

Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Anne Read

Role: Curator

Museum: Museum of North Craven Life at the Folly, Settle (Yorkshire)

Location of interview: meeting room, the Folly

Date: 17/12/18

Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

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

TB: If you could start by introducing your name, date of birth and your role please thank you.

AR: My name is Anne **Read** and I was born on 24 October 1943, I am the honorary curator of the museum of North Craven Life here in Settle, and I've been involved since the inception of the museum in 1977.

TB: (00:00:25) Ok, brilliant. Just tell me about the governance of the museum.

AR: The museum is owned and managed by a charitable trust, we are unusual in that we are a building preservation trust so the museum is not the sole purpose of the trust, but we have recently had our articles revised to imbed the museum much more strongly, but the museum has always been an important activity for the trust right from its early days.

TB: (00:01:02) Ok, well that's very interesting. So we'll come to the building when we talk about the early days of the museum. The other thing is how many people work at the museum now, in terms of paid employees, do you have any?

AR: We don't have any paid employees at all, other than just recently we have got a lottery grant for a 2 year project which has brought with it a part time project officer, but otherwise we are a total volunteer run.

TB: (00:01:31) Fantastic, and what's the nature of the project that your?

AR: It's a project which is going to develop a much greater number of activities based round our collections and also to try and engage different audiences. And it's developing lots more different approaches really to the collections and giving people the opportunity of being able to curate exhibitions themselves, and to perhaps move a little more away from a theme based approach. For instance next year one of the earliest exhibitions is going to be called curiosity, and different people are being encouraged to choose what they think is one of the most curious objects in our collections and bring together their own thoughts and views on that.

TB: (00:02:29) That's lovely. I love that idea of somehow [unclear 00:02:31] the curatorial role that's fascinating. And are you a registered museum?

AR: Yes, accredited museum, yes.

TB: (00:02:43) Accredited ok, fine. Do you recall visitor numbers and if so how many do you get a year?

AR: Yes we do record visitor numbers, we average about 5,000 visitors a year as daily visitors but we have more than that through the special events and activities and talks that we run. We have only just gone over in the last few months to working and opening every day of the week. Before we just used to open for 5 days of the week for three quarters of the year, and we are now taking on the rather ambitious idea of opening every day and every day of the week as well, which is quite a challenge. But we opened the coffee house in the museum just last year in 2017 and that of course has increased the demand for the museum to be open because people come into the coffee house and want to have a look round. So we've got to try and square the circle but it is a real challenge because recruiting volunteers and particularly in this area where we have a very low population, we only have 15,000 people in the whole of North Craven and a lot of organisations depend entirely on volunteers. So it is quite a tough call.

TB: (00:04:18) How many volunteers to you have?

AR: We have at the moment about 55 fairly active volunteers, but of course because a number of people have been volunteering for a long time we lose people every year and we gain a few more but we don't vary much in terms of net gain as it were, so that's the tricky thing. The Heritage Development Officer, the Lottery funded Heritage Development Officer is really trying to address this, this challenge by creating totally different role descriptions so that people can almost dip in and out of volunteering at different stages and different times of the year and involve themselves very strongly and intensively in a particular project that may interest them, and then back off for a few months, so we're hoping that that might increase interest.

TB: (00:05:230 Right I see so it's not too onerous but you can actually [unclear 00:05:27]

AR: No, and make sure that we try and match the interests and skills of each volunteer to the task that they're doing. We're trying very hard to recruit some younger people as well which isn't easy but we've got links with both Settle College and Giggleswick School. Of course that tends to lead to people only being able to volunteer for short periods because they're typically sixth formers and they go on and leave the area but we're trying to build a degree of continuity by getting other people in the school to become interested and involved as well so that they can recruit people for us.

TB: (00:06:18) Ok, look lets go all the way back then to the early days and simply just tell me the story of how it all came about?

AR: Yes, it was quite an interesting thing really the actual impetus for starting the museum was the Queens Silver Jubilee in 1977. At that time our organisation was not called North Craven Building Preservation Trust it was Settle & District Civic Society and that was formed in 1968 and had got a very lively group of people involved and Alan Bennett was our President. He was a great enthusiast and people were tremendously energetic and a lot of very useful projects were done in the town in those early years. Buildings were saved, and we had a lot of initiatives to raise the profile of the history of Settle. A number of other local history societies were formed during this period and there was a real feeling of energy, I think and very often from people coming into the area from outside who were immediately fascinated by the place and wanting to learn more and realising that if there was going to be something like a museum set up then it would need them to do it. It wasn't going to necessarily emanate from local people or people who'd lived here all their lives. So the idea was then that we should start the museum in 1977. So we began preparations in 1976 and what happened was initially members of the Civic Society were asked if they'd got any artefacts and photographs and objects of interest that they could lend for a temporary exhibition just to try and get the show on the road. That was quite a successful venture because it brought out some real treasures right from day one, then on New Years Day 1977 we had an interview on local radio which drew attention to the fact that this was the year the museum was really going to get off the ground. The building preservation part of the Civic Society

meanwhile were able to acquire a very rundown building in Victoria Street in Settle and it had been an old warehouse and it was in a state of almost total dereliction but it happened to coincide with the period when Manpower Services Commission activity was at its height. So we were able to buy the building for a modest sum and the restoration was mainly done through MSC labour and it progressed very successfully and by September 1977 we were actually able to open the museum in new premises. We started with about 3 or 4 temporary displays most of which consisted of material that was on loan, but then we gradually built up more in terms of collections and we recruited a number of volunteers so we were able to open for 3 days a week and it gradually increased. Interestingly one of the great I think plus points right from the very beginning was that we got excellent advice from the Area Museum Service for Yorkshire & Humberside as it was then called. The Director came out and visited us and gave us really good advice and said that whatever you do don't just become another collection of bygones, have a proper theme and proper idea and it was at that point that we decided we wanted to be the museum for the whole of North Craven, this was just Settle. We wanted to develop the approach whereby a visitor coming into the museum would automatically and easily be able to learn about the area and then when they went out and started exploring the landscape or the villages or the different features they would understand what they were all about and why the fields were the shapes they were, and why the barns were the shapes they were, and also about local industries like Burton in Lonsdale Pottery industry. So that was the approach we took really from more or less day one and it was that, that led us to have a successful application for a Carnegie UK grant which allowed us to develop our first professionally designed and mounted permanent display in Victoria Street in that building. It was immediately successful and we produced in conjunction with that a series of guide cards which people could buy and take out with them into the landscape so they could follow a pack horse route or they could go and explore areas of particularly interesting geology etc. We always kept up the tradition of temporary displays as well and there was so much to go on and we've never ever been short of a topic for a temporary display. However the drawback about the Victoria **Street** property was that it was a bit isolated from the town centre and the opportunity came in the early 1980's of acquiring another building which was much closer to the centre and we moved there in 1983 and it was a bigger space and it enabled us to house our

collections on properly designed storage racking and enabled us to open up a series of rooms and we stayed there until 2000 and in 2001 we moved the collection over to the Folly. A parallel story as you realise through all this being a building preservation trust we had our eyes on trying to save the Folly for a number of years and it had been in private ownership and remained in private ownership until the early 1990's and at the height of the property boom the then owner wasn't able to sell it but he wanted to emigrate to New Zealand so the local authority gave permission for the building to be divided into two and one half was sold quite easily the smaller, a third I should say, the smallest part and the remaining two thirds remained empty for the next six years and began to deteriorate badly. Of course we were very concerned but there was no way we could afford to buy it and then heritage lottery funding came into being so in 1996 we were able to acquire the two thirds of the folly. The third part remained in private ownership until 2010 and we were then able to buy that as well so we've reunited the house. When we moved the museum in here in 2001 it was particularly timely because it was the year of the great foot & mouth outbreak and Settle and the whole surrounding areas were totally closed off to the public and so it helped enormously that there was a place people could come and it saved the sort of commercial and economic life of Settle. Because it encouraged people to keep coming and we had thousands of people through our doors in that first summer, more people than we've ever had since.

TB: (00:15:49) Crikey. So you had the foot & mouth and this was just afterwards where everyone could come again?

AR: No, no it was at the height of the outbreak because all the public footpaths closed, nobody could move freely around the hinterland and of course what you have to remember is that Settle has always been for very many years the centre of massive walking, climbing, caving activity, so people were just completely unable to do that for six months.

TB: (00:16:25) They couldn't go riding around.

AR: They couldn't go anywhere else.

TB: (00:16:27) But they could drive here and come here?

AR: They could come here yes because they could come into the town and there were shops and there were cafes and places but there was also something for them to do and it was very timely that we were able to just be ready to open in these new premises at that stage.

TB: (00:16:51) Just a couple of quick things to just check. So it was H&F Folly that bought the two thirds first of all, the last third was that HLF as well or?

AR: No that was a grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund.

TB: (00:17:03) Roughly what sort of money are we talking about from the H&F would you know?

AR: Yes I'm just trying to remember now, I'll have to look that up for you.

TB: (00:17:19) Don't worry, ok sure. But it would have been in the hundreds of thousands.

AR: Oh yes, it was about £650,000 from memory but that's, yes.

TB: (00:17:28) Just to get an idea, ok sure, wow, so pretty substantial. So let me just kind of recap a little bit. So we started off in 68 with the Civic Society, in in 76/77 was that when there was a separate organisation formed which was just the preservation or has it always been part of the civic society really.

AR: No, you're right there was a museum committee formed in 1976.

TB: (00:18:02) Ok right. Did that museum committee then become a completely spin off organisation in the end?

AR: What happened was it sort of morphed. It was originally part of Settle & District Civic Society which became the North Craven Heritage Trust but the building preservation arm of the civic society became the North Craven Building Preservation Trust. Initially the museum remained in the ownership of the Heritage Trust but in the early 1990's it was decided that it would be better if the museum and its building could be in the same ownership. So the museum collections and management were

transferred to the Building Preservation Trust. They really started as the same organisation but developed according to need really and common sense.

TB: (00:19:02) Ok, so the Civic Society that became the trust the whole thing. Right so, a spin off is not right it just developed into the trust.

AR: Yes it developed yes, in quite a purposeful way really. There were reasons for each stage of development.

TB: (00:19:22) So going back, in that case perhaps it would be good... You were involved in 68, were you involved in the?

AR: No I wasn't involved until 1974 in the Civic Society.

TB: (00:19:34) Ok. So let's just talk about that time then. I can understand a Civic Society wanting to save buildings, but the move to creating a museum is quite distinct and actually quite unusual for a Civic Society to do. So just tell me some more about why it was that people arrived on that idea to create something that's open to the public?

AR: Yes, I think there were several reasons. I think one of them was because tourism was a very important development in this area, it has been for hundreds of years but there wasn't a museum in Settle at that point. Though interestingly Settle has been the home of many museums in the past, well three others before we ourselves. Going back to maybe even earlier but going back to the 19th century anyway but for various reasons they all closed down. So there was a history if you like of museums in the town but there wasn't anything probably from the early 1960's onwards. So in one sense you could say we were plugging a gap, that people were perhaps expecting that Settle should have a museum, so that was one reason. Another reason I think is the one we were talking about when we were upstairs that there is always this feeling that if you leave it too late certain people will have died or objects will have vanished and it's the right time to be trying to rescue things, so that was very much the case. Also I think and this is an important fact that as I mentioned before there was a great development in local history groups in the surrounding villages so you had quite a wide group of people who were all looking very carefully

at the history of the area in their own villages talking to people and beginning to collect things as well. It needed a focus I think that would be what I would say.

TB: (00:22:07) Fascinating. So what brought about this big interest in local history and those history societies, by the sounds of it in the late 50's 60's we're talking about, they were coming through more?

AR: It's really interesting to speculate I think, looking back it's probably something to do with people coming in from outside and realising the richness of the stories that there are in this area. They emanate a lot from the local landscape, from the buildings from the occupations of the people, it's a very interesting area because it's an area of great contrast even within quite a small I suppose geographical spread. You've got very many different sorts of occupations emerging and that had emerged really from the late 17th century onwards. There was a lot to be discovered and I think people were coming in from outside and thinking we've really got to get to grips with this, but whether it was anything to do with the time I don't know, we were sort of in the post war period, we were emerging from the post war period of everybody just having to you know keep their noses to the grindstone. There was a bit more money around, people were beginning to appreciate leisure, they had more leisure and I think all these things coming together. It was a very very inspiring period actually there were a whole lot of people who were very very keen. Which was good, yes.

TB: (00:24:03) I was going to ask you what sort of people in the late 70's were involved in the society, can you just give me a sense of their backgrounds or were they all newcomers or was there a mixture or?

AR: There was a mixture, yes, which was good of course, it would have been terrible if it had been people coming in and just imposing this on people. No it was a mixture so there were professional people who actually worked in the area, you know doctors and solicitors etc. Some of the old business in the town, builders, bank managers, people who knew the area extremely well and had the different skills I think. I think it was quite important we had a very good balance of different skills and architects too, so yes it all seemed to gel very well in those days.

TB: (00:25:18) It sounds fairly kind of middle class would that be fair to say?

AR: Yes, it was but having said that as soon as we got the museum off the ground that changed a bit it was really rather nice that people thought well this isn't just some fancy idea this is something I can really contribute to and they did. You know brought in some fascinating artefacts and better still had some lovely stories to tell because of course it stirred memories. You know how objects very often do just bring that out in people don't they, they can see an object and they'll say ooh yes well of course I remember how that was used and I'll show you if you like and I'll make you something you know. So it was very very good in that way, I think we felt pretty much united as a group and everybody really put their backs into it too. It was terrific loyalty and co-operation, it was very good.

TB: (00:26:25) Well it sounds to me like you have the space that was professionally designed I guess but lots of work to do in the research and also like listing building I mean restoring the first building the warehouse sounds like a major project. So was that kind of volunteer labour?

AR: Yes and I always remember you know the night before we opened for the first time we were all still there at 11 o'clock at night, decorating and I remember for some reason the lighting track failed so there was somebody up a ladder trying to fix that and anyway it all came together, but it was that sort of spirit which was very good and which is perhaps not quite so easy to capture now. I think there's so much change in the last forty odd years that you can't keep going in quite the same way.

TB: (00:27:26) How do you mean, what kind of changes?

AR: Well demographic changes mainly. In those days most of us were fairly young, and we we're all working as well, most of us were working. I mean I used to work full time in Leeds and I was a librarian, academic librarian in the University and one had a lot of energy in one's younger days and I used sometimes stay up all night doing museum work having got home from Leeds. Other people were similarly fitting it in round day jobs, a lot of our volunteers were newly retired people but also people particular women who didn't work. Now that has completely changed in the last forty odd years, in fact I would say even in the last ten years because more newly

retired people are either looking after grandchildren and can't be free to volunteer or they are not able to retire, they're having to go on working anyway and people have a much much stronger sense I suppose of wanting to once they have retired go travelling and follow their own interests, other interest and just spend far more time away from home. So I think the whole nature of volunteering has changed enormously and that is what is now I think puts museums like ours which are solely volunteer run in a very difficult position.

TB: (00:29:22) That's fascinating. I never thought of it quite like that.

AR: I don't know whether the other volunteer run museum have said this to you but I think again it's linked in with our relatively low population base and the fact that so many other organisations like the library service now in the town is having to be totally volunteer run, so they're spread very very thinly. Of course the same's happening in the villages they need volunteers to run the village shop and other organisations just to keep the whole fabric of society going really.

TB: (00:30:02) So there's a lot of competition for volunteers.

AR: A lot of competition for volunteers. So you've endlessly got to thinking of new ways of attracting people which is why our new Heritage Development Officer is doing such a great job in this. Interestingly if I can just say one more thing about this. I think the way to develop for the future has got to be to find methods of being able to employ more staff and of course the other great problems for small independent museums has always been funding. I think that one has to get a sort of foot on the bottom rung of the ladder and if you can begin with one even part time paid person that enables you to do so much more and that can gradually build and build and build and I know of one museum in North Yorkshire which has very successfully modelled this approach and they now have managed to have about, they've got seven or eight paid people. I think that has to be the way of the future because there is just **no** way at all in which we are going to have that consistency of volunteer hours offered.

TB: (00:31:33) What museum are you thinking of just out of interest?

AR: Ripon. Yes I don't know if that's on your list.

TB: (00:31:37) I haven't been, no. Is it a council run museum?

AR: No, no it's run by a trust, they have three separate museum sites, it's all based round the subject of law & order. So they have a workhouse museum, a police museum and a court house, so it all gels beautifully. They've got three sites to run and Ripon isn't such a big place there is only a population of about 10,000. So again challenging but they've built up gradually and I think that is the secret, that's the way forward it's got to be.

TB: (00:32:21) Yes, interesting. Just a couple of kind of factual things I'd like to ask you, and if you don't know don't worry. You said that the 60's or 70's that was a period where there were lots of newcomers coming to this area, can you just give me a sense of why that was, why were people at a time when I would imagine a lot all through the century when people were going from rural area to the cities but there was people coming back and was that to do with I don't know cheap property or what was it?

AR: Yes, I think again there were mixed reasons, there were often people coming back to their roots you know, they had gone away and they'd worked and it was a very attractive place to come back to. In those days it was actually much more self sufficient than it is now, one could quite happily buy everything one needed in Settle you didn't need to go further a field it was a very pleasant place to live there was plenty going on. Of course the countryside around was amazingly wonderful which it still is but since then there have been more changes and I think that it is harder very much harder now for younger people to find work. They were beginning to look seriously at this and address some of those needs but I think yes a lot of it was people coming back to their roots, people coming back to a place that they'd perhaps had lots of lovely holidays in the area and thought it would be a lovely place to retire to. There were more jobs too in those days, I mean we've still got a very low unemployment rate but it's not necessarily the right sort of jobs these days that attractive young people. But in those days there were still plenty of jobs for the different trades because we had so many more trades in the town you know. There

were lots more craftsmen still working than there are now and people were perhaps more content you know to work in this environment.

TB: (00:34:47) Yes I see. The other thing was you mentioned three museums that closed, I don't want to put you on the spot here but what were they or were they similar, kind of was it local history focused perhaps and also do you know why they didn't work out or why they closed?

AR: Well interestingly the first one that we know about was the mechanics institute museum, I mean the mechanics institute was a very successful organisation particularly in the 19th and early 20th century and they have their premises very very very well built, sadly there aren't any photographs left they were demolished. A lot of I suppose and this is important as a catalyst in the 60's there were an awful lot of very bad planning decisions made in this area and generally up and down the country. A lot of the old buildings were demolished and replaced by very indifferent replacements and not necessarily replaced at all. Mechanics Institute was one of those buildings but the activities of the Mechanics Institute had gradually diminished. We don't know when the museum closed we don't really know much about it at all. It was certainly flourishing in the mid 19th century probably continuing into the late 19th century and probably some of the materials that was in there and we only know of one or two named items either went into private hands or went into one of the successor museums, which was very successful and very well known for quite a long period and it was called the Pig Yard Club Museum. And it was started by a particular very well known man in the area called Tot Lord and it was an amazing collection of caving material mainly but also memorabilia and it was what in today's language you will call highly eclectic collection, but it was developed by him almost as an individual and very important archaeological collections he was a very keen and gifted amateur archaeologist. A lot of the cave finds are now in the Natural History Museum in London and various other national collections but some of them do remain in the hands of his grandson but still privately owned. There was never a trust set up, so when he died and when the house that he lived in had to be demolished in the early 1970's the museum closed. Some of the collection as I say is still with his grandson but it is not publicly available. So that was probably the most famous museum and it was the museum I think that led to its closure led to our opening because we were filling a gap but we couldn't fill the exact same gap

because we didn't have those collections. Also we've never been an archaeological museum because as you will be aware every district has its own finds museum and the Craven Museum in Skipton is the finds museum and archaeology collections for our area for Craven. The third museum was a very specialist one and it was a speleology association museum because this has always been a major centre of caving and again it was the brainchild of one man really. The collections from that I think that museum closed in the 50's and most of the collection I'm glad to say has gone to Derbyshire to the I've forgotten the name of it temporarily.

TB: (00:39:17) That's lovely. So the second one you mentioned the Pig Yard Club did that end in the 70's did you say?

AR: Yes, it really sort of ended when Town Head which was the big house that housed it was demolished. I'm going to give you another booklet which sets the whole thing in context but I'll just show you a quick photograph of that.

TB: (00:39:45) Oh yes right gosh, I can see it's a big mark on map, it's actually almost [unclear 00:39:48]

AR: Yes it was and it was riddled with dry rot but it also coincided with the death of Tot Lord the grandfather of the present Tom Lord and so it just fizzled out really but most of the collections were rescued though I'm not entirely sure of the whereabouts of all of them but there is some really lovely stuff there.

TB: (00:40:22) Right and the other thing I wanted to ask was this decision not to make it just a Settle museum but to make it a North Craven Museum, so just tell me a little bit about that because... and you've also mentioned the fact there's lots of local history going on in villages, so when you make decisions about geographical range and often you're looking at ideas of cultural identity and clearly in this period the early 70's that was coming into question, mentioned that something?

AR: Yes, the local government reorganisation. The area that is now represented by the name North Craven is really the area of the old Settle Rural District Council. It does encompass some of the most amazing scenery and landscape features of the Yorkshire Dales and it's been very well recognised and strongly appreciated for

hundreds of years, you know it was part of the almost the grand tour gentleman had to come and explore along with the Lake District, and they actually wrote all these wonderful books about the grander of the scenery and they almost trying to make it that made people feel awestruck, we had lots of great artists you know, Turner came and painted it etc. So there were a lot of very important features in the area but because of the geology and I mean everything in the end goes back to landscape I think, you get this massive range of occupations and types of occupations. For instance just a few miles north of Settle only about 10 miles north of Settle we have Ingleton which was a very important site of coal mining and you would not expect to think of coal mining in the Yorkshire Dales, but it was because of the geology there were seams of coal, and there were also seams of coal going towards the next village near Burton in Lonsdale which then developed in the last 18th century this really major pottery industry because they had coal, clay and water. It was all these natural features which came together to produce a particular kind of occupation, but of course agriculture has been one of the staple occupations for hundreds and hundreds of years but the nature of agriculture has changed enormously. The other that I think singles out our area that its been a very important sort of crossing point, there have always been important routes going through it. So it has been very important trading centre for many hundreds of years and Settle got its first market charter in 1249 and there was a great resurgence of trading after the restoration in the late 17th century. So there have been lots of people moving around and bringing in not only new ideas but new occupations and I think it has had a very strong identity which has almost been born out of diversity but contained within quite a smallish geographical area. It really is a most fascinating area to explore but also this coupled with the fact that's been border territory and you've got this feeling that people are very, very determined in their own minds that they are still in Yorkshire even if they are only in Yorkshire by a few hundred yards. There was some very unfortunate boundary changes in 1974 where some people got hived off into Lancashire which was not too good. The same with Cumbria, so it's yes It's just an area that is full of stories and full of people who've really made their mark. Some very very well know national figures have been born and brought up in this area and not just in the 18th and 19th centuries but even today. So it's an area that sort of breeds independence I suppose.

TB: (00:45:48) Ok, well that's interesting, yes, ok. Why, was there a conversation as to whether to make it a Settle museum or whether to make it?

AR: I think that was born out of the fact that Settle & District Civic Society had decided that it was going to call itself that when it was first started but the & District bit started to rub a few people up the wrong way. The people of Ingletton and the people of Clapham and people north of Settle didn't much like just being lumped in as Settle & District so it was then that the whole idea of calling it the North Craven Heritage Trust grew and we thought that it made really good sense as a museum to reflect this. There was so many interesting things that were emerging from the villages, I think I've mentioned at the beginning that one of our flagship collections is our collection of Burton in Lonsdale pottery and that came to us quite early on in the persona of one person, mainly one person. So it made sense then to develop and explore these links between all the different parishes I think. You know I don't believe you can set up artificial boundaries and because Settle was the local market town or one of the two market towns in the area there was a lot of two way traffic going on all the time and it doesn't make sense I think to set an artificial boundary round a place, not in this part of the world anyway. It can in some instances obviously.

TB: (00:47:47) Ok. So in 74 the word the North Craven that term was that, East London you know there's an East town and West town that sort of thing came Newham, just totally inventive word. Did that happen here or was that a local government term or a fact that Cravens an actual older?

AR: Craven is a very old district and it was originally an ecclesiastical area. So it goes back I'm not entirely sure when it goes back to but it's certainly probably around the 11th century anyway.

TB: (00:48:31) Alright, so it's an historical term for the area? In 74 what happened, in government terms did Settle Parish Council loose it's power or how did that work?

AR: Yes, well Settle had its own rural district council of course and they managed all the affairs of what is now North Craven and that was felt to be a great loss when

everything was sort of centred on Skipton and that is something from which this area has never really recovered. People still feel that Skipton gets all the attention, Skipton gets the money, Skipton gets everything really. We have to try to work as closely as we can I think with what is going on, I mean we have very good relationships with the Craven Museum in Skipton which is a local authority museum. There is a very strong sense of identity of the northern part of Craven and that starts at sort of Hellifield I don't know which way you've driven but you will have come through Hellifield today probably. It goes east a long way, it includes Malham, Malhamdale which is a very famous part of the country of course with lots of wonderful landscape features, you know Malham Cove and Gordale Scar and Charles Kingsley Associations and all that and then it goes west into the Forest of Bowland as well, so it's an area of great contrast but a very strong sense of unity.

TB: (00:50:29) Well Nidderdale made a decision that it was going to be, while similar to it's not going to the meeting of [unclear 00:50:37] bridge its going to be the Dale, the river family as I understand it.

AR: Yes, quite.

TB: (00:50:43) So is that when you've got a water catchment area which has its own feeling?

AR: It's really interesting because we're different from the other dales, we're known as the Craven Dales but we're the only area where the water which is the River Ribble actually flows to the west, it flows to the Irish Sea, all the other dales their rivers flow to east and we are the western most dale, but we've got more in common with the other dales than we have with any other parts of the county of course. And then of course you have the complete reorganisation of Yorkshire itself you know when the ridings were got rid off and we used to be in the old west riding here we are now in North Yorkshire of course.

TB: (00:51:48) When did that happen, was that the same, similar time?

AR: Yes it was, I think it was, or was it just a little bit earlier I'd have to look that up. I think it was about the same time but yes about 1970ish.

TB: (00:52:03) Which eventually leads to the county border moving, so ok. I suppose the inevitable questions is then do you think that all of those reorganisations and perhaps feelings of annoyance not least the loss of power actually, quite literally that there might have been more of an energy to kind of having a museum or something that expresses this area, that might feed into it?

AR: Yes, I think that did very strongly and people were extremely concerned about for instance the archives of the district council, the rural district council disappearing off to Skipton and so things were saved as much as they could be from that.

TB: (00:52:56) So did the society step in and say look we'll look after these, they're not going to Skipton, kind quite literally. Ok that's interesting, right.

AR: Yes, some of the things not done in quite the way they should have been [laughing] but we have preserved them and that's good, yes.

TB: (00:53:13) So an archive is fun fight kind of over, sort of powerplay kind of happening, which is very symbolic isn't it? Yes, very interesting.

AR: But it's interesting that you should mention it did help because I think that was an approach that they very strongly took, whereas other of the small museums that started in the area they were on the whole were wanting to be very contained but I think it doesn't honestly work in area like this again where you've got relatively low population, but everyone being dependent on one another as well, you know it's tremendously important to work together as a community. One of the most pleasing developments in the last decade is that we and I think we've been very much at the forefront of this we have been able to develop really excellent partnerships with other organisations in either our immediate area or in North Yorkshire as a whole. I'm sure that this is the way forward you can't just remain in your little box you've got to think of co-operation and pooling resources and that is working well in this area.

TB: (00:56:49) And one example of that was the railway exhibition, if you can tell us a little bit about that as an example?

AR: Yes, well the Settle Carlisle Railway, the friends of the Settle Carlisle Railway was set up at the time when the line was under threat and it became one of the great success stories and they managed to do so much in the way of helping to raise the profile of what was going on. Also they've got a huge number of volunteers and they have collected down the years some wonderful archives and they love being hands on as well and going and helping on the line and helping people to experience the line and they've collected some superb archives. A couple of years ago we were able to provide space for their archive collection here in the Folly and so they do a lot of their research based here. It's been a real success story because obviously we've been able to talk to them closely, they've been on the spot, we've told them what we've got in our collection about the railway and it just makes good sense to everybody to again pool resources and to make the best we can be, you know to be the best we can be by pooling resources. There are many other examples of this, there's an organisation based in Clapham called the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust and they have been very successful before the Millennium in getting grants.

[Interruption 00:56:47-0057:03]

AR: So they've been very successful in getting grants for certain projects and they've developed.

[Interruption 00:57:13- 00:57:20]

AR: So they've been successful in getting grants and just in about the last four years they've got a huge lottery grant which has enabled them to run a programme called 'Stories in Stone' which concentrates on the area that's described as the Ingleborough triangle so its Ingleton going up to Ribble Head and then coming back down to Settle and fortunately Settle has been included even though we are not quite in the national park, well bits of the town are but not all of it. This 'Stories in Stone' project has been absolutely excellent because it consists of 72 sub-projects, it takes some organising but we've been able to tap into and be an important part of quite a number of these projects and something that we're working with them on at the moment is to develop here in the Folly a heritage discovery centre which is going to be looking at initially at how Settle has developed. It's going to be called Settle the town scape transformed. It's showing the influence of all of the things we've

been talking about, the repositioning of roads and routes and how that has led to so many changes which are still continuing to this day, so people can then explore and follow a route. We've also got very close relationships with Friends of the Dales, which used to be called the Yorkshire Dales Society and there are projects which are being developed jointly by us. There is a dales community archive for instance whereby collections that are in different hands included some of these local village history groups are being scanned and put onto a shared database. So this has all come out just in the last few years really and the example of the Craven in the first world war project that's all come about through lottery funding but a real willingness for partnership working as well.

TB: (00:59:50) That's interesting. Do you think... so what's brought about this sort of sudden move to co-operation and partnership?

AR: I think some of it is necessity, because you realise that you can't duplicate effort and there isn't enough funding to go around anyway and it just doesn't make sense I think. I would say that that this the biggest argument it doesn't make sense because we can be better together than apart. We can you know pool our ideas, we can pool our energies really and where you've got limitations set by the people who are available it drives it but it also makes sense. It's not a council of despair at all, it's being a great I would say just the opposite a source of reinvigoration.

TB: (01:00:59) Has it been a formal network that you've made these connections or has it been much more people knocking on the door and?

AR: I think it's developed quite formally in some ways, once the realisation, I mean this realisation developed simultaneously in quite a lot groups because of pressures of funding etc but once that realisation took place I think the effort to make these more formal partnerships and just opportunities for discussion and for doing things together and for creating new projects that have emerged because of people having the chance to put their heads together really, as simple as that. I have to say a really important factor in all this has been the work of the Yorkshire Museum Service, the fact that they do provide this wonderful focus and source of advice for independent museum, I'm sure you're aware, you know it's a nationwide thing isn't it. The Yorkshire group our Museum Development Officers they really are excellent and

have enabled us to do more than we could have done alone and are also always able to point out and help through museum forum meetings and more informal groups, other museums who might be able to help with a particular thing or give advice. We all work together extremely well.

TB: (01:02:56) Right, so there's a very strong kind of support that you've got on that level, ok.

AR: Yes, and I mean as you know accreditation has just been revised the whole thing.

TB: (01:03:07) Well I was going to ask because one thing which a lot of museums have in common that's just kind of despair really at the amount of paperwork involved in accreditation but I don't know if for you it hasn't been such a huge issue, I don't know, but tell me about that and has it been [unclear 0:01:03:26]

AR: I mean I've always thought of accreditation as being an extremely positive thing and yes it is a lot of work or has been a lot of work up till now but the benefits that it's brought have just been amazing because it's for a start it enables you to really put across to your governing body the importance of doing various things that you can't afford to skimp on the way that you care for your collections or on your emergency procedures and all that kind of stuff. So it's been a very good way of just educating I suppose the trustee body as to what is involved in running a museum. I'm glad to say and I'm sure everybody else will be glad as well that the revised accreditation guidelines that were published last month they do suggest that the paperwork is going to be more simplified, yes.

TB: (01:04:42) Ahh, that is good news.

AR: We've still got to do all the basic things but it sounds as though the form instead of being about 70 pages long is going to be perhaps half that.

TB: (01:04:54) That's very welcoming, I didn't know, right perhaps I should be up to date with my museums journal shouldn't I. Right ok, so that makes a big difference. So is that still under consideration or?

AR: Well no I think the guidelines have now been reissued and certainly in Yorkshire we've got seminars beginning in the New Year that we can attend for guidance. The museum development Yorkshire team have an accreditation expert among them and she's going to be running these workshops and so we're sending a couple of people to attend these and I'm sure we'll learn far more. We don't know yet when we shall get our invitation because everything as I'm sure you are aware has been put on hold in the last two years while all this revision of the standard has been going on. We should have really been re-accredited in 2016 so we're in limbo but we're still allowed to retain our accreditation status until it comes up again.

TB: (01:06:09) When did you first become accredited then, is that something that's recent to you?

AR: It's again as I'm sure you know it started with the museum registration scheme and we were first registered in 1992 and then it developed into the accreditation scheme and we first got that in 2009 up till then it was still registration and then we were re-accredited in 2014. So we are waiting to be re-accredited.

TB: (01:06:50) There's a couple... times creeping on so do say if you've had enough, you ok, you're alright. There's a couple of things that I wanted to ask, one was just on the collection side you've been going a long time but where have all your collections come from, it sounds like you didn't inherit a lot from the old museum that closed down, in fact?

AR: No, we didn't inherit anything no.

TB: (01:07:13) So where's everything come from?

AR: Well that's an amazing story really. It's come incrementally, it's come in ones and twos and it's come also in some very large collections, and one of the most pleasing things I think in the last five years is that we have acquired two really important collections which encompass so much, and also shows the degree of trust that people place in museum and why we as a museum have to make sure that we continue to honour that, and that we can if anything ever happens to us you know we have a trust and we will make sure that the collections would be properly put into other hands to remain publicly available. The two collections that we've had

donated in the last five years, the first of these as a wonderful family archive that was gathered together across three generations of the family, and the sort of begetter if you like. The first generation was one of the most remarkable people to come to Settle. He came from Lancashire in the very last years of the 19th century and he came to work in the papermill at Langcliffe which is just up the Ribble Valley from here. He developed the most massive interest in every aspect of the area and he wrote two definitive books one 'The Ribble from source to the sea' and another all about the area immediately around Settle and he was a superb photographer, he gave lantern slide lectures, he produced a series of local guides, he ran a local bookshop, he was a pillar of the Zion congregation church as it then was. He used to write plays, produce plays but everything that he did is encompassed in this archive and because he was such a keen and very good photographer it includes amazing collections of photographs that span a hundred years.

TB: (01:09:56) Crikey. So the family just rolled up and said look do you want it?

AR: Yes, which was wonderful. The second archive which meshes beautifully into that is the Zion collection itself. The Zion Chapel Collection because what happened was the chapel finally had to close in 2016 and after various negotiations they tried to sell it but it wouldn't sell on the open market, so they donated it to our trust. Prior to that they had donated their entire archive which goes back two hundred years and includes plans of the original chapel and all the minutes of their meetings. So again an amazing social history of the area. It does mean of course maybe we are a little bit different from a lot of local independent museums in that we have a very strong archive collection as well as object collection. I would say it almost comes out at 50/50, but we have to make very careful judgements about these things of course because if we don't have the right environmental conditions to keep things. For instance we wouldn't be able to house collections of glass negatives or glass slides to any great degree, I mean it would be alright for certain things but then we have to make sure that anything like that would go to the County Record Office but we are a great distance of course from Northallerton here and so we feel it is important and fortunately Northallerton agree with us, that we can actually keep a large part of this kind of local collection, locally, which is good.

TB: (01:12:02) So it sounds to me like if that's typical that it is local people someone dies and they say look do you want it?

AR: Yes, well as so often happens with families they disperse so when it gets to the third generation they are living all over the country, in Scotland and in Guernsey etc but it's thanks to one member of that generation that we've got this collection because she was wanting to well you know very sensibly find a home for it and realised that this was the centre where it needed to come.

TB: (01:12:45) I mean compared to Nidderdale Museum which is totally different.

AR: Yes totally different and wonderful.

TB: (01:12:55) So just tell me why is it that so here it's clearly it's very you know it's explained as you say designed for a casual visitor and it doesn't have thousands of objects that are all over the place, so presumably you've got a lot of stuff in store.

AR: We have but all that is going to change, you see one thing I don't think I have explained to you is I'm going to retire next year and what we're hoping is that I mean nobody is succeeding me as honorary curator but the Heritage Development Officer is concentrating a lot of her energy and skills on producing totally different kinds of exhibitions, as she says we're going to throw away the museum rulebook. Not entirely actually, but she had got a wonderful programme developed for 2019 which is going to be I think resulting in having far more of our collections on display through this curiosity idea that I mentioned to you at the beginning, and I think that that is really important because it will re-enthuse people and it will help people understand the breadth perhaps of our collection as well. There are various other exhibitions which are planned which are going to bring out different parts of the collection as well, and I think it's really good to have this change of direction. I mean the only concerning thing is that because it is a temporary post we've got to try to make sure that someone else will carry on afterwards. This is one of the dangerous things about independent museums at this particular juncture. It's the funding and trying to get that core funding, I don't know if Nidderdale have a paid person, they don't do they? No.

TB: (01:15:18) I don't honestly know?

AR: I don't think they do, no, no.

TB: (01:15:24) They're looking into having someone, I think yes, but.

AR: Well I'm sure they're in exactly the same situation as we are because we all started at the same... we're all getting old together and something has to give you know if the thing is going to continue it can't be person specific. It just can't be, and this is where Ripon has really succeeded and I think that's got to be the great model for the rest of us.

TB: (01:15:55) There's just perhaps one final question which is why did you personally get involved and what is it you know, for you what is history, what is the local history that you think is important to have, so just maybe just thinking back to those early days when you first got involved, that sort of thing?

AR: Well I mean I almost fell into it by accident because obviously the society, the Civic Society were looking for somebody who would set up the museum and there wasn't an obvious person living in Settle, we didn't happen to have a sort of retired museum curator and I was seen as the next best thing because I was a qualified librarian. That had certain and does have certain skills in common to being a museum curator, so I was asked if I would be interested and by that stage I'd lived in the area for 5 years and I'd got very interested and I'd become clerk to Giggleswick Parish Council and got tied up with various... but I was doing this while I was working in Leeds as well. I thought oh yes that would be a nice thing to do it probably won't involve very much time [laughing], little did I know. I suppose the thing I've always loved about it is the way that it enables one to make such amazing connections and I think that's what one of the joys of a local museum is because you learn about one topic or one theme and then you suddenly think oh yes, and of course that links into something else that we know and then you enjoy bringing those two things together. That can develop into an amazing network of projects and sort of research projects. I think what makes a local museum so important though is the stories behind the collections and I know that's a fairly obvious thing to say in one sense but it really is true. It's no good just putting an object on display and saying this was made in such

and such by the end of story, you need to put it into some kind of context and some of the stories that we are finding are quite amazing and the links between people and places and the different types of work that were being produced by different people and just the amazing spread of skills that there were and still are. It's very very rewarding and it's also a lovely way of course of bringing a local community together into a place that they can all experience and share and enjoy being in. And the work that we do with an organisation called Pioneer Projects, which is a healthy living organisation in Bentham it's been one of the most rewarding things we've done you know working with people who suffer from memory loss and developing work that they themselves produce being inspired very often either by objects in the collection or by the place, the house. This house seems to have a lovely feel about it for people and they come in and they can have a really relaxed time and be shown things and then they can add their own interpretation and it just gives that lovely opportunity for people to do things in different ways and to be. I think we're very lucky to have this house although it's difficult in some ways to work with and round because you are all the time trying to make sure that you're not preventing people from seeing the architectural features of the house, you don't want to be sticking up display panels in front of windows for instance you know. It is at the same time a place that seems to have good vibes for most people, they like being here, they feel a warmth, they feel a sense of belonging and I think that's really important. I have to confess I'm not a historian I mean my degree was in English language and medieval literature and old Icelandic, so some of it's been relevant but you know I've learnt a lot of history.

TB: (01:21:140 Is there a sort of, there's a lovely high point that you mention though with having people coming in and doing some memory work and so on. Is there any other kind of... put it like this what are the highest and the lowest, what's been the toughest moment of your career and what's been the highlight?

AR: Well I suppose the toughest moments have probably come from lack of money and having to make some really hard decision about the sorts of exhibitions we would like to do and not been able to do because of lack of funding. You know disappointments about applying for grants and not getting them. I mean obviously the most, the biggest sort of constants I suppose in a curator's life is trying to look for funding, perpetually, and you're very lucky if 50% of the time you are successful.

This again is where the museum service the Museum Development Yorkshire is so wonderful because they have this, not only this small grants programme but they also have museum development support which is in kind support to help one to develop certain things. So, I suppose the low points yes have come from just not being able to realise certain projects that we know would make a difference. For instance you asked me at the beginning about visitor numbers and we have never managed to break through that 5,000 visitor a year barrier if you like and that I suppose has been one of the disappointments and I think it comes a lot of it comes from poor signposting and that becomes a vicious circle because we are not allowed to have brown signs because we don't have 50,000 visitors a year. It's a... [laughing].

TB: (01:23:37) Wow, is that what they've told you that's horrible.

AR: This is individual local authorities you see have their own rules about these things. So it's a complete chicken and egg situation [laughing] so you're never going to get 50,000 visitors if you don't have brown signs. Anyway. But high points just seeing you know the pleasure that can come from certain.

[interruption 01:24:08-01:23]

Yes but you know being aware of either an exhibition or an experience or a talk or just something that has brought genuine pleasure to people and an increase in understanding and has probably led them to go and develop some other enthusiasm of their own, some research project or some almost copycat event, inspiring people I suppose is what I'm trying to say. Yes, that is lovely and I mean we've got such a loyal bunch of volunteers, they are wonderful they really are. I can send out an SOS message, we use this three rings communication system and I can send out an SOS message to say we haven't got anybody to work tomorrow, how about it? And you know two hours later somebody will have put them selves down and it's really good, it's very lovely feeling that.

TB: (01:25:36) Yes, so being supported by everyone in that way.

AR: Yes, pretty good yes. Just wish we could recruit another honorary curator. I've been asked to write a biography of the museum which I've got to do really, because

people have got to understand the way that it has developed and particularly with records how they've changed down the years you know. The database, but I'm hoping that I might be able to write something which will be published in the local papers and might just inspire somebody to give it a go. The problem is it's the hours it takes, I mean I do work about 60-hour week, though now that we've got the Heritage Development Officer that could lessen a bit, but as I say that's a temporary solution.

TB: (01:26:38) That's a lot of hours.

AR: Yes it is a lot of hours yes, people just can't afford to do it voluntarily anymore literally you know, in every sense of that word afford.

TB: (01:26:51) That's wonderful, is there anything else that you would just like to kind of mention or?

AR: There are things that I'd like to give you because I wrote this little piece back in 1989 which was for the 21st anniversary of the trust of which answers a lot of the points you've been... but then we've also published as a joint exercise North Craven Heritage Trust and Preservation Trust and the museum a 50th anniversary booklet and I've written another piece in here which brings up to date a lot of that and also it will help you to see the rest of the other activities and the other work of these organisations which all comes together in a sense.

TB: (01:27:53) That's brilliant thank you. Well I could say that I can pay for these because we do have a budget.

AR: No you can't, no, no don't worry about that I'll give you them with pleasure, and that is a poster from the 1970's, the great little museums. So it shows that spirit, Nidderdale museums mentioned there. It shows the spirit that there was that I've been trying to explain really in those days for doing this kind of thing in local area. You can have that, I've got heaps of copies of that left.

TB: (01:28:32) Fantastic. Just so I've got it on the record, that's fantastic. Thank you.

AR: It's all very much of the same vintage you see and quite interesting really.

[Audio ends: [01:29:00]