

# Museums n'That Episode 1 Transcript

Meg: Welcome to the Museums n'That podcast, where each episode, we have a chinwag and serve you the steaming hot tea on the things that museum people love the most. We're your hosts, Meg and Sara from Leeds Museums & Galleries, and we get to know the people behind the objects, by asking them the questions that you really want to know.

*(Theme music)*

*(Theme music ends, rustling sound of someone in the background moving about)*

Sara: There is a bin in here, do you want me to take it and put it in the bin?

Meg: I haven't turned my microphone on! Go on.

Sara: This isn't the first time we've done this.

Meg: No it isn't. Sara's just taking my - probably not going to put this in I'm not going to lie but - I just gave you my chewing gum and you're putting it in the bin. *(makes whipping sound)*

Meg and Sara: Right, we're here but should we have come.

Meg: *(laughs)* Hello cheeky podcast monkeys. It's us.

Sara: Meg.

Meg: You're not Meg. You wish you were Meg, come on.

Sara: And Smez.

Meg: Smez, that's you. Sara. How's it going?

Sara: I'm alright. I mean, it's a beautiful, bright blue day so I can't complain.

Meg: It's lovely outside actually.

Sara: Yeah it's nice.

Meg: Banging, just posted it on Twitter. You'll probably see it in... you'll have to scroll back like 15 months by the time I've edited all this.

*(Sara laughs)*

Meg: Right welcome to the first episode of our podcast everyone. This is exciting.

Sara: It is. It's monumental.

Meg: Right so basically, me and Sara have been told that we need to introduce ourselves. And it's been stressing us out. We've recorded this like no lie, like 3 times.

Sara: Yeah, at least.

Meg: Yeah because we just can't do it, we can't do it - we can't describe ourselves because it's too embarrassing.

Sara: Which is ironic because you're very good at talking about yourself.

Meg: Yeah. Shut up.

*(both laughing)*

Meg: So I feel like we've decided that the best way to do it is that we describe each other. RIP me. Right so you go.

Sara: Go.

Meg: In fact I've thought about mine and mine's actually very nice. So Sara Merritt. Is the Audience Development Officer for Leeds Museums & Galleries - we're both from Leeds Museums & Galleries first of all. Greatest city in the world, greatest museum service in the world. So, Sara Merritt, Audience Development Officer. Which is like marketing and also getting people through the door right?

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: To each of our 9 sites. But specifically you work on like 5 of them. But yeah, so, what can you expect from Sara? Disdain for me.

*(both laughing)*

Meg: Sara has a dog.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Um, Sara is really really bad at anything scripted. Full disclaimer now actually, we're both quite bad at anything scripted.

Sara: Yep.

Meg: Also by the way thanks for tuning in. We haven't said that yet.

Sara: Oh, god, yeah! Thank you. Welcome.

Meg: Yeah. Jesus Christ if you're listening to this...

Sara: ...ramble.

Meg: Yeah god. Sara's really bad at anything scripted which is why I don't let her do the first bit. That you've just heard.

Sara: Yeah that's fair.

Meg: Um, Sara's very good.

*(Sara laughs)*

Sara: Full stop. Thanks that's a big accolade.

Meg: I feel like that's all they need to know. Sara's very good. I feel like you say intelligent things.

Sara: Oh right, thank you. I don't feel like I do. But thank you.

Meg: Yeah you do yeah.

Sara: Well let's talk about you!

Meg: My favourite subject.

Sara: Exactly.

Meg: It's not by the way that's just deep set insecurity that no-one's ever going to think about me *(laughs)*

Sara: Yeah, yeah. But it's fine, because they will. Meg is our Digital Engagement Officer. It's a great title. She looks after all of our social. All of it. There's a lot.

Meg: Engaging people digitally.

Sara: And we have a massive digital audience - there was a bit there where I couldn't say anything because I nearly did a swear, but...

Meg: ...actually. If we swear we're going to have to beep it out. So if you ever hear like a weird beep that is us. Swearing.

Sara: Yeah, so you know. But Meg looks after all of our digital. Social media, and our website, and our enews and podcast and this is her baby, so give her a break. But also, she's very good and we don't deserve her.

Meg: Should I get some maternity leave?

Sara: Errrm, sure.

Meg: Great so we've got a couple of disclaimers that I've written down in my notebook. My notebook which actually has on the front of it - this is a really good notebook actually, I should put a picture up - I'm so proud of it, it says 'Kanye attitude with some Drake feelings'.

Sara: Kanye. You're so posh. Also you've got a HB pencil...

Meg: Kanye. How do you say Kanye?

Sara: Kanye, because I'm from the Midlands.

Meg: I wrote some really scruffy disclaimers down so I will literally read them out word by word. Number 1: none of us know what we're doing...

*(both laughing)*

Meg: Number 1: none of us know what we're doing, we've never done a podcast before and we're very good at asking stupid questions.

Sara: Yes. Yeah.

Meg: Yeah? I feel like that's fair. We don't know what we're doing. This is just a little trial. If you hate it, cool. Probably fair enough.

*(Sara laughing)*

Meg: If you like it, even better. Um - we're editing ourselves it might be bad. Yeah there you go.

*(both laughing)*

Sara: Point 2. Taken.

Meg: Yeah basically please don't blame me. Um, number 3: we sound bad scripted. That's you.

Sara. Yes.

Meg: Yeah. Our trailer. We took forever didn't we.

Sara: I just can't read aloud very well. I like reading in my head.

Meg: Sara's quite a nasal person and it comes through a lot...

Sara: ...in a scripted sense. It's just not me. It's not who I am.

Meg: We've not scripted any of it. Disclaimer about taxi?

Sara: Taxidermy.

Meg: Ah, taxidermy yeah. So this leads us on nicely to talking about who we've got on today.

Sara: Our very first guest. The Rebecca Machin.

Meg: Yeah she's amazing. She's our curator of Natural Science, so we thought we'd start strong. We'd start strong and then we'd slowly get worse and worse. No I'm joking, they're all really good. She's fab and she's come on to talk to us about the natural science collection - she works for Leeds Museums & Galleries. We ask her specifically about gorillas, that's her main love isn't it. Gorillaz the band.

Sara: No. Gorillas the gorilla.

Meg: But a disclaimer to anyone that might be a bit squeamish or might be a bit unsure about what we're about to talk about, or anyone eating their lunch, we are going to talk quite graphically about taxidermy. We know this is not for everyone so if it isn't for you, or you want to find out a little bit more about it everything we have is going to be put on our website with the show notes.

Sara: Yep.

Meg: So yeah.

Sara: This is us.

Meg: Yeah this is us really isn't it.

Sara: Also, really helpfully, we started doing this in winter 2019 so.. um.. Context. You're going to have to make some stuff up about it.

Meg: Yeah sorry because it has taken me 15 million years to edit all of these because it's not my only job, sorry about that. Also I have no experience of editing anything. So I guess everyone buckle up.

Sara: Yeah, strap in.

Meg: Strap in for Rebecca Machin, because I feel like we've probably had enough waffle from us now haven't we.

*End of introduction*

Meg: Well, Rebecca Machin you're here.

Rebecca: Hello.

Meg: Hello, how are you doing?

Rebecca: I'm alright thank you very much.

Meg: It's an honour and a privilege.

Rebecca: Yes it is.

Sara: Our very first guest.

Rebecca: Thank you that is an honour and a privilege.

Sara: How do you feel about that?

Rebecca: A mixture of excitement and panic.

Sara: Oh.

Meg: This is really annoying actually because, literally just before I pressed record you were like 'oh I'm frightened but because it's you two it's fine' but you didn't say that did you!

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: No because I don't really mean it. So I don't want to get recorded lying.

Meg: Yeah that makes sense yeah.

Sara: Fair enough.

Rebecca: Yeah the excitement is because I'm being recorded and the panic is because it's you two.

Sara: Yes. Fair.

Meg: So Rebecca Machin, tell us who you are.

Rebecca: I'm a curator of natural sciences, so I look after rocks and plants and animals.

Meg: It is insane -

Sara: You led with rocks?

Meg: Yeah why did you lead with rocks?

Rebecca: Because they're the only things that aren't dead.

Sara: Ok, fair.

Meg: But they're not alive are they?

Rebecca: You're quite right. They're more alive than most other things in the collection in some ways.

Sara: It took me a while to figure that one out. Wow.

Meg: Yeah. Also not to be mean to any Geologists because I do think that rocks are really cool it's just insane that you led with rocks because I know that you don't really like them. You slag them off.

Rebecca: *(laughing)* it's not that I don't like them, it's just...

Meg: Slag is a type of rock isn't it?

Rebecca: It is. But they're not as interesting as things that actually lived and breathed. In my humble opinion.

Meg: So. What's your best animal?

Sara: And how do they even name them?

Rebecca: Oh crikey. Well I did a bit of a count up - 8% of mammals named after people are named after women.

Meg: Yes!

Rebecca: 92% men. And exactly the same stat for birds as well.

Meg: Because a t-Rex is named after a man. Is that right?

Rebecca: Well sort of...

Sara: ... Someone was called Tyran- no! Someone was called Tyrannosaurus Rex?

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: Known as Mr T, you know. No so Tyrannosaurus Rex means 'tyrant lizard'. Tyrannosaurus... Rex means King. But there's no reason, since probably around half of Tyrannosaurus' were female, that they couldn't have been called Tyrannosaurus Regina, which means Queen. And Paleontologists do suspect that perhaps the females were bigger. So, if anything, they should have been called Tyrannosaurus Regina.

Meg: Um, what's a paleontologist?

Rebecca: Ross off of Friends.

Meg: Yep. Did they make it up just for his character?

Sara: And then people just sort of started getting degrees in it?

Rebecca: Today's podcast is sponsored by Ross from Friends.

Sara: Actually, we thought your favourite animal was...

Rebecca: Well... so my favourite individual is Mok the Gorilla. Is that what you were going to expect? But also I'm very fond of Gold Crests. One of our smallest birds in this country.

Meg: Can you tell us a bit more about Mok? Because I try and explain to people about Mok and I get it wrong all the time.

Rebecca: Aw. You're always on duty Meg. That's lovely.

Meg: Well no it's actually just me just regurgitating information as if it's my own, but actually getting it wrong.

Rebecca: You should be a curator. That's a big part of the job. *(laughing)* Ah yes, so Mok is short for Mo Koundje, which I've been led to believe means 'little chief' but I'm not entirely sure in which language.

Meg: That is very cute, kind of like those Motorway service station restaurants.

*(laughing)*

Sara: No!

Rebecca: Yes! He came to us after he died, having been at London Zoo for 6 years.

Meg: When was this?

Rebecca: This was between 1932 and 1938. So we got his remains in 1938.

Meg: So just after Downton Abbey then?

Rebecca: Quite a bit after the Downton franchise.

Sara: Anyway, back to Mok.

Rebecca: So yeah, Mok was at London Zoo between 1932 and 1938 with his companion in inverted commas 'Moina'. Short for Moina Massa which meant 'little lady'.

Meg: Moina Massa?

Rebecca: Mm hmm.

Meg: That is a sick name.

Rebecca: It is isn't it. And they had been in what was the French Congo, which is now Republic of Congo. He had been kept as a pet by a Colonial administrator there called Monsieur Capagorry.

Meg: And was that quite a common thing, then, that people kept them as pets?

Rebecca: Well this is something I'm keen to find out more about. He was kept by him for about 2 years, although I get the impression that it was his wife that did most of the looking after. But then he was taken across land and over the sea, all the way back to Bordeaux, where they stayed in a hotel for a few weeks.

Sara: With the gorilla?

Rebecca: With the gorilla-s. Plural.

Sara: Gorillas.

Meg: Oh wait so he was with his girlfriend?

Sara: Companion.

Meg: What was she called sorry? Moira?

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: Moina.

Meg: This is the kind of thing that I regurgitate and I tell it wrong.

Sara and Rebecca: Yeah.

Sara: You just made up a gorilla's name.

Meg: Somewhere down the line, somewhere in Leeds, someone is telling people about a gorilla called, like, Sally or something.

Sara: That you started.

Meg: And it's chinese whispers. Moira.

Rebecca: One of the interesting things to me is that it turns out that in 1932 it was actually against Colonial law to keep gorillas in captivity, or to sell them, or to remove them from the French Congo.

Meg: Right, so bad man.

Rebecca: Well, yeah. But I want to look a bit more into what his motivations for keeping Mok and Moina were - whether he did it because they'd been orphaned in some hunting, or he took pity on them in some way. But I don't want to say too much because apparently he has living relatives who I haven't been able to contact so I wouldn't want to speculate too much. So do get in touch if you know anything about that.

Meg: Um, so what happened...

Rebecca: They were taken to London Zoo and they lived in a small enclosure to start with, in the Lemur House, and then they had a brand new enclosure made specially for them, designed by the architect Lubetkin, who was famous for his penguin enclosure and various other things that you can still see at London Zoo. And various things happened to them. He became ill with pneumonia shortly after arriving so they were very worried they were going to lose him. The Queen as she wasn't then, Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, visited in 1937. There's a picture of them looking through the bars, so he might have seen the Queen. And unfortunately he wasn't fed a very good gorilla diet - they followed the diet that the French Colonialists had given him, which was mainly European food. Including wine.

(laughing)

Sara: Fine wine and cheese from Bordeaux?!

Rebecca: Well, yeah! So he ate cheese and eggs and chicken. Apparently the keeper, when he was told 'this is what they're accustomed to and this is what you need to feed them', he did actually say 'what about the wine list?' in exasperation.

Sara: Wow.

Rebecca: So he died of Bright's Disease which is kidney failure, as a result of his diet.

Sara: Oh.

Meg: This is another example of where I've been telling everyone the wrong story.

Rebecca: But do you know what you're not alone Meg, because we've been saying all sorts of things about Mok in the past, and I don't really know where they've come from, but looking a bit deeper, we'll find out a bit more.

Meg: Great, so it's not my fault basically is what I'm taking from that.

Rebecca: It is your fault but you're not alone.

Sara: Yeah, they came out of your mouth those words.

Meg: Um so when you say we have Mok in the collection, what does that mean?

Rebecca: Well it's unusual because normally in that situation, you'd either keep the skeleton or you'd make a taxidermy specimen - so a stuffed mount. But we've got both. So his skin was taxidermied and we've got on display at the City Museum, and his skeleton was articulated, so put together, and is in our store at Leeds Discovery Centre, which you can come and visit on Thursdays at 11 and 2 at the walk-in tours.

Meg: So, taxidermy then. What is it? Why?

Rebecca: Why, when.

Meg: How does it work?

Rebecca: So taxidermy means moving the skin.

Sara: Does it?!

Rebecca: It sure does! Taxi as in - (*singing*) taxi! And Dermis as in, dermatitis.

Meg: It's really sad that you didn't have a better way of saying dermatitis then.

Rebecca: (*singing*) dermatitis. Yeah I don't know.

Sara: Skin isn't it.

Rebecca: Yeah, skin. Dermal, dermis, epidermis.

Meg: Oh my god, I never realised.

Rebecca: No, I didn't until recently.

Sara: This is why we're not the curators.

Rebecca: So basically you're taking the skin from a dead animal and placing it around some sort of mount to make it at least try and look vaguely how it was when it was alive - with varied success in our collection.

Meg: Do you ever worry - you know...

Rebecca: I worry about everything Megan.

*(laughing)*

Meg: Do you ever worry, like, you know when you're walking down the store. And there's like, a lot of taxidermied animals.

Rebecca: Mm hmm.

Meg: Do you ever worry that any of them are actually alive?

Rebecca: Erm, no. And also if they were, I would be thrilled rather than worried.

Meg: Aw, that is lovely.

Rebecca: Yeah no that would make me really happy.

Meg: But it's like, you know what people worry about - so, I get stressed, I mean... not to make this about death...

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: But go ahead.

Meg: Yep. You know like, when you get buried.

Sara: No but yes.

Rebecca: Intimately, yes.

Sara: I know of burial.

Meg: Actually burial, whatever, it's the same thing I just worry that they'd do something to me and I wouldn't be dead.

Rebecca: They'd be a bit premature.

Meg: And like it's like a classic horror film thing isn't it when you're like ooh I'm in the morgue, and then oh, he's alive.

Sara: Although, you know, then you're onto a winner because you're alive.

Rebecca: Not if they start doing a post-mortem on you.

Meg: But what would you do if you were in the store, and Mok was alive?

Rebecca: With his skin on or just his skeleton?

Sara: She'd cry.

Megan: Somehow the skeleton has walked into the skin.

Rebecca: Yeah I mean we don't need to look into the details do we? I might be concerned about my immediate safety, because he'd probably be really fed up with people.

Meg: Are they dangerous then? Are gorillas dangerous?

Rebecca: Well in natural conditions, they would only pose a threat if you had startled them or frightened them or threatened them in some way. When they were first discovered people used to think they were very vicious and monstrous and that they would attack people to eat them or just for kicks but actually they only ever really attack if they think that you're a threat to them and their family. Er so I don't know what Mok.. If Mok woke up feeling like 'oh gosh, my kidneys feel better now' then I'd try very hard not to make him feel threatened, and maybe run upstairs to get him some lettuce out of the fridge or something.

Meg: We don't have lettuce in that fridge. Come on.

Rebecca: No. Let's not think too much about that.

Sara: Is there anything in the store that you are scared of from your collection? That creeps you out?

Rebecca: I'm not overly keen on caterpillars, and the caterpillars we've got in our collection are blown caterpillars, and I find that unpleasant.

Sara: What does that mean?

Rebecca: That means that they've had their innards removed, but the way that's done is... I had it described to me once...

Meg: (*gasps*) is it like an egg? When you blow out an egg?

Rebecca: It's basically like that... only.. It's just not as... it's worse. It's just worse.

Meg: Go on.

Rebecca: Well, I don't know if there's different ways of doing it but someone told me that basically you get the end of - I'm gesticulating here which isn't very helpful on radio but...

Meg: Radio.

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: This is on BBC1 isn't it?

Meg and Sara: Yeah yeah yeah.

Meg: Meg and Smez FM.

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: You get the end of the guts, the innards, from the anus...

Meg: *(pronounced wrong)* the anus.

Rebecca: The anus of the caterpillar. Get something like a pencil and wrap it around the pencil and wind it out, and then I think you need to dry it out. I've never done this.

Meg: Sorry hang on. Right right right. A pencil.

*(Sara laughing)*

Rebecca: Just any kind of pencil.

Sara: A HB?

Rebecca: Just any kind of bobbin-like structure that you can wind the intestines out of the caterpillar's anus with.

Sara: I can't look at that pencil the same.

Rebecca: You know, or a cotton bud or something would probably do it. Just something to wind it out on like an old cassette.

Meg: Like a fruit winder. So you can't taxidermy a caterpillar?

Rebecca: Yes.

Meg: Is it because with taxidermy, you have to stuff it?

Rebecca: Sort of, so...

Meg: I don't know why I did that with my fingers then, that was weird.

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: Like you're stuffing a chicken for instance, it's different to that. So with taxidermy, what you would do is skin the animal, which is a whole thing in it's own right, and then to turn it into a taxidermy mount, nowadays you would have something like a fibreglass model or maquette I think they call them, basically in the shape you want it in and then you place the skin around that. In the olden days they would have made a frame out of metal and straw and some of them have plaster, and then placed the skin around that. So it's not stuffed so much as kind of dressing over something else.

Sara: It's like it's draped.

Rebecca: Draped yeah, and then stitched. Not unlike the way our colleague Vanessa Jones is currently mounting dresses in fact.

Sara: Wow.

Meg: Is it... is it hard?

Rebecca: Yes.

Meg: Have you done it before?

*(laughing)*

Meg: What do they do with the body stuff?

Rebecca: So you keep some of it depending on the size of the animal and also its condition, a lot of them still have their skulls in, a lot of them still have some of their limb bones to add some of the structure.

Meg: But then how do you keep a skull in? Do you have to like, suck the brain out?

Rebecca: I don't think you'd suck it...

Sara: You've been reading that amateur taxidermy book again haven't you...

Rebecca: Yeah with Johnny Cash on the front.

Meg: Rebecca's got an amateur taxidermy book on her desk and it looks like Johnny Cash is on it, but he's not.

Rebecca: Disappointing actually.

Sara: Put a picture up.

Meg: So sorry so you suck the brain out...

Rebecca: *(laughing)* I'd forgotten the question, it's like a job interview!

Meg: You know like in Indiana Jones with the monkey brains.

Rebecca: Yes it's not like that. So if you were doing like a small bird or something, you'd do this for a study skin as well, you'd skin it so the skin is still attached to the head, but you'd skin it off the head enough to make a little hole in the back of the skull and then you get the brain out through that.

Meg: With what.

Sara: A hook? Like a crochet hook?

Rebecca: Like a little crochet hook type implement.

Sara: Size 7.

Rebecca: You could use tweezers. It depends.

Meg: *(laughing)* a size 7?

Sara: I do a bit of crochet and that's all I know.

Rebecca: Yeah I think it depends on the animal really, as to how you do it, but carefully haha.  
*(laughing)*

Meg: Jesus Christ.

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: And then, yes, once you get the brains out, you need to make sure there's no bits of fat left on the skin or bits of flesh that potentially would rot or be eaten by pests. So you make sure that the skin is completely clean and in the olden days they would have treated it with chemicals like arsenic to keep insect pests off, which we don't use nowadays because it's not safe, but also means modern taxidermy is more pest prone than the old stuff.

Sara: What do you think - seeing as you haven't done it it's a bit of an unfair question, but - what would be the hardest thing to taxidermy?

Meg: Is it worms?

Rebecca: Yeah again you would not try and taxidermy a worm.

Sara: Did you not listen to anything about the caterpillars?

Rebecca: Oh gosh.

Meg: Is that when, so with things like snakes, and fish and that, is that when you put them in jars. You know when you see things in jars?

Rebecca: You can do that as an alternative, yes.

Meg: What is it? What's that in there?

Rebecca: So if you preserve things in ethanol or in formalin, you can preserve the soft body parts of animals that don't have skeletons or animals that don't have skin that you can taxidermy. So for instance if you had a slug, you could pop that in ethanol to preserve it.

Sara: Why would you?

Rebecca: That's a very good question. That means all the anatomy is preserved and also, it's possible to extract DNA from them.

Sara: How long do they last? When they're in there.

Rebecca: Well, theoretically, they should preserve for a very very long time.

Meg: Indefinitely.

Rebecca: Indefinitely, I like that. That's the word.

Meg: Like in Notting Hill. When Julia Roberts is like 'sorry can you ask me again?'

Sara: I don't think anyone else would have made the connection between slugs in ethanol and Julia Roberts.

Meg: It's the most beautiful part of the film. Have you seen it?

Rebecca: Yes I have.

Meg: When at the end she's like 'ask me the question again about how long I'm going to stay' to the journalist and she's like 'indefinitely'. Have you... have... can you taxidermy a human? Because you know you can mummify a human but can you taxidermy one?

Rebecca: Yes. Erm it has been attempted - trouble is with human taxidermy, apart from the fact that that would be a whole level of...

Sara: ...ethics.

Rebecca: Exactly. But also we're not very furry, so you'd see all the stitches. You know, and that sort of thing.

Sara: That's a bit grim isn't it.

Rebecca: So things with fur and feathers tend to keep a bit nicer.

Sara: Hence why you don't get a lot of jackets made out of human skin.

Meg: Apart from in Silence of the Lambs.

Sara: Yes. You're on a film roll today.

Meg: Yeah I know. IMDB, the M stands for Meg.

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: Sorry I've got a bit in my eye.

*(laughing)*

Meg: Oh actually, what happens to the eyes? What are the eyes made of?

Rebecca: Glass. There are lots of different types of eye available so that you get the right one for your specimen. They're quite beautiful things, they come connected together with wire. In little pairs.

Sara: Do we have any?

Rebecca: I've never seen any knocking around here, but where I used to work there was a little box of spares, which was very pleasing.

Sara: You always need a spare eye. Aye Aye.

Rebecca: But then some of our taxidermy...

Meg: *(laughing)* did you just say aye aye?!

Rebecca: ...only has one eye.

Sara: Yes and then I was immediately embarrassed. Next question.

Rebecca: Go.

Sara: How long does it take to taxidermy something, roughly?

Rebecca: So I've seen someone skin a bird and make it into a study skin in about 15-20 minutes.

*(gasps)*

Rebecca: Good reaction!

Meg: 15-20 minutes?

Rebecca: Yeah.

Meg: I can do literally nothing in 15-20 minutes.

Rebecca: Yeah, no I know. But yeah making a taxidermy mount is a lot more complex so would take a fair bit longer, but I don't know.

Meg: So is it like, the bigger the animal, the longer it takes? Or is it the smaller, the more fiddlier?

Rebecca: Yeah well a bit of both really, and it depends on the animal because say a nice, healthy middle of the summertime duck will have lovely fatty skin and that takes an age to clean off. Said no one ever.

Sara: Better in the winter when they're starved.

Rebecca: Yeah no it's true, it's a big difference.

Meg: This is also like in Silence of The Lambs. No but this is what he does, have you seen it?

Rebecca: Yes but a long time ago.

Meg: When he puts them down the well and then he starves them so that their skin is loose on their body. Yeah it's horrid. Anyway, so you know you said you had Mok's skin and his skeleton. And his skeleton is articulated - it's how he would have been.

Rebecca: Yep.

Meg: How do they get it out? Is it like a jigsaw puzzle? That they then have to rebuild? Or do they pull it out in one go? I don't know how it works.

(laughing)

Sara: In one go?!

Meg: Well yeah, imagine when you're taking off your tights?

Rebecca: Um well no, it's not at all like taking off your tights. But basically you've got a body - I'm going to pretend it's smaller than a gorilla in my hand here - and you skin it and you do kind of peel the skin off as if you're taking a coat off. So if you've done a good job of it, it should all be in one piece.

Meg: So you don't have to like...

Rebecca: You don't have to yank stuff out. But then to get the skeleton in that state you would have had to rot it down or macerate it to get the meat off and you'd have to remove the innards and everything, but then you'd have to reattach the bones. Rearticulate them.

Sara: So how long do you have between an animal dying and it going through to the taxidermy stage? Before it goes to mush?

Rebecca: Start the clock.

Sara: Yes.

Rebecca: Yeah, erm I'm afraid again it really depends on the conditions and the animal so for instance a blackbird flew into the window earlier, here at the Discovery Centre.

Sara: A female one and I identified it.

Rebecca: Yes. Very well done. Very well done, proud.

Sara: Thank you.

Meg: Rebecca literally walked up to where me and Sara were with a dead bird in her hands with absolutely no context.

Rebecca: Because I wasn't actually sure at that point if it might just have been stunned. So on a cold day it wouldn't go properly mushy for a couple of days, but then you've got pests working on it, and if it was say in wood among some leaf litter you get loads of different things like Carrion Beetles come and eat away at it, flies laying eggs in it, and their larvae kind of munching away. So if it's hot it'll start going mushy much quicker, and then...

Meg: ... you absolutely can't taxidermy it?

Rebecca: Yeah, correct.

Sara: You have to do it pretty much immediately.

Rebecca: I think the sooner you get the skin the better.

Meg: Um so. If we just step aside from animals for a second. So the thing that I think we're going to ask everyone is what's your favourite day at work. But I want you to tell everyone about my favourite day at work.

Rebecca: What, your favourite day at work?

Meg: Yeah, because it is because of you.

Rebecca: I think I know what you're going to say. I'm hoping it was to do with the fortress but I'm thinking it might be to do with colouring in water (*laughing*).

Meg: So Rebecca Machin is like, genuinely one of the smartest people I know.

Rebecca: Oh God (*laughing*) - a damning indictment.

Meg: Yeah. Tell everyone what you did. I'd like you to tell everyone what you did.

Rebecca: Right well, one of our colleagues was leaving and we were very sad about it. We had that thing with a card going round where we had to sign it and I didn't really feel like what I'd written would convey my emotion properly, so I wanted it to look like I was crying tears of sadness that she was leaving. But they didn't show up because it was just water, so I thought slightly inky water would give the impression. Anyway I was hoping to find like a pot of ink or something - you know, because we're a museum and we have that kind of thing...

(*laughing*)

Sara: You know, as it's the 1600s.

Rebecca: Yeah exactly. Couldn't find my quill anywhere. But then I thought if actually I cup my hand, with a tiny bit of water in it - *(laughing)* I don't know if you can hear the sound my stomach just made...

*(laughing)*

Meg: Can I please leave that in?

Rebecca: It kind of went 'pewwwww'.

Sara: It was almost like a mew.

Rebecca: Well, it was a big lunch.

Meg: What did you have for lunch?

Rebecca: Guess what I had.

Meg: Lentil soup.

Rebecca: No. Do you see how much happier I am than this morning?

Meg: It's scrambled eggs.

Rebecca: Yep. Thank you North Star. Other cafes are available.

Sara: She still thinks it's the BBC.

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: Yeah so I had a little cupped hand with a little bit of water in, and I thought I'll just stick a felt tip in there - it didn't seem to be working so I kind of jiggled it about a bit and then Megan told me that I was trying to colour in water. *(laughing)*

Meg: But it wasn't a felt tip, it was a fine liner.

Rebecca: It didn't even work. And she still went.

Meg: So yeah thank you. That was my best day at work.

Sara: So we hear that you met a veritable celebrity, he'd hate to be called that probably as well.

Rebecca: Yeah, I'd say a divinity. But actually that's underselling him to be honest.

Sara: There are no other words other than David Attenborough. Which I have now termed the big DA, which is awful. And I take it back.

Rebecca: That's his initials.

Meg: The DA? Isn't that in films where someone's like 'I'm just at the DA's office man'.

Rebecca: The District Attorney.

Meg: *(laughing)* man.

Sara: Is that your American impression?

Rebecca: It's uncanny. She's from Reading.

Sara: Tell us about the time you met David Attenborough. Twice!

Rebecca: I will. This is just like some of my best memories. Twice. Yeah the second time wasn't as exciting but this first time...

Meg: Literally the time I was there.

*(laughing)*

Rebecca: Yeah, Meg spoiled it for me. I was at this free conference called Earth Optimism. The idea of it was supposed to be because obviously there's awful awful things that we as a species are doing to the planet at the moment. And indeed have done for a lot of our history.

Meg: So annoying isn't it. How annoying are we.

Rebecca: It's so awful. We are the worst species. Of all of us.

Sara: Can't make a damn decision.

Meg: You're talking about Brexit aren't you.

Rebecca: No well that's part of it. To be serious here, we know - at least, any right minded person who is sentient knows - that what we are doing to the world isn't sustainable, and that we are killing lots of species irretrievably, so lots of animals are going extinct, plants are going extinct, things that we rely on to feed us. And we know we need to change it and we know how

to, and yet, we're not. And it's the most monstrous piece of stupidity for which we'll never be forgiven. If humanity manages to survive this I think we'll be seen as the Idiot Ages, I don't know. It's incredible really.

Meg: Sorry to interrupt, but I feel like this is a good point to shout out about your award that you just won.

Rebecca: Oh well yeah, never mind climate change and species extinction.

Meg: All that matters is that you won an award.

Rebecca: Yeah! We got the Museums Change Lives Sustainability Category award. We did an exhibition called Beavers to Weavers: The wonderful world of animal makers.

Meg: Did it include any colons?

Rebecca: No but it did include cocoons that looked like vulvas, and beavers, and tits. Didn't have any penises in, but it did have animals that had anuses.

Sara: Important.

Rebecca: We didn't put that in the sub-heading because we did think that would be too detailed. But it was mainly about things that animals make, so in museums we tend to collect and preserve the bodies of dead animals, which can be very interesting and are very useful for science, and also a memorial for extinct animals because you can't see them anywhere else. But as with us, many many animals do lots of things when they're alive that are often more interesting or critical to themselves, their bodily selves, so it was an attempt to kind of share some of that really. Either, things like nests, or cocoons, or tools, but also dances to attract mates, or other displays of light.

Sara: I thought it was really inspiring when we had the opening that one of the things that you said when you talked and you introduced the exhibition was that you basically wanted people to come in and look at the exhibition but to really go outside, and explore their local area, and to get involved and look at the world around them and do what you can to help and I thought that was really brilliant.

Rebecca: Thanks, yes. Because the living stuff is way more interesting than the dead stuff, generally speaking in my opinion. I think they liked that.

Meg: Wonderful.

Sara: Beautiful. Couldn't have said it better myself.

Rebecca: I was talking about David Attenborough though. Anyway, he was one of the speakers. One of the ideas of the Earth Optimism event was to give people some good news and positive motivation and hope really, as it turned out there was quite a lot of gloomy news too. But he spoke about how important children are and how clever and wise they are and that hopefully they're going to get us out of this mess. But in the lunch break he was there, he was talking to Jane Goodall, another hero of mine.

Sara: She's the monkey lady.

Rebecca: Chimpanzees are apes.

Meg: (*singing*) you got something wrong.

(*laughing*)

Sara: I was too giddy.

Rebecca: No that's alright. It was like seeing - I don't know, it was just too good. It was amazing. But everyone was trying to be a bit cool I think, and I'm not held back by such things as trying to look cool. And also, being quite small, I kind of winkled my way through the crowds, managed to get myself next to him. I reached Sir David Attenborough, and I caught his eye and I put out my small hand and I just gave him my hand - not in a holding hands way, in a shaking hands way...

Sara: Did he reciprocate?

Rebecca: He did! He didn't like lunge away in horror and I said I would just like to thank you for everything you've done, and then I gibbered for quite a long time.

Meg: Did you go red?

Rebecca: Undoubtedly, yes. And he was ever so sweet and he just kept nodding and saying 'that's nice'. I think he was worried for me.

Meg: What a gorgeous angel.

Rebecca: Honestly, he's such an epic, wonderful man anyway for lots of reasons. But in real life, even better, he looked really well. It was just a top moment in my life.

Sara: Wonderful human.

Meg: Can't even believe it.

Sara: Right, so we're nearing the end of the podcast. So what is the one thing you think everyone would take away from what we've talked about today? What's the one thing, a 10 second snippet.

Rebecca: Some people think that our collections are a bit irrelevant because they're old dead crusty things.

Meg: Krusty the krabs! Have we got any crusty crabs?

Rebecca: Ahhh. We do yeah.

Sara: Yeah we've got loads of crabs.

Rebecca: Ooh...

Sara: Ooh, another one.

Rebecca: And I think all of the animals we have, I'd far rather see them alive, and if we can use our collections to just help people realise what's out there and what an amazing world we live in, then maybe we can all find it easier to respect it a bit more and enjoy it, rather than eating it all up.

Meg: I feel like crying.

Sara: So, we've got your main take away. But what is, your favourite, takeaway? I don't know why I have to say it like that.

Meg: (*mocking*) takeaway! Take. Away.

Rebecca: Ohhh. Is this going to be done through every episode?

Sara: Yep. Favourite takeaway. Go.

Rebecca: Favourite takeaway. I don't often get takeaways, but - well, it depends on the context - but, probably my most recent takeaway was very Hebden Bridge, where I live, Tibetan. Some nice momos.

Meg: What!

Sara: Tibetan? No!

Rebecca: Yeah you get a nice bit of squash curry with a nice bit of rice, you get momos, you can even get a bit of green tea while you're waiting.

Meg: That is so ignorant of us to be like 'ergh Tibetan curry, what?'

Sara: No, only because I don't know anywhere where you can get a Tibetan curry.

Rebecca: Hebden Bridge!

Meg: I've never been on deliveroo and scrolled down - you know when it's like, pizza, chinese - I didn't even know there was a Tibetan.

Sara: Didn't even go to T.

Meg: Didn't go to T.

Sara: You stop at pizza.

Meg: No I do go to T, I get a Thai.

Sara: Oh yeah that's true.

Rebecca: I think probably in any other situation, if I was on a night out, chips and cheese.

Sara: Ooof. Gravy?

Rebecca: Ketchup.

Meg: I've seen you eat chips and cheese before.

Sara: Excellent choice, now I'm really hungry. (*gasping*) I do have some chocolate buttons upstairs.

Rebecca: I did have a pain au chocolat earlier!

Meg: Cheese twist?

Rebecca: No. No because I had my scrambled eggs and cheese scone.

Meg: Course you did. Well.

Sara: That's excellent. Thank you ever so much.

Rebecca: Not at all.

Meg: And you are on twitter are you not?

Rebecca: I sure am. @Curator\_Rebecca.

Meg: Brilliant, we'll see you there.

Sara: Whilst you're eating your Tibetan takeaway.

Rebecca: Yeah, my momos.

Sara: I sound really bitter, and it's because I am.

Meg: You're being really...

Rebecca: You're like John Humphries.

Sara: Yeah I am.

Meg: Shut up John.

(laughing)

Sara: I'm the John Humphries to your...

Rebecca: Tess Daley.

Sara: Emily Maitliss.

Meg: Actually I quite like Emily Maitliss. Have you seen that episode of Alan Partridge where Emily Maitliss is in the lift? Anyway, right.

Sara: We're getting away from ourselves.

Meg: Thank you, Rebecca Machin, for coming in.

Rebecca: Thank you for having me.

(theme music)

Sara: Go.

Meg: Ready... go.

(both make weird noises)

Meg: Well. Episode 1, completed it mate.

Sara: Done it.

Meg: Done it. Rebecca Machin, job done.

Sara: What a legend.

Meg: Gorillas.

Sara: Yep. Learnt lots. Taxidermy.

Meg: Not the band Gorillaz.

Sara: No but good still.

Meg: Um what was your best learn from that?

Sara: Erm do you know, it was difficult because there was a lot and I'm super fascinated about science, and if I'd have had any level of clever I'd have done science but I didn't, so I was kind of fascinated by all of it but certainly the T-Rex thing. Half of them are girls, why are they always named after men?

Meg: Yeah. T-Regina sounds pretty cool as well doesn't it.

Sara: It does, so let's make a t-shirt and a petition.

Meg: Great.

Sara: Absolutely. What was your best learn?

Meg: Good yeah great you actually asked me this time.

Sara: You were ready to tell me I wasn't going to.

Meg: Yeah yeah. Right Sara does this thing where she doesn't ask me the same questions back and it's so annoying.

Sara: Can't get a bloody word in edgeways.

Meg: *(laughing)* Right my best learn. I really think that there is just nothing that can beat the caterpillar is there.

Sara: Yeah. Caterpillar pencil.

Meg: Sticking a pencil up it's bum. I barely knew that caterpillars had bums. Winding it out like a fruit winder? I haven't had a fruit winder in years but just thinking about it now...

Sara: You must have to have a very light touch. It's not like you can clamp the caterpillar whilst you're doing it is it.

Meg: Touch it tenderly.

*(laughing)*

Meg: And a really sharp pencil actually. Um but yeah that was my best thing.

Sara: Good.

Meg: So yeah congrats, first episode. Big day for us. Also actually since recording that since Rebecca Machin's left the room, Sara has gone and got herself a cold.

*(Sara laughing)*

Meg: You looked at me then as if to say what are you talking about but you have you've just got a cold.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Yeah. I've got a seed in my tooth.

Sara: Yeah, done really well.

Meg: Yeah it's really good. So we have a list of thanks that we have to say at the end of every episode.

Sara: No it's not that we need to say them, we love saying the thanks.

Meg: Yeah we do actually but we do need to say them as well.

Sara: Yes.

Meg: Out of politeness. So thank you to Tim Bentley who did our lovely theme tune for us, which we've called The March of the Moths. Which I've just realised actually, we should call March of t'Moths. What's that? How do people in Leeds say it?

Sara: What?

Meg: *(laughing)* March of... *(laughs)*

Sara: March of t'Moths. Yeah that's really hard to say.

Meg: of t'Moths.

Sara: No because it's not of the moths. Oh, yeah it is.

Meg: Yeah, March of the Moths. March of t'Moths.

Sara: Gosh that's hard.

Meg: Gosh anyone actually from Leeds that wants to say that for us please do.

Sara: Yep.

Meg: So anyway, March of the Moths. And also shout out to Alex Finney who is very talented and wonderful - local lad! Local lad Alex Finney - who did our cover artwork for us, and we love it. What else?

Sara: What else do we do?

Meg: We do spotify.

Sara: Oh yeah we do, we're doing a playlist! *(gasps)*

Meg: By the way we are literally on Spotify.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Yeah that's pretty cool isn't it.

Sara: So we spent a lot of time finding related music and also asking people for suggestions, but there'll be some humdingers on there.

*(laughing)*

Sara: I don't know why I thought of that. It's a good word...

Meg: Humdingers. Yeah it's good. Yeah so we're going to have a spotify playlist for every episode. So Rebecca's put a few songs together and we've added some too, so we'll have a link to that on our website. Which is also where you'll find our show notes which will have transcripts and pictures and links that we've talked about throughout the episode. So yeah, who's on next week Smez?

Sara: It's Errin Hussey.

Meg: Errin Hussey who is our Archivist.

Sara: I'm very excited for that one.

Meg: By the way, if you want to ask us any questions, then you totally can on the social medias.

Sara: Yep.

Meg: Off of Twitter we are @LeedsMuseums. Greatest twitter account in the world.

*(laughing)*

Meg: I can't say that because I run it. And Smez what's your personal twitter account mate?

Sara: Don't know.

Meg: Yeah you do.

Sara: Nope.

Meg: So Sara is @saralmerritt? @saralmerritt?

Sara: Maybe.

Meg: And I am @MuseumMeg. So feel free to tweet us any questions or to tell us how great we are, please don't tell us how bad we are.

Sara: No, we can't take it.

Meg: Yeah I can't take it, I can't handle it mate.

Sara: The world's mean, let's just keep it nice.

Meg: Let's just all relax and tell each other lovely things. I tell you what, you tweet us something lovely, we'll tweet you something lovely back.

Sara: Yes, that's fair.

Meg: That's fair isn't it. By the way if you've lasted this long throughout this podcast then congratulations and thank you.

Sara: Well done.

Meg: Right, see you next week kids.

Sara: 2 weeks!

Meg: 2 weeks! Oh right, sorry. See you in 2 weeks, kids...

Sara: *(laughing)* Well done.

*Theme music*