

Celebrating Community Heritage through the People's Collection Wales: A Case Study in the Development of Collecting Traditions and Engagement

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Abstract : The world's largest collection of historical, cultural, and heritage material is unarchived and undocumented in the hands of the public. Not only does this material represent the missing collections in heritage sector archives today, but it is also the key to providing a diverse range of communities with the means to express their history in their own words and to celebrate their unique, personal heritage. The People's Collection Wales (PCW) acts as a platform on which the heritage of Wales and her people can be collated and shared, at the heart of which is a thriving community engagement programme across a network of museums, archives, and libraries. By providing communities with the archival skillset commonly employed throughout the heritage sector, PCW enables local projects, societies, and individuals to express their understanding of local heritage with their own voices, empowering communities to embrace their diverse and complex identities around Wales. Drawing on key examples from the project's history, this paper will demonstrate the successful way in which museums have been developed as hubs for community engagement where the public was at the heart of collection and documentation activities, informing collection and curatorial policies to benefit both the institute and its local community. This paper will also highlight how collections from marginalised, under-represented, and minority communities have been published and celebrated extensively around Wales, including adoption by the education system in classrooms today. Any activity within the heritage sector, whether of collection, preservation, digitisation, or accessibility, should be considerate of community engagement opportunities not only to remain relevant but in order to develop as community hubs, pivots around which local heritage is supported and preserved. Attention will be drawn to our digitisation workflow, which, through training and support from museums and libraries, has allowed the public not only to become involved but to actively lead the contemporary evolution of documentation strategies in Wales. This paper will demonstrate how the PCW online access archive is promoting museum collections, encouraging user interaction, and providing an invaluable platform on which a broader community can inform, preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage through their own archival material too. The continuing evolution of heritage engagement depends wholly on placing communities at the heart of the sector, recognising their wealth of cultural knowledge, and developing the archival skillset necessary for them to become archival practitioners of their own.

Keywords : social history, cultural heritage, community heritage, museums, archives, libraries, community engagement, oral history, community archives

Conference Title : ICSH 2023 : International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : October 30-31, 2023