

## Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Alyson Tippings

Role: Destination Management Officer, Blaenau Gwent Council

Museum: Tŷ Ebbw Fach Heritage Centre

Location of interview: Tŷ Ebbw Fach Heritage Centre, in display area

Date: 6/3/19

Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

---

Material from the interviews can be downloaded and re-used under the terms set by Creative Commons (CC-BY-4.0). This allows all users to quote from, distribute, remix, and build upon the research, so long as it is attributed.

We recommend that you use the following information when citing the interviews:

Name of interviewee, (year of interview), interviewed by Toby Butler, Mapping Museums project, Available at [www.mappingmuseums.org/interviews](http://www.mappingmuseums.org/interviews) Accessed (date)

We would like to know how our research is being used so please use the [Get in Touch](#) link on the Mapping Museums website to tell us about your work.

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

---

*For readability the transcript has been made using 'intelligent' transcription (removing ums, ers etc). The interviewee has reviewed this transcript and minor amendments have been made for clarity.*

- TB:** First of all if you could just start please by if you don't mind giving me your name, your date of birth and your job title at the moment.
- AT** Okay, I am Alyson Tippings, I was born XX-XXX 1962 and I work for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as the Destination Management Officer which is better known as the Tourism Office probably.
- TB:** Right, okay that's lovely. And how long have you been working for the council in that role?
- AT** Well, I have been working for the council for about the last 30 years but in this role for the last I don't know, 15years.
- TB:** Okay, wow right, well that's fantastic because I was looking kind of at the museums that were set up in your area in local history. And there's a couple that were set up in the 1970s and a whole load that were set up in the 2000s. I mean it's you know kind of seven or eight or whatever, this is for the wider area not just your patch but still.
- AT** Not just Blaenau Gwent.
- TB:** What's wonderful is that you have professionally been involved over that period in the 2000s which is really interesting to us because that does seem to be a real boom time. So, we will come back to that. Let's just start off with this amazing place here and so, maybe perhaps you could just first of all explain what it is and then we will move onto perhaps you could tell me the story of how it came about.
- AT** Okay, Toby so, here we are in Six Bells which is a small mining village in the town of Abertillery. And some time ago the Welsh Government wanted to do something for the most deprived communities in Wales, so they selected the lowest 100 wards based on the value of deprivation and need in the area and Six Bells was one of those in that 100. So, the local Six Bells Community First group also set up a Six Bells Regeneration group which it aimed at regenerating the community. So, it was a mixture of physical regeneration and some more passive community capacity building.
- TB:** And sorry, when was this, this was the early 2000s or?
- AT** Yes.2001
- TB:** Okay, yes.
- AT** And previously in my work in the Landscape Department of Blaenau Gwent Council there was a local councillor, two councillors in fact from this neck of the woods who were both miners and they said there's no commemoration for the Six Bells mining disaster. And an artist was commissioned to make a

memorial to those people and it was done in conjunction with the people. However, they felt there was no ownership of it and this was highlighted by the work that the Community First group here in Six Bells did. So, I worked with them to find some funding for a new memorial.

[0:04:06]

**TB:** **Just stop there because that's interesting that they felt there wasn't ownership over that first memorial. So, just tell me about why was that, was it someone that was parachuted in and did it or?**

AT I really don't know because the artist worked with the local history museum in Abertillery, he worked with local miners. He drew sketches of local miners and their faces were etched on the actual war memorial, sorry the mining memorial. But I don't know why the community didn't have ownership of it, perhaps because they weren't involved in the fundraising it was something that you know we secured the funds for, the local authority and placed here.

**TB:** **I see, yes.**

AT However, so when this started I was working with the Heads of the Valleys Arts Project that were looking at public art throughout the Valleys. And the money that Blaenau Gwent share of this money I recommended we spent it on the Six Bells mining memorial, and it sort of snowballed. The guys here in Six Bells, the Community First people were really engaged at a much deeper level with the community and I felt it was the right thing to do. The building we are in today was a pub, but the pub had closed down and the refurbishment of this building was part of the Six Bells regeneration. So, they have this heritage room, they have a café, they have office space and meetings and business space on the upper floors. And this all came about alongside the commissioning of the actual memorial.

**TB:** **Well, that's fascinating so that was absolutely bound into that kind of whole funding push was the conversion of this building as well?**

AT Yes.

**TB:** **Yes, okay.**

AT Yes, and I think a lot of community tourism is very much done on a wing and a prayer, but I think this was, it has been done to such a high quality that it's proven to be a really important part of the story of the Valleys. A number of artists came forward for Guardian, one of them was Valerie Gantz she is a female artist who actually went down Six Bells pit and did lots of artwork underground. And her artwork can be found here in this building and in the National Museum and Galleries of Wales. Valerie was then very, she did a smaller memorial and then one artist came along and said you know he felt

that the commission was too small, and we needed something a lot larger. And we decided to go with this artist called Sebastian Boysen and we have got this huge 20m memorial now, just on the actual site of the pit head. And I think the fact that it's on the actual site of the pit head, not on an easier to get to location that's visible off the main roads, is key to the whole thing. The first memorial we did was just you know put in the space some distance from the pit, whereas this one is actually on the site of the shaft of the pit. And I think that is the single most important thing to the miners and to the community. So, Guardian was commissioned and after lots of visits back and forth to the artist's studio in West Wales the sculpture came here. And I think there's 20,000 different pieces of steel were all welded together to make this beautiful sculpture that we have today. And it was unveiled and dedicated by the Archbishop of the UK who was (previously) the Archbishop of Wales Dr Rowan Williams. So, he came here and dedicated it on the 2 June, in 2010. And we had a wonderful solemn occasion to do the dedication and then afterwards a celebration which in subsequent years we have always called the Pit Party. So, that takes place in September (should be June) each year. And we have, you know it's a time for the community to get together and commemorate their own history and never forget what happened here. The day starts with a service in the local chapel that overlooks this building and they go on to the celebrations. So, there's always this joint occasion of commemoration and celebration.

[0:09:24]

**TB:** I see, okay lovely. Well, there's quite a lot to kind of unpick there but the, one of the interesting things I suppose about this museum and it's, it's called a museum isn't it in some places here which is great,

**AT** Yes, yes.

**TB:** And I can see it has got objects and it certainly is, is that clearly it is very tied up with two major themes. One is memorialisation of a terrible disaster and the other one is it's tied into a public art, a big public art project which is perhaps a little bit unusual.

**AT** Yes.

**TB:** So, let's just unpick the latter looking at the public art focus. So, there was the original memorial, so it seems to me that the idea really arose from a you know [phone rings]. Sure, no it's fine don't worry take it if you like, there's no problem, I can pause this.

**AT** No, I can just switch it off.

**TB:** Alright, no worries.

AT It's wonderful isn't it?

**TB: [Laughing] it's lovely, do take it if you would like.**

AT Just take it quickly.

**TB: Yes, no problem. Great, yes so, I suppose I was just wondering whether there was any individual or group who really pushed this forward? I mean was there, could you say there was a founder or a main kind of member of the community that really went for this?**

AT Six Bells Community First is a partnership that was made up of officers that were responsible and were on the guidance of local communities. There was a small group of the local community who they reported back to and out of that group they set up Six Bells Regeneration. So, it was very much a strong community focus driving this work.

**TB: Right.**

AT And so, the officers did the important bits, then it was a partnership with the local authority. A sculpture this big needs some serious structural engineering so the Blaenau Gwent council engineers you know put that element there. The regeneration team also helped secure the additional funding that was required and myself as Tourism Officer found the public art funding into it. So, it was very much a marriage of the community, of officers of the Welsh Government, local authority officers and people who had a strong passion for this commemorative statue to be built.

**TB: Yes, I see what you mean and also you mentioned that there was an opportunity there in terms of funding. There was a fund for public art and that this community could benefit from that in that way, yes.**

AT Yes, we had a bit of a battle with - there was a battle between the Arts Officer who wanted a smaller statue and lots of little workshops with the community. There was a battle with planning who wanted a smaller statue that wasn't so imposing on the environment, but I felt really, really strongly and the community felt that this what we have now is what we wanted and that's what should be built. So, there was, you know there were lots of people who tried to stop us, there were people from the arts world that might have, that would have preferred something less tangible than we had. But I think because of the community selecting it it's important it's something the community wants.

**[0:13:20]**

**TB: So, you were very bound up in those debates.**

AT Yes, yes.

**TB: So your role - sounds like you had a number of roles?**

AT We had a Six Bells Regeneration were the team that drove the whole thing forward but there were a number of us. I was involved because I helped the secure the funding, my background is in arts, so there were a couple of people in the community. Some of the people who were involved were very keen engineering and industrial history backgrounds. So, it was just a small group of people who were passionate about delivering this. I think there was Mair Sheen from Communities First, Alan and a couple of others from the regeneration board and Alan was the Chairman. And I think he changed Chairman sometime during it, so he had a little swap over there and then myself from the council were the core team that delivered it.

**TB: So, who was Alan, what was his role?**

AT Alan was the Chair of the Six Bells Regeneration.

**TB: Right, I have got you okay, what was his second name?**

AT Alan Thomas.

**[0:14:42]**

**TB: Thomas, right brilliant. Okay, let's just tell me a little, first of all this is a basic question but what was the overall budget for the project?**

AT The initial budget was £75,000.

**TB: Yes.**

AT It went up to £200,000 and probably a little bit more with infrastructure works that we had to do around it.

**TB: Yes.**

AT And then afterwards we had interpretation works. Another key feature of it is that the Ebbw Fach trail which is a walking and cycling trail that goes the whole length of the Valley goes through the site. So, part of the interpretation here in the heritage room links to that. But I think when you are cycling you always need to stop somewhere along the route and inevitably Guardian is the place now here everybody makes their halfway stop.

**TB: Oh, I see lovely. So, did the trail exist before the Guardian or did the trail come about after the Guardian?**

AT Side by side.

**TB: Ah, so was that part of the whole of that project in fact to establish that trail?**

AT No, it was a separate project that was going on and the Ebbw Fach Trail ties in 13 different community groups along the Valley length. Some of them look after a section of the river, some look after some woodland, some do some informal parks. So, we have got lots of different environmental groups down the Valley, so they all adopted a section of the route. And this section here was adopted by the Six Bels Regeneration.

**TB: I see, okay lovely. So, that was very fortunate that something wonderful to put on the route in that way.**

AT Yes.

**TB: Okay, so it's £200,000, was that for the statue itself and the conversion of this building?**

AT And the plinth, no and the plinth yes that's just that artwork. This building was converted under different funding and then we had some interpretation works to do with this heritage room.

**TB: Okay, so what was the budget for this room do you know roughly, don't worry if you can't.**

AT I cannot remember the exact, it wasn't a huge budget it was very small, but it was partly linked in with the Ebbw Fach Trail as well because it does some interpretation for the trail and there is some interpretation for the Six Bells.

**TB: Yes, would you say that most of the funding came from well, was it from local council funds or?**

AT Public sector mainly, yes.

**TB: Okay, so that might be Welsh Government or?**

AT Welsh Government funding, there was some from Community First, there was some from at that time we had a Heads of the Valleys project which straddled the top ends of the South Wales Valleys. It stretched from Aberdare a bit further across, Rhondda Valley to the next valley over to Blaenavon, so it was just. You often find the southern end of the Valleys that are closer to the cities suffer less deprivation than northern ends of the valleys where all the coal mines were, where all the steelworks were. And further away from Cardiff were worst hit by the industrial decline. So, the Welsh government set up a sort of project covering those areas and they looked at regeneration, community development and tourism they were the three keys. So, I was

involved in the tourism element of that and then I the regeneration element there was a public arts sector. So, we looked at different themes for along the Heads of the Valleys and one of them was memories and memorials. And Guardian led on that theme.

**TB:** I see, right well that's lovely so you had some themes for the trail as it were that you run though

**AT** Yes, for the Heads of the Valley public art scheme.

**TB:** Oh, sorry for the art scheme.

**AT** We looked at towers and various things, so there were themes and then we put things forward.

**[0:18:47]**

**TB:** Okay, so why memory and memorialisation then, that's an interesting choice. It could have been you know scientific, or something quite different, but just tell me about that.

**AT** I do think, I think public art can split opinion, some people love it, some people hate it. And there's often in areas of high unemployment and deprivation they look at your hundreds of thousands spent on public art as a waste when there's holes in the roads or you know a leaky roof on the school or whatever. So, there's always this why did you spend all that money on that? And so, I think if you, if there's a purpose for that public art so it's not just a random piece of art dropped into it. And the other thing we felt strongly about was that public art wasn't sort of community art where you get the community together to make something or to design something. We felt it important to use artists to come up with a design solution that is selected by the community.

**TB:** So, when you had these kind of pictures and ideas for it did the community get a chance to vote or I don't know, but or at least to decide?

**AT** Yes, they got to, well we had a larger group to decide on the actual artist and then once the artist was selected, as the project develop. Because it did develop quite significantly different to what it started out to be as what it finished. Initially we looked at the metalwork being more like a cage and the cage was going to have the names of the miners not engraved on it, cut out of it sort of laser cut out of it. But physically it was going to be really difficult because of the figurative stance and when the artist tried, did some mock ups of it, it didn't work. It was going to be copper covered, so it would have this sort of reddish hue and it just didn't work. So, then we came up with this other design solution, so we were the little steering group were responsible for feeding that back to the community and taking the community's ideas back to

the artist. So, there were lots of consultations with the community on that.

**TB:** I see, yes, it's almost like sort of Nelson's Column isn't it, it's that kind of big.

AT It's really big yes.

**TB:** And it's a figure on a plinth, you know it's kind of quite a statement there.

AT Yes.

**TB:** But by the sounds of it that's what the people were keen to have something that substantial to mark the spot.

AT Yes, and the important bit if it, it was the names of the people and it isn't a little plaque at the bottom with the name son it's a wide, wide band with all the names written around there. So, the name of each of the people who lost the lives is important, there's brothers on there, there's fathers and sons on there, there's a set of twins on there. And we have got not just the miner's name but often their nickname because there were so many David Jones or David Williams in the pit you know. We had all these different nicknames for the different people and we put their ages on there. Because if you look there's quite a lot of really young people who lost their lives in it. So, by including that in the artwork it sorts of tells the story all itself, all by itself.

[0:22:54]

**TB:** Yes, lowly yes. And when the statue opened was this place kind of open at the same moment or is it?

AT The building was open, but the interpretation wasn't complete then, it was just the building was open.

**TB:** I see, so the statue opened in 2010 as it were in.

AT Yes, and this opened the following year.

0:23:13]

**TB:** 2011, okay lovely. So, let's just talk about this design. Now, I can see clearly, it's been very professionally designed and there's some really lovely features here. We have got this amazing kind of array of lockers which have got objects in, there's a brilliant chair where you press buttons and people speak to your kind of out of the chair. Plus, there's interactives and various sorts of mining objects and so on so it's a great, great mix. But let's just start off with the, with how this came about. So, yes did you have a team working on it or how did it work?

AT Well, it's a very important building in the village, Six Bells is a very small community. It's quite split because of the road that goes through it and it hasn't really got a village centre. The village, the commercial village centre is on the one side of the valley and the park. This other side of the valley has the church, the chapel, the pub so it's quite - the balance isn't all in the middle of the community. But this bottom of the valley where we are now, being where the coal mine was, that's the importance of this as a location. The pub had been closed and was, it wasn't quite derelict, but it was beyond use so it needed a great deal of work. And when you do a lot of work on a building you either have to look at you know at end use that's going to be viable. So, the upper stories were turned into offices, they were first occupied by Six Bells Community First and then Six Bells Regeneration are still based here. Community First project came to an end so they, because of the reduction in funding they joined the Six Bells Communities First and the Llanhilleth Communities First the Cwmtyleri one and the Abertillery one all those four consolidated in larger offices in Llanhilleth. So, it left upstairs empty so upstairs we now have Six Bells Regeneration and office space to rent out and a meeting room that is used by lots of local clubs and organisations. Downstairs we have a café, a little bistro and a café, there's lots of traditional valley food, homecooked foods and can cater for large parties or smaller family gatherings or just drop in visitors.

**TB: That seems to be doing pretty well I mean you know it's we are seven, eight years on which is great.**

AT Yes, so that's ticking along nicely. In here we have the heritage room that has to tell a number of stories. First of all, the Ebbw Fach Trail so this was a key site on the length of the Ebbw Fach Trail, it's the only area on the trail that has catering. So, it's a popular spot for you know topping up on your tea and coffee and food using the facilities that we have here. So, the Ebbw Fach Trail is told here.

**[0:27:00]**

**TB: I notice there's some dog biscuits and a bowl and some towels even in the corridor, so is that about that so someone walking with their dog can dry off there?**

AT [Laughing] yes dry off their paws and come in here [laughing].

**TB: I have never seen that's, its brilliant, it's absolutely brilliant yes.**

AT And at the back we have got a little garden area, so in the summer time that's really popular. The other thing it tells is the story of the making of Guardian and we have lots of the maquettes that the artist made. And we have got memorabilia of Guardian that can be purchased by visitors, so there's a little

cabinet that tells us all about that. And then the rest of the museum tells us about the Six Bells itself, what it was like living here, growing up here, working here. And I think above all it tells you a really accurate story of the price of coal. Six Bells wasn't the biggest mining disaster, it was the biggest disaster in the nationalised coal field, so, in the NCB this was the biggest disaster in their lifetime. But it tells you what every little village was like you know, the colliery was the heartbeat of that village and its why the village was here. Six Bells comes from the ring from the drams coming up from the level that was just higher up the mountain.

**TB:** **Oh.**

AT So, you know that's what it got its name from and Six Bells wouldn't be here without the pit. And now the pit is gone all that's left to tell the story is the memorial and this little heritage room.

**TB:** **Yes, I see what you mean.**

AT And it's laid out like somebody's front room.

**[0:28:44]**

**TB:** **Yes, there's... so tell me about that.**

AT The photographs on the wall there's some traditional ones and there's some electronic ones that change so we could put all our photographs in one place quite easily. We have got the chair with the buttons that you can sit in and listen to recordings of people's life here in Six Bells. The sideboard, the cupboards and the drawers open and they are full of artefacts from the period of the mining disaster. And then we have the actual other end of the room tells of the disaster, I think the newsprint on fabric that you can actually read the newspaper is and how they reported the disaster is quite emotional. And then we have the actual drawings of all the seams, because in a valley there would be lots of different shafts and underground they all met up. So, you could go to work down one shaft but the coal that you dig could come out from a different shaft further up the valley. So, you know the drawings we have on the wall sort of tell that story.

**[0:30:07]**

**TB:** **I see, I see. Yes, I mean I suppose perhaps surprising given that the monument is about the disaster is that actually probably I don't know three quarters of this room is not about the disaster, it's about different aspects of the community and the mining, so that's an interesting decision that you made there. So, it was you didn't want it simply to be a memorial to that moment, but you wanted to interpret something a bit wider by the sounds of**

it.

AT Yes, it's not and I think the fact that we use lockers to tell the story and to display artefacts is a really, it's a great design solution to telling the story. It's lovely to see you know the actual artefacts are not those sort of rare exhibits you would find in other museums, but they are the ones that tell the story of Six Bells. And they are all donated by miners who were, who worked here in Six Bells.

[0:31:04]

**TB: Well, I was going to say where do all the objects come from? So, when it was a, when you made it clear that this room was going to exist did people then offer things or did you appeal for them or?**

AT Yes, there were some donations from former miners, there was some donations that may have been duplicates in other museums. And there were one or two artefacts that we needed to tell the story that we purchased to go in there, but mainly donated by local people.

**TB: And what about the locker itself, was that just kind of, did you have to source it from?**

AT We, yes, it's a second hand one as you can see.

**TB: Yes, sure.**

AT So, it's had its own life story, but we got one in good condition, you know relatively good condition. But I think it's important not to have any, to have something authentic.

**TB: Yes, yes sure.**

AT And its lovely to handle it you know it's not a "do not touch" museum, it's very much come in, sit in the chairs, open the drawers you know press the buttons. It's one of those interactive and I think you get lost in the story, here don't you?

[0:32:19]

**TB: Absolutely, yes, it's lovely. So, was there kind of much just in terms of the interpretation and some of those decision that were made about the design and everything. Was this a fairly kind of professional activity or was there sort of a community committee involved or anything like that?**

AT We had professional designers, we engaged professional designers for this who worked with us to lay it out and the content then a lot of the content was

written in conjunction with past miners.

**TB:** Ah, right okay.

AT So, we had a huge archive and it was distilled into what we have here today. And I think interpretation is really well written, isn't it. I find sometimes in museums its very scientific, whereas this is more interpretation than a standard museum.

**TB:** Right, do you mean it's more positioned or?

AT You know yes, we haven't got that sort of hierarchy of labelling every exhibit, we just use the exhibits to tell the story.

**TB:** I see what you mean so it's not too text heavy in that respect no.

AT No, and from tourism background I think sometimes if you have, if you are faced with a huge panel that's all text you get fed up and you never get to the end of it. Whereas this is once you start reading you know you want to finish it don't you, you want to get to the end. You don't read the first line and walk away, you read every bit of it which is important.

[0:34:06]

**TB:** I see yes. Well, I don't suppose you can record numbers here can you I don't know? But to the room or the monument, but do you have a sense of what your visitor numbers are?

AT Yes, visitor numbers are quite large, we have got sensors on the footpath outside.

**TB:** Ah, right.

AT Up to Guardian so it's in tens of thousands every year.

**TB:** Wow, okay.

AT So, that's really, really popular. Some of those visitors visit daily, some of those visitors will only visit once, some of them are local to Wales to our area. We have international visitors quite often come here, we have visitors who come for the industrial side of the attraction, we have people who come to pay respects. We have others that come for the artwork. When it went up first of all somebody called it the Angel of the Valleys and instantly we had loads of people from the Northeast coming down to take a look at this, you know at this version of their Angel of the North type of thing. So that was nice. We get lots of Welsh groups who are, you know you get Welsh societies all over the UK, so we get visitors Welsh societies will come here. They might come back to Wales every so many years and they will all want to see what's new in the

area. So, yes, we get lots of different people coming.

**TB:** **That's interesting so these are Welsh, these are societies outside of Wales these are?**

AT Yes.

**TB:** **Right, okay I have got you.**

AT You know you have got the London Welsh and you have got, we get them from Kent and yes, all over, wherever they go you know. Wherever they live if there's enough Welsh people in the area they congregate into a Welsh society, so they come here to visit.

**[0:36:08]**

**TB:** **I mean would you say then I mean obviously mining isn't exclusively Welsh in the UK but still, does it have a kind of symbolic role then, in terms of, you know, feelings of Welshness [laughing]?**

AT [Pause] Do you know, it's St David's Day just last week and every St David's Day all the school children in primary school dress up for St David's Day. And you get rows and rows of Welsh ladies in traditional Welsh costume. You get loads of lads and girls in rugby jerseys, red rugby jerseys, red football jerseys. And you always get a couple of miners in that line up.

**TB:** **Really, right.**

AT Always get a couple of kids with you know black on their noses and a pit helmet and the lamp. I can't think of any other industry where that is reflected in a nation like coalmining, probably anywhere else in any other country in the UK you wouldn't get it.

**[0:37:27]**

**TB:** **Yes, absolutely. And also, I wonder whether not just that it was a massive industry clearly you know in terms of Welsh history, but also there's that kind of idea of resilience isn't there and the strikes in the 80s and all that kind of thing. I wonder whether that's also a part of it, so its to do with character as well as economics, I don't know.**

AT I think Aneurin Bevan when he was a miner and he talked about mining life and he says there's no other industry where you give up your life and go in and descend into complete darkness for ten hours a day. You know, its different from any other industry or any other occupation in the UK. It is, and I think the danger especially in the Welsh mines that had high levels of the toxic gases that caused the explosions, it was a really dangerous industry to be involved in.

Not just here in Wales across you know Yorkshire and other areas of the UK. So, there's a camaraderie and a trust that grows out of that.

**TB:** I see, yes.

AT You literally you know your life is in your workmate's hands, so if your workmate is slapdash or you know doesn't adhere to the safety rules and realises they are putting your life and all your friends lives at risk. So, I suppose it's something akin to you know armed forces or whatever where they have to depend on their comrades, their colleagues for their life. They have to trust them, and that element of camaraderie goes across their whole and goes through the whole community then.

**TB:** Right, I see yes so it does, it literally binds the community together.

AT Yes, sadly when Six Bells closed after the miners' strike I had a colleague who worked for the Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales. And his first job when he said when he was employed by them all these mines were closing and there was a dictat from the government of the day that said that we have got to just wipe the pits out, you know.

**TB:** Wow.

AT So, they literally they looked at all the beautiful buildings and I suppose coming here today you come up the valley and you pass the...

**TB:** Yes, the ruin, what was that?

AT Down there, that was Navigation Colliery, beautiful red and yellow brick building, a series of buildings. Six Bells was one of the prettiest, some weren't pretty, but some were really built well. They were all different companies, we call this Parc Arael Griffin because Arael Griffin was the name of the colliery that was in Six Bells. And there were lots of private collieries before the nationalisation of the coal industry. So, they had a quick look through all of the pits that were being closed and were going to be bulldozed and he was sent here. So, he came down here, he had a little Mini at the time and he had to try and rescue the plans, the any old ledgers or any books that were important, any photographs. And they literally knocked all the buildings down and the furniture and bulldozed them down the shaft and capped the shaft of. Because the government didn't want any legacy of the industry as a reminder in these communities.

**TB:** Wow.

AT So, it was, not only did this community here and lots of communities across the country lose their employment and their livelihoods. The knock-on effect in the chapel and the shop and the pub also impacted on it. But that thing that

was a large slice of the community also got destroyed and bulldozed. And you get these not on this site but on a lot of sites you get a pair of pit wheels erected as the sort of gravestone to the industry. But the actual buildings that may have been reused that could have been turned into some light industry or something else all of those were just destroyed. So, it was a serious act of vandalism to destroy the heritage of the village as well.

**TB:** **That's astonishing because I was just going to compare to say the mills in Yorkshire you know some of which are still ruined but many have been repurposed to art galleries and so on.**

**AT** Yes.

**TB:** **So, they literally buried that history down the coal, down the shafts.**

**AT** Bulldozed it down the shaft.

**TB:** **Wow.**

**AT** So, I am sure if you uncap that shaft and went down there you would find old dressed stone, you would find the manager's leather chair, you know and all those things. Now and again people salvage them, you know they took them out of there I don't know where they took them to. If you go to Big Pit there's one in Big Pit from one colliery, lovely big leather table in the meeting room there. But they really did rip the heart out of these little villages.

**[0:43:14]**

**TB:** **Astonishing. And when did this close, do you know the year off hand the actual Six Bells?**

**AT** No, I don't know.

**TB:** **Don't worry, it would have been the late 80s would it or mid to late 80s?**

**AT** I don't know exactly, but yes but it was yes.

**[0:43:30]**

**TB:** **Okay, wow that's just amazing. So, just going back to visitor numbers so it sounds like its in the tens of thousands for the monument itself.**

**AT** Yes.

**TB:** **Do you know how many come here or?**

**AT** We don't have visitor numbers in here but it's a busy little place. And sadly, now we haven't got Communities First upstairs to do the guided tours but if

people book in advance we do arrange guided tours for them. But the café takes care of this so if anyone wants to buy anything and Six Bells Regeneration are not upstairs and the café looks after it say on weekends etc.

**TB:** Okay, sure.

AT But it's all, the Six Bells Regeneration is all run by volunteers.

**TB:** Oh really, right.

AT So, they give up a day or two of their week to sit upstairs and staff the offices and try to balance the books.

**TB:** Wow, so the governance of this place is that bound up with that?

AT Six Bells Regeneration yes.

**TB:** Oh, okay and is that a charity technically or?

AT It is, yes.

**TB:** Okay, so they have trustees and so on.

AT Yes.

**TB:** Right, so this museum is, but clearly, it's just one small part isn't it of a lot of other things they are doing?

AT Yes.

**TB:** Okay, but still it's independent.

AT Yeas, this is the magnet, this is what gets people in and then the visitors frequent the café to help that. But also, you know because of the good reputation of the café, people it has its regulars that just go there. Lots of clubs and societies meet here like the Rotary for instance who meet upstairs once a week and so that keeps everything ticking over here. The meeting facilities are really, really good I would hire them for meetings, the Six Bells Regenerating will hold events here. They do in conjunction with the chapel opposite they do a nativity every December with real animals in the nativity.

**TB:** Wow [laughing].

AT So, its and then they come back here then for the refreshments afterwards and other things. A craft club meets here, and we can see some items on sale, its got very much a St David's theme going on at present with Welsh ladies and daffodils and dragons. But it's you know it's still is that heartbeat in the community.

[0:46:30]

**TB:** Well, it's just astonishing how an ex-pub can have that community kind of focus and it's clearly been a success. And so, would you say I suppose public art then was that really the driver of that whole thing? I mean do you think would this have happened without the public art, this building?

**AT** The interpretation? I don't think so.

**TB:** OK.

**AT** Community tourism is something that really interests me and being a tourism officer here we haven't got very few paid attractions, mainly everything is free. Lots of them especially the museums are all filled with people who are so knowledgeable, and you probably get as much from having a chat with one of the volunteers as you do from looking in the various displays. So, the value of the community is unquestionable but what we have here is something that goes that one step further. We have really top-notch quality interpretation, we have a really good café, we have got that majestic memorial down there. And I have taken hundreds and hundreds of people to that memorial and it doesn't matter if it's you know a coach load of Italian school children or visitors from the twin town in France or cruise ship people or whoever you bring there. As you walk up to it the sort of transparency you get from a distance disappears and when you get to the foot of it and look up and you see this magnificent miner looking down at you and across the valley and over the community here. And it's called Guardian because he is sort of saying you know I wouldn't let this happen to you again, he is sort of - we have got a word in Wales called 'cwtych' I don't know if you have come across it?

**TB:** No.

**AT** But it's like a hug, like a cuddle but it means so much more. And he is sort of giving this community a cwtych saying you know, I will take care of you. And when you walk up there it still gets me and you can see boisterous teenagers you know making their way up there. And when they get there there's this peace and this silence and respect and all when you come to it. Which I think it's more than public art its something a lot, lot deeper.

[0:48:56]

**TB:** That's lovely, thank you its such a wonderful description its really lovely. Let me just, let's turn to some more general questions then if you are okay for time.

**AT** Yes.

**TB:** Okay, brilliant. Okay, right so the first one is yes, just as I mentioned before there's this cluster of museum formation around the 2000s. And it may be that some of these in fact were earlier museums which maybe were kind of reinvented themselves or something but anyway. It does seem interesting, there were a couple in the 70s now the 70s ones I have struggled to find founders that are alive but most of the ones I am going to be talking to were in the 2000s. I was just wondering whether you had any thought as to why local history museums have taken off in those periods as opposed to others?

**AT** [Pause] I think the Tredegar one is probably a little bit older, they had a historic Tredegar Historical Society and there were a few members from that who started up the museum there. And that museum when they built the library there was the room there for the museum. So, I imagine that was a purpose-built room there for them. Lots of the others I recall have moved location several times like the one in Abertillery was also in a library, but they found a bigger and better location for it just below in an old market hall underneath the theatre. So, they have a whole floor there and they have been able to rapidly expand on their artefacts there. The one in Blaina was a tiny little room which was not much more than a corridor a bit like a waiting room at a train station you know with chairs each side and cabinets down the middle. And they have moved into the local institute and have got a lovely light, airy room and they have been able to expand. So, I guess the community buildings looking for something to fill larger rooms has enabled the growth of these smaller museums. Interestingly the largest town in our area is Ebbw Vale and Ebbw Vale didn't have a historical society or a museum until the steelworks closed. And then they have the steelworks archive and that's a lot, it's like an archive rather than a museum although there are artefacts there on display. It's got a different atmosphere and it's like a specialist museum but absolutely wonderful when you get steelworkers in their 80s and 90s visiting it. And then within two minutes they can pluck out their card when they were an apprentice and they can tell them how many marks they had in their exams and you know.

**TB:** [Laughing].

**AT** Or what their timekeeping was like or things like that. And you can see these people you know light up because they are a part of that. It's all of a recent history then.

**TB:** Yes, I see.

**AT** but they all have their different character largely because of the people who are there. But really lovely to see and I know on a Tredegar on a Saturday there's a group of ladies do the Saturday shift. And it's full of little kids running around and they are pointing out things to children. And it's lovely to see these

museums being appreciated by younger generations. So, I think it just, it was and another thing that was important was the local authority appointing a heritage officer. So, they had someone to guide them through the you know when you become a museum.

**TB:** Yes, the accreditation yes.

**AT** The accreditation, so you had someone to guide them through that. There weren't many accredited museums but a few years ago we had some funding to. And we had a number of people employed who were able to write some education packs for the museum to encourage the schools access to them and also to help with accreditation. And to set up numbering systems and all the technical sides that were way beyond me. But there was someone on hand to do that and now I think they are all accredited in Blaenau Gwent.

**TB:** Oh, that's really interesting so I don't suppose you know what year the heritage officer might have been recruited just roughly? Would that have been in the 2000s or might that have been?

**AT** Yes, yes Frank used to be the tourism officer and he went away to work in a museum. And he came back just about the same time as I stopped being a country park manager and moved into tourism. So, we both came together at the same time.

**TB:** Oh right, that sort of year so he came back as a heritage officer?

**AT** Yes.

**TB:** Right.

**AT** Well we were both, long story in Blaenau Gwent we had a tourism officer appointed and then along the way there was a tourism officer appointed who was more heritage than tourism. And we had a, tourism officer went into a heritage officer. And then it was realised we didn't have a tourism officer, so we ended up with both of us.

**TB:** Oh, okay right so you have now got two okay and Frank came back. So, what year did Frank come back roughly or did you, when you finished your?

**AT** I am trying to think about probably end of the late 1990s.

**TB:** Okay, well that is interesting because it might be yes, we will find our I guess but sometimes museums land on the map when they get accredited and suddenly they turn up in things. So, that might have been a reason why suddenly they were noted.

**AT** Yes, the heritage officer was able to do that side of it.

**TB:** And that accreditation, that push to get everyone accredited when did that happen roughly?

AT That would have been about six years ago.

**TB:** Right, okay.

AT Yes, we had access to heritage project and we developed handling and collections that we could take out to schools and residential homes and things like that.

[0:55:39]

**TB:** Yes, so what was the idea behind that push to accredit because many museums don't bother but? Do the council feel that?

AT It was part of the project, Frank would tell you more but access to heritage, but the project was funded I think by heritage lottery.

**TB:** Ah, right.

AT And part of it was to have these officers to help the museums with their collections, management of their collections.

[0:56:10]

**TB:** Right, I see sure, sure, great. Now again this might not be a question for you but how have local history museums been supported by the local government? I am just thinking here in terms, it might be in terms of you know funding but just in terms of making them resilient or training?

AT it's usually the four walls and the roof over their head.

**TB:** Right, okay so most of them are in council owned buildings, yes.

AT Buildings yes, all of them up until recently they were all in council owned buildings. However, there was a leisure trust formed that were an arm's length trust that took on our sports centres, our libraries, our parks, heritage buildings.

**TB:** Oh.

AT And lots of the buildings were, went to that trust. So, Tredegar is based in a library so that went to the trust, Blaina is based in an institute that went with the trust but now is going to be an asset, community assets transfer. So, that will be run by the community. The Ebbw Vale works one is in the General Offices which is owned by the council, Brynmawr one is in Carnegie Buildings that is a council building that they occupy. And the Abertillery one is in the

Metropole that was that went to trust, so.

**TB:** **Wow, okay that's interesting so almost all of them have started at least as council.**

AT Started in a council building.

**TB:** **And they are now, when did the trust come about that kind of shift?**

AT About five years ago.

**TB:** **Right, okay so that's quite a big step I suppose. But are these sorts of trusts that actually the council are the only trustee kind of situation where they kind of own it really?**

AT Yes, the council... they lease the buildings to operate, but the buildings are still owned by the council.

**TB:** **Ah, right okay so the trust leases the building off the council, OK.**

AT Yes.

[0:58:21]

**TB:** **Right and one thing just to go back you said which I think was very interesting was that part of the reason why there might have been a lot of museums perhaps at that time was the space was available. So, in these I presume you have got often quite large town halls and things so was there I don't know. Or this might be connected perhaps you know things closing down and I don't know people moving out I don't know. But was there a kind of excess of space where it could be filled by something, is it too much to make a general point about that?**

AT I think in Abertillery's case the market left the bottom layer of the Metropole centre so there was a space there that the museum moved out of the library into it.

**TB:** **Yes.**

AT The was the same for Blaina there was the Institute. The Brynmawr museum was in the library and the library moved to a new location.

**TB:** **Right, okay.**

AT So, when the library moved out they moved into the Carnegie building.

**TB:** **I see yes oh right so sometimes its all of this moving around.**

AT Yes, so its sometimes it was.

**TB: Old buildings that perhaps aren't ideal.**

AT There was a deliberate, sometimes the move was the museum expansion caused the move to move to new premises. Others there may have been an opportunity of somebody vacating it for them to move in.

[0:59:32]

**TB: Right, I see sure lovely. How successful do you think museums are in terms of tourism and visitors in this area? I mean clearly you have as you said you have got quite a few and they are I imagine mostly run on shoestrings. But are they working in terms of getting people to come to the area?**

AT They are managing quite well, I think there seems to be funding for museums doesn't there? Not so much running costs but if you want to develop your collection, if you want new cabinets there seems to be lots of opportunities to apply for grant aid to support that. And both myself and Frank have been there to help you know write forms, write applications and to enable to purchase the cabinets and that development. So, they, and I think as soon as one museum gets nice, new shiny cabinets the next one says, the next one down the road gets wind of it and they apply and it's a knock-on effect. So, the cabinets I think if you look around now and they are all virtually state of the art new cabinets throughout, which is great. Sometimes the character is diminished but its really good for the visitor. And some are able to, some have café facilities, they are able to eke out a bit of money and do coffee mornings and things like that there. Others are just a room in another building, so they haven't got as many overheads, but they haven't got as much opportunity to raise funds. So, they look to other opportunities through reproduction of photographs and you know writing books, making colanders or whatever there is.

**TB: Yes, I see, yes so, they sort of might get by in that way.**

AT Yes, to get some money in that way, and there's always you can buy things to sell can you at the museum shop, there's always those. But they tick over, I don't think there's one of them out there that's a huge money-making enterprise, but they do tick over. But they are important to the visit you know and today for instance I had a call off a company that does family history research. And they have started doing not just family history research and giving you a piece of paper with your family tree on it. They now visit the places that your family came from and make little films about them and they want to interview people about that area.

**TB: Wow, yes.**

AT And some Irish migrants what would have been like when my family came from Ireland to Tredegar. So, I was able to put them in touch with all the somebody in Tredegar, somebody in Ebbw Vale, somebody in Gwent archives who can speak to the camera. And I negotiated a fee so that all of the museums would get a fee for appearing in somebody's family history film.

**TB: Wow, yes.**

AT So, that you know those little bits help them tick over if somebody is looking for an image and I can say like say if it's the Guardian I am often asked for an image. So, I can apply an image so long as they give a donation back to the community, the trust or the regeneration or whatever.

**TB: I see.**

AT So, those little things keep them ticking on. But it's the importance of supporting them isn't it?

**[1:03:39]**

**TB: So you could ask why to keep these things going? And so, one answer is that it does drive interest and visitors and so on into an area, but the other answer I suppose is the service they provide to their own communities. And I was just wondering whether you have got any thoughts about that and it could be about his place and what it offers, and I think you have covered it a lot really just by saying apart from anything else it's a fantastic meeting space for people to come. It's a very functional space isn't it, but maybe more generally kind of think what do you think the museums that you were involved with what they give the community?**

AT I think they, I think that heritage is important, your own personal heritage. There's a word in Welsh that's etifeddiaeth which is more of a, it means more like inheritance than heritage. Because heritage you think of a country house or something where as inheritance is what belongs to you.

**TB: Right, bit more personal.**

AT And I think that embodies what our local museums are for our community. I would like, sadly there's not enough school children visiting it. I would like to see a younger generation getting more involved, getting you know going along to a museum and helping with the record of artefacts you know or doing something. Taking something out of a cupboard and giving it a clean you know, doing those little things so that they could become part of that group like they are part of a football team or the scouts or St Johns Ambulance or whatever. And I would love to see more young people getting involved in them and museums are mainly open 10:00 – 12:00 and 14:00 – 16:00 so it's difficult

for people to get access. I would love to see them open on a Saturday and Sunday, some are open on Saturday but half of them aren't. The remainder are closed so that's an issue for me as a tourism officer Because visitors come mainly on a weekend. But apart from that I just think they are full of people who are full of knowledge and they love sharing that whether you are local, whether you are from the other end of the world. And I think [laughing] I had somebody from New Zealand contacted me a while back and said I am coming to Blaina on Wednesday in September 2019 you know. And I phoned a museum and they said well, we are shut, and I said yes, but she is coming from New Zealand, yes but we are shut on a Wednesday afternoon.

**TB:** [Laughing].

**AT** So, it doesn't matter from New Zealand or from your local patch, they treat you all the same [laughing].

**TB:** Yes [laughing].

**AT** But now we can arrange for those people to rearrange their visits, they go to the museum in the morning not the afternoon, so they can see something there.

**TB:** Well, it's hard isn't it yes.

**AT** Yes, and sometimes the volunteers they are elderly and sometimes they haven't got enough to open and that would be a terrible shame if we have got them all to this level now. And you see the older people tailing off and we wonder where are the younger people coming into it to carry that on?

**[1:07:29]**

**TB:** Yes, well I was going to ask that kind of how resilient are these museums? You know I don't know if any are imminently kind of going to close down or anything, but I didn't get that impression calling around but still that can happen. Is that a concern, are there issues like well, it sounds like there is at least in terms of trusteeship and new generations coming in.

**AT** Yes, and you have got to rely on, because of the opening hours if you were working full time you can't volunteer, it's difficult for you to be an active member and we fully get that. But you wonder with unemployment is there any opportunity there to engage unemployed people to do something of value so that they can secure a job? You know there could be opportunities like that, there's student placement which are great experience for students to go and work with these museums and help out. Abertillery are really good at that you know taking on a student and using them to some cataloguing and things.

**TB:** Yes.

AT But it does, it is a bit of a concern to me the ages in some groups. But then you do find the people in the museums are all in that sort of 60 – 80 group and by the time the 60-year olds are 80 there's new 60 years old replacing them as they retire and have more free time.

**TB: Right.**

AT They drop in. The only exception maybe the steelworks because their knowledge is so specialist to that industry.

**TB: Yes.**

AT Where are they going to find the people with their knowledge and passion to replace the people who are there? And some of those people are there every single day of the week.

**TB: Wow.**

AT Some people do one day, two days, some are there every day you know.

**TB: Right, crikey I see what you mean yes, that is tricky Because there's no apprentices coming into that industry anymore.**

AT No.

**TB: Yes, that is a real problem isn't it?**

AT I think the others will survive and I think hopefully there will be children of people who worked in the steelworks to come and take over.

**[1:09:43]**

**TB: Yes, yes. Okay, great. Oh, yes, your method a little bit before but I was just thinking in terms of the region and you know. We are doing a few interviews in Wales but probably not as many as we should be. Are there kind of over the last sort of 40 odd years has there been any big funding or policy things which might have affected museums opening?**

AT The biggest impact on our museums was when Welsh government made all museums and galleries free.

**TB: Ah, right.**

AT So, when a visitor came to Wales they would have to pay, you know not a huge amount but a large amount but some amount to go to places like the National Museum in Cardiff.

**TB:** **Yes.**

AT To Big Pit, to St Fagan's Folk Museum, they would have to pay to go into those museums. And then the government said that they could go to those free, so suddenly you had people saying well, why should I pay to go to your smaller museum when I can go to the National museum free?

**TB:** **I see.**

AT And that, there was a, I won't say a seismic shift but the visitor numbers in those places went through the roof then because they were free.

**TB:** **I see.**

AT And there was an impact on the smaller places and smaller attractions not just museums but other. Any attraction when you go to you know these big attractions free and then you have got to pay for smaller ones. So, that was an impact and they were supposed to, there was funding made available to help address that imbalance. But in reality, nothing came of it really, an odd bit of training and events or a bit of money to help with marketing but that was just short-lived. So, that was a negative.

**[1:12:03]**

**TB:** **Right, okay yes. What about have there been any kind of big patterns in tourism over the decades you have been involved with it? I am just, I don't know this might be good or bad I don't know, but have there been sort of anything you have noticed in terms of fashion or waves of?**

AT I think industrial tourism was always frowned upon and a few years ago we set up or Welsh gloveman set something up called Herian which was a campaign purely based on industrial tourism. That was a good, that was a huge boost for our local museums. You have got the European Routes of Industrial Heritage, you know ERIH?

**[1:12:53]**

**TB:** **Yes, tell me about that because that's.**

AT So, that's important to us, places like Big Pit are you know important on that. Unfortunately, the smaller museums cannot afford to sign up and its difficult for them to engage with it when the meetings will be in sort of Madrid one year and Scotland the next. You know so it can be or even with the UK could be in Scotland or Liverpool, so difficult to engage with. But what we have set up is a project called the Valleys That Changed the World and its sort of grown out of the Valleys a bit, so it goes from it covers the whole of South and some of West Wales. And it looks largely at industrial heritage and how the

communities and our industry was interlinked you know how the pits and the ironworks and the steelworks its an obvious link. Links between ironmasters where one ironmaster will marry another ironmaster's daughter, so they can join together and have a bigger and better mobile workforce. How squabbles meant that you know people didn't take their iron down that valley, they took it over the top of the mountain and down to the sea another way. All those sorts of things, so we have quarterly meeting, its quite a good network of sites. All the museums are in there because they really tell the story. But we have got some other quirky sites that like trying to think of something. Tredegar town clock which is a big iron clock in the middle of Tredegar that the ironmaster put there to make sure everybody got to work on time you know.

**TB:** **[Laughing] yes.**

AT But its, people look at it and they don't think of that as industrial history, but it is. So, that works really well, and we have the meetings at different industrial locations.

**TB:** **Great.**

AT Different people host it and its then often that one person who is a delegate will go back and tell their historical society, so they arrange a coach visit down to there. And its encouraging networking and sharing what we have.

**TB:** **Wow, that's fantastic, so these meetings are well attended these quarterly meetings by the sounds of it?**

AT Yes, really, you know it varies depending on lots of things, but they are really well attended. And there's, the best part of the, there's not too much, there's no talking about, very, very little about organisation of it but its something just ten minutes spots to say what's new in your area or what are you doing or update on this project. And they are the really interesting bits and that's where other people go because they get to find out what other people are doing.

**TB:** **Yes.**

AT And often about what money is out there and how they can get their hands on it [laughing].

**TB:** **Yes [laughing].**

AT That's the lifeblood of museums.

**TB:** **Yes, for sure. So, well that's who organises this Valley kind of organisation then? Is that, has to come out of European Heritage Network or?**

AT It started by a little bit of funding from Welsh government, a couple of tourism officers put a bid together to fund a coordinator to deliver.

**TB: Right, okay.**

AT And it sort of ticks over. I will have to send you a link to that.  
[ <http://www.visitblaenavon.co.uk/en/VisitBlaenavon/Explore-the-valleys-that-changed-the-world/Explore-the-valleys-that-changed-the-world.aspx> ]

**TB: Yes, well that sounds like it's really successful.**

AT Yes, really good.

**[1:16:37]**

**TB: Fantastic. Okay, yes this is one and I don't know is Big Pit is that part of your patch or is that a bit further on?**

AT No.

**TB: It's not okay.**

AT its just over the mountain.

**TB: Alright, yes but you will be aware of it. So, I suppose there you have got a very dramatic example of how a pit was kind of historicised or heritagised if you like. But you could look at this more broadly, have there been any sort of difficulties around the historicisation of industries like steel and coal where you know clearly these are people's lived lives and communities are perhaps in mourning slightly sometimes. I have worked in East London when the docks shut down and you know in a similar kind of way there's a real.**

AT Yes, the heart goes out of the community doesn't it?

**TB: Yes, exactly.**

AT Yes, and do you know I don't think its always the financial impact is the largest impact but it's that wellbeing, that confidence. All of that gets sucked out of it as well. From an outsider point in Blaenavon I think Big Pit is amazing, I think the ironworks there are amazing but the town of Blaenavon if you talk to the locals there they say it's all well and good having an ironworks and a pit but we haven't got. They shut our swimming pool down you know, so I think you have got to be balanced in how you don't make the whole of the town a heritage town and take away the heartbeat for the people who live there.

**TB: I see what you mean because.**

- AT: If you ask the people of Blaenavon do you want Big Pit, or do you want a swimming pool, they would all have said we want the swimming pool.
- TB: **Yes, I see yes.**
- AT So, it's important we don't just make us a ghost town
- TB: **Yes, I see.**
- AT of our past because we have got to live here, we want to work here you know we don't want all our young people to migrate to Cardiff and to London or wherever. We want them to stay here and to live here and enjoy the beautiful scenery and that we have and to keep them local.
- TB: **Yes, because there's a strange sensation of, I went to Big Pit when I was a scout so that was must have been quite soon after it opened I should think. But there was this kind of slightly zoo like experience of seeing the town itself. And as someone who had never been to a mining town in their life it was just my god, look at these rows of houses you know. I wonder whether there's, yes there's a slight issue of turning the whole community into a museum almost which is a little bit kind of strange, a bit kind of what's the word? It's sort of objectifying people isn't it, in a way, or framing them.**
- AT Its important you ask the community what they want isn't it? Like nobody in Blaenavon wants to see Big Pit shut or the ironworks shut you know they wouldn't want that, but they have tried to turn Blaenavon into a book town like Hay.
- TB: **Ah, right yes.**
- AT So, somebody came in bought up every shop and filled it full of books. And he wasn't a particularly friendly character, so he didn't, the community and him never engaged.
- TB: **Right.**
- AT So, instead of having you know a main street where they could buy their milk and their cheese, and I don't know their knitting wool or whatever they just had these shops full of books.
- TB: **[Laughing] wow.**
- AT There was no use to them you know, so there were issues like that that disenfranchise the people.
- TB: **Right.**

- AT That has gone but they have you know picked up on the back of the tourism value. A lady who makes cheese and Blaenavon cheddar is matured underground in the pit.
- TB: Ah, right yes.**
- AT And it really changes totally, you have got to taste before and after to really appreciate the difference it makes. And she does a great job selling Blaenavon, selling Wales and she is an amazing lady, really, really great. So, there are some industries on the back of tourism that have come into a community and reenergised it.
- TB: That's lovely, what a great example. So, that book the book thing that was a disaster by the sounds of it, has that stopped.**
- AT Hm.
- TB: It has right, okay.**
- AT Yes, it didn't, it was a good idea, but it didn't work.
- TB: Yes, sure, god [laughing]. So, was that an outsider by any chance or?**
- AT Canadian or American.
- TB: Canadian, oh right okay.**
- AT Something like that yes.
- [1:21:47]**
- TB: Blimey, god that's amazing. Thank you, I think I have covered pretty much everything that I wanted to ask you about. Well, there's kind of I don't know, got one or two more questions but has there been a particular challenge that you have had in your involvement with museums and tourism sort of over these years that really stands out? And you mentioned a couple in terms of establishing this place and sort of.**
- AT I think the biggest challenge is opening hours, that still frustrated me.
- TB: Yes.**
- AT I recognise they are volunteers, but I sometimes feel that somebody could finish at 13:00 and somebody could start at 13:00 to be open at lunchtimes you know to get people in there.
- TB: Yes.**

AT Things like that make me feel a bit.

**TB:** **It's frustrating isn't it because its there and actually, if they were open, they could literally quadruple their numbers if they were open four times the hours wouldn't they, yes, I see.**

AT Yes, so things like that are frustrating. I think marketing things like websites and marketing and the digital era. I had beautiful digital things put in under Herian, they were like a map of South Wales and you could touch on themes. There were trails, there were itineraries, there was information about the individual places. And you could build up your own personal guidebook and then it could be printed of at a cost of like £0.10 a sheet.

**TB:** **Wow.**

AT So, we give them all the infrastructure for that and I would go to museums and I would go why isn't it on? 'Oh, because the light comes on with it and it uses electricity'.

**TB:** **[Laughing].**

AT You know [laughing], struggling to come to terms with the digital age has been good. It is getting better but it's still, there's so much they can do.

**TB:** **Absolutely, and that's how people will find them now you know it really is.**

AT And every now and again you will get somebody who is really good on social media will join the group and revolutionise it.

**TB:** **Really, yes.**

AT You know like object of the week and things like that. But coming, you know keeping up with the times is a struggle.

**[1:24:06]**

**TB:** **Yes, absolutely. And I have got that leaflet which is the European Industrial Heritage Network is that right? And I have got that you mentioned that leaflet which has not just the big sites on but all the little ones as well.**

AT Yes.

**TB:** **But I sometimes take that around and show people because it's such a good example of how the networked approach doesn't just have to be kind of major sites. You can include these other smaller places, I just think that's brilliant.**

- AT Yes.
- TB:** I am just wondering whether has the involvement of the local sites and museums in things like that, and I suppose it sounds to me like the Valleys one is another, the trails are another one. But I mean do these kind of work would you say, are you finding they are successfully driving people from one site to another?
- AT They help people in the larger sites, they are like mini familiarisation visits, aren't they? So, they help their knowledge so if somebody comes to say Cyfarthfa museum in Merthyr and they ask about something, they ask about Guardian they will know where it is now.
- TB:** I see.
- AT You know, so it improves the knowledge of the professional staff in the larger sites.
- TB:** Right.
- AT That can be one advantage of it. But also, I think people are using their time and time for recreation and leisure more.
- TB:** Yes.
- AT So, it helps things like that,
- TB:** And having something paper based that they can actually take away and.
- AT Yes.
- TB:** Yes, because that's still the leaflet is still kind of you might think that would disappear. But actually, it's not and people do pick them up.
- AT I am passionate about leaflets [laughing] you know nobody else, the world can't see a point in them and digital is really, really good but its not the same as a leaflet. It's like if you are walking you can have all the gizmos but at OS map is essential isn't it [laughing].
- TB:** Yes [laughing] absolutely sure. Listen thank you, that's been brilliant, I will stop it there.

Audio ends: 1:26:17