

Museums n'That Bonus Episode - Who the flip are Meg and Sara

Meg: Just going to have a little bite of this biscuit there. (*Bites*) Mmm. Right, let me do this. Ok. (*clears throat*). Hello it's us, 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.

Sara: So well scripted. So beautifully spoken.

(*theme music*)

Meg: Hello Smez, how are you?

Sara: I'm alright actually thank you, how are you? It's Friday! And it's sunny!

Meg: It's so chronically annoying that I'm eating this right now as we've just decided to start doing this.

Sara: Do you know what the most exciting thing is though. I'm actually with Meg.

Meg: I know.

Sara: I'm so excited!

Meg: Do you know what's so good as well - this is the distance that I want to be from you at all times.

Sara: Yeah! Yeah. I think social distancing is great.

Meg: Do you know what, we've never been a hugging pair as well.

Sara: mm mm. No.

Meg: Not into hugging you know.

Sara: I am but you don't like it so.

Meg: I just don't like touching (*laughing*). Yeah so Sara is in my house at a safe distance because basically, we got fed up of recording on zoom because zoom sucked, and basically we were so traumatised by John McGoldrick and all the things that went wrong with technology that we were just like, for god's sake, we need a break from this.

Sara: I think we need to clarify: we weren't traumatised by John. We were traumatised by the situation with the multiple re-recordings.

Meg: John was a soothing tonic if anything.

Sara: Yeah I've had many a compliment about his accent and his voice generally, so.

Meg: Yeah so we were just like do you know what, screw it. So this isn't really... in fact, we'll get onto that in a minute. Right. How was your week, tell me something good.

Sara: It's been alright. It's been a weird week. It's like the 349th day of March or something, but also I went to the pub on Friday night, didn't get home until half 11.

Meg: Yeah. This week I went to the pub 3 times. And, it got to the point where - I've been sat in the beer garden the whole time, shoutout to the Kirkstall Bridge for just being outstanding and the main love of my life, but I went with Sophie, went to the pub and we were sat outside until I couldn't see her anymore because it was so dark, it was ridiculous. We were like, ok we should probably go because I actually can't see who I'm talking to because it was complete darkness.

Sara: Wow. That is dedication to the pub.

Meg: Did you like being back though?

Sara: Yeah it was good. And actually, our local...

Meg: You are so into your pub.

Sara: I am, like, we are big pub people. But our locals have been really good and they're really organised and it's a really hard position to be on the other side of that bar, and I was speaking to someone that manages a pub in otley and she was saying that I'd usually want it to be really busy and really buzzing and now I don't want any of that, and that's a really hard position to be in. So yeah, they're managing it really well, and I hope everyone can continue to be really considerate and keep them open really.

Meg: Do you know what my thing has been as well. I've always had a phobia of um...portalooos.

(*laughing*)

The Bridge have got portaloo's, and I was like no no no don't want to go in those going to have to leave. Anyway, I had 3 wines, went in and it was totally fine, it was lovely, there's a little, mirror so you can see yourself, which is my best thing.

Sara: That's a posh portaloo.

Meg: And they've got these little pumps. That you touch with your foot. These little pumps.

Sara: Have you never done them before? Oh no, you don't do festivals...

Meg: No I don't like festivals.

Sara: Yeah. To be fair they've only come in more recently.

Meg: To be fair I've been in a portaloo before but it's normally one where there's like a gear stick you know, you push it. It was on the floor, and I felt like I was doing a little 2-step on the floor. It was great, and then all this blue liquid came out.

Sara: Nice and clean.

Meg: Yeah, I assumed it was clean because it was blue but you never know do you.

Sara: Yeah so it's been alright, how's your week been?

Meg: Yeah my thing was basically the pubs to be honest, I wrote it down. Hang on, let me consult my extensive notes. Mine is that I have a kitchen now so that's nice and I've been to the pub 3 times.

Sara: *(laughing)* You didn't read that aloud at all. Ooh, I actually need the camping stove back from you.

Meg: That bag of gas.

Sara: Yeah, that portable oven as you called it.

Meg: Ok fine, you can have that. Um, right. Who have we got on today Sara?

Sara: Today it's an extra special guest.

Meg: It's... it's literally us.

Sara: It's just us.

Meg: Right basically, at the end of last episode we said ohh, it'll be a surprise who's on next, it'll be a surprise how funny ahhh amazing, kooky. Do you know what, it is a surprise because it is literally us. Because, well, to be honest. We're museum professionals. The whole thing, the whole thing that I read out is things that museum people love the most. We're museum people.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: We've not really - I mean like, you know stupid things about us. But, you don't know the real things.

Sara: Oh god. It's really hard to talk about yourself though. For some people.

(laughing)

That wasn't... I wasn't implying...

Meg: The way you're looking at me there. I don't like talking about myself actually. I'm really good at talking to other people.

Sara: Yeah, I think it's a really odd experience, generally. It doesn't make for good content, that's for sure. Us rambling. Not knowing what we're talking about. Especially if you're eating a biscuit.

Meg: Me eating a biscuit isn't good content for people. Right. Yeah. So yeah.

Sara: So what are we going to talk about?

Meg: Well basically, now is the point where I'd normally do a little intro music, but it is just going to cut to us being here at the same time.

Sara: So we could pretend. We could have a little pause, and do the *(hums)*.

Meg: Ok right, so here's a bonus special episode that you probably didn't want, of who we actually are. Queue the music...

(laughing)

(theme music)

Meg: Oh my god Sara, welcome!

Sara: Thanks, I'm actually soooo happy to be here. I actually am because I haven't been to your house for months.

Meg: My house is lovely.

Sara: It is very good, yeah. You've done a great job.

Meg: Also I'm going to Sara's house later on, we're swapping houses because I was like, Sara can I record a podcast with you and also can you make me a pizza.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Gonna live tweet the pizza.

Sara: Wow. Ok. No pressure.

Meg: I'm still eating that biscuit aren't I. Sorry, just going to finish this mouthful hang on.

Sara: It's because it's there you can't not. Look I've only eaten - Anna the lama still has a face, albeit no eyes.

Meg: Do you know why that is? It's because, as previously discussed, I'm really good at talking to other people, and I've not been talking as much as you have.

Sara: Yeah. Or you're greedy. I don't know where you got that from.

Meg: Right, let me just scroll down, right. First question. Basically I've had to outline all my questions for you because I feel like it could just end with us talking about nothing.

Sara: The pub, yeah.

Meg: Yeah. Right, number one, Sara: who literally are you.

Sara: Oh goodness, I'm Sara. Actually I have a new surname now.

Meg: Yeah so I call Sara smez, because of Sara Merritt, Smerritt, Smez. But then you're now not.

Sara: So I'm actually Sara Hallam now, which is weird. I am Audience Development Officer at Leeds Museums & Galleries. I'd say professionally, but that's questionable.

Meg: Also, I just looked at the recorder then just to see how long Sara had been talking and I feel like that was probably really off putting. Sorry, speed this up. No, don't we're good.

Sara: I look after half of our sites? Which is awkward because we have 9.

Meg: Sorry, can you name them all as quickly as possible? Because I don't think we've ever actually gone through that. Yeah, name them all. Quick fire.

Sara: Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds City Museum, Leeds Discovery Centre, Temple NEWSam, Lotherton Hall, Thwaite Watermill, Leeds Industrial Museum, Abbey House Museum, Kirkstall Abbey.

Meg: Yeah that was fire, well done. I normally go the other way, so because I live near Abbey House and Kirkstall Abbey I tend to do Abbey House, Kirkstall Abbey and then I geographically go round.

Sara: See I tried to start with city centre and go outwards but that was quite confusing because I kind of darted in and out of it.

Meg: If it was in order of your favourites what would it be.

Sara: I can't possibly say that.

Meg: You can say your top one. Everyone's got a favourite kid haven't they.

Sara: Yeah they have.

Meg: I say that like I've got kids, I don't.

Sara: But I can't tell anyone. It's a big secret. Also I really like Kirkstall Abbey. But then, they're all different, they've all got their unique qualities. That's what everyone says don't they, when they're lying. We're quite lucky aren't we, I actually just like the fact that I have a lot of variety because I have a short attention span, so. Need to be kept busy.

Meg: That's true. Seeing as you're not going to ask me...

Sara: Well, so Meg. Who the flip are you.

Meg: Right, no I don't want.. Urgh. Right fine. My name is Megan Jones, and I am the Digital Engagement Officer for Leeds Museums and Galleries. So I manage the social media accounts, I am the @LeedsMuseums account which mainly just posts like Harry Styles stuff isn't it really.

Sara: At the minute, yeah.

Meg: I haven't actually done that for a long time because I don't want Harry to think that I'm too keen.

Sara: Desperate.

Meg: Do you know what I've been doing - I've been watching, so vogue have been doing Get Ready With Me videos with celebs.

Sara: Yeah I've seen you've seen that on the Youtubes that we share.

Meg: (*laughing*) yeah I literally watch it on the Leeds Museums and Galleries account.

Sara: So it's you watching vogue videos, Gina watching bird garden sounds for her cat because she lives in a flat.

Meg: Yeah, bit of yoga.

Sara: Yeah, I don't. Incognito, obviously.

Meg: Yeah you're cool. So I've been watching Camille Rowe and Kendall Jenner because I want to get what they do to their faces that makes Harry Styles love them.

Sara: Ok yeah.

Meg: So I'm going to start doing that. One day you're going to be like oh my god when did I start working with Kendall Jenner this is so crazy and it'll be me. I'll be like sorry no I just put loads of stuff on my face that she does. Anyway, yeah. So I do social media (*laughing*). Watch a lot of vogue videos. What else do I do? Website, just a whole host of stuff really.

Sara: Yeah, well, our job is to kind of support all of the sites in talking to audiences, and that comes in a lot of forms, and it's sometimes quite hard to quantify. What I do is more traditional marketing, but actually, that's massively moved, and especially towards digital elements, so we kind of look after...

(*laughing*)

You're doing it again.

Meg: (*laughing*) no it's only because I'm worried about the battery because it keeps being weird. I'm going to put it up near me. Sorry, yep. Digital elements.

Sara: Yeah, so especially recently, we got a new website last year - we've had a new website for about a year now haven't we.

Meg: Yeah. Feel free to tell us about how amazing it is because that was us that did that.

Sara: Yeah, our little team. And just trying to push the boundaries of how it can work, which is tricky when you have a large service that is local authority run, that -

Meg: Actually, we're the largest local authority-run museum service in the UK.

Sara: We are now, yeah.

Meg: And we have 247 employees.

Sara: Do we? I didn't know that.

Meg: Yeah. Do you find it weird that I know that?

Sara: A bit, I don't know why you know that.

Meg: It's because it was in our annual report and I had to tweet about it and I remember thinking god, that's a lot isn't it. Do you think you know everyone's names?

Sara: No, because all the VA's at all of the different sites, and all of like, the staff that I don't work with on a day-to-day. I only know a handful.

Meg: I reckon I know 200.

Sara: Do you?

Meg: Yeah. Think how many - so basically, in the service we are the team that works across all of them. A lot of curators work at our site or their collection is stored at a certain site so they're there all the time, or you know like, if you're a visitor assistant you're a visitor assistant mainly at just one site aren't you. But because we go and visit all the time, I feel like we've got a little bit of a... Like I know, that if I go to Lotherton, I'm going to be fed really well.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Mike's really good at snacks at Lotherton. And if I go to Armley Mills I'm going to have a really good lovely lunch in the colour garden, probably get a nice ghost story from Louise, one of the VA's that works there. I feel like we've got a really good deal where we kind of get to know everyone?

Sara: We do, and our remit is big, and it's ever changing as well because we support all of the teams and all of the sites in whatever capacity they need, and that means we're really stretched.

But like I say, it also means we get a lot of variety and it challenges us to make sure that whatever we're doing is streamlined as much as possible. You know, we also have to put the onus back on sites and people there to say that you know your site best, you know our job is to be experts in how to speak to people.

Meg: This is the key thing with museums I think and this is why, like - *(laughs)* - not that we're really good at podcasts... I don't want to say that, that's a bit awkward...

Sara: Good at chatting.

Meg: Good at chatting, yeah yeah yeah. This is the thing, we're in a really good position to do something like this. We're able to be the hosts of something like this where actually we talk to people every day because that's our job, you know. I would never tell Adam Jaffe off of season 1 what the deal is with Japan, and what he should put in a Japan exhibition and stuff like that because I don't know about it. And our expertise is audiences and it's you guys and it's like, that we know how to translate the stuff that say Adam's putting in the exhibition to make it interesting and relevant to everyone online. And that's our expertise and that's the importance of what we do. And I think especially now, with lockdown and coronavirus like you can't go to our museums. You can't go in. So we've had to - our team are basically the gatekeepers of the website, and we've had to work on putting our exhibitions online and stuff like that to be able to make sure you can still virtually come to the museum. I guess, we're like translators Smez.

Sara: Yeah, definitely, because I think the biggest thing that we always put when we're asked to do something or asked for advice on something, the first question I always ask is: is it relevant? Who are we doing this for? Why are we doing it? Because if we can't be telling the story quickly and succinctly, then you're not going to capture anyone's imagination, you're not going to get that audience in there, because we need to remain relevant. And we're not a front line service, we're not essential, but I think what this period has certainly taught us is that there are an awful lot of people that - not necessarily rely on us, but - certainly take solace in the fact that we're there, and we're a very big part of what it means to be a part of Leeds and the wider UK.

Meg: Greatest city in the world.

Sara: Greatest city in the world.

Meg: Oh my god, I messed that up then did you hear that?

Sara: You nearly said universe!

Meg: *(laughing)* to be fair, yeah.

Sara: Greatest city in the universe.

Meg: Do you know what, any aliens, that are listening to this. Fair. I will fight you.

(laughing)

Sara: I will fight your alien powers.

Meg: Come at me. Also, that was a perfect time to give a shoutout to my friend Laura Beare, at the University Library Galleries because her absolute quote of all time is 'you are not your audience'. And I think that's a really important thing to remember. And it's kind of what this podcast has been about and like - uh, imagine if I said like less.

(laughing)

Sara: Imagine.

Meg: This is the worst thing when editing myself. The problem is you know when you go back and you rethink and get anxious about a conversation that you had earlier and you replay it in your head and make a big deal of it. That, but you've got to actually listen to it back, every time you edit.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Basically, there have been so many instances of us being in a museum and being surrounded by our colleagues and things just really offhandedly being said. Like, I asked Clare Brown what she was doing and she said 'today I'm going to put together a plesiosaur skeleton just downstairs if you want to come and take a few pictures'. And I was like, yes, absolutely I do want to do that and the problem is and the big risk of working in museums for such a long time, is that people just get used to that like that's a normal thing.

Sara: Yeah you get complacent, and you get stuck in your bubble, you know, whether it be your specific site or your specialty, it's your job and it's your day-to-day and yes you're passionate about it but you are probably um, leaning towards the more academic and that's why we come in and ask stupid questions.

Meg: Yeah I think certain people, yeah. The thing is that they're never stupid! This is the problem I think, like when you're faced with someone giving you information on something or like an authority on something, you kind of look up to them, and you assume that they're the person that knows everything and knows all the things and that is so true like, all of our curators are so intelligent in their topics and know so much information. Like, as people, they are a great resource, right? But, I think there's such a risk - and I have definitely fallen into this and only in the last couple of years I think I've managed to snap myself out of it - I've just felt awkward around people that I know to be really intelligent because I find it intimidating. And I feel like, there have been times when definitely at the beginning when I first started working at Leeds

Museums - I've been too scared to ask questions. I think actually, one of the people who I was the most scared with, which is so funny, was John McGoldrick.

Sara: Really?!

Meg: Because I know so little about Industrial History. I've watched every single Indiana Jones film 10 million times, so I feel like I could probably have blagged to Kat that I knew some stuff that I definitely didn't. Kat's our curator of Archaeology by the way. But like, with John, I don't want to say anything in case he thinks I'm ignorant or stupid. And there were so many things he'd say in conversation that he just brushed over - through no fault of his own but just because it's a thing that he's doing every single day, you know? And stuff about Leeds where I'm not from Leeds - but I've lived here for such a long time - but I'm not from here, and there's things about Leeds like about it being a centre for wool and stuff like this that I just didn't know. And if you don't ask the questions you don't get. So that's kind of what this has been about hasn't it? Just like, actually being like, it's so ok to actually ask intelligent people questions, for fear of them thinking that you're stupid, when they won't.

Sara: No, absolutely not, And I also think it's really important from an audience perspective, you know like - you might have told this story whoever you are whatever position you're in, you might have told this story 100 times in your head but for us, it's always a new experience and there's always someone who hasn't heard it before.

Meg: And also even if they have heard it before there's a new way of telling it. So like, a big part of my job and your job as well is social media. Social media has changed so dramatically - Twitter is not what it looked like 3 years ago when I first started. And, I know that when I first started my job - I can hear that noise...

Sara: Sorry!

Meg: I know that when I first started my job, and we've done presentations and talks on this, our social media content was very much like: look at this object, this is one fact about this object, and you can read this blog post for more information on it. Or like, go to this event where this person will tell you more information about this object. And most people didn't care. Whereas now, I guess the main point is that museums have to constantly change our tone of voice and the way that we're talking to people because the way that we're talking to each other is changing. If you look at now, social media is such a huge thing. This is the first time that we're with each other - how long has it been? You've probably been counting the days haven't you?

Sara: No. March.

Meg: Yeah exactly. It's been so long, like we've just been texting or on whatsapp or on twitter, sending you dog videos on instagram and stuff like that.

Sara: Yeah. Accidentally instagram calling you.

Meg: Oh god. *(laughing)* That was so embarrassing.

Sara: That was so embarrassing *(laughing)* for both of us.

Meg: Were we both drunk?

Sara: Yes.

Meg: And then you just called me.

Sara: Yeah and then you answered and was like I'm really sorry didn't mean to ring you and you were like, I didn't mean to answer.

Meg: It was video.

Sara: Ah, it was bad. It wasn't even late. But that's really true, and a big part of a museum's job is not just to talk about history and to educate people, but to be part of rewriting it, and to be active. And to be proactive about it. And so that's how, when we say, oh, you might have told this before, or you might think it's the same information - we're telling it in a different way because people need to hear it in a different way and actually our audiences are really savvy, so you don't want to be telling them the same old thing, and retelling a story in a way that is relevant to their lives now is the most important way of doing it I think.

Meg: I think there's a thing as well like, just because you're being informal doesn't mean that you're not being serious. I think informal and serious are 2 things that aren't seen as being in the same vein but they should be. I know we joke about a lot but I think what we do is serious.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Just because you're talking about something in a jovial way that doesn't have to be super formal doesn't mean that what you're saying isn't important or poignant in any way.

Sara: And asking questions and trying to balance those things can be tricky. And there is a strategy behind everything that we do, but often it has to change.

Meg: It's also really funny how many people think that there isn't a strategy behind everything we do.

Sara: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Meg: There's been so many times when we've had a comment from someone being like, oh, who let the work experience kid on the twitter account. And I'm like, really though. Do you really honestly think. Ugh.

Sara: Yeah. I think we're really good at that as a team as well, trying to make the right decision based on all of the evidence that we have and how we think it's going to be perceived and it's a really difficult balancing act quite a lot of the time, to make sure that that comes across effectively, and also it's all about timing. I mean, the other day - and this is completely irrelevant but it just reminded me - there was a massive thing about cake, and 3D cakes. And then everyone went mad, and went like 'oh, I'm actually not a cake, don't try and cut the museum open' and making all these jokes. And you'd been off for the day, and you came back and you were like 'what's this. What's going on about cake'. But I know I'd seen that months and months ago, but it was just the right time and the right place and the right person saw it, and often it is a bit of a gamble about how you're going to do something, you know. It could be perfectly strategically placed, you've done all of the research and the evidence suggests that this will work, and the timing is slightly off for whatever reason. But that is the nature of working in a pretty fast paced environment where you are working with digital that's moving all of the time, vs traditional which is a lot slower paced and more expensive, and then you've got PR that you might have the best story in the world but if someone's paid £500 for an advert you might get bumped back a little bit. And it's a really difficult thing to get that right now. And it's hard to justify as well I think.

Meg: On top of all of that as well - and this is something that we've definitely talked about - there's so many things to consider and juggle, and bearing in mind we're a team of 5, and I know there's some national museums and stuff that have full teams, they've got full digital teams. Like, we're a team of 5 working across 9 museums and galleries, and on top of juggling everything that we have to think about, there's also, I think, a really big mental health aspect to our jobs. Being on social media - and I've talked about this quite a lot - there's lots of resources and articles where other people, and my colleagues in other services have talked about this too. I think we've both referenced (I don't think I've ever actually spoken to him) but Russell Dornan who works at the V&A in Dundee about social media burnout. I realise I'm talking a lot about social media and that isn't just all I do but like, you know it's a big part of it. And it's juggling that but also trying to maintain your mental health and like, when you want to turn off and switch off, you can't because switching off means that you're not doing your job. Because your job is to be switched on and constantly saturated with information online all the time, and I've spoken about this with Joe Vaughan who's the social media manager for the MERL and Reading Museum - social media and writing, and digital marketing and being in an audience development team at this time, is so much about creative writing, and creative writing digitally. And to do that you've just got to invest so much in it. And there's been things where - you know like, this week we've had the news about Naya Riveira. From Glee. That, honestly, that's such a harrowing story, it's so sad. And like, I don't want to - I would choose not to... like fine, I should be informed and I should know about that, but like, I don't want to see that all day every day. And like, for a week whilst they were looking for her in that lake that's all I saw. And it's just so intertwined, and like

again I remember the Manchester bombings. That was awful, that was horrible. That was terrible, and people used social media to communicate that they were safe, and to communicate that they were still alive, and where they were. And that was something that was just so hard to get away from and wind down from. And now how people communicate is so intertwined with social media, like people use facebook messenger, people use twitter messaging people use instagram messenger - so you can't really log on places and not see stuff.

Sara: You know there was a meme that went round - I think Dolly Parton started it? - where it was like, your different profile pictures based on your social media channel. But that goes for your tone of voice as well because you can be having a conversation, you've seen a post on instagram, and then you message that person about it and then you might be having a whatsapp conversation about something else and then your frame of mind switches depending on the platform you're using. They're all owned by facebook, ironically, but then equally, you pick up the phone or you talk to someone and you communicate so differently now because you have so many different channels and your persona is different on all of those different channels. It's draining. And I think there's got to be a point where you say to yourself what can I feasibly do with my space and my time and my knowledge to be proactive. And then the reality is that we work in museums and it's a very sheltered environment and we are very fortunate and it's..

Meg: Oh I do fully think, having said all of that, I feel like that was such a big downer but I fully think that we have the best jobs in the world, like I'm so grateful and so lucky for like... it's... well, this leads me on nicely I guess Smez. What's been your best day at work?

Sara: I've had some really good days at work actually. You're like...

Meg: What is it? It better be with me.

Sara: It will be with you. I should have known that this was bloody coming.

Meg: I know, doesn't it feel weird answering these questions? Also, ironically, you know how we mess around and whatever with everyone else's? I feel like this is going to be our most serious podcast yet.

Sara: I know isn't it?

Meg: I know, I feel like this is heavy.

Sara: Well, it's because we're frustrated.

Meg: Do you know what as well it's because it's important. I think so often, when you think about people who work in museums, it's curators it's conservators it's visitors assistants, and so often Audience Development comes under marketing, and so often I don't think that marketing professionals are necessarily treated like, or considered, always to be museum professionals.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: You know? And like, we interview people that are around objects but so are we. We're around objects all the time. I've got so many useless facts about literally every collection, I know our collection inside out and like I know everything we do inside out and I would probably be really terrible at any other job.

Sara: I know, I always describe our job as, like you say, translating, bringing a lot of different sometimes quite niche things together and ideas and plans and objectives, and making it clear. To the people that are either coming through the door or visiting us online.

Meg: And also listening to people and listening to what people are saying and letting that then inform what we do.

Sara: Definitely, because it's trying to get around the fact that these are big old sometimes fusty institutions and it can be quite an intimidating space, and I think that only goes to show how complex they are. But complexity comes with the fact that they are based on history and history is forever being rewritten and we should be informing change.

Meg: This is the thing with all the Black Lives Matter stuff isn't it, it's like - yeah, definitely. If there's something that needs to change, absolutely we agree.

Sara: I'm struggling to think about...

Meg: We've gone intense again. We've literally just had an intense moment.

Sara: I think one of my best days at work was probably really early on when we went on a bit of a store tour at Disco with you.

Meg: Legend.

Sara: Yeah. And you pointed out all the fun things and I just couldn't get over that I worked somewhere...

Meg: I'm pretty sure that you thought it was a store cupboard. Or maybe Gina... Gina's our colleague by the way in our team.

Sara: I'd definitely seen the pictures of it being much bigger. But I just felt like I'd found my place and my slot and I felt like I fitted in with a load of people that were super passionate about what they did and I felt like I could add value.

Meg: It's so good isn't it, when you find - I feel like, my job before this, I worked at a law firm. And the only thing that made it good was that I some of my best friends worked there - Kate and Freddie, and Vinnie, listening to this podcast. I know I mentioned Vinnie and his kid that no-one cares about er apart from me before, but like, it's the people that really make it and make what you do, and when I first started - well, at my last job I was scared to go in the kitchen. Like I was literally scared to go in the kitchen and bump into someone. I chat people's arses off you know? And I was really intimidated like it wasn't a comfortable environment at all, and then as soon as I got to Leeds Museums I went into the kitchen and Judith came in and was chatting to me and I was like, oh my god it's so nice to make a cup of Yorkshire tea and not be scared to do it. You get so anxious when you go somewhere new don't you? And like, I never really felt that when I worked here.

Sara: And I think there's a really nice culture of people just being quite confident in what they know or what they do, but not in a cocky way by any stretch. And everyone just likes being there, and I think this period has really shown that we've got a really nice team to work with and that's really important.

Meg: I'm pretty sure that - like, I consider most of my work friends actual friends.

Sara: Mad, even me?

Meg: Uh no how embarrassing, I'm so embarrassed oh my god.

Sara: So why are you coming to my house for pizza.

Meg: For god's sake. It's because the pizza oven's there.

Sara: Yeah true. You're only coming for Dimple and pizza actually aren't you.

Meg: Yeah fair. I'm going to get to stroke Dimps! Have you ever wanted to ride her?

Sara: No. She's too small.

Meg: I might ride her later.

Sara: Errrr. Ok.

Meg: What was my best day at work yeah thank you Sara errr - my best day at work, to be honest, I don't really know that much. I was thinking about this - I don't know. I've talked about it being Rebecca Machin's time that she coloured in water, we talked about that in episode 1 series 1. Like that time with John McGoldrick last episode where he showed me round the loco shed. It's like that thing where people like Clare are like, oh yeah I'm just going to go down and

piece together a plesiosaur and like rearticulate it, yeah sure I will come down and watch you and have the best day doing that.

Sara: I really enjoyed the day where we got to pretend that we were curators or conservators with the pilot whale skeleton.

Meg: For the press.

Sara: That was good, for the press yeah. I had a really inappropriate tshirt on that day. Never mind. Shout out to rip n' dip.

Meg: Oh yeah. Lord Nermal. We had to put on purple gloves and pretend to be conservators and hold dinosaur - no! - whale bones.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Whale bones, yeah that was amazing. There was another time too where Kat Bax, who is ff... I nearly swore there, who is really good...

Sara: Phenomenal?

Meg: Yeah who's phenomenal she's going to come on the pod, she's our archaeology curator. And one day I was like, hey Kat, how's it going what are you doing and she was like, yeah good I'm just going to go do some - like check on some sort of skulls. And I was like, ok cool what kind of skulls and she was like you know like roman skulls. And I was like, what? And she said I could come and have a look and she like, talked me through it, told me about it, you know like on tv when someone dies and you can tell that they died like this because of this wound on the skull.

Sara: It's like, waking the dead.

Meg: Yeah. That was one of my best days. Also, there was a time when I got roped in with Nige who's our curator at the art gallery, was doing like a - the lead curator for Leonardo da Vinci's works on paper from the Royal Collection came up to Leeds during the Leonardo da Vinci 500 years since his death exhibition that we had on at the gallery a couple of years ago, so we had to prepare food and stuff for people coming to the lecture, it was in the evening.

Sara: God can you imagine, people sharing food?

Meg: Literally can't even believe it. I was on duty for getting all this food and stuff and he was like get some wine and stuff, and I was like sure I'll get some wine but also, shall I get some aperol. And he was like, what do you mean, and I was like, just trust me, and he was like, yeah sure just do whatever you want. Went and got it and came back and made 3 jugs of aperol spritz, listen it's summer time, the punters are going to love this. Anyway, had the lecture and all

the aperol spritz went. Everyone was queueing up for my aperol spritz. And Nige was like, pfff. Unbelievable shout. And that felt really good, I felt vindicated. Right Sara, what's the big takeaway for our listeners about what you do?

Sara: (*gasping*) um, what I do is really good and I'm very lucky to do what I do. It's quite nice to have a job where I'm like, oh it's something I'm actually good at and I enjoy it. So yeah, I'm very lucky. There are definitely better people out there than me so this isn't a plug.

Meg: You are quite good to be fair.

Sara: Oh thanks mate. But that it's ok if you think you've already said something once, say it again, ask it again. Audiences change, and are really hard to describe actually, because they are kind of everywhere and nowhere and all at once and nothing at all, and -

Meg: Wait, there's a word for that.

Sara: Is there?

Meg: What's that word for what everyone says that God is? Omnipotent.

Sara: Omnipotent, yeah.

Meg: By God of course I am referring to Harry Styles.

(*laughing*)

Sara: But I really enjoy the challenge and I love speaking to people and I think that makes my job easier, and it means that at the point where I stop asking questions, it's probably time to not do this anymore. I'm also very happy to be told that I'm wrong, which is quite unusual and Luke will definitely disagree. In a professional capacity. How about you, what's your big takeaway Meg?

Meg: I was thinking this, and basically, I don't know. Other than, to really appreciate and look after your colleagues, number 1. And check in on people - so like, the other day, I'm sure she won't mind me saying this, but Rebecca Machin wrote a really brilliant book. Book?

Sara: Blog.

Meg: Do you know what, one day she will write a really brilliant book so fair enough I'm going to leave that in. She wrote a brilliant blog on decolonising the natural science collection and the issues around that and what we need to do, and it was really popular, and people engaged with it really well. But obviously we had a few twitter trolls where they were being just horrendous and annoying and because Rebecca's such a lovely person, she just was like, no that's not

right, you're being really unfair - she kind of argued back with them, which I totally understand. It was in the evening and I was trying really hard to switch off so I hadn't seen it and if I had I would have just said to not engage with it, they are just classic trolls. The next day she wasn't working - I'm friends with her, she's one of my closest friends and I rang her up and I was like are you ok like I know this is really horrible when someone's really mean to you on any level but in a public situation I didn't want her to be over thinking that because I overthink everything. And she was really grateful and I hope I made her feel a little bit better about it, and it's just like - if you're in any position and you're aware that someone isn't feeling so great or you've made someone feel not great, check in on them and make sure that they're ok. And I did a little talk about my job for Carl, who was episode 6 last season. And when it came to giving advice about people who maybe want to get into museums: just, be really nice. Like, be nice to people and be interested in what people do, and I've been so much more successful in my job than I would have been if I hadn't asked the questions that I had and if I hadn't made people feel comfortable and that's what this is about, we try and make people feel as comfortable as possible. I think that's so important, you know like groundbreaking news everyone - be nice.

Sara: Yeah, be nice and supportive.

Meg: Sara what's your favourite actual literal takeaway?

Sara: This is really difficult, because on any given day, I'm changeable, but I do love Thai, and consistently, I've really enjoyed Jino's in Headingley.

Meg: I've never been to Jino's! I've lived in and out of Headingley for years and I've never been.

Sara: BYOB. But it's split between that and Medina, which is Moroccan Lebanese and they're in Otley, and they're really good, and I'd never had any level of Moroccan or Lebanese food and the guy that owns it is so lovely and if you're really nice he'll give you free baklava. And that's BYOB as well so maybe there's a theme there.

Meg: Do you know I've only ever been to one BYOB in my life, I think it was Algerian food, and it was literally a man's lounge, there was 3 of us. And he was like, do you want a cooler for your bottle of wine, and we were like - yeah but do you have 3 because we bought 3 bottles of wine.

Sara: Wow.

Meg: Yeah that's bad isn't it. I was really young.

Sara: To be fair at BYOB you do tend to drink a lot more because you're like, it's not expensive.

Meg: Yeah yeah, for sure.

Sara: Was that your favourite takeaway then?

Meg: Erm, no. Honestly, I think about this all the time and I don't really know. But, I think to give some honourable mentions because I don't know if I can pick just one. Number 1 - slap and pickle.

Sara: Ooh yeah.

Meg: And I know Kat Baxter who I've mentioned like a million times in this episode, biggest fan, she loves slap and pickle. Basically all their burgers they do vegetarian or vegan as well and I got their personal cheesus which deserves an award for their name. I got the personal cheesus veggie burger the other day whilst watching Troy.

Sara: Wow that is delightful and intense all at once.

Meg: Yeah, and they've done something with their chips where they scoop it out so their chips are shaped like little boats. Yeah it's really good. Also shoutout to falafel guys, who are literally the guys, but also ecco pizzeria.

Sara: Yeah, good choices.

Meg: Headingley institution that.

Sara: Mm, yeah very good choices.

Meg: I will change those as well in like a week, but I think those - since lockdown I've been having a lot of takeaways and literally I've just cancelled my gym membership as well, so...

Sara: Amazing.

Meg: Flippin' eck well..

Sara: I think we rambled, you know.

Meg: We've rambled for, what's that - 57 minutes!

Sara: Woah!

Meg: Right ok, let's make this a round 60. Oh in fact, the battery's gone.

Sara: Oh.

Meg: Well it hasn't gone.

Sara: Nearly.

Meg: Right ok, let's see if I can do this really quickly.

Sara: Ok.

Meg: Conclusion. Right. Wait, shall we put the music on? Music!

Sara: *(hums)*. I don't know, it doesn't sound like that at all. We don't actually need to do that because we can just pause it and then..

(laughing)

You know like that whole editing thing, you can just stop it...

Meg: Oh yeah, that editing thing that I do sometimes.

(theme music)

Meg: Ok what was your best learn Meg what was your best learn Smez - no, we don't need to do that we both know each other.

Sara: Yeah. No.

Meg: Thank you! The thanks.

Sara: Oh yeah, the thanks.

Meg: Right, big thanks to Tim Bentley - oh actually, I went to the garden centre with Tim Bentley this week.

Sara: You had KFC!

Meg: I had KFC! Yeah! I had KFC with Tim Bentley, he picked me up, we wore masks, I sat in the back of his car like a dog with the windows open and we got KFC and sat in the car park at the arium and ate our KFC.

Sara: It's such a classy establishment to have you 2 sat eating KFC on the kerb.

Meg: Yeah, I got some plants as well. I'll tell you about those next time. Tim Bentley wrote the theme tune and he's great, so thank you Timmy. Alex Finney did our cover artwork for us which we love. Very good, well done, thank you Al. Also, had many - I haven't had KFC with al actually.

Sara: No.

Meg: Please subscribe and leave us a review because do you know what we've been bumped down a little bit on Apple..

Sara: sad.

Meg: Because we've been really like, scatty with the order of our podcasts and stuff.

Sara: I've got stuff to do, got museums to reopen!

Meg: Do you know what I've got a flippin' pandemic to flip out about, you know?

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Do you know what, this series is just going to be a bit of a laugh isn't it Smez.

Sara: It's fine, it's fine. We're learning.

Meg: Please leave us a review if you like, some people have left us some really lovely reviews. Someone wrote one the other day that literally said 'back of the net' and I died a thousand Alan Partridge deaths, I loved it.

Sara: (*gasping*) Wow, that is amazing because neither of us do sport. But I still understand that analogy.

Meg: Yeah, for sure. Yeah so please leave us a review and we'll give you a badge if you do. Oh my god I've got like 45 seconds, ok. Transcripts are on the website if you would like those. Please follow us on social media - I'm @MuseumMeg, Sara what are you?

Sara: @SaraLMerritt.

Meg: Which is such a lie, because that's not even your name anymore.

Sara: No because my actual name is Sara Hallam, I've changed it.

Meg: And ask us the questions, and the stuff.

Sara: Or @LeedsMuseums.

Meg: Or at Leeds Museums. Oh yeah, @LeedsMuseums!

Sara: (*laughing*) You're panicking because of the time.

Meg: I know I'm panicking I've just seen the time - who's coming up next time?

Sara: Dunno.

Meg: Do you know what, don't know. Don't care. No I do care.

Sara: You do care.

Meg: I don't know, and I'm really sorry that I can't tell you but do you know what, I'm just stressed.

Sara: Yeah, we'll figure it out.

Meg: Didn't plan it through.

Sara: No. We do have guests, we just need to work it out.

Meg: Yeah, the thing is we've got guests lined up but you know, they've got kids and stuff and it's stressful, don't want to stress them out. So yeah, thank you for listening to our bonus episode! Our first bonus Smez!

Sara: It is isn't it!

Meg: We're the bonus!

Sara: Oh my god, we're so cocky...

Meg: Ok thank you everyone for listening.

Sara: Thanks bye!

Meg: Byeeeee!

(theme music)