do you have any other income streams apart from the rent that you get from the library?

CE: We rent out, there's another little room, a workshop that we rent out.

LH: Clock repairers.

CE: We get some income from that and then we get grants. Like all museums are always applying for grants, but there's a local organisation called the Perranporth Gardeners Charities, who run the car park and when they've paid for the gardens and all those other things, they give out grants with the excess money and they usually give us some money every year.

LH: And the parish council.

CE: And the parish council do as well.

[00:27:14]

TB: Yes. And have you had any large grants. You mentioned the Heritage Lottery Fund, so was that bigger?

LH: Yes, it came to the point where the Oddfellows wanted to dispose of this building basically.

TB: Right.

LH: So, we thought this was an opportunity that we ought to take. They offered it to us for a very good price, so we applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund and I think we had a grant for £151,000 which was to buy the property and to build the extension on here. I mean we were so stuck for space, weren't we, really? Most of our storage was up there, on the top of the cottage. So, they were very supportive of the whole event. They sort of saw us through it.

CE: We could access, because there was an extension on the end there, but the only way you could get to it was to go out the front door and round the side.

LH: It was a little lean-to.

CE: It was very damp. That was an understatement really and so yes, we renovated the downstairs bit and built another floor on and then made this access through here.

LH: It's made a huge difference.

[00:28:32]

TB: Did that money pay for the building or did you...?

CE: Yes, it did.

TB: Right, okay.

LH: It paid for the whole lot really.

TB: And the conversion. Wow, that's good.

LH: We had the designer in. Which we overruled him.

[00:28:46]

TB: Yes. Tell me a little bit about that then. Also, when was this? This would have been in the 2000's, would it?

LH: 2000.

TB: Yes, it's on a leaflet probably.

LH: Yes, 2003.

[00:29:05]

TB: Oh right, okay, great. Okay, so the extension's been done, but then there was some money to get a professional involved?

LH: Yes, that was all part of it and we had to have wheelchair lifts and things which didn't really work in the building, but they had all sorts of things, but we registered as a museum fairly early on in the process, with the Museums Association.

[00:29:38]

TB: Oh did you?

LH: We felt it would give some credibility really.

[00:29:42]

TB: Yes, so was that before the HLF grant?

LH: Oh, yes.

CE: It was very early on, wasn't it?

LH: It was, very early.

CE: One of your early bits of paperwork.

LH: Yes, that's right, we thought wanted to show that we meant business, so we registered and then after a few years, after 2008, then Museums, Libraries and Archives Council brought

out accreditation, so we had to go through it all over again and that was really onerous, wasn't it, the amount of paperwork you had to do with governance and management and museum and everything. So, we upgraded. we were one of the first, was it the first or one of the first in Cornwall to be accredited.

CE: It certainly is a volunteer museum, because we're a volunteer-run museum. Some of the professional museums might be slightly ahead of us.

[00:30:42]

TB: That's amazing. I've heard it's a lot of work, but you thought it was worth doing?

LH: Oh, absolutely. We felt it just gave us that...

CE: Credibility.

LH: Credibility.

CE: And we wouldn't have got the HLF grant if we hadn't have been registered.

[00:31:00]

TB: I see, yes, I'm with you, yes. So, just tell me about the redesign then? How did that work?

LH: It didn't make a huge difference, did it? Obviously, things like setting out the boards and all that sort of thing.

CE: Well, they did the design work on the boards as well, so that there were two... it was a designer and an assistant designer, he was also a designer, but it wasn't his project. It was Barry Gamble who was the designer, who designed the museum and he did quite a good job with it all and a chap called Colin Furin, did all of the graphic design. We had a local...

LH: Basically, they knew what they were talking about in terms of, but we knew what we wanted, and he knew what we should do. So, we did what we had to do.

CE: We had a local builder who did the building work, the conversion work, who also built the boards and the display things. He was really... they were quite pleased with that, all the other carpentry work.

[00:32:17]

TB: Oh, I see, great. So, what did you want, you said you that you had some opinions about what it had to be like?

LH: Well basically, we wanted to be able to move things around if we needed to, and that sort of thing. I can't really remember how we differed, I know, as I say, half my brain's gone now, but we had a lot of help from the HLF as well, who came and our friend Sam saying about concentrating on your unique selling point, USP. So, which mainly revolved around local people really. Winston Graham lived here and Donald Healey, the Healey family's very strong in Perranporth as well.

CE: And the theatre as well, the summer theatre.

LH: The summer theatre with Peter Bull and Robert Morley.

CE: He didn't pick up so much on the surfing, which I suppose people think it comes from Newquay, but actually quite a lot of early surfing was done in Perranporth.

[00:33:28]

TB: Oh right, yes, I saw some of the photos go way back, don't they?

CE: Yes, they do, yes.

TB: I was quite surprised actually.

LH: We have a fight with Newquay over who had them first.

[00:33:39]

TB: Oh, really, I see, right. So, you're kind of identifying things people might have heard of or what makes you unique compared to other villages, I see.

LH: Yes, definitely.

TB: Well, I think that comes across very nicely in your displays and so on.

LH: Good.

[00:33:54]

TB: What was I going to ask? It was... oh, yes, that's right, so just on tourism itself, you were saying earlier that this town. Is it a town? Village? Town?

LH: Village.

TB: **Village, okay.**

CE: We think of it as a village, it probably is a town.

[00:34:09]

TB: **But within living memory it went from a few buildings to pretty substantial holiday destination now, so that's quite something. So, just tell me in terms of your visitors, your audience and so on, you're open seasonally, right, from Easter until...?**

CE: The end of October.

[00:34:28]

TB: **Okay, right. And what are you visitor numbers a year? Would you know that?**

LH: Not as much as we'd like.

CE: No, sort of up to about 3,000, something like that.

[00:34:38]

TB: **Okay, yes and how often are you open, during the week, I mean?**

CE: We're open every day from 10.30 until 4.30, but that's the weekdays, and then on Saturdays we're open from 11 until 1 and Sundays we don't open, basically because it's very good to get volunteers to do it, that's the thing. We're volunteer run, that is the problem, staffing's a problem.

LH: We've got one paid member of staff who works part-time, very part-time, she's really busy. She's an archivist really, isn't she? So, she really knows her stuff and we want to hang on to her. So, most of the stewarding in here is done by volunteers.

[00:35:26]

TB: **Right, but you do have a paid member of staff, part-time. Okay right and so she does all the cataloguing and archiving for you?**

LH: Yes, that's right, she's done a lot. She did a lot of work on copyright for us for the book, didn't she? She's got a lot of knowledge there, I mean, she's keen on staying but we're

worried she's going to disappear at some point. We were lucky, we had one before, a museum assistant. She didn't have the qualifications in that way, but she was absolutely dedicated to research and stuff, wasn't she? She researched all the war graves and we thought, we really need for consistency's sake, we need to keep that one employee, if we can, well an employee.

[00:36:15]

TB: Yes and you're saying that you have a temporary exhibition area, I mean of those 3,000, what percentage would you say are probably local people or perhaps people that live in the area who come and see it and how much are outside tourists, that are coming for the holiday?

LH: It's difficult to say, isn't it?

CE: I would say the majority are probably tourists, but a sizeable minority. I was almost going to say 50/50.

LH: Yes, I was as well.

[00:36:48]

TB: Oh really, okay, so both of those are important audiences for you? It's not just visitors?

LH: No, it's not just the visitors, we obviously want them, we get some very nice things said about us in our visitors' book.

CE: Obviously we do all the things other museums do, we have outreach and The Brownies come and look around and the Scouts and Perranvale, the old folks' home down the road there, they'll come up. Sometimes they'll organise people to come up and look around. We can go...

LH: I was going to say, you go down there quite a lot.

CE: Yes, I've just given them a talk, with my wife, about St Perran's, so we give them a history of St Perran's. So yes, we go out and do that sort of thing as well.

TB: That's lovely. So, is there something about tourism...

[00:37:37]

JW: I think you were saying earlier that it's important for you when you're putting together the display and what the museum's about, that you're telling a story which... and tourists

coming into Cornwall might think, oh pretty place, nice beaches, some surfing, what have you. So, is it important for you to put together something in the museum, which said something different than that, telling an authentic story about the place, is that what you were thinking about?

LH: Yes. We've been involved, well, we are involved in a scheme with Exeter university, investigating Droskyn, because the old men's working up there, but one in particular. HLF haven't been quite so good to us over that, but we did a bit of a Heritage on the Beach thing down there and asking people what was their view of all the caves around Droskyn, the headland at the end of the beach there. And the vast majority of people thought they were natural caves, when in fact, they're actually they're mine workings and they didn't realise that and a lot of local people didn't realise it either.

CE: No, they didn't, a surprising number actually.

LH: Yes, one chap said, I've been coming here on holiday for 70 years, I never knew that. But they've got no idea about what's behind it all, unless they go looking. I suppose you get people coming down that do want to look at the history of the place because we've got the usual holy well and various other things around the parish and they all come for the oratory and can't find it. Well, they can now because it was buried for such a long time, they used to come and say, where is it, I've been up there, I can't see it. Well, it's under that sand dune there with the stone on top. But now that's been uncovered so you can actually see it now, sort of.

[00:39:38]

TB: **So, just sort of, this museum is telling a story, isn't it, well, many stories of course, but for you, are there... one of the things that you want this museum to do, or that you want visitors to take away from it, and you mentioned that there's a lovely example there of the fact this is industrial space as well as pleasure ground, which is a really nice one. But is there anything else that you kind of think is really important to communicate to people?**

CE: I do think the industrial past is important, because just in the place names, there's a Wheal Leisure car park, you know, Wheal Leisure Mine and so on. So, I think that's important and there's just... of course, anybody can see that and just to, yes, I suppose the oratory of St Perran's, the place name, Perranporth. St Perran's harbour, beach, those background things are important, even those background things are important but the thing is it's not just buckets and spades, being on the beach, which is lovely.

LH: The heritage has got to be a pulling point for people, and we've got to keep that going on because traditional holidays are going.

CE: At the moment, I guess the obvious one is the Poldark thing, because we get quite a bit of interest in that, and Winston Graham lived in Perranporth for 32 years and wrote all of his Poldark stories here. So, that's the story that's worth getting across at the moment.

[00:41:18]

TB: **Yes, it's lovely but what's also interesting, the heritage here is supporting an industry, it's supporting the tourism industry and that's clearly so important for this village. It must be, well, I don't imagine there's much industry beyond that?**

LH: We've got the cider farm.

TB: **Yes, okay, yes. Sure, sure. But still it's quite an important thing.**

LH: Yes.

CE: Yes, it is, yes.

[00:41:40]

TB: **And just tell me a little bit about the temporary exhibition, you've got something about plastics and things that you found on the beach and so on. So it would be nice, you said that's a particular area of interest of yours?**

CE: Yes, it's a particular interest of mine because I'm quite keen on my beach combing and I might have been doing it a while, I mean I've always been interested in beach combing really. So, I've just been very aware of how much plastic there is and obviously now there's much more interest in that. So, I thought, well I've got stuff at home and I'm particularly interested in things that comes from the Americas, the American fishing industry, so bits of their fishing gear come up mainly.

A lot of the plastic that washes up on the beach is from the fishing industry and I don't want to be too damning about it, because I imagine if you're on a boat and it's gone up and down like a yoyo, it's really getting hard to make sure everything stays on board that should stay on board, shouldn't it, so, things turn up, ice shovels and I don't know, all sorts of stuff I've got.

So, I thought it would be really interesting to put together an exhibition, just so people can see, make them aware of the plastic on the beach, make them aware of the problems of plastic, but also make them aware it's not just... it comes from everywhere and where it all comes from, for me that's really interesting. We get lobster trap tanks from Maine and Newfoundland and so on and I think that's really...

[00:43:23]

TB: Yes, it's a way of thinking about place, where actually what makes this place is its connection internationally with all of these other places?

CE: Yes.

[00:43:31]

TB: Whereas tourism works like that as well, doesn't it?

LH: That's right, yes, yes. A lot of trade, well, we can't go back as far as the Venetians, I suppose, but it's always been connected in a way.

CE: Yes, absolutely, the thing with Cornwall was, it's a peninsular, so sea trade was very easy. Now, we're stuck on the end of somewhere but at one stage...

LH: We were the centre of the universe.

CE: That's right, people could easily get to Cornwall from Spain or from Brittany and so on.

[00:44:08]

TB: Yes, yes, sure, absolutely right, the centre of things from that respect, yes. That's a really interesting thought, I don't know how Cornish people feel about this, but you have this idea of periphery and centre and how that shifted and I've never considered that before.

LH: Yes. We are still the centre of the universe as far as we're concerned. They just don't understand it. Can't even get the trains down here sometimes for goodness sake.

[00:44:39]

TB: Okay, brilliant. Well, let me just quickly check, do chip in, Jake, I've been dominating.

JW: *No, no, I think that Toby's been lots of these. He knows what he's doing, so I'll just sit back and enjoy it.*

LH: He's very good at it, isn't he?

JW: *I've learned to let someone get on with it, when they're good at it.*

[00:45:01]

TB: You're very kind. Right, okay, are there any kind of major grants. I'm thinking about regional kind of grants, or European money. Has that touched you at all?

LH: Not so far. We were in the process with this other project we're involved with which might lead to some but that's a bit...

CE: We do get a grant from Exeter university, just to run the Heritage on the Beach, because it was Exeter university, they ran it, so I couldn't tell you how much it was for actually but it was a reasonable size grant. It meant that students could come down from... because it's a two campus, Exeter university has a campus at Penryn as well, so some were from Penryn, but some were from Exeter. So, when they came down, they had to stay, there were costs involved in that. But really not, no cost for us as such.

LH: No, that's right, I mean we go to the national South West Federation and is it the Association of Independent Museums. We get not huge grants from those but they're useful for things like the acid free paper and all that, conservation items and things. So, we get them from that.

[00:46:24]

TB: I was going to ask about networks of museums, because the first one you mentioned was the South West...?

LH: South West Federation.

[00:46:30]

TB: Federation of Museums. Okay, so, has that been useful. Apart from the little bits of money, has it been useful in terms of...?

LH: They do a lot of courses, don't they?

CE: They do.

LH: They do a lot of training courses down here. They're all the... they're all across the South West but they do, do them at this end as well, so it's a bit further out.

[00:46:50]

TB: Okay, yes, so is that something that people have done?

CE: More so in the earlier days than we do now.

LH: Not so much now.

CE: I think we tend to use them more now for advice, you know, some people will come in and give us advice. Very useful for things like that.

[00:47:09]

JW: *Did you also find that, because I think you mentioned earlier, that you'd also been to a couple of other museums, maybe one in Truro and they helped you find out about collecting, did you find going to visit other museums...?*

LH: Oh definitely, if we're away, we always have to visit museums and come back with photographs.

[00:47:27]

INT2: *And it helps to get ideas sometimes?*

CE: It does, that's right.

LH: The Truro, the Royal Coal Museum, was actually a hub. I don't know if they do the hub business. They were the hub at one point, and they were helping, in the early days we had curatorial advisors that were based in Truro and Jonathan Holmes from Pendean as well.

CE: He was a curator. We've still got a curator but she's not as active.

LH: No, but they were very useful. They used to come to meetings, not every one, but used to come to meetings.

CE: Anna Tyack was here early on from Truro.

LH: I thought there was somebody else as well, I don't know, anyway, they were very useful and they helped us out a lot and I think we got their support for the HLF grant as well, which was very useful.

[00:48:23]

TB: *And have you done anything with other local history museums in the area in terms of, I don't know, cross marketing? Is there any...?*

CE: No, not much.

LH: We do talk to St Agnes occasionally.

CE: But not if we can help it.

LH: They're a little bit, you know, sort of...

CE: There's that village rivalry.

LH: A bit of friendly rivalry.

CE: Joking about it really.

LH: We do get on, we talk to each other but we haven't done any...

CE: We haven't done any joint projects with them.

LH: No, no.

[00:48:59]

TB: I think some areas clearly, you're doing your own thing and why would you bother, kind of thing but in others, in South Wales, they've done quite a lot of, I have to say, mostly driven by the council really, but just producing maps and leaflets linking up all of the similar things and heritage sites or whatever. But there hasn't been much of that, by the sounds of it?

CE: No.

LH: Not really, no, I can't think of any joint projects or such, because we're local. We're a local museum, I suppose, it doesn't really... I mean, we border with St Agnes and the coastal footpath goes through but not really.

[00:49:42]

TB: Okay. Here's a question. Do you think this museum has an impact on the local community in any way, given that a lot of your visitors are tourists, but I just want to throw that open to you? You've mentioned a few things already in the ways that it has.

LH: I think it has with a certain section of the population.

CE: I guess it depends what you mean by impact, but certainly we're much more recognised now and it's... if people want to know about things, they come to us, so, yes.

[00:50:25]

TB: Right, yes, okay, so it's an important resource then for the community?

LH: It is, very much so, yes. It's like the war graves, family history, that sort of thing. We get a lot of tourists in doing that and doing it on the internet now as well, but I think we need to do more digitising, our stuff... it's getting... you know more about that side.

CE: Our website is being redesigned at the moment. By a volunteer, but a chap who runs... that's what he does for a living, so we're very lucky to get that amount of local support, really.

[00:51:05]

TB: Yes. So, why is that important to have that digital... you mentioned these were international researchers...

LH: People.

TB: Family history stuff.

LH: Family history stuff.

[00:51:15]

TB: It's a big thing now, isn't it?

CE: It is, and we're not as geared up for it as we ought to be really, I don't think. I mean we've got files, when somebody comes up with some more stuff, we put that into a file.

LH: It's an ongoing thing.

CE: Ongoing, yes, thank you.

LH: Ongoing is a great... documentation, ongoing.

TB: Yes.

LH: That's up to date now, so it's alright.

CE: It's a great to word to use.

LH: Absolutely, like Brexit.

CE: Have you done so and so? It's ongoing.

LH: Brexit's ongoing.

CE: Oh, don't.

[00:51:51]

TB: Do you think the museum might have affected the village's own sense of itself, in its identity in any way?

LH: I think it has. You get people referring to the museum in the Facebook, and you have your entries in there, and things.

CE: I think...

LH: I think things like the Heritage on the Beach thing made a big difference, that a surprising proportion of people didn't know they were mines.

CE: That's true. When we get, I suppose more youth groups in a way, that come and visit us. The Brownies come and do an evening tour of us or something, that makes an impact. They often, the school comes down... actually, last summer, going back to my plastic thing, I'm sorry to beat on about this, but the school did a beach school. A beach school for ten weeks, a different group came down for ten weeks and they came to here and look at all the plastic that came and where it came from and so on, and I passed around bits for them to look at and so on, so that makes an impact. They brought, quite a number of them brought their parents and said, come and have a look at this.

[00:53:18]

TB: Lovely. And you're working across generations now, aren't you, which is rather lovely.

CE: Yes.

[00:53:24]

TB: That's great, absolutely. Okay, right. Oh, okay, just about museum closures. Do you know about any museums in the area that have closed down or has it been fairly resilient around here?

CE: No, not in this area.

LH: Seem to be quite resilient, don't they? St Agnes' were going before we were, weren't they?

CE: No.

LH: Weren't they?

CE: No, I don't think they were. No, no, they had a collection but no building.

LH: Ah, right.

CE: Do you remember when we opened, and they came along and said, how did you get the building and you said, well, we've got a building but not very much collection of objects, it was the opposite, really.

LH: They had a turtle. We were jealous of their turtle. Washed up.

TB: Oh, dear. Wrong side of the border of the parish.

LH: That's right, yes. We did have a bit of a dispute over one item.

[00:54:14]

TB: What was that?

LH: It was on the border. A smock, wasn't it? It was in a building that was... it was actually in our parish, church parish, but it was actually in their parish area. Anyway, we decided that finders keepers.

[00:54:38]

TB: Did you find it?

LH: Sorry?

[00:54:40]

TB: Did you find it?

LH: Yes. It was donated to us and we decided we were going to hang on to it. Yes, we could justify it by the church parish.

TB: I see, yes, because when we first came, you were talking about your collection policy and how you made, very early made decision to keep it local.

LH: That's right, yes.

CE: We did, yes.

[00:55:03]

TB: I can see that the borders with that are quite tricky aren't they, sometimes?

LH: They are, yes, but it was a lovely item and we didn't have much.

[00:55:12]

INT2: *Was it a farmer's smock?*

LH: That's right, yes.

CE: It is, isn't it? Yes. Yes.

LH: It was only just over the border. I'm sure he wore it when he came into our parish.

[00:55:25]

TB: Just to kind of... has there been a really low point or challenging moment in your involvement with the museum and conversely has there been a complete high point, which for you has been a highlight of your involvement? It might be different for both of you, of course but anything?

LH: I think the 30-year anniversary was quite a high point for me, really. Yes, because I think we've been going along and then it really felt as if we'd arrived when we had the dignitaries coming in and various people.

[00:56:05]

TB: Lovely, so you had a big event to celebrate it?

LH: We had a big event.

CE: For me, I think it would be the reopening after the heritage lottery, was a high point. Low point would probably be with the craft workshops not working out and wondering how

things were going to go after that. The high point, because after the heritage lottery, it was just... at the time, I was the chairman of the committee as well, and I was just so pleased at how doing that whole process, we had to move everything out, move things back, and people were just so helpful and just so supportive.

Everyone really worked together so well with that, because, you know how it is with builders. They go, oh well, we need to be able to do this tomorrow and you've gone, oh, gosh, there's all this stuff, yes well you just need to move that and you're thinking yes, well... and I'd make a few phone calls and a gang of people would come down and move everything around, it was great. So, at the end of it, apart from heaving a sigh of relief, it was great, just to see the final result. For me, that was a high point.

TB: Yes, lovely. Well, I think I've come to the end of my questions. Jake, have we...?

JW: No, no, no.

TB: Okay, that's wonderful, thank you so much. It's always amazing to hear stories but for something to coalesce like that, over 30 years, I think is pretty amazing, and you've both clearly stuck in and kept with it.

LH: Survived [laugh].

TB: Yes.

CE: That's it, you've got it. Yes [laugh].

[00:57:52]

TB: Has there been a moment where you think, do you know what, this is too much, and I don't want to do it?

LH: No, I don't think so, not really.

TB: Yes, okay, great.

LH: I had the out when I stopped for a while, when I was working full-time, but I've got other things on my mind at the moment, but not to do with the museum.

[00:58:16]

TB: What's the most rewarding part of it then for you, would you say, Linda, why have you stuck with it for so long?

LH: It's the people, I think. It's likeminded people, I suppose, the community and the friends of the museum, and we have little get-togethers, we have our annual lunch and everybody can... that thrives, we have to book in advance because we have so many people come.

CE: Yes, go on?

LH: No, carry on.

CE: We have a reminiscence part of that as well, so we have the meal and then we have a reminiscence, usually on a theme, so we tell people what it is, so they can think a bit about it beforehand.

TB: That's nice, oh brilliant,

CE: Recently, it's been recorded as well, so we could use it.

[00:59:09]

TB: Oh Lovely, great, that's lovely to capture that, isn't it? So, it sounds like it's given you quite a deep sense of community, or the ability to meet likeminded people, in that sort of social way?

LH: Yes.

[00:59:19]

TB: Has that been the same for you?

CE: Yes, it has, that's true. And also, I love the information that comes in as well. In the summer time, I act as a volunteer, I steward and just looking through all the bits of paper and all the stuff and things, it's just fascinating really. People bring things in and you think, oh, I didn't know about that and it gives you that snapshot of what life was like here or some aspect of that.

[00:59:53]

TB: Yes, lovely. What strikes me about, what you said about the beach, is this reconfiguring of the...

UF: Sorry.

LH: Chris' wife.

TB: Oh, hello. Hi.

LH: Karen, sorry.

UF: Correspondent originally.

TB: Thank you for lining things up for me, that's been brilliant.

UF: That's okay.

[01:00:11]

TB: We're just sort of saying about going to the beach and seeing it in one way, but then seeing it as an industrial space or discovering there's an oratory there, which has... it completely transforms your view, doesn't it, of what is in fact the same thing, which is quite extraordinary, isn't it, just that one little bit of information can do that?

LH: Yes, they've built so many houses in Perranporth over the last few years as well, it's a whole new audience, really, which we should be exploiting and bringing in here, because I'm sure a lot of them don't know. We are a little bit out of the way here, very often tourists come, there's a footpath over there, they come through and they find us by accident, and they're delighted when they do. So, we need... although we've got museum at the end of the road and museum on the end of the building, people just don't see.

[01:00:59]

TB: I was going to say, have you done the brown sign route?

CE: No, we haven't.

LH: We haven't.

CE: We did look into it once.

LH: It was so expensive, it was ridiculous.

CE: It was a couple of thousand pounds or something and we thought, oh gosh, that's a lot of money, and then they told us you have to maintain the signs as well and that could be an ongoing expense and we thought, oh gosh, well yes.

[01:01:25]

TB: Yes, okay, you thought maybe not, yes and just on that point, the newcomers, a broad term that.

LH: Incomers.

[01:01:33]

TB: But for people who are buying these flats. I'm sure they're not all outside of Cornwall but perhaps there are some that are a bit cheaper.

LH: They are affordable.

[01:01:43]

TB: I mean how's that played out in the village because I imagine for a small village these are big effects?

LH: Yes, a lot of people are objecting, although there are so many people that do want to live in the village and want to come back because they've been forced out because of the pricing, I think property really has caught up with us a bit, I don't know that they would be that much more expensive now than we used to be, I don't know, but it's not been too... there are a lot of people on the new estates that were already living here in not very good conditions and things like that.

CE: Some.

[01:02:23]

TB: Right, so, the housing stock's improved in that way, you could say?

LH: It has, yes, but they tend to be much more expensive than the people that really need them.

[01:02:34]

TB: So, that has the effect of pushing people out to cheaper places.

LH: That's been going on for a long time.

TB: Yes, sure.

LH: If you just go a little way outside of Perranporth, past this forecourt but in Perran itself, although they're building in Carnarvon as well. We've had a lot of... we've gone way past

what we were supposed to be having. They'll say, that's alright, that wasn't the limit, that was just what we were aiming at. Just because we've passed that, doesn't mean we've got to stop.

TB: I mean this is nationwide, this push.

LH: That's right, we know we're not alone.

[01:03:10]

TB: It still has its challenges, doesn't it?

CE: It does. So, it's holiday lets and things. I live in a row of cottages and there are three holiday lets. Sorry I should explain, there are nine cottages and three of them are holiday lets.

[01:03:33]

TB: Right, yes and that can hollow out a community, can't it, if people aren't here?

CE: I know I live near the sea so that's a few more of them, there might not be

LH: There's very rarely any problem getting a let for the winter, but everything goes in Easter and they're desperately looking round for somewhere to...

CE: I mean we're lucky, we've still got a good community here. You can tell from the support we have but my concern, I've got no problem with people having a second home or a holiday let, but you know that those houses, there's nobody going to run the football club, there's nobody going to train the surf club, they're not going to join the surf club, they aren't going to be in the local choir, they'll never be in the WI, they're never going to be part of the community.

LH: Or the museum management committee.

CE: They might support the committee and they'll give you a grant or come to the museum or become a friend of the museum, but they're not going to be able to staff it in the summer time or any of that sort of stuff.

[01:04:40]

TB: Yes, I see what you mean, yes that's right. Yes, they need to be physically here to buy into it, don't they?

CE: That's just how it is.

TB: **Absolutely. Okay, guys, thank you so much. I'll stop it there.**

Audio ends: [01:04:52]