

Museums n'That Episode 4 Transcript

Meg: Konnichiwa - because we're doing Japan - and 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)

Meg: Hello the Smez.

Sara: Hi Meg.

Meg: How's it going? What's new?

Sara: I'm good thanks, how are you?

Meg: Yes I'm very good, I've had a good week ask me why.

Sara: Why? Where have you been? What have you done? Who have you seen?

Meg: I went to Reading. Which shouldn't be that exciting normally and I'm allowed to say that because I am from there... but I went to Reading to go to The MERL.

Sara: *(gasping)* The MERL? Off of The MERL?

Meg: Off of The MERL, yeah. I went to The MERL and I met Joe. Who I'm sure won't mind me naming him by name. I met Joe who is me but at The MERL and I had a really lovely time. He's a very sweet angel and I think that he might come on the podcast one day.

Sara: That's incredible, how exciting.

Meg: Yes, it was great. How was your week?

Sara: If everyone doesn't guess this already, we're actually recording this in the run up to Christmas and I made mince pie brownies at the weekend. So. There we go.

Meg: I'm literally going to whoompf one down after this it's insane. Like I'm obviously focused on this, in some ways, but also I'm literally just thinking about my brownie upstairs.

Sara: Yep. We have earned it. It's been a big Monday.

Meg: So who have we got today?

Sara: We have got Adam Jaffer. Jaffs. He is our Curator of World Cultures.

Meg: He's good. He's really good isn't he.

Sara: Yes he's very good. He's very knowledgeable and worldly wise.

Meg: He's going to talk about Japan. The band. Not the band.

Sara: About the exhibition.

Meg: And tell us all the things that we want to know about Japan really. And other countries actually, I've got a lot of other questions about other countries.

Sara: Yeah I think he's got a fairly large remit being world cultures hasn't he. It's not like...

Meg: Literally the biggest. It's literally the biggest - it's the world. It's big. The world is big. So yeah. Let's crack on and enjoy.

(Theme music)

Meg: Right. Adam Jaffs. Adam Jaffer I should say. The Jaffs.

Sara: We've never actually asked if you don't mind being called Jaffs.

Meg: I have. I definitely asked.

Adam: Uh, I don't mind, yeah. I don't mind. There's quite a lot of Adams working for the museum service so I guess it clears things up.

Meg: Um, do you like Jaffa Cakes?

Adam: I do yeah. I really do.

Meg: I nearly brought in a packet of Jaffa Cakes on your first day, but then I didn't know whether it would be rude or it would go down very well so I didn't. But then you brought them in.

Sara: You nipped it in the bud.

Adam: Nipped it in the bud, yeah.

Meg: Welcome to the podcast! Congratulations on being our first guest, how does you feel?

Adam: Thank you, I feel good yeah.

Meg: Do you feel alive?

Adam: Erm just about.

Sara: It's Monday.

Adam: It is Monday yeah. And I'm in exhibition fog at the moment, so...

Meg: What's the fog?

Adam: Well it's like having an essay deadline where you think about exhibitions nearly 24/7. So usually about 4 months before an exhibition opens you have a bit of a fog descending on you where you start thinking about the exhibition all the time so I'm in that zone at the moment.

Sara: Surely if it's Japanese related it's like some sort of beautiful, sensual mist.

Meg: Yeah scented with like...

Sara: ...Jasmine.

(laughing)

Sara: Cherry blossoms.

Meg: Sushi.

Adam: But it's a good feeling. It's productive.

Meg: So firstly, tell everyone who you are.

Adam: So my name's Adam Jaffer, and I'm the Curator of World Cultures for Leeds Museums and Galleries. And I look after artefacts from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas.

Meg: Erm, sorry but I think it's actually pronounced 'Ah-sia'. *(pronounced wrong)*

(laughing and then a long silence)

Adam: I've been getting it wrong all these years.

Meg: Yeah how embarrassing for you. Um sorry so Africa, Asia (*pronounced wrong*)...

Adam: Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas and some material from Europe as well.

Meg: What is the other one. Antarctica.

Adam: Yeah. Antarctica.

Meg: Have we got some from there?

Adam: No.

Meg: How come?

Adam: Because there weren't people there. So the collections that I look after mainly relate to culture so objects made by people.

Meg: Wait so where's the eskimos?

Adam: Aren't the eskimos in the Arctic Circle?

(laughing)

Sara: I can't even comment because this is so good.

Meg: Why? No sorry, so Antarctica's at the bottom.

Adam: Is at the bottom, yep.

Meg: And then the Arctic circle is at the top.

Adam: The Arctic's at the top.

Meg: Santa.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: So there's people there?

Sara: Santa.

Adam: People that we might call the Inuit or the Eskimos, they were kind of spread over the Arctic and the Sub-Arctic I think.

Meg: Is that... is it... is it Europe?

Adam: Oh good question! Erm...

Meg: Sara's looking at me like that's a stupid question...

Sara: I wasn't!

Adam: It's possibly North America and then if it's in Russia yeah so possibly.

Meg: So do we have Inuit things?

Adam: We do have Inuit material. We have some stone carvings, and we might have some snow goggles as well which they use to protect them from the blinding effects of the snow.

Meg: God that's mad isn't it.

Sara: It is. I remember one time I was in an airplane going over Afghanistan (*pronounced wrong*)...

Meg: (*laughing*) Afstanigan?

Sara: I was in an airplane and I was going over Afghanistan and I opened the window blinds thinking 'ooh it must be daylight again out there' but it was the snow from the mountains and I genuinely thought I was blind and I had to get an air hostess to come and check my eyes.

Meg: No you didn't.

Sara: I did, I was terrified that I was blind.

Meg: But did you not just look back into the plane and see people...

Sara: I couldn't see straight away it was so bright.

Meg: Mad. Um, sorry, so why aren't there people in the Antarctic?

Adam: I don't know, I don't think it was settled by people perhaps because of the sea - I'm looking at the map now on the wall - but perhaps because it was divided by such a great expanse of sea compared to the Arctic which you can get to. If you look at Russia, if you look at Canada you can get to the Arctic a lot easier, there's kind of land jutting out towards it.

Sara: And what's really helpful for all of our listeners is that on the visual map that no one can see, there is a boat that is giant, it's massively disproportionate to everything else and it's right near the top and there are no boats near the bottom. So I think that's true. I think that's a fact.

Meg: The boat's the size of Angora. Angora? Andorra?

Sara: *(laughing)*

Adam: Andorra? Angola? No?

Meg: I can't read it! It's in Africa, what's that?

Adam: Oh, Angola.

(laughing)

Sara: Andorra's in Europe!

Meg: Oh my god. Anyway, right. Would you ever go to the Arctic or Antarctica? It's so funny because he thought he was coming on here to talk about Japan.

Adam: Japan, yeah...

(laughing)

Adam: No I don't like cold weather, so I mean even Britain at this time of year, December, is too cold for me.

Meg: Do you know why that is? Because you don't have a good coat.

Adam: Well maybe Father Christmas might bring me one.

Meg: Cute. Santa if you're listening hun.

(laughing)

Adam: But yeah I don't like cold weather, I prefer tropical climates.

Sara: Agreed.

Meg: Like... Japan?

Adam: Not really no. Japan's not tropical, no.

Sara: It's similar to here, although it's more extreme. Like they have proper seasons there.

Meg: Isn't it the best place to go skiing? In Japan?

Sara: In the world? I think it depends who you speak to.

Adam: It was a good jump from the Antarctic to Japan though.

Meg: Isn't it? Wasn't that seamless? Weather. Cold. Skiing. Japan. So tell us about the exhibition that you're 'fogging through' at the minute.

Adam: Ok so I'm working on an exhibition called Making Japan, which opens at the beginning of March and runs until October, and it covers about 300 years of Japanese culture. So I'm selecting the objects, writing the text, looking for images, trying to get hold of objects to feature in the exhibition.

Meg: Have you had to go over to Japan?

Adam: I haven't. There was potential for me to go earlier in the year, but Leeds have a pretty good collection, so the majority of it is going to be Leeds' collections plus a few loans from other individuals who travelled out to Japan. Probably if I'd had, you know, a couple of years I would have gone out to Japan, maybe collected some objects...

Meg: ... and taken us?

Adam: Maybe taken some of my colleagues..

Meg: Of all of your colleagues, who would you take?

Adam: Well I'd probably take colleagues who can speak Japanese because I don't speak Japanese.

Meg and Sara: *(at the same time)* Konichiwa!

(laughing)

Sara: I love the way that that was just immediately a competition.

Meg: Let me think of anything else I know in Japanese...

Sara: Sayonara.

Meg: Kit Kat.

Adam: Is Kit Kat Japanese?

Meg: I don't know but they have lots of them - I think that... did they not start them?

Adam: No I don't think they started them, no.

Sara: Was that not Nestle?

Meg: I don't know. Anyway. Would it be us?

Adam: You're in the top 5 maybe. Top 5 colleagues but speaking Japanese when you're out there, it would be a benefit. Especially because collecting objects when you're in another country can be very hard work. People think it's kind of easy and you just turn up and buy things but if you're doing collecting properly where you might go and speak to people, you might go and find artists or go into people's houses, it's always helpful to be able to go and collect from people who trust you and know you.

Meg: So how does it work then? If you were to go to Japan with the aim to collect things, then where do you even start?

Adam: Well, I think you'd probably have a shopping list before you go, or you'd have an idea in your mind what you might want, so that kind of thing is becoming apparent now. Leeds has a really good collection of Japanese material but there are some areas where we could do better, particularly areas of popular culture for example, where it would be nice to be able to borrow things that are very new, very modern. Even things that Leeds have in their collection from 5 years ago are out of date, because popular culture moves so quickly. So I think you'd have a shopping list, you'd maybe talk to people about artists or makers who are out there who you might want to borrow from, but I'm more interested in the art of every day: the things that people perhaps throw away. Things that are common to cultures in different parts of the world. But yeah, you'd definitely have something in mind, but then you'd probably build in a little bit of budget or a little bit of time to collect things that you didn't expect. So if you turn up to a country and you know - all the teenagers are doing this, or all the shop signs have this kind of design, or everyone's wearing this t-shirt, you might ask a few questions and then make a new acquisition based on what is out there. So generally in museums we call that field collecting, so it's where you get a sense of a place and then you decide what to collect. You don't always go with a fixed idea of 'I want this'. I'm lucky because my predecessor went to Japan for a conference recently, so she's bought a few objects back. So she's bought some Shinto prayer boards back which are absolutely beautiful. We are going to have some modern Japanese things in the collection.

Meg: What's a Shinto prayer board?

Adam: Ok so in Japan the two major religions are Shintoism and Buddhism.

Meg: So is Shinto the Shinto monks?

Adam: Yeah, yeah what we were talking about the other week.

Meg: Yeah so Adam - I don't think you were in the office when we were talking about this - but basically we were talking about mummifying.

Sara: Oh ok.

Meg: Anyway I'm going to absolutely annihilate this so you tell it.

Adam: (*laughing*) Ok well, I might do as well because I only remember it vaguely. So in the office were talking about Egyptian mummification because Leeds has a mummy in the collection, and obviously lots of museums in the UK have Ancient Egyptian mummies. Some museums have Peruvian mummies as well.

Meg: Which I learnt recently they're buried upright. That's right isn't it?

Adam: Yeah, they're buried upright, often I think they're buried with their knees kind of hunched towards their bodies.

Meg: And they have their - sorry, it's just that this is something that I genuinely know...

Adam: It's alright.

Meg: Right so basically Peruvian mummies have in their eyes, the eye lenses of the Humboldt squid.

Sara: Yeah.

Adam: I didn't know that.

Meg: Did you not know that? Have I just taught you something? Yeah, so we've got a pair of Humboldt squid eye lenses in our collection and they're gorgeous, they're like little tiny... if you think about a fruit pastille, like an orange fruit pastille, it looks like a little tiny piece of amber. We've got those in our collection and they were inside a Peruvian mummy inside its eye sockets.

Adam: So they were inserted in there? I didn't know that, I'm going to have to look that up after this session.

Meg: I'm going to cut that little sound bite and play it on a loop in my own head whenever I'm feeling a bit down to remind myself that I do know things.

Sara: Ok great.

Adam: I will never think of a fruit pastille in the same way again.

Meg: Also the orange ones are the best ones aren't they? Sorry, so...

Adam: So yeah, I think we were talking about mummification in the office, as you do in a museum, then I think we were talking about mummification in different parts of the world, Peru being one of them. But in Japan - and I'm going to be slightly vague about this - in Japan there was a process that Buddhist monks would practice where they would mummify themselves while they were alive. It would be a very very slow process, so I think some time ago they found all these monks who had mummified themselves. I think they found them in caves, I'm not entirely sure, but the process could take up to 10 years where you would consume tree resin, tree sap and slowly slowly that would get into your body, and it would sort of dessicate your body from the inside.

Sara: Why?

Adam: That is a good question - so it's kind of a way of renouncing the world, it's kind of a form of a-aestheticism in many of its facets. So it's a sort of way of renouncing the world through controlling your body essentially. So these monks, I think the majority of them are mummified in a posture of mediation. So yeah it's a form of rejecting the world and placing emphasis on discipline and control, and I think I read somewhere that it takes about 10 years for them to do that. There's some debate about whether it's a kind of suicide or... it was a ritual practice, it wasn't extensive within Japanese Buddhism but it's an element of it. So I always think it's funny when you say mummies to people that people always think of Ancient Egypt, but mummification has always occurred in different parts of the world for different reasons.

Meg: Um, so, if say a Peruvian mummy comes into the collection, not of its own accord, or if we had a Shinto monk. Who decides which part of the collection that would go in? Would that be in your collection or would that be in the archaeology collection?

Adam: Yeah so good question - so I think we wouldn't get offered one, because they're human remains and we've got very strict ethical guidelines about accepting human remains, but let's see - if they're Peruvian, they probably would come into World cultures because we have Peruvian archaeology in World cultures so we've got some pots and things like that in the collection. I'm not sure where these monks actually are now, whether they've been left preserved by the authorities in Japan or whether they've gone to, say, the national museum in

Japan. They're very striking to look at and to think that somebody had the will, the foresight rather, to do that to themselves is quite an interesting aspect of their practice.

Sara: Big question. What's your favourite thing about Japan that you've found out so far?

Adam: What's my favourite thing about Japan that I've found out so far?

Meg: What's your best one?

Sara: Yeah. Because you've talked about the normal and the day to day, and it reminded me of something that I really liked when I travelled to Japan a few years ago. But I wanted to find out what yours was.

Adam: Oh ok, well there's the kind of more general geographical facts about Japan, that it consists of over 6000 islands, which you don't always think of.

Meg: 6000 islands? Is one of them the Isle of Dogs?

Adam: No I think that *(laughing)*.. No..

Meg: Off of that Wes Anderson film.

Sara: That's different.

Adam: *(laughing)* That's different.

Meg: Good film though.

Adam: Which film's that?

Meg: Isle of Dogs!

Adam: Oh, I haven't seen that.

Sara: Stop motion.

Meg: It's really good you should have it on loop in the exhibition.

Adam: I think also, the fact that Japan is a fairly uninhabitable place because it has a lot of mountains and forests that you can't grow things on, people are squeezed on to these narrow coastal plains in Japan. I always think about that when you see photographs of Japan and you always imagine it to be very spacious. Sometimes we have things in the collection that you can illustrate with that. So we've got Hello Kitty temple charms in the collection so again back to religion, Hello Kitty is obviously a massive brand in Japan and we've got some temple charms

that have little prayers inside them that are in these little wallets with Hello Kitty on them. So again, I like that popular culture meeting religion and the sort of every day aspect of it. Japan's also world leaders in gaming, things like pop music as well. People may be aware that there's a thing called J-Pop in Japan, which is Japanese Pop. Although we don't have anything in the collection relating to J-Pop, it's something that I'm looking for at the moment. There's a J-Pop band who have over 130 members.

Meg: So like Blazin' Squad.

Sara: On steroids.

Adam: I mean Blazin' Squad yeah that reference is probably pretty close, they have a huge line up. I think they're called AKB48.

Sara: Yeah, and they do live shows all the time. Because I remember being over there and it was just multiple live shows a week. And they're kids! And it's absolutely mad.

Meg: Was that your favourite thing about Japan?

Sara: No, my favourite thing about Japan - the sound that the traffic lights make when you're crossing the road.

Meg: What does it do?

Sara: So all traffic lights make a different noise across the world and it's really interesting, so we did a comparison to see which ones are the best ones. Japanese is like 'pew pew pew pew'.

Adam: Oh, ok, yeah I think I've heard that sound before.

Meg: Is that like, what's those things in Takeshi's Castle.

Sara: Yeah, I'll find it, I'll find the thing and we can put it on the podcast.

Adam: I like the idea that you're going round the world comparing traffic light crossings.

Meg: What are the American ones like?

Sara: I don't know I haven't been to America.

Meg: You've not done much research have you?

Sara: We're talking about Japan!

Meg: Fine.

Sara: You went to America...

Meg: I wasn't doing field research, I was mainly eating things.

Adam: Meg have you been to Japan?

Meg: Um I haven't but I would.. I don't know... it's not actually very high on my list and I don't know why. I'm quite scared of flying and it's quite far away isn't it? Don't like skiing. Don't like sushi.

Sara: Sushi is really expensive in Japan.

Meg: Is it? Do you like sushi?

Adam: I do like sushi yeah.

Meg: What's your best sushi?

Adam: Oh I don't know the names of all of them. I like Japanese food in general. I like East Asian food.

Meg: So actually Chris Sharp, came on this podcast last week, and he told us that there's a new Japanese place that's opened up in Armley. Japanese takeaway.

Sara: Yeah a Japanese takeaway that he said was really good.

Meg: Shall we go?

Adam: Sounds like a... yeah?

Sara: And he also told us what his favourite vegetable was.

Meg: Mooli!

Adam: What's that?

Sara: It's a Japanese white radish.

Adam: Oh yes I've had that! I've had that in Chinese food if it's a similar thing. What's it called sorry?

Meg and Sara: A mooli!

Adam: Ah I didn't know that. I didn't know that.

Meg: Are you planning to go to Japan?

Adam: Um, no. I think there's quite a lot of other countries I want to go to and having done the exhibition...

Meg: You're a bit Japped out.

Adam: Yeah possibly.

Meg: What about if we went up into the office now and I put the band Japan on, on repeat. Just Life in Tokyo.

Adam: I mean I do like the new age band Japan, but they don't really have much to do with Japan.

Meg: Why are they called Japan?

Adam: I think their aesthetics are kind of... I think their lead singer had some kind of aspect of the Japanese aesthetic but I don't know why they're called Japan.

Meg: So which other countries are on your list to visit other than Japan?

Adam: Well, I'd like to go back to India, so I'd like to go to Kerala...

Meg: It's actually pronounced Indi-ahhh (*pronounced wrong*)

Adam: (*laughing*)

Sara: You're telling someone who's half Indian...

Adam: So yeah I'd like to go to India, I'd like to go to Vietnam, Uruguay, I've got friends in Uruguay that makes me really want to go there.

Meg: What's like a Uruguayan food?

Adam: Um they probably eat a lot of meat, probably a lot of beef, in Uruguay. But I sometimes think if you meet people from countries and they're nice, it makes you want to go to those countries. I've always thought that in my life, especially in England, you get to meet people from all around the world. If you meet someone that's nice from that particular country it makes you

want to go. And as part of this I have met lots of nice Japanese people in Yorkshire, so that is definitely a plus point for going to Japan at some point.

Sara: Yeah I'd agree with that, in terms of you meet people and it makes you want to go places, I find that really interesting. Romesh Ranganathan's done a series recently and it's like 'dangerous places' or places you really shouldn't go on holiday, and he went to Bosnia and I was quite intrigued by there because the people were really lovely.

Meg: Bosniiiiiyaaaa (*pronounced wrong*)

Sara: Not everything sounds like that. But it was interesting...

Meg: Do you know why this is by the way?

Sara: Yes.

Meg: Because I watched Bridget Jones when she's like 'Chechnya'. 'Isn't it awful about the situation in Chechnya'.

Sara: Yes.

Meg: Anyway yeah sorry.

Sara: Ah! This is what I find interesting about Japan - fashion. I find the fashion incredible over there, and we went to Harajuku and... just to look at everything. And it is mad. Why do you think that Japan is so unique in that respect?

Adam: Well I think it's possibly a bit like, maybe a bit like England. So Japan's an island, so it has a natural barrier around it, and also - I'm trying to put this across in the exhibition - people often think of Japan as being a very conformist culture where people dress the same, people work in salaried offices, but there's always this pushing out slightly by the younger generation who want to be different, dress different. Also, the economy in Japan, certainly in the 20th century, was just racing faster and faster, and often when you get economies that are tripping over themselves you get innovation like mad. Whether that's robots, whether that's music, whether that's car design - you get new products hitting the market all the time, because people want to be sold to. So I think that fuels the idea that there's always new stuff to buy, there's always new ideas. But I would say there are lots of cultures around the world where that's going on, that sort of accelerated culture. But in Japan possibly it's also that there's this kind of explosion of creativity, And there's lots of sub-cultures there, but it's important to say that not everybody walks around in kimonos, not everybody is Buddhist, and just not be too stereotypical. It is hard to do when you've got a collection that is of a certain time, and with a certain idea in mind, but you can hint at it with you know, subtle things.

Meg: So when you're collecting material from other cultures, how do you deal with a language barrier? So like if you were to go to Japan, and you don't speak Japanese, how do you go into people's homes and collect things from them? Do you have to get a translator?

Adam: Yeah so I think normally we would get a translator. It is easy to just buy things, it's a commercial society so you could just go into shops and buy things. But it's often nice to get personal stories behind things - if somebody from Japan comes to London, they'll get a certain view of London that is perhaps not an insider's view of a culture. It'll just be the shop front if you like. I kind of think that to be able to collect things that are really indicative of aspects of the culture you would need some kind of language as well. And that'll be the same from people collecting from us. Britain isn't just Harry Potter and Oxford University and Cadbury's chocolate there are lots of things in between.

Meg: Gregg's sausage rolls.

Adam: Yeah.

Sara: Yeah. So that must be quite a difficult part of the job, especially if you're taking a certain culture that perhaps we haven't got as much about anyway, and you're far removed from it - would you say that's one of the hardest things? Or what do you find difficult like on a day to day?

Adam: I think obviously not being native Japanese myself is difficult.. But you can mitigate against it by taking advice from people, again we have Japanese people we're working with on the exhibition, you can go and look at other exhibitions and see that they're doing similar things. I think the biggest thing that you're worried about is that you're not just being stereotypical. Again, not everyone in Japan would be a Samurai.

Sara: Damn it.

Meg: That would be sick if they were.

Adam: It would be, it would be. And actually, a certain amount of Samurai armour that you see wasn't even made for battle, it was a courtly dress, and it was worn during periods of peace.

Meg: So I was thinking about what might be the hardest part of your job, and I imagine that you might have to deal with people asking you questions about the items that we collect and things to do with repatriation. Because quite a lot of that is about your collection isn't it? That probably quite a lot of the questions you get are about that?

Adam: Yeah I'd say that the collection I look after, rather, is the main focus.

Meg: So how do you deal with that? What's your stance on that really?

Adam: Well we have a collecting policy, as is with most museums in the UK we tend to say that repatriation will be treated on a case by case basis, because that recognises that objects were collected in various ways throughout history. Some were collected through gift, some were collected through trade, some were collected through colonial violence, theft, looting etc, some were purchased, and all of those historical conditions need to be considered on a case by case basis with each particular object. We always take enquiries from Indigenous organisations who might be wanting to look out their cultural heritage. The downside is there's not always that much information about how things were collected. So yeah I think Leeds has repatriated some material in the past, we repatriated some material to New Zealand, but yeah we would also never say yes to something without considering it: who are we returning it to, how did it get here, what are the implications of returning that material. So I generally keep an eye on that in the press, when other colleagues at other museums do that. It tends to be the high profile things that get asked for first, and things like human remains. So they're the sort of things that come up most for world cultures.

Meg: And that's not the focus of what you do - you're like the everyday.

Adam: Um yeah, I'd say that if you look in our collection, human beings have similar issues across the world, but they approach them in different ways. We all have to eat, we all have to sleep, we all have to fall in love, get married etc - but people approach these things in completely diverse ways. So that's what the collection that I look after can help to focus on, we look at the similarities and differences between you and someone who lives 4000 miles away.

Sara: That's nice.

Meg: They probably know about the Antarctic.

Sara: They might know a bit about the Antarctic, yeah.

Meg: Um so we have a couple of questions that we ask everyone. So question number 1 is: what's been your favourite day at work. At Leeds! It has to be at Leeds. Actually, no it doesn't.

Sara: Na.

Adam: What's been my favourite day at work?

Sara: For any reason.

Adam: That's really difficult...

Meg: So Rebecca Machin's was actually my favourite day at work, it was the day that she tried to colour in water, I don't know if you remember that. Errin's was when she got retweeted by Idles I think?

Adam: Oh the band, ok. Can I have 2? So we've been working on an exhibition about migration. So I really enjoyed the private view of that, the launch of it, because there were so many people there, and that was such a good introduction to the museum service...

Meg: There was also a really good... oh wait no, that wasn't the one...

Sara: What?

Meg: There was a really good buffet at one of them.

Adam: Yeah, I think there was. I was probably too nervous to eat anything but we'll put on a good buffet for the launch of Japan I'm sure. But it's quite nice when you've been working on labels, at sort of anti-social hours, or you've been going on the bus to collect artefacts from people, but then when the exhibition opens and those people who loaned to the exhibition bring their families with them and they're looking and showing their grandchildren 'here are some things from my family and they're nicely displayed in a museum case' so that is always a nice feeling that you get. So I did enjoy the launch of that. My second day would be - I really enjoyed having training on the scissor lift.

Meg: Yes! We love the scissor lift

(Sara laughs)

Adam: So here at the Discovery Centre we use a scissor lift which helps us get up to the racks that are high up...

Meg: ...in rack city...

Adam: Yep. And we had training on it last year. So I don't drive a car, so I was a bit nervous and I don't really like heights...

(laughing)

Adam: ... but I actually really enjoyed the scissor lift and I enjoy driving around the store safely on it.

Meg: How does the helmet look on you, does it look alright?

Sara: Do you feel safe?

Adam: I feel safe and secure. And the guy who trained us was very good. It's good because I don't have to ask colleagues to get things down for me anymore I can get them down myself.

Meg: Who's a good boy?

(laughing)

Sara: Brave boy.

Adam: I did quite like that.

Sara: Very good. And the last question, but it's 2 questions in 1 - what would be the takeaway for our listeners from what we talked about today?

Adam: Ok so in terms of Japan, I would say that Japan is a very dynamic country and that there's a real playfulness between contemporary Japan. Japan isn't a traditional country, it isn't a modern country, it's the 2 together and it's the struggle between those two that creates really interesting objects and it creates a society that's really innovative. So I would say that definitely that's a take home from today and hopefully a take home from the exhibition from my point of view.

Meg: Great, our follow up question then is naturally, what is your favourite takeaway?

Adam: What is my favourite takeaway? *(laughs)* I think my favourite... I really like Indian food, I really like spicy food so I would say that Indian food is my favourite takeaway.

Meg: What's your Indian order mate? We've been for many Indians.

Adam: We have, yeah. Erm... I like biryani, I like daal, I like chapatis *(laughing)*

Sara: Family naan.

Meg: Do you know what? What was it you said, that chapatis are better than naan?

Adam: Yeah.

Sara: *(gasping)*

Meg: Can you imagine? Can you believe?

Sara: No. Garlic and coriander? Mmm.

Meg: Peshwari naan?

Adam: I kind of feel like naan breads have had their day.

Sara: To be fair I do really like chapatis because they're lighter.

Meg: Chapatis are boring naan!

Sara: They're light though aren't they.

Meg: Naan is like an indian garlic bread.

Adam: I mean I feel like you're going to get a lot of grief if you say that about chapatis I feel there's gonna be a...

Meg: Chapatis are boring and do you know what that is a hill I'll die on. Hill I'll die on?

Sara: I don't think that's the right phrase.

Meg: It is isn't it? The hill I'll die on? Yeah.

Adam: I was going to say we are having a section in the Japan exhibition about food.

Meg: On Indian food.

Adam: No not about Indian food but about food. And it's one of the subjects where I have too many objects and not enough space.

Sara: Do we need to eat stuff?

Adam: *(laughing)* no. It's all... I wish.

Sara: Is it the fun plastic food?

Adam: Um it's the fun plastic food, it's sake sets, it's teapots, it's bento boxes. We have quite a lot of food. We've also got quite a lot of manga. I found this out the other day, we've got lots of manga that's about food as well. So I am trying to narrow down.

Meg: What's the preview situation like, are we going to have sushi?

Sara: It's risky isn't it.

Adam: It is risky yeah. Well it's safe.

Meg: Kit kats! Kit kats.

Adam: We haven't got that far yet in deciding the food for the private view. I wish we were at that luxury of being that close but there will be a Japanese flavour to the private view.

Sara: Sake.

Adam: So I had sake properly for the first time this year. Apparently it's supposed to be drunk warm, and I had it when I was younger cold and it wasn't the right way to drink it. But when I had it this year, somebody was teaching me how to make sushi and she gave us sake with the food and it's warm and it's nice.

Sara: It's quite delicate.

Meg: In my head it tastes like soy sauce.

Sara: No, not at all.

Meg: I don't know why, it's quite dark isn't it? Is it black?

Adam: No.

Meg: Oh (*laughing*). What does it look like? Red wine?

Sara: Clear spirit.

Meg: No.

Adam: Yeah it's a clear spirit, yeah. Because it's rice wine right?

Meg: Oh, I thought it looked like soy sauce. So therefore in my head...

Sara: I've got some at home, I'll bring it in. Christmas party.

Meg: Right.

Adam: I mean there's quite a lot of beer in Japan as well. Japan makes...

Meg: ...Asahi?

Adam: Asahi, yep.

Meg: Gluten free beer that.

Sara: They have some good craft beers and they love - I don't know if this is a myth, but we did speak to Japanese people over there about it and they love scotch. And over here we have a big thing for Japanese whiskey because it's really hard to come by and it's really expensive and I don't know the difference but yeah, they love scotch. And yet they have really good whiskey, that they make right there.

Meg: Well, on that note.

Adam: I mean it's been quite nice talking about cultures of the world and Antarctica. So.

Meg: Hasn't it?

Sara: And how some of us don't go down there. But massive whales do, apparently.

Meg: I feel like what's confused me is I feel like I've seen lots of tv programmes about Antarctica. And then I'm like... well, there's people in Antarctica. Filming. And I'm like well...

Adam: I mean it's so remote. It is so remote.

Meg: Great, well thank you very much for coming on, you've been a great guest. See you at the opening with kitkats.

Adam: Yep with Japanese tea flavoured kit kats maybe.

Meg:: Amazing.

(Theme music)

Sara: Well, wasn't that lovely?

Meg: That was lovely, I feel like I learned lots of things about Japan.

Sara: What was your best learn Meg? Mine was about mummifying. Because I didn't realise - that's really ignorant, but - I didn't realise that..

Meg: Sorry, was your best learn from me?

Sara: Err no, no! Adam talked about...

Meg: Peru!

Sara: No! I knew about Peru! About Japanese Buddhism... Shinto...

Meg: You didn't know about Peru mate. I was really hoping he'd talk about that actually, because he said it in the office the other day and my mind was blown and I've been thinking about it ever since.

Sara: Yeah I also still can't get around the fact that these guys had - you know, basically slowly killing themselves over the course of 10 days. Do they not think they want to do something else? You know, they could read a book...

Meg: No 10 years mate. 10 years.

Sara: Oh, I did not listen.

Meg: Yeah, brilliant.

(laughing)

Meg: Um my best learn is actually a serious one today. I really liked his takeaway. His actual takeaway not his takeaway food. About how Japan is modern and contemporary and the traditional and it's the jarring of those two that creates the things that we know to be Japan.

Sara: Yeah. It's a fascinating country. I didn't know all the things we're learning about and the connection that we have from a Leeds perspective as well. It's interesting.

Meg: I want you to go back and record the crossing.

Sara: Pew pew pew! We're going to find the actual soundbite so we can put it in and compare it with the likes of Germany and England which is actually very boring.

Meg: So as always thank you to Tim Bentley who wrote our theme tune for us, and a big thank you to Alex Finney who did our cover artwork for us. What an absolute angel. Pair of angels. Sterling lads.

Sara: Yeah. Thank you very much. If you want to hear more from us, please subscribe and review. But just 5 stars obviously.

Meg: Yeah. Don't give us anything less than 5 stars or...

Sara: Oh my god and today I've actually remembered what my twitter handle is so if you want it it's actually @saralmerritt.

Meg: Which I've said every time. I know your twitter handle better than you do. So mine is @MuseumMeg do tweet us if you fancy and if you have any questions you can - oh actually you can also tweet us at @LeedsMuseums.

Sara: And that's probably the proper one, @LeedsMuseums.

Meg: @LeedsMuseums if you want to ask us any more questions. We will answer them. Will you Smez?

Sara: In due course. I don't know, maybe.

Meg: Yeah I will. I'll give them an answer. Who have we got next week?

Sara: I have no idea.

Meg: We've got the greatest person that's ever lived.

Sara: *(gasps)* is it Doctor...

Meg: Yes!

Sara: Dr Rebecca Wade?!

Meg: Dr Rebecca Wade. I am deceased thinking about it I cannot believe.

Sara: Oh my god that's incredible.

Meg: Right, have a good week. Kids.

(laughing)

Sara: Bye!

Meg: Bye!

(Theme music)