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KEY:

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

I1: = Interviewer

I2: = Interviewer

R: = Respondent

I1: I presume we have. Okay, let's do that, just so it's official. Okay. So, thank you for being agreeing to be interviewed about the research project. **Key purpose is to collect information about your experience of creating a new artwork for a heritage site. You may decide you don't want to answer some questions and that's fine. As you know, this is part of a longitudinal research process and we may follow up on some of these questions later. Given that you're a named artist within the project, the information that you provide will be used in a range of outputs from the research, including conference** ___[0:01:32]. Okay?

R: That's going to be fine.

I2: Okay. So, how would you reflect upon- this is going to be different for you, about the Heritage [s.l England 0:01:50] selection process? So, in thinking about your commission, Andrew, how did you choose the site that you wanted to choose and why? The question that we asked the others was, "What about the selection process and the brief?" I think, for you, it's reflecting upon the brief for the sites, how did you come to the decision?

R: Well, actually, this is going to be a slightly odd answer. It was originally Cherryburn that appealed to me more, because of the Bewick connection, and because of the things that I was thinking about in terms of scale and animals. I was quite interested to return to something that I'd been working on years and years ago. Actually, Cherryburn, may, probably, be the one that was originally more interesting to me, but then because of the way that the project unfolded, it seemed more sensible to do two projects.

So, actually, to some extent, it was a practical decision, because of the sites we had, and it was more sensible to do two projects in one bigger site, which was Gibside, because Cherryburn couldn't have handled two. So, I thought, "Okay, Gibside is going to be sensible."

I suppose, I was quite intrigued by the whole Mary Eleanor Bowes story, although I was also quite conflicted by it, because the National Trust were interested in marking the year of women's suffrage and I didn't feel particularly the right person

to deal with that subject matter. In that obviously, it connects much more closely if you're a woman.

Nonetheless, as I got into Gibside, which hadn't been a place that I particularly enjoyed visiting, generally speaking, over the last few years. Anyway, I thought there were interesting things about it and this... Have we moved on to what I responded to the site was yet, or is it still on something else?

I2: No, that's fine. Keep going, because I go into the relationships.

R: So, there became things, both about physicality, the physical nature of the site. This thing, obviously, it's vast scale of little things that are separated by long distances. Like the Avenue that leads down from the chapel to the Column, and the fact that the Column, itself, being one of the tallest monuments of that sort in Britain, if not the tallest at the time. So, that, sort of, monumental versus tiny scale was interesting.

I became more interested in the story of Mary Eleanor and particular aspects of it, some of which are coming out in the work and some which aren't yet. Her wealth was founded on coal. This strange idea of her being incarcerated while she was sending off her... Well, originally, I thought he was her protégé, William Paterson, who was the gardener turned botanist. Not sure that he was, actually, really a protégé of hers, as it turns out.

Other aspects of the story which are coming into focus and going out of focus as I'm developing the work. Particularly, the character of Andrew Stoney-Bowes, a cad, but also quite a typical sort of person in some ways.

I2: Alright. Okay. You talked about the engagement with the story and the reason why it was a practical issue coming in play, which is interesting, about why you were responding to a larger site. Can you comment on the working relationships that you're beginning to develop with the site? Specifically, obviously-

R: Do you mean the people on the site or the site itself?

I2: Yes.

R: Okay. Well, I mean, those are also complicated, because initially I think there was a little bit of a tension there. This, again, is very specific to my part in the project, because obviously the other artists went through this selection process which we'd schemed up in the first place to mirror the way things really happen.

My involvement as an artist sat rather oddly with that, because there wasn't a competitive process- well, there was a competitive process actually, which is one that we went through with the AHRC in the first place. So, you know, which is probably, actually, more competitive than what was imposed upon the artists. Nonetheless, that didn't involve the sites themselves.

So, I suppose I felt a little bit uncomfortable about that, which was also why I, kind of, thought Gibside was a good idea, because it was a bigger, more open site, plus there would be another artist there who had been involved with selecting. So, it was, necessarily, such an imposition.

I think, actually, there was that kind of tension in the real world, particularly with, yes, I think [Name] for instance, felt a little bit uncertain about how a project that I

was doing, was going to be able to play in the women and suffrage theme. So, there was all that stuff, which again related to the practicalities of it. Which I think is actually settling down much better now.

Then there are other possible relationships which are yet to really develop. For instance, one of the aspects of this project, as I said, will be to do with William Patterson, or Paterson, I just don't know which it is

I2: I think it's Paterson. It's got one 'T', has it not?

R: I can't remember.

I2: I think it's got one 'T'.

R: Going off to South Africa and collecting plants and that kind of- well, it comes in a bit later on, but anyway, I mean, I think there's a good relationship to be had with the gardeners there, working around that.

I2: Could you just explain that a little bit more, in relation to your proposed work?

R: The gardeners bit or the plants bit, or both?

I2: The planting bit with the gardeners, yes.

R: I see this great contrast between Mary Eleanor Bowes being stuck at Gibside, more or less imprisoned, so unable to move from a place, whereas William Paterson was one of the first Europeans, so incredibly liberating, in a way, to go to South Africa, total free reign, the opposite in a sense. But both focused on this thing of these exotic plants and him finding all these plants, that some of which had never been found before, and collecting them and sending them back.

So, there's just an interesting pull there between what her experience must've been like and what his experience must've been like, and whether she was, kind of, living vicariously through him or something. You know, it's impossible to say, but you could think about it in those sorts of terms. So, that all amazing discovery of new plants might've been something that she would've thought, not necessarily aspired to, but you can imagine what it might've been like in somebody's imagination. I suppose, that is the, kind of, impossibility of a woman of that period being able to go on an expedition like that, as well.

In practical terms, I think I want to use some of these pots literally as planting pots, probably just two of them, but having South African plants. I have imagined various ways of it happening, but very intense coloured plantings in them, through different periods of when the work is on show.

So, there will be certain plants that are in bloom in early summer, others that come into bloom in mid-summer, some that come into bloom later on in the year. So, they're going to have to be a changing display, if you like. So, working with the gardeners there to identify those plants and then they'll actually cultivate them, could be an important part of it.

There's another relationship which I'm also interested in, just carrying on that natural history theme. This idea of Mary Eleanor Bowes being incarcerated in the house and the whole thing of the parrot. You know, the bird in the cage, because

parrots were quite a lot kept in Georgian Britain. I began to think what birds would represent the other protagonists in the story.

Curiously, Andrew Stoney-Bowes and a robin connected my mind. Even though a robin is Britain's favourite bird, in fact they're extremely promiscuous and quite nasty birds. I think, in a way, the correspondence is quite close, because he obviously managed to con people with consistency through his life and beyond. They weren't ever that clear cut, these kinds of court cases and stuff, and he still had quite a following.

So, if you think of him as like a robin, then what other characters become what kind of birds? At one point, I was thinking, "Well, maybe I should get the volunteers, all, to actually do the vignettes of these various characters who appear in the story," and literally put it out to a questionnaire. You know, 'What bird do you think corresponds to this person in the story?' I haven't done that and it's still there in my mind.

So, that could be another possible collaboration with the people who work at Gibside. I mean, the whole thing of working collaboratively is quite an interesting dimension in this project, for me. Partly because, I have done that in some ways but not in this particular sense.

I2: What do you mean, "Working collaboratively"?

R: Allowing other people to have a say in how the work develops in quite a big way. So, for instance, when I've done stuff in India with women who work with cow dung, there was a project I did there, where they were the main shapers of the work, really. It couldn't have possibly have happened without them having made these things before.

So, I think this idea of people having a, sort of, ownership of the work by actually having a part in its creative gestation is a very interesting thing. Particularly, as at the moment, the different models of creative practice, where you've got the individual voice at one end and very participatory, collaborative ways of making work at another, is a very topical debate in the way that contemporary art is made. So, I think this whole idea of working in a heritage place plays in quite an interesting way to that wider debate.

I2: Do you think the site staff and the relationships that are beginning to emerge there, are they having an effect on how you're thinking about the work or not, perhaps?

R: Well, they are actually. I think one of the things that an artist working in a heritage site, there's always a balance between doing something that you think is going to be acceptable within the ethos of the site, I mean, there are different ways, or something that is much more challenging. You know, making pieces that are quite confrontational or provocations.

The conversation we were having yesterday, where I'd expected them to be much more nervous about putting stuff on the Avenue or putting stuff- might be quite difficult. What are bound to raise objections from people who go there. In fact, they took a very different approach to what I'd expected, which is, "Yes, this is only a temporary intervention."

Actually, they were seeing it in terms of warming things up a bit for that, well, you know, for that, sort of, [s.l Korean tumuli 0:15:48] thing that they're planning to do

in the Walled Garden. I don't think ___ to do, yes. God, I feel deeply compromised, if I'm really helping them or not. (Laughter)

I2: What one?

R: You know, the tumuli in the Walled Garden. That's what they were talking about yesterday.

I1: They spoke about it in our original site visit, I think.

R: Yes, they don't refer to it directly, now. It's always, kind of, oblique.

I2: Why did I miss that?

R: The tumuli.

I1: Oh, the shaped gardened.

I2: Oh, that shaped garden. Oh, the big thing? The huge, big project?

R: Yes.

I2: Oh, yes. God, no.

R: That's what they were talking about yesterday.

I2: Oh, were they?

R: Yes.

I2: Oh, yes, that's rights. Yes, I did quite get- right, okay. Yes.

R: Well, because I notice, now, that they allude to it quite often and they're always skirting around it. (Laughter)

I2: I don't think that's going to happen.

R: Well, anyway. Well, they seem to think it's going to happen. Yes, so they were thinking, "Well, actually, maybe it's good then to confront people with something that's a bit less comfortable," because we're thinking we're going to do that, big time, next year, whenever that is that, that's going to happen. So, that did make me think that, actually, these pieces should be more of a provocation than a, sort of...

I2: Yes. It's trusting, that, actually.

R: Well, it is, because of the nature of these pieces as well, is that they can either sit very comfortably, a pot is potentially a comfortable aesthetic that sits quite happily within a situation like that, or they could be much less comfortable.

I2: Sorry, I'm commenting on your work, but that black one that you made is really quite menacing, which is really...

R: Well, they could be really nasty, because to some extent, I think of them as embodiments of the different people in the story. So, Mr Nasty, but also Mrs- I

don't think Mary Eleanor Bowes is exactly, a particularly sympathetic character either.

I2: No, she's not. No. Right. So, yours is going to be, obviously, a different kind of comment on this, but the relationships with the research team, in respect of you as an artist, how are you finding that, as being an artist and part of the research team as well? I mean, is that conflicting? Is that difficult?

R: Well, I suppose the difficulty, again, goes back to the way that they work develops. I'm very conscious of a need to always pull it back to the story, if you like. Which I don't think is a particularly natural thing for an artist to do, actually. I mean, I think quite often you want to... Well, you have to backtrack a couple of steps here, that one thing that I haven't had to do, and this is a very marked contrast to the other artists, is come up with a proposal in the first place, that directly answers the site. I mean, eventually I did do that, but I was quite resisting doing that. Whether I should have been or not, I'm not sure. I think that it's much more interesting, as an artist, not to have a proposal that you're locked into, but to be working in a way that is much more developmental and you don't have to predict what's going to happen with the work, and that it does evolve along the way.

Actually, that's been one of the most interesting things for me, because the fact that you're tied into the mechanics of having to make things safe and stand up, and somehow be acceptable to the site team, at the same time as doing what anyone would do artistically...

I2: Is that compromising?

R: Yes, not necessarily compromising, well, it is compromising, actually, yes. Also compromising, I think, is continually pulling something back to a narrative that I don't necessarily find that engaging. I mean, the Mary Eleanor Bowes story is so deeply unpleasant, it's not something that you would, probably, naturally make a piece about. I mean, there are elements in it that are interesting, but I think there are lots of things about the story that are pretty horrible.

I2: I mean, that's quite an interesting reflection. So, does that mean that you have a sense of resistance as you're making the work? This is different, then? This is different from any other commission you would've had, because in a way, it feels like you're being dragged into it?

R: No, it's not so much being dragged into it. It's more a question of, when you're making work you're always imagining how it might go, and quite often I'm imagining ways that these might go that have absolutely nothing to do with... At that point, they completely depart from the historical narratives, or they depart from having a particularity to Gibside.

They become more about themselves and how they develop independently as pieces of art. Although, I suppose, I'm always imagining them in that physical situation. The conflict, really, becomes to me, saying to myself, "Well, now, I really need to pull this back to this particular story of the set of characters in Georgian England."

I1: Is this the tension with the brief thing that we've been thinking about?

I2: Yes. This is really quite interesting, because is, then, the brief restricting artistic practice? Have you ever made a piece of work in direct response to a brief like this before, being a historical site?

R: I'm not sure. I mean, I think the thing I did at Cragside kind of responded to a brief, but perhaps... Actually, interestingly, that was a bit different because, well, in a way that was very different, because that went through the proposal accepted or rejected stage. Once the people who are doing the selecting had accepted what I put to them, then it responded to the brief. That bit of the question is solved, so I then went on and made the piece, and in a sense, I didn't have worry whether it connected to Cragside, in that case, or not.
With this piece, I suppose, because it hasn't gone through that kind of approval, it's in my mind, therefore, that it has to be pulled back all the time to the brief. Do you see what I'm saying?

I2: Yes. It's quite an interesting reflection you've made, actually.

I1: Yes, it is.

I2: You do wonder whether briefs are restricting.

R: I mean, I think they can be restricting or they cannot be restricting, really. It depends a bit.

I1: I think this is something that is, perhaps, worth thinking about in terms of looking at the work later in the process, because of the ways that other artists have responded. I don't necessarily want to raise that now, in case of shaping the discussion in that direction, but I think this is really interesting and we've got a lot, here, in this reflection, I think, to think through.

I2: Yes. There's something about that, that's really...

I1: Yes.

I2: I think I've finished my bit, hang on a minute.

I1: Yes.

I2: How do you see the relationships develop as we go through the commission? How do you see those relationships with the sites developing?

R: Well, I'm hoping that thing with the gardeners will develop quite positively. I don't know whether this idea of the characters in the story, trying to involve other people in doing that. There are other things that I'm still thinking about. Like, one of the things I was quite interested to bring into this piece were artistic quotations. So, for example, Louise Bourgeois uses needles as a motif for mending in a lot of her work, and that idea of mending, sewing, seems to potentially to connect with Mary Eleanor Bowes.

So, one point, I was thinking of trying to get an ant's nest working in one of these things, but I think it's too difficult. There's a thing called a great hairy northern ant, that makes it's nest out of pine needles. 'Pine needles', you know, and that sort of needle. Having a big heap of needles, as both using that Louise Bourgeois idea of the needle as a motif for mending, so it's there as a quotation and it becomes a pot that's about mending.

Then I was thinking, "Well, I could get a load of volunteers to go and collect a load of these pine needles," but I should really have done that if I was going to do it, because they're all getting a bit manky now. Although, they're not seasonal in the way that other leaves are.

I2: You would have to talk to the gardener, because it might have an impact on the garden, of course. I don't know.

R: Well, yes, and they've got quite a lot of the right sort of pines there, so I potentially could still get them, but that's not exactly collaboration, that's more labour, you know, getting people to actually go and...

I2: When you say about you think, "The relationship with the gardeners will develop," that's what you said, for whom will that...? Is it for the benefit of them or for you?

R: Yes, I mean, I don't think it's, necessarily, a deep intellectual expedition, but I think on the scale of things, I think it's quite interesting looking at what... I've already been having this discussion with the nursery that I go to, "What are South African based plants?" That's what we're talking, South Africa as a source for these plants. "Which ones flower at different times of year? What are the cultivation requirements?" So, I suppose, the beneficiary is the artwork, in the end. I don't think it's a person, necessarily.

I2: Right, okay. A thought occurred to me, is the requirement in your head, as you're part of the research team, to work with a historic site, is there a need to keep relationships good and active within the site, impacting on your thought process of developing the work?

R: Well, there's probably a bit of that, but I don't think that is what's driving there. I think that might've been more a worry about the management team more. I was a bit nervous that, that was getting derailed. Not exactly derailed, but wasn't on the rails as much as it could've been at one point. I think engaging with the gardeners and stuff, it's not something I feel obliged to do because of the project brief. It's something I do more out of a genuine interest in how that changed the work.

I2: Okay, great. Thanks.

R: There may be a bit of that shading it as well, I suppose. I hadn't thought about that.

I2: Yes, okay, that's good for me.

I1: Yes?

I2: Yes.

I1: I mean, what's interesting, and I've just looked back at the notes, even in thinking about the commissioning process, you've covered a couple of the questions that come under section three. There's this question about your creative practice. So, I guess, it's worth, probably, focusing on two out of those four questions now. Really, the first one is, rather than relating to this specific commission, it's this sense of what your artistic practice is? So, I

guess, the subheading question is, what would your formal statement of practice be? How do you describe your artistic practice, in general?

R: I think this is an artificial thing to have to do, but artists have to make statements. I quite often describe it as citing work in relation to architecture or landscape, or scale. So, generally speaking, my work exists outside a gallery situation. So, I am making things in relation to the place where they're going to go.

I1: Why does it feel artificial? That's an interesting...

R: To write an artist's statement?

I1: Yes.

R: You're trying to explain something in 100 words, or whatever it is, that doesn't tend to want to be explained in any number of words. You know, it's a visual activity.

I2: So, it's restrictive?

R: It's restrictive. It's also restrictive because there are expectations now, the kind of language that you use or the kind of things that you say, or how you put your work in relation to other work that's being made, or trends in contemporary art. You're never just talking about the work, you're always thinking about, also, how it's going to be positioned in the mind of the person that you're writing the statement for. So, you might write a very different kind of statement for curator X, as you would do for public Y, and neither of them are really, often, a very accurate description of what your work is really about.

I1: That's really interesting.

I2: It's interesting because these pieces that you made, are they sculptures? Are they ceramic pieces? There is a fluidity, I think, in your practice. Your practice is fluid, in that it does change in respect to situation and location, and context.

R: Yes, I think there's certainly a pull there, between a very traditional craft-based form, which is the pot. You know, you wouldn't necessarily have to see that as being a piece of contemporary sculpture at all. I think they, potentially, become more on the contemporary sculpture end of the spectrum when you group them together and you think of them as containers or bases for things.

I think one of the reasons why I'm quite interested to put plants in them, was because in one way that's just saying, "Okay, it's a pot plant. It's a plant pot with plants growing out of it." You could take it on that level, as being, you know, it might be nice to look at, but in conceptual or intellectual terms it's extremely unchallenging, or that could not be the case at all. I mean, it could be much more thought provoking in the way that, that relationship between sculpture, a plant, a plant pot. All of those things are up for consideration.

I2: Interesting.

I1: Yes, definitely. So, I guess, you have definitely covered a bit of this question, but I think it's just worth asking specifically. How does your approach to this commission differ from anything you've done before? Does it feel different?

R: Yes, it feels totally different. I mean, part of it is because I feel a great sense of responsibility, because it's part of this, sometimes I think, a ridiculously over-funded project. (Laughter) Don't write that down. Yes, it's a vast amount of money, isn't it?

I2: Yes, but yesterday you were saying about the budget being too tight.

R: Well, the budget is too tight. I mean, when you reflect on the budget, and it's a huge amount of money in what is normally art-grant terms, and yet that is immediately divided into three, because a third of it goes to salaries, a third of it goes to overheads. So, it's basically only a third of it, less than a third of it, left for, actually, the making and siting, and doing of the work. I think it's £180,000. We had a best part of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million that's actually not committed to salaries or overheads, or whatever. Might be a bit more than that. I can't remember. So, the budget is a very curious thing anyway.

I1: Yes, it is.

I2: The budget is a curious thing, because in commissioning terms it's not huge.

R: No, that's the curious thing, isn't it? That it's for three or four, or five, however many it's going to be, not tiny, they're relatively modest commissions.

I2: No, it's not. It's a modest commission, definitely.

R: That was interesting, that was noted on one of the peer review comments, that they were fairly small value commissions. I mean, I think they're okay within the scope of the thing. As it turns out, I think we would've got away with doubling them. It only would've added an extra £60,000 to the overall project budget.

I1: I guess, that is interesting to think about.

I2: I think it is.

I1: In terms of, a) follow-on funding, but also then having the-

I2: Yes, absolutely.

R: Well, the thing is, I was really nervous that the thing was getting fair too expensive. As it turns out, now, I don't know, but it was ranked the second to top, if the top one, of those ones that went to that particular panel. Our project was top, apart from one that was an early career researcher one, which tend to get bounced up anyway. So, we would've got anything up to £1m, which is the maximum bid that you can make under that scheme. We would've got that, for definite. So, the lesson to that is you just cost them as they cost, and see how they-

I2: Yes, don't compromise.

I1: Yes.

R: Yes. I mean, I think the top eight, or something, were funded. If it had been seven or eight, it might've made a difference, but as it turned out it wouldn't have done.

I1: That's interesting. I guess, that's just interesting to think about, in terms of, again, your position within this project, as both artist and PI, and that sense of responsibility in your creative process actually impacting in, perhaps, a slightly different way, maybe?

R: Well, yes, because I'm also conscious that it, again, comes back to the costing, because we only actually allow... When we were costing up the commissions, we cost them in such a way that there was a fee of £16,000 for each and a making budget of £7,000 or £8,000. Which is ridiculously small. What all the artists have done is turned that on their heads, that they're taking a much smaller fee. Well, I think Mark has gone a bit- well, with the- well, we imagine, but certainly Fiona and Matt. Certainly, Matt has taken quite a small fee and putting all of his money into the making of the thing.

It does mean that I've only got quite a small budget to work with, to actually make these pieces work. Hence, to some extent, the clay, which is a relatively cheap material to work with.

I1: So, that's interesting. The next question is around success, which what does success look like in terms of this project, for you?

R: Well, again, there are different ways that I think about that because there's the project overall and the impact that, that has. By impact, I think I mean the amount of attention that it generates. Whether it gets a high profile, which I hope that it will do. In particular, whether it fulfils quite high expectations on the part of National Trust, potentially English Heritage, if we end up working with them, Churches Conversation Trust, Arts Council, other stakeholders.

I think, so far, the signs are quite good on that front. AHRC, what they make of it... In a way, it's a funny sort of thing for, both, as an academic and as an artist, they're very different things. So, in terms of my success as an academic, most depends on some of the academic aspects of the project. Its artistic success is much more difficult to judge, because Gibside is not a major contemporary art venue, or anything like that. So, artistically, this is not going to be a... Well, it was quite interesting to talk to Mark about this, because you don't think it's going to be a mega hit, because, you know, making work for Gibside, it's not a very high-profile site. I suppose, whether or not the work succeeds or not in its own terms is another judgement. I was having a conversation with Mark Fairnington about the potential of this as a REF output, the whole project. Which he said himself, "This was a potential for a four-star REF output." Which I hadn't thought about it as, but when we were talking about it, I thought, "Yes, maybe he's right."

I1: Which, I guess, is interesting because the sense of the project having an element of research which is about the aspect of the influence on the artist in that professional development, and there are a number of people who are the artists, who are in this curious artist, academic...

I2: Position.

I1: Yes.

I2: That's interesting what you were saying, but am I getting this right? Artistically, this isn't a huge challenge, for you?

R: No, it is a huge challenge artistically.

I2: It is, artistically?

R: It's definitely a huge challenge. Yes, it is a huge challenge. For me, personally, how I make this story work within these pots. Whether these end up as being pots or sculptures, there are many dimensions to it that are... I'm investing a huge amount of time in this, which could be invested in something else. So, whether it was at Gibside or somewhere incredibly prestigious, it's become irrelevant. Artistically, it definitely is a challenge, yes.

I1: Yes, that's really interesting.

I2: That's interesting.

I1: Yes, it is. Okay, that's probably that covered, really. So, audience.

I2: Who do you see the audience for the work?

R: The audience will be people who visit Gibside, people who visit the work online and our stakeholders, and people who just chance upon it while online, basically, because that's more of the art audience. I don't think there's a massive art audience at Gibside, so that's your public. So, I certainly want it to be accessible to those people, who I imagine those people to be.

I2: Are you think differently about this work that you're making because you're thinking about the audience at Gibside, do you think? So, is the audience coming into your thinking?

R: Yes, they are. I want it to be accessible. Actually, I definitely include as the audience, the people who work at Gibside.

I2: Can you just explain what accessible means a little bit more?

R: It means somebody can encounter the artwork and understand what it's about and appreciate it, and not feel completely alienated from it, or alien to it. They see it as something that connects to them. Well, they might look at it and think, "Oh, those are nice pots," and then they look at it a bit more carefully and then they get something from it. I don't think they will necessarily get anything about the story of Mary Eleanor Bowes. They might get a teeny-weeny bit of that, but I think they'll find it, kind of, intriguing.

I2: I'm just going to drill down a little bit more, because I find this bit... I mean, obviously, this is just something that I'm personally interested in, in that, when you're thinking of those people, you're making an assumption, aren't you, about the position of those visitors and who they are?

R: Yes, I'm making an assumption that they're not people who have a particular interest in visiting art galleries, who aren't interested in contemporary art.

I2: Yes, I have these discussions with the National Trust quite a lot and English Heritage quite a lot, because as a curator, they would say to me, "Our visitors won't be able to take anything contentious or uncomfortable," and you're saying, "How do you know that? How are you judging that? How are

you positioning that?" I found it quite a challenge, those sorts of conversations about audience.

R: I think people are more receptive to thing than they're often given credit for.

I2: Absolutely, I do. As a curator, there's a danger that you start pitching things at a level that you think is appropriate, which it's all a nonsense. So, discussion for another time, but it's like audience, who is that audience? Why do you think they won't get the story of Mary Eleanor Bowes? Do you think you need to make it-

R: I don't think art is very well suited to telling linear, narrative stories. I think it can allude to things. I mean, I'm very pro these having a panel, somewhere, explaining something about them, because I don't think you would... Even though the thing behind you is far more literal than I would ever normally do, I still don't think somebody looking at that would understand that it was about... What that writing is, is excerpts from William Paterson's journals done in South Africa, but obviously you wouldn't know that unless you were told.

I2: Did you feel the need to make it more literal?

R: Yes, I did.

I2: Because you think the audience is going to get it?

R: Well, I think one of the reasons why I wanted to do a number of these pots as well, is because then I thought that would give scope for some of them to be more literal. There was a bit of a tension, here, actually. Some of them could be much more literal and others could be less literal.

I2: Oh, there's some good stuff coming out here, I'm telling you, for our conference, how literal and that-

R: Well, I mean, literal in literal terms, because it is literal as in word literal, isn't it?

I2: Yes. There's some really interesting areas that won't be-

I1: Also, that I think this is an interesting thing and I'm trying not to turn it into a conversation, but the role of the artwork, both, in relation to language, in terms of your statement. What it does, how you can speak about it, how it is effectively something that should not be words.

I2: Interpretation, yes.

I1: This sense of artwork is not very good at telling literal stories, yet it is being put in the position to actually try and do that.

I2: The brief did, actually, ask for it to be a literal story. So, it's going back to the brief.

R: I think all the artists struggled with that, particularly with Gibside.

I2: Yes, they did.

R: I suppose, as ever with a piece of art, things happen along the way. The way that these words are actually incised into the clay, to me, became like a kind of scarification, which again connects with Africa because there is a lot of scarification that goes on, but also this idea of Mary Eleanor Bowes being physically- it was a physically abusive relationship as well. So, I was quite interested in the way that actually making words, they become a physical action as well as something that you read.

So, putting that in relation to the audience, that's something that I hoped they would pick up, probably not consciously, but thinking about how words are incised into the surface.

I2: So, you want them to actively engage with the story of Mary Eleanor through this work?

R: A bit, not massively. I think I'd probably want them to know that, that's at the route of it. See, I don't think that story is there anywhere at Gibside at all. There's a very simple reason for that, which is that the house, which is where normally that story would be told... If you go to any other heritage site, it's always through the house and its furnishings and the stuff that's in there, that's what tells the historic story, isn't it? That's completely absent at Gibside.

I2: Yes, there's no sense of resonance with the person.

I1: Houses perform that biographical function, don't they?

I2: Even if it's a fiction.

R: Yes, there is her wedding dress in the chapel, but that's a bit out of context anyway.

I2: How do you imagine the site staff and the volunteers will engage with the artwork as we go through? I think you've touched on this, actually, but...

R: I think some of them will be quite positive about it, because I think they will look at a big pot and there will be a certain, kind of, "That's a big pot," thing about it. Also on one level it's fairly accessible.

I2: Okay, yes. That's one.

[Break in conversation 0:50:10 - 0:50:19]

I1: I guess, we're at heritage-

I2: Yes.

I1: What does the word heritage mean to you?

R: I have a great prejudice against the word heritage. What the word heritage really means? It's a big turn-off for me.

I2: Is it?

R: Yes, because I associate it with things that I have something of a prejudice against, which is it's got a mushy academic zone, a, sort of, lack of any precision. I

find it a term that has overtones of being nationalistic in an objectionable way, but on the other hand it's a part of my heritage and then maybe it's not such a bad thing.

I2: You think it's quite narrow?

R: Well, heritage is famously undefinable, isn't it? Nobody really knows what heritage means at all. It's not history and it's not... I mean, I suppose, if you were asking me to define it, it would be something around history, in the way that it relates directly to an individual.

I2: Okay.

I1: You said, "A lack of precision," and, "mushy," can you say a bit more about that?

R: Well, I think it's mushy because I think people squeeze it into meaning whatever they want it to mean. Sometimes I think that we're actually using the word heritage in this project to, not exactly shoehorn it, but it makes it fit into certain fashionable categories. Like the AHRC has got a bit heritage theme running at the moment, and we are becoming a part of that, which is fortuitous actually, but simply by virtue of having the word heritage in the title. If we had called it contemporary art in historic places, it might've made a profound difference to the way that this project is received.

I2: Yes, you're right there, I think.

I1: So, with that, how is it significant to your practice? Is it significant?

R: The whole project or the pieces that I'm making?

I1: I suppose, these questions relate- they're interrogating the sense of the term heritage.

R: Right, heritage, okay.

I1: So, you've described it, on the one hand, as, "Lack of precision," as, "Overtones of nationalism," and, "A discussion with the project," and this can be your personal engagement with... So, part of this questioning is around your personal family, it's just this sense of what it means to you, but also, then, that connection to your artistic practice.

R: I think the concept of heritage is not something that I would necessarily think of as relevant to my practice, because I think artistic practices tend to respond to very specific, often, visual prompts or other cues, and that goes back to heritage being a rather woolly, overarching term. So, putting art and heritage in the same sentence is actually quite a... What's an oxymoron, again? Anyway, it might be one of those.

I2: So, my agency, Arts&Heritage... (Laughter)

R: Well, no, because I mean, this is given the understanding it's happening all over the time and all over the place. Yes, Arts&Heritage is a very general umbrella term, isn't it? When it comes down to a particular piece of work...

I1: Yes. What's interesting, yes, is this relationship between your practice and heritage, and I guess, following on from something you said about, "There are overtones of nationalism," and I guess, I don't want to qualify this question, I always worry that that's what I do, but what do you think the significance of heritage is more broadly? The prior question was about its relationship to you and your practice, and then this is just asking for, perhaps, more specificity around your understanding of the broader significance of heritage.

R: I think heritage is incredibly important, and this can be a positive or a negative thing, as people have always, but are very conspicuously constructing their identities in relation to what they perceive as being their heritage. I mean, then it becomes a political thing, obviously, but I think it's extremely important.

I2: Think it's dangerous?

R: Yes, I do. It can be very positive, or it can be a very negative thing. You could see Brexit in heritage terms, couldn't you?

I2: Yes.

R: Which is a negative, but on the other hand it's also very necessary. People do need that sort of grounding, otherwise you can be quite dislocated.

I1: So, this is not relating to your artistic practice necessarily, but just more in the sense of your personal history, what would you say your previous engagement with heritage sites has been?

R: Strong, because we were taken as children to what are now- I mean, I think they were described as heritage sites at that point, but I've always gone around old places.

I1: Are there any examples that you remember?

R: Millions, yes. Castles, houses, gardens, lots and lots, and lots. I mean, like prehistoric sites. I could name a dozen, if you wanted me to, but they would be, more or less, random choices.

I2: What are your memories of that experience?

R: Really important.

I2: Really important?

R: Oh, very important and very positive.

I1: What do you think the impact of those experiences have been through your lifetime, do you think?

R: Enormous. One of the strongest.

I2: That's interesting, because you say... So, that's very positive.

R: It's only the word heritage that I don't like. I would never think about these places as being heritage sites.

- I2: Yes, okay. So, you think about them individually, as places with a history, which is different?**
- R: They're not my heritage. If you think of Avebury Ring, for example, you know, that Stone Age circle. I mean, I don't think about that as being a heritage site, it's just an interesting place. I don't cast my own, personal heritage back there.
- I1: What I'm interested in... You look like you were about to...**
- I2: That's really interesting. Sorry, yes. How did you know that my head was going?**
- I1: I could see [s.I you entranced 0:59:53]. (Laughter)**
- I2: You said that, "That's a very interesting site," and I think... (Laughter) That's very funny you saw me doing that. That's funny, because I would say I connect to that site through a human story, but you seem to be talking about it as a site of things, as a visual. Do you think that's true?**
- R: Yes. When I think about those places, I don't primarily think about the people who made them. I mean, I do sometimes think about that, but yes, I think about them as material places.
- I2: As a material, and as a visual? As a sculptural...?**
- R: Yes, totally.
- I2: Now, that's really interesting, because I don't think about them as that. My overriding thing as I come to these, I actually think about the people and the connection. Strange. That's really interesting.**
- R: I don't think about them like that at all.
- I2: What do you think about them? How do you think about them?**
- I1: I don't know. I think about them as complex places. As difficult, not difficult in the sense of difficult histories, i.e. obscured etc., but difficult in the sense of, "How do we deal with them?" They tell stories, are physical places, they fall down, you have write about them. I see them as complex places. I guess, what I was fascinated with, with Andrew, and I want to try and just pick up on this, partly just for the record, if you like, this project is trying to establish impact on people who visit, and I think one of the things that you've highlighted is perhaps the complexity of that, in relation to the impact on you, is lifelong. How do we think about what the impact of these places are on people, in a project that has this kind of temporal line, in relation to what the places are for people? When are we thinking about when this impact is going to be?**
- R: Well, that's an interesting question. My answer to it might be relevant or not, but when I think about Gibside, when I first went there, I remember being taken there by somebody, probably about 30-plus years ago, and it was quite different from what it is now. All that stuff, out by the common, was ___[1:02:45] at the end, by quite an aggressive, excluding landlord. It's taken me a long time to dislodge that memory. That was my impression of Gibside, which I think was one of the reasons

I was a bit negative about it. Plus, I think the house is very unattractive aesthetically.

I think when you think about places like that, places like Gibside, you're always replaying your memories of those places when you think about them. I suppose, for a child coming to Gibside when these sculptures are there next year, I hadn't thought about this before, but that will be a part of their memory. For a child, these will be quite memorable objects, because they're like giant pots. So, then I think that might quite imprint itself on a child's memory of that place and they get a, kind of, association.

I can't think of any- because contemporary art didn't really exist in heritage places when we were children, so you can't have that kind of association very much.

I1: That's a really interesting description. This idea that it'll be imprinted within memory.

I2: Yes, it is quite interesting, actually. It was all, "This was how it was," when you visited the historic places? Sorry, yes.

R: I mean, I do think that art can ruin, well, not ruin, but be a negative thing of experience. I remember going to Rievaulx Abbey once, and they had the most dreadful exhibition of art dotted around the place. It really did quite spoil it. You know, what is normally- I don't know if you know Rievaulx, but it's very-

I2: No, I haven't been to Rievaulx.

R: Where is it?

I2: No, I've not been to Rievaulx.

R: It's a lovely one. It's one of those kinds of Abbeys, like Fountains, Jervaulx and Rievaulx. It's a really nice one.

I1: It is beautiful.

R: It's beautiful because, you know, it's all that pleasure of ruins, or whatever it is. As soon as you bring into the contemporary world by imposing contemporary art on it, it can be quite a negative thing.

I2: "Imposing contemporary art on it." Absolutely. So, that's where those things like the Waddesdon places and the Chatsworth, wherever, where you've got somebody putting something on it, imposing on it, that doesn't make any sense.

R: I think that, often, doesn't work at all.

I2: Yes, and you can always tell, can't you?

R: Yes. I mean, this is where this project is going to become interesting, because in the end, the proof is in the pudding, really, isn't it? For instance, I think Mark's will be a very considered response to Cherryburn. I guess, you can, sort of, see it's going to fit in there anyway, isn't it, because framed pictures are part of the place anyway. So, it'll be quite unimposing, but I should think it'll be quite successful, I think.

Whereas, Fiona's, I'm really not sure how that one will go down at all. I think that'll probably elicit a much more mixed response. I can't comment on mine, I'm too close to it, but thinking about how I imagine those ones playing out. Then Matt's is obviously a much less visited site.

I1: His plays into the things that you've talked about. About the sense of engagement and how heritage is used particularly, and how it influences with audience.

R: Yes.

I2: It's about the human engagement, that one, as well.

I1: Yes.

R: I think his will be successful, although-

I1: The spectrum of collaboration, that's what I was thinking about. That Matt is in a different place on that spectrum, I think.

I2: Yes. I think it would be different if you were a visitor and you haven't been involved in it, how you will view it. If you are a participant in that, it's going to be-

R: The thing about the HGC one, is that people are going to go there specifically to see the artwork, aren't they?

I2: Yes.

R: Rather than come across the artwork because they're at the place anyway. I think our sample is so small, really, of the...

I1: Yes. Okay, I think that's...

I2: That's it.

[Aside conversation 01:07:39 - 01:07:59]

[End of Recording]