

FINAL REPORT ITP MA (MUSEUM ASSOCIATION) CONFERENCE BRIGHTON 2019

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The ITP MA Conference Brighton 2019

In 2019, the Museums Association (MA) Annual Conference & Exhibition has selected a theme 'Sustainable and Ethical Museums in a Globalised World' and for this year, the event took place at the Brighton Centre, Brighton City from 3rd to 5th October 2019. I had been selected to participate and became one of the international delegates to join one of the biggest museum events in the United Kingdom. I also had an opportunity to meet with the International Training Programme (ITP) team, Claire Messenger and Anna Cottle, and join interesting visits and activities organised by them. This trip to the United Kingdom also brought me to reunite with ITP 2017 fellow, Astghik Marabyan (Head of the Department of Cultural Heritage & Folk Arts, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture & Sport, Armenia), as well as to meet other ITP fellows, Dai Xuejing (Educator & Exhibition Curator, Shandong Museum, China, ITP 2015), Namrata Sarmah (Project Curator, Assam State Museum, Guwahati, India, ITP 2018), Roshan Mishra (Director, Taragaon Museum, Nepal, ITP 2018) and Wesam Mohamed (She is currently a PhD fellow at Aarhus University Denmark, Egypt, ITP 2015). With the amazing ITP team and fellows, I spent valuable time and experiences throughout the programme in London and Brighton.



ITP team and fellows at MA Conference Brighton 2019

International Training Programme (ITP) visit to The Weald & Downland Living Museum and Polesden Lacey, 1st - 2nd October 2019

On 1st of October 2019, our ITP fellows were scheduled to join a special trip organised by the ITP team, Claire Messenger, Anna Cottle and John Williams, Head of Photography and Imaging at the British Museum. Our destination for the day was the Weald & Downland Living Museum located in the South East of England. Prior to this programme, I had made background research into this museum and was quite curious to witness the collection of historical buildings that represents the history of England for a span of more than 1,000 years. I understand that it is not an easy task to re-assemble historical structure to its original form, to conserve, preserve and subsequently give access to visitors to get closer to these structures. The Weald & Downland Living Museum

has successfully brought not only one, but almost 50 historic buildings together on a site of 40 acres of land. It needs tremendous efforts from different museum professionals such as curators and conservators, as well as generous financial support by the cultural sector and private individuals to make this happened. On this trip, ITP fellows were given ample time and freedom to explore the site after the formal welcoming remarks by the knowledgeable museum staff.

This site, which contains buildings that date from 950 CE up to the 19th century, is simply amazing. There are lots to discover, but my favorite among these were the Schoolhouse from the first half of the 19th century, the Medieval House from the 15th century, Bayleaf Farmhouse from the 15th century and the Tudor Kitchen from the 16th century. The Schoolhouse, dated 1840s/1850s used to be a small school for six poor children from the parish of Wittering. This small building is furnished with long tables, stools, a black board, and adorable writing tablets placed on the tables. It is not only reviving the ambiance and feel of the early 19th century, but also creates an element of interaction for visitors especially for students and children. The Medieval House, which was originally located at Sole Street, Kent, is presently used as the museum's family activity hub. The Bayleaf Farmhouse, which is furnished with re-created medieval furniture, allows visitors to enter not only its central hall, but two rooms that were previously functioning as a service room and room of the owner. The 16th century Tudor Kitchen offered an interesting cooking demonstration by friendly volunteers of the museum.

The Weald & Downland Living Museum is not only successful in preserving the national heritage of the United Kingdom but for me they also offered an interesting site to study historical architecture. As a museum, it is always a challenge to present and to display architecture as a subject to the public. Visitors perhaps requires a comprehensive image or idea of a particular structure to help their overall understanding and to have a sense of space rather than see separate elements and parts of architectural objects such as columns, foundation stones etc. At the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, we took the initiative by displaying scale models of important and historical structures such as the Djenne Mosque in Timbuktu, Mali, the Umayyad Mosque, Damascus Syria, the Court of the Lions, Cordoba Spain, or the humble prayer houses located in the Malay Peninsula and Southeast Asia, together with historical architectural artefacts to help visitors' understanding.

The Weald & Downland Living Museum is not only displaying an actual historical building itself but accompanies that with a re-creation of activities of the past, and for me they are successful in creating the concept of the 'living museum'.

I would like to congratulate them and to wish many thanks to the staffs from the museum, Lucy Hockley (Cultural Engagement Manager) for the introduction and the tour of the museum, as well as to Julian Bell (Curator of Collections) who has vast knowledge about collection management and about their 15, 000 interesting and unique collections in the stores.





The Weald & Downland Living Museum

The second trip organised by the ITP team was on 2nd October 2019 and this time ITP team heading up to a beautiful country retreat called Polesden Lacey. We were expected to meet with Caroline Williams, House and Collections Manager of Polesden Lacey, for an introduction and a tour of the house. Polesden Lacey was originally owned by Lady Margaret Greville who lived there from 1906 – 1942. After her death, Polesden Lacey was gifted to the National Trust, United Kingdom. In the past, Lady Margaret Greville was known as a great host for weekend parties and her magnificent mansion that contained 15 rooms received many outstanding guests such as Winston Churchill and King Edward VII. Polesden Lacey is also known as a place of honeymoon for the future King George VI and Queen consort Elizabeth after their wedding in 1923.

The tour led by Caroline gave us an opportunity to understand the background of the site, the challenges to manage a piece of the country's national heritage and above all we managed to see closely the architectural details of the building and rooms inside it. To celebrate the contributions that were made by staff and workers at Polesden Lacey in the past, the "Polesden Voices" exhibition that is set up inside the building displayed stories of peoples who once worked hard to ensure the smooth running and operation of the house and estate. It is interesting to know that the staff and workers were allowed to use facilities and join the activities in the Polesden Lacey when there were no other guests staying in the house (such as playing cricket, tennis or golf), and they were also received generous gifts from Mrs Greville during special occasions such as Christmas. This exhibition presents the untold stories of the life inside Polesden Lacey.





Polesden Lacey

The highlights of the MA Conference Brighton 2019, the Brighton Centre, 3rd - 5th October 2019

The second day (Friday 4th October 2019) of the Museum Association Conference Brighton commenced with a keynote session, 'What is a museum?', a refreshing subject for museum professionals and delegates that discussed a variety of meanings and interpretation about the museum, and controversies about its definition. The speakers for this session including Richard Sandell, Professor of Museum Studies, Leicester University, Jette Sandahl, Museum Consultant and Errol Francis, Artistic Director, former mental health campaigner and chief executive in the United Kingdom.

My highlight for this final day of the conference was a session 'World Cultures Curating'. This session featured three museum curators; Rebecca Bridgman from Birmingham Museum, Rachael Minott from Horniman Museum & Gardens and Christo Kefalas from the National Trust who shared their experiences with the audience about the skill sets, requirements, and behaviors needed for those who work with world cultures.

Rebecca Bridgman, Curatorial & Exhibitions Manager who specialised in Middle East and South Asian collections, spoke about the Birmingham Museums' practices to respond with their world culture collections. Rebecca, who is also Chair of SSN Islamic Art and Material Culture mentioned the importance of collaboration with other curators from different specialisations, as well as academics in order to approach a wide scope of world culture collections. Rebecca Bridgman and Rachael Minott have collaborated for a temporary display / exhibition 'The Past is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire' at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The engagement with communities that belong to certain cultures is crucial as curators have an ethical duty to represent them responsibly. Christo Kefalas, specialising in Oceanic collections and working in preserving Hinemihi (the Maori meeting house) at Clandon Park, Surrey, briefly shared her project that requires connections with diasporic Maori communities from New Zealand. As a curator at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM) who is dealing with Islamic civilisation collections from around the world, somehow this session is relevant to me. It gave me an overview about the practice of some museums in the United Kingdom on dealing with their world culture collections. This session also highlighted the challenges and barriers experienced by museum professionals who are working with global collections.



ITP team and fellows at MA Conference Brighton 2019

In this conference I also joined some other interesting sessions such as "Big Ideas, Small Museums" as well as "Leadership for Sustainable and Ethical Future". The former session conducted by staff from Bude Castle Heritage Centre, Cornwall, presented a case study of how their institution responds to the issue of climate change. The team exemplified how such an institution, with a small number of staff, can generate small efforts which could bring a greater impact to world climate. The team from this institution showed us how they utilised the café in the museum to create awareness and to disseminate a green message through a small display. The latter session then introduced us about the modern leadership skill of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity). According to the presenter, this style of modern leadership requires 'hyper-connectivity' and speed networking among staff in the work place. Another presenter in this session also taught us how nature, such as a garden-

setting, could inspire and contribute to the improvement of modern leadership, and this was one of the unique and eye-opening sessions which I have participated in this conference.

Prior of joining the Museum Association Conference Brighton programme, I anticipated that this conference will put forward a variety of issues related with museums' sustainability, its principles, economic, environmental and social sustainability and much more. As a museum professional, it is important to have insights on the issue of museum sustainability as we have different kinds of challenges ahead of us, but of course the challenges are different among different institutions and countries. This conference to me not only successfully highlighted these issues, but importantly it gave me an overview about the museums culture in the United Kingdom and how they respond to challenges to ensure their sustainability and survival in the modern era. It expanded my horizons on seeing how museums actually can take up a role, a stand and responsibility to respond and to interact with issues as climate change, discrimination, even issues related with political upheavals.



ITP 2015, 2017 and 2018 fellows after our farewell dinner

This short visit to the United Kingdom also brought me back to the British Museum. I spent most of my time here visiting the new exhibition *Sir Stamford Raffles: collecting in Southeast Asia 1811-1824*, and *The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic world* and *The Enlightenment Gallery*. I also went to an exhibition at the British Library, *The Sir John Ritblat: Treasures of the British Library*, and enjoyed a short visit to the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS).

I would like to give thanks to everyone involved in the programme and to the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust for making it possible.