Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Paul Cowan

Role: Chair of the Trustees

Museum: Pewsey Heritage Centre

Location of interview: Museum office (outbuilding)

Date: 21/11/18

Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

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

TB: Let's just start. Could you just give me your name and your date of birth, please?

PC: Geoffrey Paul Cowan, normally called Paul. I was born on the XX-XXX 1945.

TB: That's lovely. Great. I think it would be nice if you could, just go way, way back to the beginning, the very early days and I'm particularly interested in concentrating on the idea of the museum, the planning of it and so, we're going back to pre-1992 when the museum formally opened.

(00:00:38) So, just tell me where did the idea come from and tell me the story of that?

PC: The building in which the museum is housed was owned by my wife's family. They ran a water engineering business and they also did agriculture engineering as well. It was all basically, agricultural and when I got married, I was working in Salisbury and then in Devizes and then I went to Northamptonshire.

My father-in-law, who ran the business died the year before I was married, and my mother-in-law was running the business at the time with a manager. She unfortunately, had a stroke and my wife was concerned so, she wanted to come home to help her mother run the business. I had very little knowledge of water engineering so, it wasn't much good to me, but we agreed to sell up in Northamptonshire and come to Wiltshire and we moved in with my mother-in-law for a year to help look after her and also my wife helped the manager etc. to run the business for a period of time.

I decided that perhaps with the some of the redundant buildings they had, I could run an accident and repairs division which was where my forte was, on the adjoining buildings. Which was agreed, and we started, and we ran the business and we expanded that business very, very rapidly and it became a major part of the Whatley Company.

About 1976 I wanted to build a new building, or I wanted to convert the existing building that we had here, the stone building, into a purpose-built accident and repair business using a second floor and a lift to take the cars from the ground floor to the second floor for the painting and refinishing side of the business. And Wiltshire planners were very, very difficult and said I couldn't do it because the building was stone, it was of national interest and because the building had no foundations, it wouldn't stand the development. So, we fought this, and it was obviously a dead loss.

So, we actually demolished some of the buildings that were at the back and built a new workshop. In doing so, I needed to get rid of some heavy machinery and we contacted the National Science Museum to find out if they were interested in the machinery and they came down and got themselves all very excited about two or three of the pieces. And they said, "If you can tidy them up and make sure that they're all working and everything else and then deliver them to London, we'll be very, very pleased to take them".

Having realised that the transportation costs were going to be in excess of a few thousand pounds, which was a lot of money back in 1976, we said, "Well, it's all we

can do to afford to build what we want to do, never mind provide a load of equipment etc. and deliver it to the National Science Museum." They did actually take two pieces of equipment from us which were quite interesting, and I wish that had never happened today, but you can't go back.

So, I said, "We've got this stuff, what do we do with it?" And we had a very vibrant local history society run by a chap called Michael Duckenfield and he and I got together, and we decided that about just less than a third of the building could be handed over to the history society to create a heritage centre, which is what they did back in 1976. And it was in the middle of the workshop and people used to come in the front door and they'd be ushered to the left-hand side, and people who were working there would be ushered to the right-hand side and so on and so forth, which was far from satisfactory or anything else.

But as time went on and the history society and the then Pewsey Heritage Centre managed to gain more and more space, probably by stealth rather than design. In about 1990 it was obvious that the motor industry business was changing nationally, and a lot more investment was going to be needed and all sorts of other things.

So, in the late '90s the business was restructured and in 2005 the accident and repair business was sold to a company in Devizes and the water engineering business etc. moved to a site in Salisbury Road. And the site was actually sold for development, not before the family put some very, very stringent requirements on the sale of the land.

Firstly, they wanted the heritage centre protected because the heritage centre was now using the whole of the building. That was advantageous to the company because to turn it into a heritage centre meant we no longer had to pay rates on that building which was an advantage. It was actually so cold and draughty and wet that we couldn't use it for anything reasonable. And so, we decided to gift… The family decided to gift it to the local community for the community use as a heritage centre.

The development of the land at the back for housing, sixty-five houses, was a very drawn-out process, it took about fourteen years. But part of the application was that the developer had to re-roof the building, he had to provide heating in the building, he had to rewire the building, fit new doors and windows in it and had to make the building safe for people to use. Which necessitated closing the heritage centre for a year, that actually took over eighteen months, for this to happen.

The family were very unhappy about giving the building to the county council to look after because we thought that they would sell it as an asset and turn it into flats and so, it was agreed that it would be given to the parish council. So, the building actually belongs to Pewsey Parish Council and not the district council or the county council. And it was also incumbent on the developer to use the 106 monies to do the redevelopment of the site. The heritage centre reopened as the heritage centre back in 2007. And we had a grand opening of the building as you see it today.

The renovation to the front of the building was done some five years ago as the houses were being developed, all the new windows and doors and everything else was fitted and the heating was put on and it was a great benefit to the community. It was realised that there wouldn't be sufficient footfall from a small museum to make it viable so, the space had to be versatile within the centre of the building to use it for other functions. And annually, it probably has something in the region of between ten an twenty events actually, in the main hall, to which seventy or eighty people would be invited to and the cost that generated, made the building a viable operation.

So, we've had all sorts of things from art exhibitions to…

[Aside conversation 00:09:51 to 00:09:59]

So, we have art exhibitions, we've had some very expensive artwork in here, not that I want that to become publicly aware. And the acoustics in the building are amazing, we've had many choirs, we've had orchestras and it's really popular, whenever we put an event on it's a sell-out. You've got to book your tickets otherwise you don't get in. So, that is quite popular, we get really, really valuable support from the parish council. And then four years ago, we bought the building alongside for an adult learning centre… For a learning centre and a research centre.

That is owned solely by the heritage centre from monies that was left to us by the demise of the Kennet District Council, they left us some monies for adult learning and for supporting local schools etc. within the heritage centre. And we do that a lot, we've had school parties, we've had four or five school parties here this year. And actually, this Friday, I'm going to talk to another school. So, we are heavily committed into the local community and the local community is very supportive of what we do. Many, many of the volunteers, of which we have forty or fifty volunteers all come and help us support this project.

Some building work on the learning centre was done one hundred percent by volunteer labour. This has never been achieved on the European Lottery Grant that we received, they could not believe that we could do a building project of some twenty-five thousand pounds for no labour costs. Even the electrical company that installed all the electrics only charged for the materials that they fitted, we had no labour costs whatsoever. It just shows the commitment that local people will but into this project.

TB: Yes, that's amazing. Did you say it was European funding for that or was it Heritage Lottery?

PC: We got European funding through the Heritage Lottery Funding.

TB: (00:12:39) I see. And just about the governance of the place. You say that the council own the building but do the history society run it, is it a trust, is it a charity?

PC: Pewsey Heritage Centre is run by a… It is a charitable trust, it's a limited company by charitable trust, we cannot recover VAT, but we are a limited company. And it is a charitable trust, we have nine trustees and we have four trustee meetings a year as

well as meetings that are run by volunteers and all sorts of other things for the day to day running of the different things.

We are an accredited museum, all our artefacts are actually accessioned so, there is an accession register. And we have one lady that spends an inordinate amount of time, just keeping all our records up to date. We have approaching ten thousand artefacts in our control, not including the ones that are loaned to us. We've recently done a World War I exhibition of which probably, a thousand artefacts were loaned to us, which again we keep records of. So, when they're loaned to us the people get a copy of what they've loaned to us, we know exactly whose loaned it, how long we've had it for and so on and so forth.

And that is important because you need to keep longevity and we need to be able to borrow different artefacts for different displays. Next year, we're looking at possibly doing a street scene, we don't know, this will be decided tomorrow… A street scene for the centre of Pewsey going back to 1920, reconstructing all the shops etc. as they were back then. So, that people can get an idea of how life was in 1920.

TB:(00:14:50) That's lovely. How are those sorts of decisions made? You said there is the trustee meeting quarterly but also, a volunteer meeting. If there's relatively big decisions like that is it…?

PC: The trustees will make the final decision as to whether they do that. Some of the ideas come forward from the volunteers of what they would like to do and as they are probably going to be people doing the lion's share of the work and the trustees listen very, very, closely to what the volunteers want. And this is one of the reasons that the volunteers are so committed because they have ownership of the ideas and are supported by the trustees. Very rarely do we spend any money, our treasurer is incredibly mean, but we do beg, borrow, steal and all sorts of other things to put exhibits together and we have a very clean and well-illustrated display.

TB: (00:15:56) Yes, I was going to say, clearly you've got some professional graphic design there, haven't you and those wonderful boards you've got up with the themes and so on. So, what sort of budget did you have to… Clearly, it's accumulated over the years, hasn't it? But can you give me a sense of the budget that you had for the permanent display around the areas?

PC: When the heritage centre closed for eighteen months when we were doing the building up, nine years ago, we budgeted about forty thousand pounds to make display cabinets, display boards etc. to do those sorts of things. And also, it had to be for the learning centre. Just under thirty thousand pounds of that was a bequest from a lady that used to be one of our volunteers and when she died, she left us this money and it was for adult learning and for school support.

So, that is where a lot of the funding came from for this. We still have some of that money set aside for our research centre and for our adult learning centre which is in the process of being done at the moment. We had… From the demise of the Kennet District Council, we had a substantial amount of money that was triggered once the roof was done on the building to regenerate the centre and some of that money was

used for that. The adult learning centre was bought for fifty thousand pounds for us, from some of that money that was given to us with the demise of Kennet District Council. And that is now solely owned by the heritage centre and if there is a situation where that becomes unviable, we have the real estate to recover the money that we have invested in it. So, that money is not lost, it is still within our grip.

TB:(00:18:13) So, can you give me sense…? Financially, I suppose turnover perhaps wouldn't really make sense because clearly, some years you spend a lot and other you don't…

PC: On an annual basis, the financial stability of the heritage centre has been stable for the last four years. Each year, we have actually gained more money that we have actually spent. So, our annual accounts are still at a similar sort of level as they were five years ago. One of our serious difficulties that we had four years ago… No, three years ago, was, we had a big debate that raged for about eighteen months. When we reopened, we did not charge, it was by voluntary donation. Now, as part of our accreditation, we keep a very strict check on our visitor numbers and people who use the centre.

Now, whether they are visiting or whether they're using it for an event or whatever, we keep a good record of that. And the donations from people coming in the door dropped year on year for four years and we got to a stage where each visitor was putting in a contribution of less than 49p, and that wasn't sustainable. We debated whether we should charge and the decision that was made was we would charge £2.00 for all adults including old age pensioners. And I would say old age pensioners are probably the majority of the people we have visiting.

We have a lot of children, children below the age of sixteen do not pay. If we have university students that come in to do a project, they do not pay. So, we keep a record of children and we keep a record of adults and we charge £2.00 per adult. Since then, our numbers have been sustained and our numbers have grown, year on year on visitors.

TB: Really? Right.

PC: This year has been our highest numbers of visitors that we've had through the door in the region of fourteen hundred visitors this year. And they have come, you can have a look at the visitor's book in a minute, they have come from all over the world, Australia; a lot of families coming back to trace their family history. And we help people with tracing their family history. We have a lady that will go through your family tree and find out where your relatives were, where they lived and send you to the house.

And we've had one of our volunteers or our treasurer to be precise, had a man overlooking his garden wall and he said, he was taking photographs of his garden and he said, "Can I help you?" Whilst he was tending his roses, and he said, "Yes, I used to live here, and the house is called Rose Cottage." Hence tendering the roses. And he took him in and showed him upstairs etc. and he said, "I was here during the war." He said, "I was thirteen and my room was in the attic and I had a very small

window and I had a wooden Tommy gun. And the soldiers were parading up the street and I poked the gun out of the windows and I was shooting the soldiers as they went by. And my father came up and gave me such a leathering and he said, whatever you do, you do never shoot at our soldiers." He said, "I remember that from that day to this and the window in the attic is still there."

TB: Yes, how lovely.

PC: This was eighteen months ago.

TB:(00:22:30) That's fascinating that there is this increasing interest in the family history and that's international kind of pursuit.

PC: Yes. So, we've had people from Canada, we've had people from Australia, we've had Chinese, we've had Japanese, we've had Americans. They've all come and it's very welcoming. One of our big benefactors and we don't know if that has made a difference in our turnover this year, is for the last four months, we have put some display boards about at all the scenes of interest within the county. Martinsell Hill has one of these boards up there. And it gives you a link through your computer or through your tablet to all the other sites where the boards are, and this has increased interest actually in the community because you can, by scanning the boards, actually get a history of the whole of the Vale of Pewsey.

And it's important that people have a perspective of how important the Vale was. The agriculture riots originated from this part of the country and that is quite evident when you go through these boards and you see where they happened. And they've landed up in Tolpuddle at the end of the riots, at the Swing Riots. That all took place from this area so, agriculture and the local history has been very important. This museum has no stones and no bones. We've got plenty of those at Avebury, at Stonehenge, at Salisbury Cathedral and so on and so forth.

So, this is social history, the last two hundred, three hundred years of how we lived, how we earned our living, how we looked after each other and how we abused each other. And more often than not, by today's standards, we abused one another. We have within our history here, we have records of all the workhouses that there were. There were three workhouses within ten miles and housing some three and a half thousand people who were there for probably, just the unfortunate business of becoming pregnant by the local butler who forced himself upon you.

And you were sent to the workhouse because you were a lady in disgrace. And you couldn't go home because you brought the family into disgrace and the breadwinner of the family could lose his job because they had a girl of ill repute living within the home, that is how serious it was. And that is a true story from a local girl.

So, it's giving people the perspective of how it was. We have children in here and they can touchy-feely, they can pick… They've picked up a rifle and seen how heavy a 303 rifle is and they can see the destruction that has happened. Sometimes these things are very difficult to talk about, even to children today, and you've got to be very careful and very sensitive as to how you do it. And we've had several children

that have come, and children have a very bad reputation of not paying attention and all sorts of other things like that.

I would suggest that is probably more to do with the person that is giving the information than the children because we've had them, and they've been very, very attentive and they have asked some very, very poignant questions. They didn't realise that families were given up because they couldn't afford to look after them and they were sent to the workhouse, children, the age and younger than they were themselves. And that was less than a hundred years ago.

TB: Yes. Just tell me about that decision to go the for the social history. Did that come from you?

PC: The artefacts that we had, that came to us naturally through the building. We couldn't sell, or we couldn't give away the big machinery that we had here. Some of the machines weigh ten and twelve tons so, you can't just pick them up and move them away, so, we had that part of the history. The original heritage centre was started by the agricultural and local history society and so it evolved, and it was deemed that, as I said before, we didn't need the stones and bones, there was overkill of that. You could go to a Devizes museum and get that, you could go to Stonehenge, Salisbury and so on and so forth.

So, we felt something a little bit newer and something a little bit more relevant to today's life, today's living. It's very interesting when everybody walks into our heritage centre, they all have got their mobile phones out, they've all got to look at their mobile phones. Last year, we did an exhibition on communication and we had old cine films here and we had the old brick, the old mobile phone that had no bloody coverage. It took forever to charge up, it was as heavy as you like, you couldn't put it in your purse and when you give a child a brick and say to them, "That's what I had to have as a mobile when I was fifty." I didn't have them before that, they didn't exist. And you give them an old telephone to use, they pick it up and they play with it.

And we have the old control… The telephone exchange from Trenchard Lines which used to Upavon RAF. It had two lines in and eight extensions, that's all it had, the whole place. The company, Whatley & Company, when they started, their original telephone number was four. Now, that was it, you picked up the telephone and you dialled four. And there were only twenty-eight telephone numbers in Pewsey. And Whatley's still have the same number except it's got five digits in front of it.

TB: Yes, I see. That's great they've still got the four in there. That's brilliant, please take it if you'd like to.

PC: I don't know that it's important, to be honest, it's gone.

TB: (00:29:52) Paul, just a very quick question, what is your role, are you the chair of the trustees?

PC: I am chair of the trustees. I started this… It was a little bit of a passion of mine, with Michael Duckenfield. I had very little to do with it but because the family had an interest in it and myself and my brother-in-law, Tim Thompson, the trustees of the

heritage centre, we had a control of it. We now have no… Financial interest in it whatsoever, the buildings don't belong to us and nothing now, Whatley's have moved to a different site and this is in the control of the local community.

But I have been the chairman of the trustees forever. Michael Duckenfield was… He found love in his late life and he moved to Malvern, and Mike Asbury came and joined us, and he has been the curator and archivist in charge of the archives for many years. We're winding his role down in that a little bit inasmuch as the archive is being taken over by somebody else now as we need to spread the load of the work among more people.

And it's quite specialised, getting people to do the archivist work is quite a specialised thing. We used to get help from the Wiltshire Museums Service, that has ceased, we do get some support from them but whereas, we used to have somebody seconded to us, that helped us on a monthly basis that no longer happens, and we actually have to buy that support as it happens, from the same person that gave us the support before. Which is very valuable, he is a freelance mentor to many museums, including ours.

TB: (00:31:59) I was going to ask, the accreditation process, why did you decide to go for that and when did that happen?

PC: We decided to go for accreditation because it made it more viable for getting grants. Getting grants from the National Heritage Lottery Fund etc. was virtually impossible if we weren't accredited. The amount of work involved is enormous and it was fortunate that Mike Asbury had retired and was able to put the months, not hours, months of work into producing all the documentation to do it. And it's thanks to him, and it would have been done without him. It was thanks to him that we got the accreditation.

TB: (00:32:46) Did Mike have any professional experience in curating or was it something that he developed?

PC: No, it's something that he learned. He was an air traffic controller for the RAF and then later on, for the… For Air Traffic Control.

TB: (00:33:07) So, the only professional advice you got was from Wiltshire coming in… Was that part of the accreditation process you got where you found that…?

PC: Yes, we had to do that.

TB: (00:33:15) Have you modelled the display on any other museum or has there been any influence particularly?

PC: The then trustees spent probably four or five years, and we still do, going around other museums. We go off on holiday and you know, I went to the Bowes Museum and I've been to all sorts of museums all over the place. And we're bits of devils for taking photographs and we go to museums and we take a lot of photographs and we download all that information. We were very impressed with the Vale and Downland at Wantage when they newly started. They had much bigger premises

that we've got, and they had facilities for having a café and all sorts of other things, which generated quite a lot of income for them.

We had to try and find other ways of getting income stream and we were supported very heavily by the local community café and the community café provided us with income from their take. Because it was done by the community, fifty percent of all their take came to us and fifty percent went into supporting the community café. So, that is a totally separate organisation.

TB: (00:34:38) Where is that café, is it near hear?

PC: Right opposite.

TB: Oh, I see.

PC: So, it would be a bit churlish of us to open our own café, we do have the space to do that now, but we didn't at the time. But we still get that support today and so, we try to keep that going.

TB: (00:34:57) I see. So, you're income is… Well, there is that, which is a regular income, plus the entrance fee, plus grants, that's it, I presume?

PC: Yes, and we get support from the local carnival, Pewsey Carnival last year gave us a thousand pounds and if we have a special project or we want something special, we can apply to the parish council, we can apply to Pewsey Area Board. We've applied to the Pewsey area Board for eight thousand pounds to help us with the adult learning centre and to put a new toilet and kitchen in there. And we've also applied for some Lottery Grant Funding for that as well.

So, we apply in different areas. We do have reserve funds, we are very loath to spend those because once it's gone, you can't get it back and if we come upon hard times or a disaster happens we need to have some funding available. So, wherever we get a project, we try to make that self-sustained through its own level of funding.

TB: (00:36:11) So, it sounds like there is local kind of funds, local council related funds. There's event funds, community café local funds, there is Heritage Lottery Funding. Are there any other major funds that you've had that you haven't mentioned over the years?

PC: The events that we run, last year raised something in the region of four and a half thousand pounds.

TB: Right, okay. So, that was a big…?

PC: That is a big… That is an important thing. And it's getting people who are prepared to put the events on, organise them. We've had a group of singers who come in, they tour the UK and they've come here and sung. And they've been so impressed with the acoustics they've actually asked if they can come and practice here.

TB: Oh, wow. Great.

PC: But when you see how far they have to travel, it makes you wonder whether that is going to be viable for very long because, between them, they're having to travel about three hundred miles.

TB: (00:37:09) Let's just wind back a bit because I would just like to get a sense of the… Because there was an opening in '92 and you said that the history society was perhaps the most involved group at that point. And then there was another one in 2005, after the [unclear 00:37:26].

PC: Actually, that was 2009.

TB: Sorry, yes. Okay. So, let's just go back to the '92. So, you had the space, the history society were interested, what was the… That kind of moment really to go public and turn it into a museum, where did that come from, was that your idea or the history society's idea; can you tell me a little bit more about the decision to make that into a public space?

PC: When we first started the history society used to have the use of about twenty percent of the building. And they would invite people to come in and have a look at it on a timed basis when they could be here. Because it was a working environment, people had to be escorted in so, they had to have helpers here to do it.

As the working environment shrank and the heritage centre side of it grew, the dynamics of that changed to a certain extent and it eventually became a stores area where we could just fence it off so that people could come in and look at the artefacts etc and it became, if you like, more of an open museum at that time. And then, when we decided to close the business and move it to Salisbury Road, the whole building was then given over to the heritage centre.

TB: I see, right. So, it was quite a gradual process then?

PC: It was a very gradual process. It has taken probably thirty years to get to where we are today, but it's been a gradual evolve, it's been gradually evolving over the years. And accreditation didn't happen until ten years ago, I suppose.

TB: (00:39:25) Right, okay. So at what point did it have regular opening hours, that would have been '92?

PC: No, that would have been just after '92, yes. And the building as you see it today had big blue wooden doors there and it had a very leaky roof, we used to have to strategically plant the buckets and we had no heating. In the winter, if it was freezing outside, it was even colder inside, and everything was damp. So, we had a real problem with retaining artefacts.

TB: And what was the display like then in '92? Because the corner where you've got all the machinery that workshop… I assume that was exactly the same, but how was the rest of it, was it similar?

PC: The rest of it was just display cabinets that we put about and we had some tall wooden cabinets and all sorts of other things which we had begged, borrowed, stolen from closing shops, from other museums or whatever, we gained a lot of this stuff. Then when we closed for the renovation, to keep the volunteers focussed so

they didn't lose interest in it, we talked to the carnival committee, who have got a great big modern factory unit. And we said, could we have about twenty percent of the space to create some display stands?

And we literally had people down there every Tuesday and every Thursday building display stands and painting them and decorating them and then when we reopened, we brought these in kit form, back to the heritage centre and then reassembled them. We had to bring it in kit form because each wall took about four people to carry it. And then we put it all together and then we created the display stands and then we had to get those wired in which the electrical people who were doing the work, wired it all in for us. And we had to have a staircase put in and we put a display stand underneath the staircase which we display a collection of steam engines.

TB: Oh, yes, I saw that.

PC: Which were made by one man over the space of ten years and they've all… When we received them from the family… Because Alfie Baker had died, they were all registered and they were all certificated. Unfortunately, to get them certificated today, it costs about two hundred per machine, per annum. So, it's beyond our means to do it. But I'm sure because they've been kept now in this environmentally friendly environment because they are in a special cabinet which keeps them at a fairly constant temperature and it keeps them dry, which is the important thing. They would probably be… One could test them and get them through…

TB: (00:42:31) So, registered with who; they had to have a licence, steam engines need a licence do they?

PC: For insurance purposes, you can't use them in public or anything else unless they're registered and tested as being safe.

TB: Okay, so, it means you can't use them?

PC: The pressures are so vast, they are bloody dangerous.

TB: (00:42:47) I see, I'm with you, I didn't know that. Gosh. So, was there any big differences from the '92 one to the 2009, it sounds like there was a very big reorganisation at that point when you had the big display cases come in? So, before that, was it thematic the same way that it was?

PC: When Whatley's sold us originally in '92 and they moved to Salisbury Road, we actually had an opening here and everybody turned up in Dickensian outfits and we had a big cutting of the ribbon because it had been passed in the local community for use. It was actually held by the family, but it was held in trust by the family prior to the agreements being signed in 2005 for it to be passed to the community. Because we were having trouble with the developers, the developer hadn't been chosen at that time and we hadn't got… The council were arguing about who was going to have control of the premises and all the rest of it.

I was being difficult about the type of houses that were going to be built behind the property because we were quite specific that we wanted to have a control of the

design of the houses etc. so they mirrored the heritage centre. And I'll show you in a minute to the river walk which has got some of our displays in it. So, it isn't just the heritage centre as you see it, we do have some displays actually along the river bank.

TB: (00:44:24) Oh, really, I didn't realise that, okay. So, just go back, so, pre-2009, can you just give me a sense…?

PC: Pre-2009, we didn't have the adult learning centre opposite, we did have this little office, this is where we did all our administration. And this was the only place that we could keep archives safely, paper archives, that sort of thing because we keep this dry and so on and so forth.

TB: (00:44:55) What about the display itself, was it the same objects?

PC: It's the same objects but every year, to keep interest, we change the theme. So, every year the theme is in the same space. Some of the artefacts are always there because they cannot be moved but we change the artefacts. At any one time we probably have about two and a half thousand artefacts on display, yet we have ten thousand artefacts and each year when we put a display on, we will borrow artefacts from other organisations, other people for the display. You'll notice in our laundry at the moment, we have some knickerbockers, I can promise you they don't belong to the heritage centre and they're not mine, but they are somebody's. And they will need to go back to them this winter.

TB: (00:45:53) So, could you list for me the themes… Not all of them, but you mentioned the communications one, the World War I, just give me a sense of the other displays you've had?

PC: We've had World War I, we've had the photographic and communications, we've had the engineering, where we had a lot of engineering stuff here including stuff like the blacksmiths and… We've had involvement with the local horticulture, with the ploughing machines and all that sort of stuff. We've done the history of the local industry within the Vale, of what's been done in the mills, agriculture the water mills. And you've got ploughing and the machines that we use for ploughing so, we've had those sorts of demonstrations.

This summer, we did apple pressing in the harvest out in the forecourt at the front, because it makes a mess everywhere. People could bring their own apples along and we did pressing, and they took their apple juice away and so on and so forth. So, we try to jumble it up. And we've also done the arts so, one year we did the arts of the Vale and local artists, past and present, old art from yesteryear was brought in and that was displayed.

TB: Fantastic, that's lovely. Because it sounds that there are lots of artists around now and so, that's a big thing for the community.

(00:47:42) Let me just take you back, Paul, to your motivations. Because it sounds to me like this has kind of for you, has grown probably, from when you were running a business and you know, you were trying to think of something to do with this empty

building and I presume you had an interest in local history but you're not from here originally. So, just tell me a little bit about your own motivations and why you decided to put so much effort into this?

PC: History was never my subject. It was my favourite subject at school, I did not achieve in history. I didn't achieve in many subjects, to be honest, if any but I had an inherent… I married into a family that had a long history and being an engineer, I found it fascinating. I got fed up with people coming along with a new invention and this is a better way of doing it when actually, the simpler products, going back a hundred years, was far more productive than what we're producing today, and it was far less polluting.

I got a very quick take that a lot of this was getting lost, it was going, nobody's caring for it. And I had a likeminded vision with Michael Duckenfield that really, we ought to be not destroying this stuff, we ought to be keeping it, so people could see what we did and how difficult it was to do things. And probably, that was a better way of doing it than doing it the way that we're doing it today.

And so, I got a bit of a passion about trying to preserve the Whatley family archive for future generations and my grandchildren probably get bored to tears with grandpops, wanting to take them around the heritage centre. But they always seem to come willingly, and they will always bring their friends. But it's not my work, this is not my work. I am there guiding it possibly, is what you could say but I've got a fantastic team around that are doing the work for me. And some people with much more vision than I've got.

We were very fortunate for a space of about two years when we were rebuilding the heritage centre, that we had a museum… She ran museums, not in this county, elsewhere. But she was having a child and didn't want to lose touch with it so, she would come down here and she would do a lot of the work.

Certainly, Fritha Costain was instrumental in producing our display boards. Now the display boards have got so much information on them and if somebody asked me to cost out how much it was going to cost to produce them, I would say you're talking thousands and thousands of pounds. In point of fact, the boards cost us about eight hundred pounds for all of them and they're not all there because we've got some that we haven't displayed. So, we have a timeline which we're putting up this winter going back to about 1870 so, it shows the history of the community.

So, along the line, we've had lots and lots of people that have come along and helped, and some have moved on, Fritha's gone, she went off to the Outer Hebrides, I think, that's a long way away. And we've had people come and people go but we've always had plenty of volunteers.

TB: So, they've kind of brought in their own ideas and vision?

PC: And it's channelling those ideas into something that is sustainable.

TB: (00:52:11) Do you see your role then as perhaps looking at more of the business side of things for the centre, is that where you're most… Your skills best lie?

PC: Yes. My education isn't strong enough for some of the other bits and pieces. So, I like to keep an eye… Mike Asbury is brilliant at the archivist and all the rest of it. And we have an accountant who is a volunteer and who is our treasurer. He was the finance officer for industry. And so, I try to draw on expertise and use people for what they're good at.

TB: (00:52:52) You said something that was interesting, which was the family history was a very, very important thing to preserve, why?

PC: Whatley & Company were a family that started in a village just up the road, Wootton Rivers and it was started with another family called Hosier and if you look at the Whatley and the Hosier families, they, through this part of Wiltshire controlled a lot of what has gone on. Hosier's made milking machines and all sorts of things.

When the two families separated, amicably, I have to say, the Hosier's wanted to go into more agriculture engineering and Whatley's went into more water engineering and they felt that it would be better as two separate companies. So, Whatley's moved to Pewsey, Hosier's moved to Collingbourne. Some of the Hosier family were farmers, some of them were engineers.

And the very famous rotary parlours, milking parlours, were made by the Hosier family. And they used to take the machines out to the fields and milk the cows in the fields, not take the cow from the fields to a barn. And they produced these rotary parlours which they could take, and they would milk the cows where they were.

So, all of these things came about, and Whatley's were at one point, the biggest employers in Pewsey, they employed over a hundred people. They had a history in the engineering, they had a history during the war, they had a history with the railways building railway components for the railway's workshops.

This building was built from stone which was redundant from building the railways and the canals and Uriah Whatley bought the stone and built this building. There isn't a square in the building anywhere, the walls aren't vertical, the walls aren't parallel. There isn't a square in the building anywhere. And even the crane, the five-ton crane is on pillars that aren't vertical. But it's the way it was done and it's very safe and I don't think anybody is going to say that it's dangerous.

We don't use the crane because to do so, we would need insurance and today's insurance rules would be so stringent that it would not pass. Having said that, it was used for over a hundred and twenty years with only one accident and that is when the beam fell to the ground, but nobody was hurt. Somebody had put something on the beam and when they traversed it, it twisted, and it fell to the ground. So, we don't use the crane, it's there, we can demonstrate it, but we don't use it.

TB: (00:56:11) So, you're saying the family clearly had a massive impact on the local community for such a long time so, that's a really important reason to keep that stuff. But what about for you, because this is a family that you… It's not your family?

PC: No, it's my wife's family, yes.

TB: It's your wife's family, right.

PC: I just got fascinated by the whole thing.

TB: And also, you said as an engineer… Clearly, it's the same thing, it was making engines and things?

PC: Yes, that's right. But my own family came from Northumberland. It was broken up, it was very patchy and here, I found a family that actually had made a difference to a community. Not over one generation but over probably ten generations and was still having an influence on that community and those modern generations, even today.

And it just showed what can be achieved. Half of the high street, the shop on the corner was their ironmonger's shop, Whatley's Ironmonger's shop. The shop opposite that was the Pewsey Electric Light Company, which is now an estate agents. Then beside that was the house where the family lived. Wilfrid… No, Uriah Whatley had fifteen children, five by his first wife, Sarah Hosier, I told you about the Hosiers.

And then Sarah died… No sorry, he had nine children by Sarah and Sarah died about eight months after the birth of her youngest child and Eva, Sarah's sister came to help Uriah look after the children and nine months after that he married Eva and had four more children. So, he had fourteen children and one stillborn, Eva had a stillborn, so, it was fifteen in total.

And they all lived in the high street but there wasn't a house big enough so, some of the older ones used to sleep elsewhere and they would go and sleep in other people's houses, but they all had their meals together and so on and so forth. Some of them were in the business and of course, fifteen children, some of those would have been working when the youngest ones were born. But they owned four houses in the high street here. So, the high street was quite a prominent place with the Whatley family.

TB: (00:58:58) I see. So, it's almost like marrying into the Cadbury family or something, isn't it? On a slightly smaller scale but no different in a way, it's a massively influential, big family business.

PC: You see, Whatley's had an influence with what they did and what they made and the pumps. Anywhere that you go in the Vale, would have had a pump made by Whatley's because you got it made locally. If you went to Hungerford, and beyond Hungerford, you would have had an Oakes Pump made by the Oakes family. Well, the family that started Whatley's was Oakes and Whatley. So, the two have come together.

Now the Whatley's, George Whatley emigrated to Australia and he patented the double-acting pump which we sold under licence in this country. He patented that in the Australia and Commonwealth Office and I have a copy of the patent here.

TB: So, it's international now? It's like a hub of a wheel, isn't it? It has lots of tendrils.

PC: Yes. It's important not to lose those links and that's what I felt. It's too easy to lose your history and to rely on professionals that probably don't understand the history as well as you do.

TB: I was just going to say, where does the collection come from, where does the knowledge come from? And when you were taking me around, it was quite clear that…

PC: The collection is given to us.

TB: Yes, a lot of it is donated isn't it, so, is that from local people?

PC: Yes. Very, very few bits we have bought. We have bought some things because it's been essential that we keep it. There's a cattle trough in there that was cast on this floor, and we bought that for forty pounds in an auction. But the auctioneer knew us and phoned us, and he said, "We would like this to go to the heritage centre, we'd rather people didn't bid for it."

TB: Wow, great, lovely. So, you've got some connections?

PC: Yes, so, it's helpful. And somebody needed the money, so we paid forty pounds for it.

TB: Thank you so much. I'm just going to quickly check if I've covered… Yes, just something about the community. So, what would you say this place gives the local community? You mentioned the events which are very important, but is there anything else you think that it gives Pewsey?

PC: I think the important thing is it gives the parish a pride. They're proud of their heritage centre, people come along, and they pay an interest to it. And you quite often see people come in and they'll bring their family in and it's one of the first things that they do. And the information that we get coming from abroad is quite surprising, we get people phone up and say, "Can you look this up for me?" And we do it. And they find that it is useful, it gives them a pride.

We try to keep it looking tidy and all the rest of it, the problem I've got is keeping the windows clean. But it is part of the community, we get back what we give to the community, you only get back as much as you put in. We are fortunate, we'll have a carnival and each year the carnival will have a divvy, I don't think that we've gone a single year where the carnival haven't actually given us funds. We have probably, one of the wealthiest carnivals in the United Kingdom, it owns a lot of property.

TB: Wow, really?

PC: Yes. And it's self-sustaining and each year it gives away quite a lot of money. So, we are very fortunate to have that pride. And again, the carnival is… It's not Pewsey, it's not a single organisation, the carnival belongs to the community, it belongs to all of us. And it's the effort that people put into it that makes it successful and I don't think there's a family in Pewsey that probably don't put a lot of effort into carnival every year. And that's why you will probably see six or seven thousand people here on carnival night.

TB: (01:03:55) Crikey. Tell me about carnival night, I assume it's a procession, but it sounds like it's more than that?

PC: Carnival goes on for a fortnight. And you have a Feast Tea which is a tea which they have they have in the Bouverie Hall which is provided by the community and that is for the old folks. I have to say, I serve at the Feast Tea sometimes and I sometimes whether I ought to be sitting or serving. So, you have the Feast Tea, you have the wine race on the first Saturday. On the Thursday, you have a wheelbarrow race, which involves pushing a wheelbarrow around nine pubs. The pubs aren't all there anymore, some of them have become property, but they pop up on the night.

TB: Brilliant.

PC: So, you push a wheelbarrow, one in, one out and one pulling and then you have… We have a history talk on the Thursday, which normally takes place in the Bouverie Hall because there are far more people go to that. But the funding for that comes from the heritage centre. And you have all sorts of other events, there are events going on all the time. And then on the Saturday, you have the carnival procession and it's the culmination of the Wiltshire Carnival Queen competition, so, all the carnivals in Wiltshire, they have a Wiltshire Carnival Queen competition here in Pewsey.

TB: Oh, right, so, this is the…

PC: So, it's the last carnival of the year.

TB: I'm with you, right. Gosh, that's got a big regional focus as well, that's amazing.

PC: Yes.

TB: You said that it gives people pride. Why do you think, or I'll pick that a little bit; pride in what?

PC: Because it's possession. The heritage isn't mine and it's not anybody else's. It belongs to the people of Pewsey and it is their heritage centre, so they feel that they have an element of ownership and that's what it's about, it's ownership, giving people ownership. And that is what will protect it and hopefully, it will protect it in the long-term.

TB: Well, that's very interesting because thinking back to those riots you mentioned.

PC: The Swing Riots?

TB: Yes, wasn't it a little bit about that, just having no power or ownership or kind of control?

PC: Well, the Swing Riots all evolved the people were being paid nothing. They were working on the land and they couldn't survive. Their homes, they were living in accommodation was at the behest of the landowner and that could vanish without a minute's notice. And it was felt that this was an iniquitous situation and the people were so poor, they couldn't survive. And in the end, they just started to form the riots and the riots just moved and moved until they got to Tolpuddle and they had the…

TB: Yes.

PC: But we have an expert on the Swing Riots. We have a gentleman called Richard Giles, who does a lot of historical talks and he will talk on the workhouses, he'll talk on the Kennet and Avon Canal. The fact that that was a defence line if there was an invasion…

TB: Oh, yes. It has pillboxes along it.

PC: All the pillboxes along the canal bank, he can talk to you about the pillboxes and the canal and all those sorts of things. So, Richard does a lot of talks and he generates for us, quite a big income. His talks will generate anything from forty pounds in a village hall, one of the village halls to two hundred and three hundred pounds in one of the bigger halls. He does it, and the money comes to the heritage centre. He is an ex-deputy headmaster of a large school in Wiltshire and he's got a real interest in local history. And again, this is another man who has taken possession of the subject.

TB: (01:08:38) Yes, I see what you mean. Something which we haven't got on record and I would like to, could you just tell me about the signs that you've organised all over the area; just how many there are and where the money came from?

PC: The signs were done through a grant fund from the Coop… One of their charity grant funds, we applied for that. You never know how much it's going to be, we thought it was going to be in the region of about two thousand pounds. And what we thought it would be useful to have is history signs around the area. And what we did was, we asked all the villages and communities to do a local history of their particular area.

And if you take Upavon, my village, there is a history there of the church, the Norman Church and of the army and what they did because it's part of the army training ground and what they do. And we wrote the history of this up. And in the village of Upavon, there are two notice boards and one in the church. Now, the notice boards… I don't quite know what the thing is, but you've got a little square box at the bottom…

TB: Yes, a QR code?

PC: A QR code. And you can slap your device against the QR code and it can tell you all about that board and the history in greater detail than is written on the board. You can also get access to all the other ninety-seven boards that are around the community.

So, all the villages were given the chance to have one of these boards. Some were more forthcoming than others, so, some have got one or two and some of the beauty spots like Martinsell Hill, the Milk Hill at the top at the Alton Barnes, they all have a board. So, when you go there, if you're walking and you want to walk along the ridgeway etc. you can see these boards and you can get information about the local area. And if something is there that picks your fancy that you would like to go and see, it will tell you exactly how to get there and your device will take you there.

TB: Right, that's brilliant, it sounds amazing. And this is this something which the centre organised?

PC: The centre organised that. We didn't realise how successful it was going to be because it depended on how many people actually put their money in the pot. But instead of getting about two thousand, two and a half thousand pounds as we thought we were going to get, we got six thousand, seven hundred pounds. So, that made a real difference to the number of boards we could produce, hence we've got ninety-seven.

TB: And are they on notice boards, on walls, or just wherever you can put a screw in?

PC: Some of them are on notice boards. The ones at the Wilton Windmill there is a purpose built board that they've mounted it on. Some are mounted on a wall like the one at the heritage centre. And there is one opposite here that is mounted on a wall, but they are all over the place.

TB: It's a hell of a lot of work. And also, I guess, that advertises the centre itself?

PC: It advertises the centre itself, yes. So, we don't really know… Why our increase in numbers has been quite so significant this year, we're not quite sure but hopefully, it's got something to do with the boards and hopefully, we'll be able to tell more on that next year. But this year, at the moment, our numbers are up, and they've been up significantly since we put the boards up.

TB: That's amazing. I guess there are records… If they do track a QR code then there is someone counting that, so you know how many people are using the app, that might be interesting. Do you have figures for that?

PC: No, I don't.

TB: (01:12:24) There is a really interesting pattern in Wiltshire and it's one of the biggest growth areas in the whole country for local history museums since 1960. So, we're looking at the moment, it's quite a span, this. But there has been a huge growth in small local history museums in this county. We don't know why, and I was wondering whether you have any thoughts or ideas as to… Maybe you know of other little museums that have set up, I don't know, over these decades, but do you have any thoughts on that?

PC: The Vale and Downland Museum at Wantage has a similar sort of theme as ours, it is different. I don't know why there are so many. We've got one at Devizes, we've got a very small one at Market Lavington, it's basically a room. We've got the car museum at Calne and so, I think people have drawn an interest into something that they want to get involved with.

We've got a small organisation that has just cropped up in… Excuse the pun, talking about crop circles, that started at Alton Barnes. So, there is a café there and they've got a lot of board up about the crop circles over the years and all the rest of it. Now, that is… You either love it or you hate it, but it gives an interest and we find a lot of people that come here are actually either on bicycles or they're walking, or they've come down the canal. And they're doing all these history things and it's people

trying to find something to do whilst they're… They'll tootle down from Hungerford to here and then they'll get off the barge at the wharf up here and they'll go the wharf board there and cast it and then they'll come down here and look at the…

TB: Yes. So, you have got… With Stonehenge and so on… There is a lot of tourism around.

PC: Yes. The Pewsey Area Board has started a thing called PCAP which is the Pewsey Area Community Partnership and that partnership is looking after the tourism of the Pewsey Vale and they have put together… They helped put together these boards with us, so, it's a joint application. And then we had two very talented people that actually put the boards together, both people that live in Pewsey and they did the writeups and the redid the writeups. So, when you're reading the boards, have a look at them because they are quite well done, and people have commented on them.

And of course, if you're living in Croydon, for argument's sake, and you say you want to go to… You're thinking of going down the canal, having a canal barge, you start looking at it on the internet because you want things to do. And it's actually becoming quite easy to use the Pewsey area as a tourist base because we've concentrated a lot of effort through the Pewsey Area Partnership in finding things of interest in this neck of the woods.

So, you can travel to Pewsey and you can then go to Marlborough High Street, a beautiful high street, one of the best in the country, overpriced… I didn't say that. You can go to Avebury. It's not too difficult to get to if you want stones and bones. You can go to the Long Barrow at Silbury and Silbury Hill. It's all within walking distance.

Audio ends: 01:16:28