



**South and East  
Museums Federation**

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## A first foray into online collecting

When lockdown was announced at the end of March 2020 we were just about to run a series of collecting events for our Pride in Suffolk's Past project. This project is investigating LGBTQ+ history in Suffolk and collecting contemporary stories to add to the archive and to use in displays that will share the project's findings.

The aim of the collecting events was to ask people to come and see us at venues around the county, to record oral histories and share photos and documents that we could scan. We were planning to use the material collected at Suffolk Pride in June.

Once it became clear that Suffolk Pride would not be able to go ahead this year, our plans for a physical display morphed into plans for an online display. The display would use the historical content found by the project's researchers, but we also wanted to include contemporary stories. Since we could no longer run the in-person collecting days we started to investigate how we might collect those stories remotely.

The first suggestion was to ask people to email us their material. However, drawing a flow chart that showed how that process would work showed that it would be labour intensive and involve PDF forms going back and forth, with the depositor having to print and sign them, then scan them in to send them back. The whole process had several steps and we felt it was unlikely that many people would be prepared to put in the effort it took to do things in this way.

As an alternative we investigated whether an online survey platform could accomplish what we needed. As part of Suffolk County Council we have access to Smart Survey, which has been approved as GDPR compliant. We knew we could use it to ask people questions, but we also wanted to be able to collect digital files from people. Once we had confirmed the platform offers the option for people to upload files we knew this tool could work for us.

We selected and adapted questions that we had planned to use in oral history interviews (developed with SCC's LGBTQ staff network) and kept everything optional and open.

The survey starts with some background information about the project and who we are, why we are running the survey, and information about what will happen to people's responses. After asking about the respondent's connections with Suffolk, and their connections with the LGBTQ+ community, the questions they can choose to answer are:

- If you are out, could you tell us about your experience of coming out? How did your family and friends react?
- If you feel comfortable talking about it, can you tell us about any prejudice, discrimination, abuse or violence you have experienced because you are LGBT+?
- How do you think things have changed for LGBTQ+ people in your lifetime? What do you think still needs to change?
- If you could say something to your own teenage self about being LGBT+, or your own LGBT+ journey, what would it be?

- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?


These questions are followed by the opportunity to upload digital files if the respondent would like to.

The final page of the survey asks two consent questions, so respondents know exactly what will happen to their responses, and we know exactly how we can use them. The first question asks whether we can use the response in displays, publications and so on, and the second question asks whether we can preserve the responses within the archive. Both questions have the options to answer yes or no, or to set conditions on use of the material.

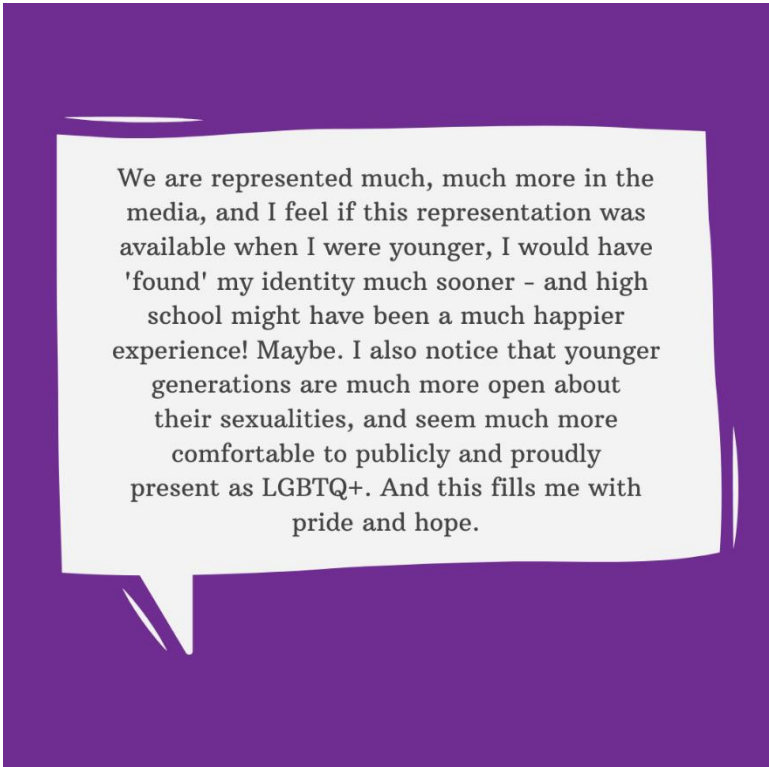
Given the potentially sensitive nature of the information being collected we thought carefully about how much identifying information we should ask for from people, and decided to ask only for a first name (even this was optional), for an indication of age, and for the respondent's preferred pronouns. This provides us with enough contextual information to be able to present people's responses while protecting anonymity. We also included a link to a list we have compiled of local and national organisations that offer support on LGBTQ+ issues.

The survey has been publicised through links from relevant pages on our website and on our social media channels, and by sharing with project partners and other relevant organisations. While we have not been inundated with responses, the ones we have received have been very high quality, with some people spending a significant length of time on the survey.

The responses collected so far proved invaluable in the creation of an online exhibition to mark Pride month, which can be seen on our website, [www.suffolkarchives.co.uk](http://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk), under Displays Online. Responses will also be used in a physical exhibition planned for 2021.



I feel like LGBTQ+ people are much more accepted now, and much less the butt of jokes, than we were in the 90s. Of course, there are some circles and ideologies within which we are a topic of scorn and derision, but these are much less generally socially acceptable - at least in the UK.



We are represented much, much more in the media, and I feel if this representation was available when I were younger, I would have 'found' my identity much sooner - and high school might have been a much happier experience! Maybe. I also notice that younger generations are much more open about their sexualities, and seem much more comfortable to publicly and proudly present as LGBTQ+. And this fills me with pride and hope.

Two of the responses to the question 'How do you think things have changed for LGBTQ+ people in your lifetime? What do you think still needs to change?' that are included in our online display

While we would still like to record oral history interviews when it is possible to do so, the survey has been a very useful way to bridge the gap left by the cancellation of the collecting events. Using an online survey platform has streamlined what would otherwise be a messy process, doing everything in one place, and allowing respondents to contribute in a very flexible way. Even when we can go back to running in-person events, online surveys will probably still be a useful tool we will continue to use in the future.

Hannah Salisbury

Community and Learning Officer (West Suffolk), Suffolk Archives

June 2020

## Collecting stories of lockdown

### *In the beginning...*

In March of this year we found ourselves in a strange position. Going through a major transformation project, we had *planned* to wind down activity and close our temporary public exhibition space as we shifted focus to the preparation of opening a new Museum later in the year. We didn't have a busy schedule planned regarding public engagement.

We did end up closing earlier than was planned and we did also end up postponing or cancelling some events, but not many. Our gift shop closed. Being local authority run, staff were asked to help directly with the city's response to the pandemic. At one point, three members of museum staff were involved with the council's response hubs. One member of staff, our community engagement officer, played a vital role in setting up the hubs.

### *Sharing stories*

We had always intended to continue using a site we set up called 'Oxford City Stories' <https://museumofoxford.omeka.net/>. This user friendly platform, called Omeka, creates online collections and acts as a database for whatever you want really. The initial reasons for setting up the website using this platform was that we wanted to collect images, recordings, objects (digitally), video and stories relating to the themes we will explore in the new Museum. We would then use the contributions to expand on the displays and maybe even look to include contributions in later exhibitions or display updates. It also has come to act as a way of recording and archiving the important work and exhibitions staff create with Oxford's residents. For example, the Queering Spires exhibition about Oxford's LGBTIQ+ spaces now has items uploaded to the site, whilst the exhibition itself is inaccessible.

It seemed particularly relevant to open and expand this platform to create an online exhibition around the city's response to the pandemic -

<https://museumofoxford.omeka.net/exhibits/show/the-covid-19-pandemic-and-oxfo/c19>

We had contributions from individuals, volunteers and other members of staff from across the council. We also 'harvested' and contacted organisations directly to ask if we could share what they were doing. This has fortunately given members of staff from our gift shop a focus. Within the site, you can create a map, showing hotspots of activity around the city. We saw what was happening on Facebook and other social media channels and asked people whether they might be able to share. We've even had contributions from our twin cities.

It has also grown and more organisations are asking people to contribute. The University has collected stories and will be sending to us to add as will the archive service for the county. It is great to work with different organisations that have various audiences.

### *Going forward*

We continue to grow the site and submissions, improving guidance and design as we go along. In the future, I hope we can use this as a way of developing displays and exhibitions, a really useful resource. I would like to see more personal accounts, people willing to share the negative impacts as well as all of the positive that is happening. We perhaps need to

work on our communications and guidance, but what is a real struggle is understanding how you convince people to share. The best stories are those you put the most time into. Sadly we are missing those one to one conversations, the random person popping by. In the future, we see this as being an activity in the new Museum. A volunteer being on hand to talk to visitors and locals, talk about their item and story and then capture that on the Omeka site. We see this as how we collect without physically collecting.

David Juler, Museum Development Officer at the Museum of Oxford  
(also happy to talk to anyone about using Omeka)

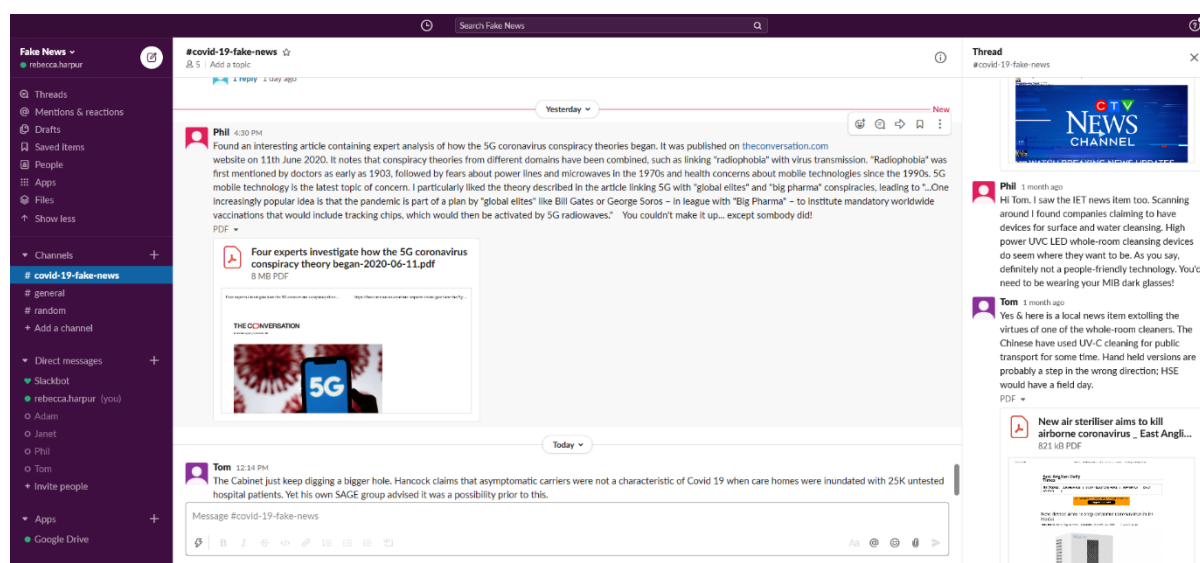
# Digital volunteer engagement during lockdown

As soon as lockdown was announced we knew we needed to keep our volunteers engaged and continue their contribution to Suffolk Archives – it would be a bonus if we could recruit volunteers on the way.

In 2019 we invested in Volunteer Makers. This is a digital volunteer engagement platform which breaks volunteering opportunities down into the amount of time which is needed to be committed. Volunteer Makers sends out notifications when a volunteering opportunity matches up to the person's skills and interests. We knew that whatever the opportunity for volunteer engagement, it all had to tie into the Volunteer Maker platform.

Three projects were identified: keeping an ongoing diary/scrapbook/photographs, filling in a survey and spotting fake news. Keeping an ongoing record such as a diary catered for those who wanted to do something physical or digital over a longer period.

Fake news engaged four volunteers working remotely, scanning online newspapers, reports and social media content and uploading what they deemed to be fake news to Slack. Slack is a secure online platform and allows volunteers and staff to engage with each other without having to share personal details. Two of the volunteers have been with us before, two are newly recruited. Two are based in Suffolk, one in Cambridgeshire and one in India. It is lovely to see volunteers who have not met in person talking and debating their findings.



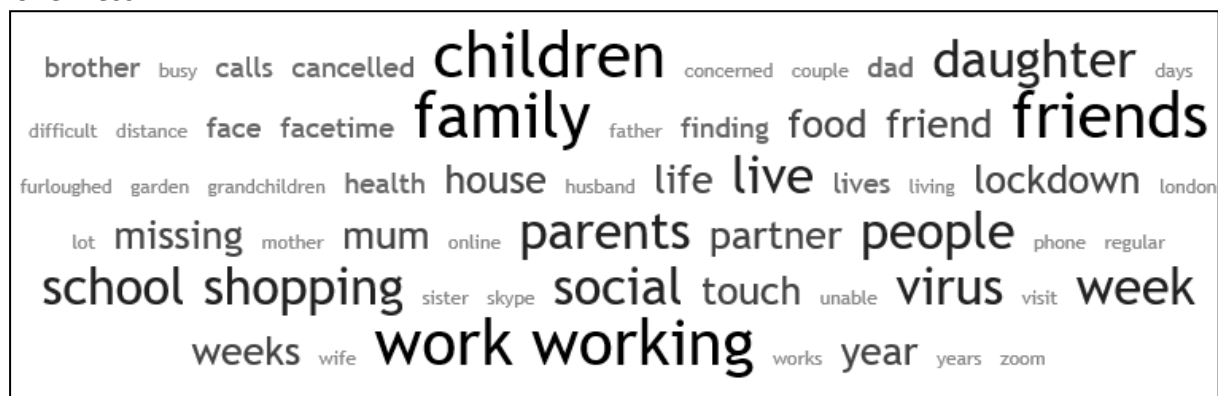
Screenshot of the fake news Slack channel.

Having all the volunteer research in one place has allowed staff members to seek out information needed for new exhibitions.

The most direct piece of digital engagement we have undertaken is encouraging people to fill out our online survey. The survey includes questions that centred on how different areas of life have been affected by the pandemic. There were also opportunities to upload content such as photographs, scans of drawings, letters and in some cases songs they have written! Finally, the survey finished with the conditions people wanted to deposit their entry under. At the time of writing, we had 87 responses. The entries are varied from people



enjoying the extra time spent in the garden to those who are missing human contact and loneliness.



Word cloud created from the responses to the question: How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected life for your family and friends?

All these opportunities are advertised on the Suffolk Archives website. A press release was published in the local newspaper and the volunteering opportunities are featured on our social media posts regularly to engage our new and regular audiences.

The content generated is currently being filtered to be included in a future exhibition. All of the content will eventually form a collection for future generations to use for research and engagement with their heritage.

Rebecca Harpur, Volunteer Engagement Coordinator for Suffolk Archives

## **Engaging Communities through lockdown**

### **The Red House, Aldeburgh**

The Red House is the former home of the Suffolk composer Benjamin Britten, located in Aldeburgh, Suffolk. The site includes a historic house and external historic rooms, such as Britten's Studio and Library, a museum and gallery space, The Archives Building and gardens.



Over the last few years a great deal of work has been done to increase engagement with local communities, families and schools. But now with restrictions placed upon us during lockdown, how have we tried to maintain and even develop this good work? Below are three highlighted examples.

#### **Reaching local families- Mini Music Makers**

Much has been done to develop an extensive learning and education programme for schools, families and children of all ages. Mini Music Makers is one of these initiatives, developed to engage local families with under 5s, with The Red House and with music. With initial partnership from Leiston Children's Centre, Mini Music Makers was launched in 2017 as a 90 minute weekly, free, and accessible music and play session to engage under 5s with historic collections, music, a gallery space and gardens. The group has developed and evolved over the last year and on average 30 families attend the sessions each week. Pleasingly, the group has turned into its own supportive community and online presence through a popular Facebook group page which has swelled to over 60 members. Since lockdown this group has grown to over 130 members. Since forming Mini Music Makers, the offer for young people at The Red House has also transformed. We now offer half-term activities specifically for under 5s with musical storytelling sessions, theatre and puppet performances as well as a range of resources within the gallery spaces to help families engage with the site.



Prior to the recent restrictions due to COVID-19, the online presence for this group had largely been the popular Facebook group page, which was mainly used as a platform to inform parents of activities and sessions taking place at The Red House. Since the closure of the site, a new approach was needed to help these families whilst self-isolating. Along the Suffolk Coast, rural isolation, poor public transport links and economic hardship create significant barriers to accessing cultural and other activities, and so the need to help families feel less isolated at this difficult time was really important. We decided to set up a musical session online through free to view videos. A request system was set up for parents, with all songs requested being filmed and posted on Facebook and YouTube so families could access. This has led to the first Live Mini Music Session which was aired Friday 3 April at 10am. Have a look [https://www.youtube.com/feed/my\\_videos](https://www.youtube.com/feed/my_videos)

The reaction and feedback from parents has been fantastic, it is wonderful to see how this has helped families cope in this difficult time. The comments have shown how there is a need for this engagement to help families feel less isolated. Early comments have included...

“That’s Joe’s dog!!! That’s Joe!!’ One very excited girl. Thank you!”

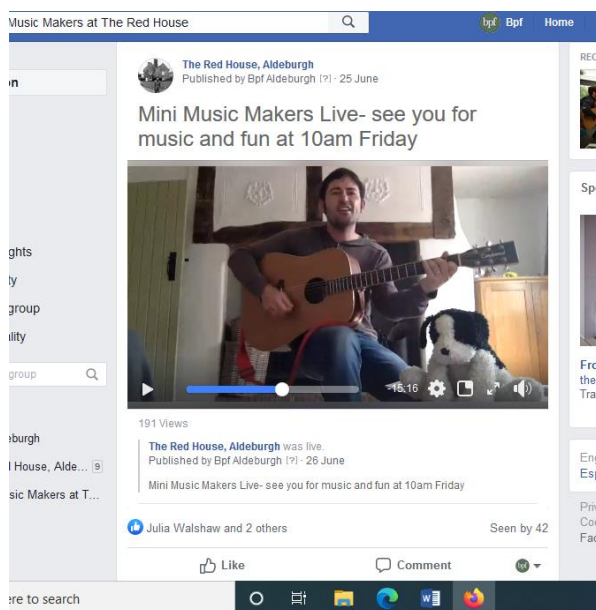
“Oh her face was so adorable just now hearing that song. Thank you so much for this Joe.xx”

“Look Mummy it’s Max! My two boys are loving this just before bedtime. Thank you Joe”

“Thank you for this, we are on 12 week lock down due to my poorly lungs so the two year old and two month old will certainly be enjoying this over the coming weeks.

“Love this, Thank you so much. Looking forward to seeing more in the coming weeks. Stay well everyone”

Requests for songs have been coming in regularly through Facebook, email and twitter which are posted on Facebook and Twitter every day Monday-Friday. We also run a Facebook live session every Friday at 10am-1030am. This includes some of the songs and requests that have been part of Mini Music Makers as well as from popular nursery and preschool sessions.



Families can access all of the videos and live feeds on YouTube

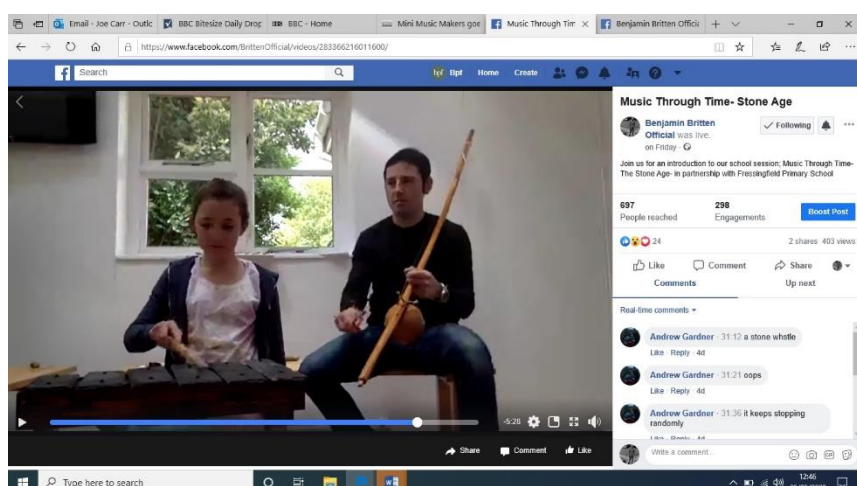
<http://youtu.be/t9elcAWFwQ8>

or join the live 30 minute sessions at [www.facebook.com/TheRedHouseAldeburgh/live](http://www.facebook.com/TheRedHouseAldeburgh/live)

## Continued Engagement with Schools

It is interesting how school engagement has also strengthened during lockdown, with even stronger relationships with schools developing and evolving during this period.

With the restriction on class visits to The Red House or outreach into schools, we have worked to offer elements of our schools offer to children online. For example we worked in partnership with Fressingfield Primary School to offer an adaption of our Music Through Time Session and The Science of Sound Schools Sessions for their KS2 students. You can find further details of these and our core sessions here, <https://brittenpears.org/visit/school-visits/>

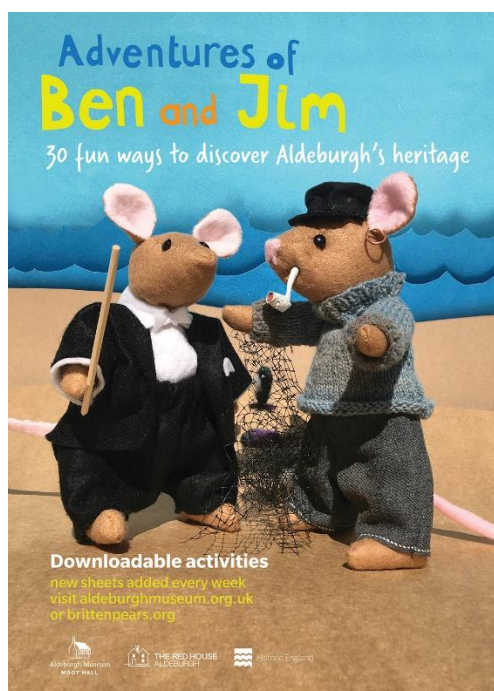


We have also worked with specific classes from local schools, meeting through platforms such as Zoom, to offer short class sessions using music and collections. These have been well received and will be developed for the future.

## Partnerships

With the goal to reaching families and communities during this time, our partnerships with other organisations have also strengthened. The Red House and the local Aldeburgh Museum were successful in securing a grant from Historic England to support a new joint educational project between the organisations. This joint project aims to share the stories and collections from both cultural institutions to a wider and more diverse audience, and help families to better understand their history and heritage while developing new skills and qualifications.

Families can download weekly activity sheets from both sites websites, each exploring an item or story from The Red House and Aldeburgh Museum's collections. As well as exploring objects, it also provides an opportunity for families to work together to achieve an Arts Award qualification by completing each activity, such as an arts and crafts task, outside play and investigation and by visiting local heritage sites and places of interest once it is safe to do so.



To See more please take a look at <https://brittenpears.org/explore/benjamin-britten/music/families/adventures-of-ben-and-jim/>



Although the the passion, spark and moment of inspiration from seeing a collection first-hand, or walking through a historic site, cannot be recreated remotely, it is important to continue to find ways to engage and inspire our audience until that time when we can welcome them back on site again. Hopefully that will be soon!

For any further information please contact Joe Carr, [j.carr@brittenpears.org](mailto:j.carr@brittenpears.org)

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The Red House, Aldeburgh