Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Peter Marsden

Role: Founder

Museum: Shipwreck Museum, Hastings

Location of interview: Café area, The Devon and Exeter Institution, Exeter

Date: 15/3/19

Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

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

TB: First of all, could I just ask you to give me your name and your date of birth if you don't mind?

PM: Yes, Doctor Peter Marsden and I was born on the XX-XXX 1940.

TB: That's great. Could you just say what your role was at the museum that you set up?

PM: I founded what is known now as the Shipwreck Museum, in Hastings.

TB: Great, okay, lovely.

PM: While I was working at the Museum of London.

TB: Okay, great. So, Peter, you're obviously a professional marine archaeologist…?

PM: I'm a professional archaeologist, most of my career has been digging up Roman temples and medieval churches and so on… Roman baths in London. But I did find some Roman, medieval and later shipwrecks in the Thames and then… I found that ships were… had no real place in our heritage.

TB: (00:01:04) Do you know, I'm really puzzled by this. Could you just explain… there seemed to be a gap in provisions, as it were, for museum with material. I know that there is a maritime museum and one would think the Museum of London would have been interested but at that time, that wasn't the case, is that right?

PM: It was interested but shipwrecks do produce a huge amount of material and waterlogged material and the Museum of London was… as a result of the old London Museum and the Guildhall Museum, which was the City of London Museum. There are a number of shipwrecks in London which has developed because it was a port. The museum, it thought, it was the history of London and ships are just visiting vehicles, they come and stay for a few days and then go, dispose of their cargo, dump their cargo, pick up a new cargo and they're off.

So, there is an inordinate amount of money and space and time spent on something that is almost peripheral to the primary function of the museum. And this applied generally so Hastings Museum, for example, wasn't interested really in the local shipwrecks and the Museum of London wanted to just keep a few bits of samples of the Roman and medieval wrecks found there but no more.

TB: (00:02:50) Okay. So, those kinds of wreck-like finds, it sounds like to tried to put them in a museum but that didn't work out, so, did you just keep them in your garage, how did that work out?

PM: Well, they were stored all over the place, bits of them, and I remember getting a letter one day from somebody at the National Maritime Museum where a large part of a medieval barge was being stored in pieces in their stores, under the Queen Anne House and they wanted to turn that, the Queen Anne House, develop it as a museum, asset rather than just simply keep it as stores. So, I got the letter from them from somebody there, saying if I finished recording these timbers, will I let them know because they can be disposed of. And I thought, "This is wrong."

And the Museum of London was the same situation and I'd been involved with a Dutch East Indiaman wreck at Hastings, called the Amsterdam, which was wrecked

in 1749. And the objects found by treasure hunters in that wreck had gone back to Holland where, I thought, some of them ought to stay in Hastings. But they didn't and the result of all that was I thought, "Well if I can't find a museum, I'll create one."

I didn't know what I was doing really so, I phoned up Margaret Rule who was… from the Mary Rose, yes and Margaret said… because they were going through the same process with the Mary Rose at Portsmouth Museum and other museums, just couldn't take this huge ship, the contents of the ship, there was enough for a whole museum, just the one thing.

So, she said, "You should join the Association of Independent Museums because they've got a booklet about how to set up and run a museum." So, I did, and I got together a group of people who were wonderful trustees with the skills that were relevant to creating a museum, like an architect, a quantity surveyor and a solicitor and so on. I went to see a junior minister in the House of Commons and asked him if he would be chairman of the trust. And I said, "We've got no money, but I'll find it." And so, he said yes, fortunately, he was junior Minister for Transport, he was Cranley Onslow, Chairman of the 1922 Committee then.

TB: (00:06:06) So, how on earth did you have that connection, or did you know that he had an interest; how did that work?

PM: Well, he had an interest in that a friend of mine called Rex Carn had been to see the minister over some very inappropriate law the Department for Transport wanted to bring in. And Rex was a treasure hunter really, or a wreck hunter, I should say wreck hunter rather than treasure hunter, but he pays for his work by selling the antiquities, which I don't agree with but at that time, the law was that the things had to be sold anyway. Because shipwrecks are dealt with, not in the conventional way, as antiquities on land are dealt with, there are a whole range of laws which apply.

So, he'd been to see the minister, Cranley Onslow, the junior minister in the Department of Transport and had put some pieces of eight on the desk in front of him and said, "Look, this is what your law is going to stop." I've forgotten what the law is now… anyway, so, the result of that was that Cranley got really interested in the whole business. Anyway, the outcome of all this was that Cranley said yes and the various people I approached as first trustees were agreed and I looked around for a place for creating this museum that I wanted to do.

TB: (00:07:58) Right, so, before you found a building, you set up the charity… was it a charity?

PM: Yes.

TB: (00:08:03) Okay, what year was that?

PM: Well, the museum opened in 1986, it was early 1980s.

TB: (00:08:12) So, it did take a few years then to find…?

PM: About three years to find the money and to open the museum.

TB: (00:08:18) Yes, because you need money, a building, and a collection don't you, for a museum really, don't you? So, let's start with the building because presumably, nothing could happen until you found that?

PM: Well I found a building at Battle where there is a Roman naval supply base and I got permission… I wanted to go really, to Hastings… and there was a real uncertainty as to whether we would go for Battle or Hastings.

TB: (00:08:48) Why there, why that area, was it because that was the wreck you were working on?

PM: No, Battle, there was a Roman naval ironworks there, the Classis Britannica of the first and second centuries AD. And in London, I had worked on and found and excavated a large part of what is still the earliest sea-going sailing ship found in Northern Europe, at Blackfriars. And so, I knew the Museum of London didn't want these timbers, they just wanted to keep a few bits and the rest were to be thrown. And I thought, "This is wrong." Having got planning permission from East Sussex County Council for the museum at Battle… sorry, Bodiam, not Battle, it's Bodiam near Battle.

TB: Yes, near Bodiam Castle?

PM: By the medieval castle there, Bodiam. Having got planning permission, I made sure that it was covered in the local newspaper at Hastings. The next thing that happened is that the planning officer for Hastings phoned me up and said, "Look, we've got a redundant building on the sea-front, would you like it for your museum; and we can give you thirty thousand pounds as well?"

TB: Wow.

PM: And so, I thought this was great and so did the other trustees. Now, we did look at the sort of people who go to the Bodiam area, go to the castle, their National Trust people, so, As and Bs of the society. And the people that go to Hastings are more the Cs, and Ds, and Es, Fs, and Zs and so on and are not so interested in culture but they're interested in the seaside resort. I felt we had to go through this to find out who our customers would be. Anyway, we agreed to Hastings.

TB: (00:11:03) Were you living in Hastings at the time?

PM: No.

TB: (00:11:06) Where were you living?

PM: I was living at Lindfield, near Haywards Heath, in Sussex and the trustees, none of them were local.

TB: (00:11:15) But the museum could have been anywhere in the country, but you liked the idea of Bodiam because of the Roman port connection?

PM: Yes. But Hastings was… In the beach at Hastings is the best preserved East Indiaman in the World, the Amsterdam. It's two-thirds complete, and she was sunk in quicksand and mud in 1749 and it still contains her cargo. She was owned by the Dutch government. These ships opened up… and the East India Companies opened up global trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and formed the basis for

the modern global economies that we have. And the earliest international or intercontinental currency are what we called pieces of eight, the Spanish… coins and Reals, of which there are smaller divisions as well.

Anyway, that's there. But on the other side of Hastings is a warship called the Anne, which was wrecked in the Battle of Beachy Head in 1690, when… James II had fled to France, was being supported by the French King, invaded Ireland, as a precursor to invading England and putting James back on the throne.

TB: Oh, yes.

PM: We've got William of Orange as our King then. They hoped that the Irish would rise up and join in, but the Irish didn't really and so, the outcome was this big sea battle. In Ireland, there is the Battle of the Boyne and in the channel, there was the Battle of Beachy Head and the idea of the French was to destroy the English and Dutch navy's so that they could invade. But the battle was inconclusive and the French, they sailed away and although nobody won the sea battle, the outcome was that the French didn't get that control of the channel.

TB: (00:13:45) So, you had two incredibly interesting wrecks either side?

PM: Yes, but nothing to do really with Hastings, they just happened to be lost there on the shore. But when the tide goes out, you can visit the wrecks.

TB: (00:14:01) I don't know if you ever became a wreck diver…?

PM: I never dived.

TB: (00:14:06) For you, it was a land-based activity and it was when the tide goes out was when you get in there and have a look at this stuff?

PM: Yes. At the time of the… in 1986, when the Shipwreck Museum was opened, there was a law for the protection of wrecks, the Protection of Wrecks Act but all it did was stop people diving on wrecks. And ships themselves had no more status than that jug, or this coffee cup, because they were designed to move, they were called chattels and therefore not buildings. And so, all the law for the protection of historic sites in Britain were land-based and about protecting structures.

I found, in London, in 1959, a Roman barge at Guy's Hospital and this came out, I asked for it to be scheduled as a monument. A few months later the ancient monuments people said, "We can't because it doesn't come under the Ancient Monuments Act." Had the boat, which was quite lengthy, about fifty, sixty feet long, something like that, had it been tied to a post, the post could have been scheduled and the area around it to include the boat. But the boat itself, which was the prime object couldn't be.

So, I used the trust as a base for campaigning, with a few other people, for a law which protected wrecks. Now the Ancient Monuments Act now does enable wrecks to be scheduled. But, in England, for some reason that I don't know, Historic England prefers to go to the Protection of Wrecks Act rather than to schedule them. But in Scotland, they schedule rather than go for the Protection of Wrecks Act.

TB: Really? How strange.

PM: But there are other laws, there are laws to do with salvage and the disposal of property from wrecks which have to be dealt with. And there is the Protection of Military Remains Act, which again, I was involved very much in with a few other people, six other people in taking the Ministry of Defence to the high court to get a judicial review. Because I thought that they were wrongly excluding merchant ships. Ten miles off Hastings is a ship called the Storaa, the SS Storaa, which was sunk in 1943 and twenty-one men died, it was torpedoed.

And I applied for this to be protected because Hanson was going to remove… ninety million tons of gravel from the seabed, they had applied for a licence. But in the area was this wreck and there was another wreck as well called the Thomas Lawrence, a nineteenth century Danish sailing ship. Anyway, on the Storaa, I went and fortunately, one of our trustees at the museum was a QC, she is now… very deeply involved in Brexit, as the Advocate General for the UK in Luxemburg.

TB: Right, gosh.

PM: Eleanor Sharpston, better known as Leo. She rides a motorbike and so on and she got a gown and chauffeur-driven car when she's in Luxemburg, flies over here, gets on her motorbike, gets through all the stuff, puts on the leathers and goes home. But… I found… the circumstance of this is… and there is an exhibition on the Storaa at the museum, is that the… Protection of Military Remains Act said that a ship doesn't define what sort of ship can be protected if it was in military service. The Ministry of Defence said it only applied to warships and we said, "No, it applies also to merchant ships, there is nothing in the Act to say it only applies to warships." And so, that was done and now the Storaa is protected.

TB: (00:19:09) Wow. And didn't the trust get the rights over that area?

PM: No.

TB: Okay, sorry, I've misinterpreted.

PM: No, that's even a bit more complicated in that the Ministry of Defence owns the guns and weapons on board. The hull is owned by two guys who live in Hastings and the cargo is owned by the… or part of the cargo is owned by a company, a multi-national, I think it's an Indian Company.

TB: Good God, how confusing.

PM: And now it's protected, and nobody can do anything without a licence from the Ministry of Defence.

TB: Right, and that's the main thing.

PM: Because it's the grave of the men who died while they were in military service. On the face of it, the Storaa case was brought by two daughters of a Royal Navy gunner who died in the ship. They had to use that as the way of doing it and the MOD wouldn't say whether or not they owned any part of the ship, anything on the ship, they wanted to divorce it completely from their thing… their sort of mindset.

Fortunately, somebody turned up at the museum in Hastings with a whole load of live ammunition… a diver brought this from the ship and… "Would you like this?" I said, "Yes, we'd love it." And so, after a few days of phoning the bomb disposal people, I put it in the boot of the car and drove down to near Portsmouth where it was all made safe.

TB: My God.

[Aside conversation 00:21:08 to 00:21:12]

PM: So, that was… yes… Anyway, the museum has been very helpful. It's given me a point on which to work on trying to change the law and get the law established which recognises these things. The idea that a ship, even the size of the Victory, cannot be protected because it was originally designed to move and therefore a chattel, it's ridiculous.

TB: (00:21:58) Well, first how the museum helped you with those campaigns, can you just explain that, did it give you some status?

PM: I didn't need status really.

TB: (00:22:09) In what way did it help with that campaign, having the museum, because you could have done those campaigns without it?

PM: I could have done without it. It meant that I could write letters. I was an archaeologist at the Museum of London, and I suppose… well, the Director of the Museum of London was very supportive of all these things. Like the medieval timbers, the ship timbers at Greenwich, I asked if all those timbers could be given to our museum in Hastings, "Oh, no, we can only give our collection to another national museum." So, I went to see Max Hebditch, the Director of the Museum of London and he said, "Yes, we'll write and get them transferred to the Museum of London and then we'll give them to you." And that's what happened.

TB: I see, brilliant.

PM: I feel like…

TB: It's bizarre, isn't it?

PM: It is a bizarre thing because the laws just aren't there and they're being applied, or they have been applied in a way which means that everything comes out wrong, in a way. So, it's nice to… You've met Hayden Luke, I think, or Tim McDonald, anyway?

TB: Yes, that's right.

PM: Tim is an old friend of mine and Hayden Luke is now the chairman of the thing and I'm a trustee of the museum but I'm gradually backing off because I'm getting on and it should be younger people who are involved.

TB: (00:23:50) Sure. So, how did the museum help your campaign; are you saying that really, it was a place where things could literally be rescued?

PM: Yes, a large part of what is in the museum now, is stuff which has been rescued either from people who… The local history museums, most of the museums in this

country are to do with local history. And the ship sailing past and being wrecked is not part of local history, other than just a few objects and so, they need their own museum. The National Maritime Museum is only interested in recent things and not interested in archaeology. There isn't anywhere else… yes, there isn't anywhere else and so, it's a huge gap in our museum setup. I would be very surprised if you find anything more than two or three accredited museums which are dealing with maritime history.

TB: Yes, it's very rare, absolutely.

PM: Certainly, archaeology. There are one or two museums which have been set up which are not accredited, not charities and are fronts for selling antiquities.

TB: (00:25:16) Yes, there are a few I know that were set up in Cornwall, I think four or five, most of which, I think have shut now, but are there others that you're thinking of… I don't know?

PM: Yes, well, I won't say. But the main thing is to see if a museum is a charity which means that collection is somewhat safe, and b), is accredited, that they are signed up to all sorts of standards.

TB: (00:25:53) So, let's just go back to the setting up of the museum. So, you got your trustees together, you found your building or were given this building and some money, which was wonderful, the thirty thousand from the council. Not a huge building but it was a good size, plus it was on a pretty major tourist destination… well, yes, you get, in the summer, lots of visitors. So, just take me through how it works, did you spend all that money on… Did the building have to be converted?

PM: Yes, it had to be converted. It was old stables, Victorian stables around a courtyard and one of our trustees was an architect and he discussed with me designs and we came to a conclusion what it should be and had to convert it. And he did a great job, a really great job. And another trustee was a quantity surveyor who kept an eye on the contractor and made sure that we only paid for what we used and that what we were using was of good quality. So, then we opened, and it was opened by the head of English Heritage at the time, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.

TB: (00:27:37) It must have been an amazing moment after so many years, it was quite a lot to…?

PM: Hmm. We also employed a manager, so, we had to have somebody down there who's job it was to run the place.

TB: (00:27:50) Yes, and you charged for entry from the beginning?

PM: We did at the beginning, now we're free and we have fifty or sixty thousand people. Last year we had over fifty thousand, the year before it was over sixty thousand. We've gone up to… ninety thousand, but at the moment… Now, how numbers of people are totted up, how they're calculated is… has been a bit of an issue and we've taken the view that anybody coming through the door, for whatever purpose, and mostly it's to do with the shop, buying things in the shop and that's what we count.

TB: (00:28:43) Yes, sure. But what were your numbers when you were charging, I assume much less than that?

PM: Oh, yes, the numbers went down to… I can't remember now, it is over thirty years ago.

TB: Don't worry, but nothing like that?

PM: No, no, no. When we charge, the numbers come down massively. We didn't have a shop to start with and only started selling after a few years, things from the counter, which we put on the counter and they sold well. We eventually had to take a big leap of building a shop and buying stock and we found that it did very well indeed.

TB: (00:29:27) Yes, essential because you've got to obviously keep the thing going and that takes money. So, initially, it was entrance fees and the shop, did you get any grants apart from the council grant for thirty thousand?

PM: No, we didn't get any grants from the council, we just had rent-free.

TB: (00:29:45) Right, it was their building and they gave it to you for nothing?

PM: And they didn't charge us council tax then, but they do now.

TB: (00:29:51) So, at what point did you decide to not charge then; how did that policy change?

PM: How did it change? We wanted to have more people coming in and we tried lots of different ways of… the amounts we charge or not charging… a whole range of… We tried all sorts of things and this seems to work well, we get donations. What we don't do is to run talks and we do occasional walks around the Amsterdam, guided tours and those do very well. I think that we should do talks.

TB: So more event-based stuff that would bring people in?

PM: I think it will do, yes and we can do events… but it's a matter of somebody to organise it and do it and all these things. And the trustees are not paid, of course, and they're doing a sterling job at the moment because we've not a person to run the place.

TB: Yes, that's right, you're looking for a director at some point?

PM: Looking for somebody to manage it, yes.

TB: (00:31:24) Okay, so, the idea to make if free was to increase the footfall and then obviously, sales in the shop might go up and donations might cover the costs in that way?

PM: Well, the shop sales would go up, but we had to take a leap there, we also had to take a leap in card selling because for a good few years we were expecting people to pay in cash for everything and you know, with card selling…

TB: You lose a percentage, don't you?

PM: You lose a percentage which goes to the people… but on the other hand, our sales went up massively when people could buy things with the cards and was well worth it.

TB: (00:32:09) So, it's funny… you're going from an archaeological museum but actually, you're learning quite a lot about retailing and other things, aren't you?

PM: Oh, crikey, retail, employment, health and safety, public… yes, it's a huge learning thing which is absolutely fascinating. And really, half the word history is story and it is telling a story and at the moment, if I've got a criticism of the place, I think that while we're there, we've been given lots of things and so, the display is very eclectic.

TB: (00:32:54) Now, let's talk about the collection because that is important. I can see… I have to say, I think it aged really well, but clearly, there have been additions just looking at the galleries. But originally, was it all stuff from your digs really that were in that museum first of all?

PM: Yes.

TB: (00:33:15) And after that, did you amass other things, did people bring things along or was it through professional connections?

PM: Yes, people brought things along and… no, no professional collections. There is an issue which I think we have to address and that is the security of the collection which depends at the moment on the security of the charity. Where independent museums run by charities have gone bust, like the Lifeboat Museum in Exeter, for example, the collection then gets sold to pay off as assets of the charity. So, there is no security, [unclear 00:34:02] security. So, what I'm doing is letting the trust have my things to display, so, the trust owns its own collection but also, the important part is my own stuff, but I'm putting the ownership of my things into a separate charity and that charity is then lending it to…

TB: I see, on long-term loan?

PM: So, that if the Nautical Museums Trust folds up for some reason then the owner of my collection can then offer it to other museums.

TB: (00:34:45) I see, right, okay. So, this is terribly important, isn't it?

PM: I don't know if you've come across this issue before?

TB: Well…

PM: It is one in the museum world and it's one that… yes…

TB: (00:35:00) It's tricky, isn't it because I know that ethically, it's supposed to be that other museums are approached, aren't they, when a museum closes down and if you can, you try and get it to another museum. But if that doesn't happen, it can be sold off?

PM: But the first… No, if a charity dies then the assets are sorted out on their financial value, which is the collection as well as the computers and chairs and tables and other things and the whole lot is sold.

TB: Really?

PM: So, if a charity goes and owes money, then the first call is on whoever is owned money and if that means a collection is sold, it's sold.

TB: Right.

PM: And other charities then, if they want things, have to raise the money to buy them and I don't think that is a very good scenario. So, if I had my way, I would put the entire collection of the Shipwreck Museum into a separate charity so that the employment of people and dealing with visitors and the shop and all that is on one side and the collection is on another side. And the collection is then loaned to the other charity and that's how I think it should be.

TB: (00:36:27) There is something else which struck me which was something Tim said which was that upstairs, there is a lot of… all your papers and research notes and books and everything. So, is that a similar kind of deal in a way?

PM: That collection, one of the things that we didn't do, was to make provision for adequate storage and that's my fault really. I think that we should seek grants to turn a major part or a large part of theatre or half the theatre into proper storage and that would solve that problem. But I would like the museum to have its own library and be an archive centre, a research centre but if my books and so on, which have been accumulated since the 1950s, there is a lot of stuff which is very expensive or almost unique or is unique and it's not used, it's just stored. And that room upstairs used to be an office but now it's a dumping ground.

TB: Right, I see, that is the storage kind of thing?

PM: That is the storage and the storage in other parts of the museum which is quite inadequate. But I think it's a matter of taking it a stage at a time and probably, more than one lifetime to do it because there is no great injection of money, you've got to just slowly develop and then find the money to deal with a problem that emerges.

TB: (00:38:33) Have you ever applied for a big grant or anything to extend?

PM: No.

TB: (00:38:42) So, the building as we see it now is pretty much as it was at the beginning, the fabric of it?

PM: Well, yes, it is. We can double the size of it. We're also doing… I've got a partnership with the Nautical Archaeology Society and maybe at some stage, they might take over the museum. But the main thing is to… we could develop but there is an issue here and that is that the property is owned by Hastings Borough Council. Now, if we raise money to build an extension to the museum, who owns that? Will it be us or them and how would it be dealt with? And this, we haven't addressed and also, how would we pay for a much bigger thing? Because we sort of get by and we've got by for over thirty years but… it needs a whole lot of new organisation.

TB: Well, that's right and there is always an issue, I think with charities that have a strong founder, of which, I think this is probably a good example. Of course, lots of other people are involved but still…

PM: There are lots of people involved and been involved.

TB: Yes, but I think that when… there is this issue of… when those people step back and this is inevitable, it's having a new lease of life, isn't it? And sometimes that does happen and sometimes that doesn't?

PM: Yes.

TB: It's one of those transitional things. Any organisation has that I'm sure, but…

[Aside conversation 00:40:33 to 00:40:38]

PM: This guy here is a professor of physics, a physicist.

TB: Hello.

M: Well, sort of retired… sort of.

TB: I've never really known an academic to properly retire, it just seems to…

PM: Well, we don't, we don't… archaeologists don't. I don't know…

TB: Do physicists?

PM: Great talk to our local longevity.

M: We like to maintain this illusion that we're useful, you see. So, it's a precious and precarious thing.

[Laughter]

M: You can't admit the truth, can you?

TB: (00:41:18) No. Oh, dear. Right, let me just quickly have flick through this. Yes, sorry. So, just thinking about the collection itself and the story it tells, what is it about that, that you love or want to communicate? Perhaps that's two different things, I don't know.

PM: The story to be told at Hastings is somewhat the story of the channel and the changing coastline. Now, ships… people like to put labels on others, and I get called a maritime archaeologist a lot. I like to think I'm just an archaeologist because ships are designed to go from port A to port B basically unless they're warships.

So, it's what's happening in the ports which is important and therefore you're into warehouses, you're into cargos, you're into trade and if it's a place like Exeter or anywhere… or London, you're dealing with sources of good for trade that come from all around. And also, what happens to the goods which are delivered to that port? So, the ships really should… tend to be seen in isolation but I don't think it should be.

It should be the port, it should include the port, it should include the goods and if it's a political thing to do with warfare, you're dealing with the… Like the Mary Rose, is the wills and ambitions of Henry VIII and the Francis I of France. Henry VIII had seized Boulogne the year before, in 1545, Francis I wanted to seize the Isle of Wight as a bargaining counter and that was it, the two fleets met in the Solent, the Mary Rose sank, the French went home with their ambition unfulfilled and the English Admiral took his fleet over and knocked the hell out of the French port to say, "We control the channel" and that is basically the story of the Mary Rose and she just fits in there as an example of a warship, a very big warship, of that time and nothing more. There is nothing more special about the Mary Rose or about any of these ships.

TB: I see, yes.

PM: And so, the ship is just a little bit of a much, much big picture.

TB: I'm with you, okay. So, I'm just thinking back to the displays and…

PM: And that is what we should be showing in our displays and we don't… we don't. But the aim of the charity it to tell the story of the English Channel and the coastline, particularly in the area of Rye Bay and Pevensey Bay and the ships which happened to pass by and got wrecked or the battles which took place and got wrecked and that's it really, and the changing coastline.

So, we deal with geology a little bit and all around there is a lot of fossils and so on from the age of the dinosaurs… and it was a coastal time, a hundred and thirty, a hundred and forty million years ago. So, you can go to the Amsterdam site which is what we do with our guided tours and you can see dinosaur footprints if you're lucky and the wreck is lying in an old river valley which is filled with silt and when she was run ashore, the sea level was of course, much, much lower, millions or even thousands of years ago.

Thousands of years ago as the sea level rose so the river valley, which was eroded into the sandstone, was much, much lower and as the sea level rose, it rose in stages and filled the valley with silt and at one of those stages a forest grew, so, there is a prehistoric forest, three thousand, four thousand years old all around the Amsterdam. But then the sea level has risen further, the ship has come in and been, by chance, wrecked and sunk into the mud, so, it's preserved, two thirds preserved. But you can go to the sea defences and see where the high tide level is now from the marine growth on the stones and you can work out how four thousand years ago, where the forest is, was dry land, and the sea level is now up there, and you can work out for yourself about global warming and how the sea level is rising.

TB: (00:46:49) Yes, yes, I see. So, there are much bigger stories that you want to tell really here, not just local but almost regional you could say, in terms of the channel and the area?

PM: Well, the Amsterdam was bound for Jakarta and Java from Holland, ten miles out there is the Thomas Lawrence which is a Danish ship which was going to the Caribbean and then there is the warship Anne, which was wrecked in 1690 which was all about trying to put James II back on the throne of England and displace William of Orange. So, it's about international history, not local. Local museums don't want the objects.

TB: (00:47:44) Right, okay. You said, right at the beginning that you saw this as a national… like a national collection or… did you say that? It might have been in the… Yes, potentially, the scape of the museum could be somewhere that shipwrecks could go.

PM: It could be somewhere else.

TB: All over the country kind of thing?

PM: It could be somewhere else and yes, it just happened to be at Hastings.

TB: Right, okay, yes.

PM: But you can see the ships on the shore there.

TB: Yes, so, not a bad spot but it could potentially be somewhere else as well if it were to get much bigger?

PM: Yes, it could be Portsmouth, it could be down here, it could be anywhere really and made relevant to those areas. We've got timbers from the three earliest… Roman ships found in this country, there are four Roman ships, but we've got parts of three of them and they are stored away by and large including the earliest sailing ship found in [unclear 00:49:04] in the middle of the second century, you know, tremendous things.

But I think one has to have a vision and this maybe comes from working in London, you know, vision beyond the four walls or beyond Hastings and that's what I would like to see presented but it needs getting museum designers in. The first step is acquiring the collection and I've done that. Now, the next step really is to get in people… exhibition designers to tell the story and to convince the trustees that this is a story we should be telling.

TB: (00:49:54) So, something more ambition in scope in terms of… not just to focus on the wrecks but also those are bigger issues?

PM: Yes. You see, we're in a seaport as well. We're in a place that has got the most marketable name probably in England, you know Hastings, in 1066…

TB: Yes, it's quite famous, isn't it?

PM: So, there is a lot going for it, but you go into Hastings and you find there is hardly anything shown about 1066. And you go to the castle and this isn't the castle that was there in 1066, nobody knows quite where it was, it's never been found.

TB: (00:50:48) Right, gosh. So, just tell me about the relationship with the town because… Well, no… clearly the council own the building and they obviously wanted it…?

PM: They have been very supportive.

TB: (00:51:02) Do you think that the museum gives… Clearly, it must give something to the community, but can you put things into words, what it gives to the community? First of all, it's free, which is wonderful.

PM: Well, and this is… it's difficult to know really how the public react, I think we'd know much better if we did talks and did much more in that way. At the moment, it's a matter of opening up and people come around and go away but whether they can… I don't think they can make the… They would depend on us to show the connections because this is our job, but how this is done… And this has got to all happen in a small building. So, it's not really straightforward at all.

TB: (00:52:03) Would you say… well, this is a kind of converse kind of question… What would you say has been the toughest point or the toughest moment of your involvement of the whole thing? And also, conversely, what has been the highlight or the best moment that you think, I'm really proud of that or, we finally got somewhere with this?

PM: I think the proudest moment is getting the support of so many people over the years and the success of doing it which means that I'd like to see much more being done and building on this. The worst moment… oh, crumbs… I can't think of anything… we get turned down when we apply for grants and so on, so, our hopes that are built up. There's a lot of work in putting a grant application in and just to have a little letter coming back and saying, "No, not with us" you must hear that so often. But it is great to have this support and to see other people succeeding.

I think one of the nicest things is going around the museum when there are children wandering around and doing things and they're answering their questions on a questionnaire sheet or whatever, and seeing them being excited and… yes, by what is there, what is on display and it's really great to see this wouldn't have happened but for our efforts.

TB: Yes. I was really struck by that actually when I visited. There were lots of kids at the time and they were really engaging with lots of… the pulleys and the tree and touching things, yes, I was really struck.

PM: The pulleys wasn't my idea, that was somebody else's idea and it's great, it's very popular and tying knots.

TB: (00:54:34) Just… the design of the museum, obviously, clearly you had Museum of London experience, so, was it you who applied that to the museum or did you want to do something a little bit different or were you influenced by other collections?

PM: I was influenced by the Museum of London because it was my background. But the Museum of London is… London's story is very multi-national and global, and the shipwrecks are not that. The Danish ship… nice things have happened like the Danish ship, the Thomas Lawrence which was an artist, we had an artist called Thomas Lawrence, but this ship is Danish, ten miles out. And when the Storaa… getting that done, the Thomas Lawrence was nearby, this wooden sailing ship and I applied for it to be protected and was refused at the time.

So, I thought the only solution, because Hanson wanted to remove millions of tons of gravel from the area. So, the only way to get protection seemed to be to find out who did own it. And that was to find out who the original owner was in 1862, in Denmark and fortunately, it was a well-to-do Danish family and the descendant who owned it was an old man living in the Dominican Republic. So, I phoned him up and wrote to him and explained the situation, "Would he be prepared to give to our museum all the ownership rights that they might have?" And he said yes, and so, we got a letter saying that.

But on the loss of the ship, two insurance companies paid out so, they may own it. So, I got in touch with the two companies and one of the companies didn't want to know, really didn't want to know at all. But the other company sold us all their rights for a pound, they never even cashed the cheque. So, the museum owns this so, with that ownership I was then able to write to the department that issues licences for the removal of gravel and say, "Look, we own this, it's part of the

museum collection ten miles out in the area and we've got to have an exclusion zone around our wreck."

TB: Brilliant, that's amazing.

PM: So, they had to find other ways of dealing with it. It still is not protected… it was turned down by English Heritage for protection, it wasn't of historic interest. I didn't agree so, I got in touch with the Danish National Maritime Museum, the national museum and said, "Look, if it was in Danish waters would this be protected?" And the letter came back, "Yes, it is of huge importance in Danish shipbuilding history and trade and so on and most definitely would." So, I passed this letter to English Heritage, which is now, of course, Historic England and they changed their mind.

But in the meantime, a sandbank had covered the wreck and they say that they can't give it protection until they know for sure where the wreck actually is. But the Nautical Archaeologists Society is keeping an eye on that and as soon as they know, and it can be identified, the site, then we'll apply to Historic England and get it designated.

TB: (00:59:06) This is a general question, but in archaeology mental detecting has been obviously, a mixed blessing but I think with reporting schemes, and so many things have been by amateur metal detectorists, I think there is probably a fairly healthy relationship between archaeologists and metal detectorists now. And I'm just wondering whether in the marine world whether that similar thing has arisen between amateur divers and archaeology or not and if not, why not?

PM: Yes, it is. Until things come up with lots of money when you start finding gold and silver bullion then… There is a friend of mine has got a tee-shirt, 'Treasure spells Trouble' and it does. I've seen people who are very keen on the culture, as soon as pieces of eight start being found or silver ingots are found, which are sometimes found in wrecks then… you've got to queue.

I've got a treasure hunting… not colleague… acquaintance of mine in America who has been out onto Spanish Galleon wrecks of the seventeenth century with submachine guns and other things because the Mafia will go for him. If he finds lots of coins then the Mafia comes in and lays a claim and they will fight it through the courts, and they've got huge amounts of money compared with this individual. And it's better to do a deal with the Mafia and pay them and let them have some money and have some for yourself, rather than to… and that would be awful to happen over here.

But it could because the law for the protection of historic wrecks works one by one, by one. And it means that wrecks which are not reported and are found by people interested in culture and then the treasure starts being found… You have to also… yes, trouble starts, but you've also got to go with the law as well, the Merchant Shipping Act because these things are owned by people. If an owner doesn't come forward after a year after recovery of these things, then the law says that the objects which have been taken by the receiver of the wreck have to be sold.

And the only way… or the best way of sorting out the value of an object is through auction which means that antiquities end up in auction rooms quite legitimately and lawfully. And museums, if they want things, have to go into all that. It's a whole minefield if you don't know the law, you can get involved in huge problems, which are quite different from those on land.

TB: Yes.

PM: In the Mary Rose, for example, on Sunday, there is a Mary Rose programme, I think it's on Channel 4 about the identity of human skeletons. Well, they've done some nineteen or twenty of them anyway but there were some more which were being done and there is a programme about them. Something like fifty percent of the people are thought to have been from the Southern Spain or Mediterranean area. Anyway, among the skeletons found on the upper gun deck were some bones with a red silk costume, and these are on display.

Now, the law at the time of Henry VIII in the year 1745 meant that only noble people were allowed to wear red silk. So, it's possible with DNA studies that one might find that the person whose remains are there, could be Sir George Crewe or another nobleman, one of the other ones on board. One of them is known… his name. So, if that is the case then the rights of ownership of that skeleton would be partly I think, to do with the descendants.

TB: Yes, human remains is quite different, I would have thought, legally, isn't it?

PM: Well, nobody can own human remains but the… the family, the Crewe family might have a case for ensuring that the bones are properly buried, interned. Whereas the Mary Rose Trust wants to keep the bones in boxes in the museum so they can be a research asset. And although there is a monument in Portsmouth Cathedral to the loss of the people in the Mary Rose, there's hardly any bones under that, they're in boxes at the Mary Rose Trust. And this is where they ought to be, I think, in boxes, not buried.

TB: Do you?

PM: It's a bit like Richard IIIs remains. Before he was reinterred in Leicester Cathedral he was well and truly studied. I wouldn't be surprised… Well, no, I won't say any more. But Richard III is an example of this. It is a real…

TB: (01:05:44) But ethically, isn't there something to be said that the individual that died clearly, their likely worldview would have probably wanted either a burial or buried at sea, kind of expectation. So, is there… I know they don't have rights, but should there be some consideration of the worldview of the actual individual?

PM: Yes, so, it's better to remain in ignorance as to the identity of the people.

TB: (01:06:18) And also, you said something about these are marine memorials or graves, aren't they. Not every wreck, but most wrecks, they have victims so that does make the whole thing much more complex, I suppose, doesn't it?

PM: It does, yes.

TB: Especially for more recent ones because then you have living relatives and yes.

PM: So, what do we do about museums that have human remains from burials… prehistoric, there are lots of museums with bronze-age skeletons in them.

TB: Yes. In Washington DC, I did a project on this and they've got some quite tough burial acts now, but Native American remains were completely unprotected until the 1980s. Before that they had this strange situation where if it was a black or a white grave then they would be reinterred in a [unclear 01:07:08] or whatever, but if it was a Native American grave, they would be taken to a museum and it was a weird racial issue which was down to lack of clarity of legislation. Yes, so, The Smithsonian have got thirty thousand individuals in their collections, some of which go back to the 1920s and some of them are fairly recent. So, yes, I think it's… I don't know, it's a very big area.

PM: It is a big area and one that has to be addressed and if the law isn't clear because it hasn't addressed that then… I've been up for getting it changed because it needs to really. So, whether the museum is… the museum has not been paramount in doing this, it is simply to save and to tell the story. I wouldn't have done it otherwise, I would have changed the law otherwise without a museum.

TB: (01:08:26) Yes, sure. So, as a result of your campaigns and efforts, laws have been established or changed?

PM: Well, me and a few others, yes. I haven't done it on my own but it's… We've now got too many laws there's the Protection of Military Remains Act, there's the Protection of Wrecks Act, there is the Ancient Monuments Act, there's the Merchant Shipping Act, which is a salvage. You can't do anything on the sea floor without getting another licence from another government body. It's too many and they're not interconnected, they each do their own thing and it would be much better if we had one department, like the Department of Culture, Media & Sport which deals with all these issues.

TB: (01:09:25) Yes, I see. So, there's more work to do then, maybe knitting those laws together?

PM: Well, I'm seventy-nine coming up, so, I think other people will picking up the baton and taking it on.

TB: Yes, sure. That's lovely, thank you so much. I think we've covered everything. Is there anything that you would like to put on the recording that we haven't…?

PM: No.

TB: Okay, great.

PM: No, this is your thing.

TB: Okay, brilliant.

Audio ends: 01:10:01