

Museums n'That Series 2 Episode 2 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 and Galleries, and we get to know the people behind the objects, by asking them the questions that you really want to know.

(theme music)

Sara: Oh, I can't hear you.

Meg: Ooh.

Sara: Oh no, I can hear you again. Um, did I send you -

Meg: Was it just that I wasn't talking *(laughs)*

Sara: Oh, maybe.

Meg: Sorry, I'm just checking to see if it's raining, I'm one of those people now that's like, you know when your younger and your mum's just like, 'ooh, my washing'. Cawston press?

Sara: mm.

Meg: Anyway, shall we pod?

Sara: *(pauses)* yeah.

Meg: Well that was delayed.

Sara: I know but it was like we'd had a delay on the computer rather than my voice but it was just my voice.

Meg: How's it going?

Sara: Yeah, alright. You know. Bit hayfevery, but... everytime I sneeze I'm like, 'it's hayfever'. I don't think anyone cares, but I care.

Meg: I kind of like the fact that with hayfever, you're not actually sick, but you can pretend you are. So like, my friend Emma came round the other day and I had really bad hayfever and I was really bunged up, and I was just acting like I was a patient.

(laughing)

Meg: It sounded so bad and it was kind of nice to get pity even though I wasn't ill, it was just hayfever. So apart from, you know, sneezing and stuff, what's been good? What's been happening with your week?

Sara: Um, so we went out for a walk the other day and as we were walking back, we were going through the Otley cemetery, and Luke was like 'ooh what's that on the floor' and I thought it was just a leaf but it turns out that it was just a tiny, baby bat. And so, I rang the vets and they were like oh yes, definitely need to bring it in and check it's not injured, and then we'll ring the bat lady that lives locally and see what can be done.

Meg: It's really sad that it's not the bat man.

Sara: I know but what was good was, I went home, got a box, went back, I found the bat again because I put him in a safe space so he wouldn't get stomped on.

Meg: Did you touch him with your bare hands?

Sara: No, I got like a piece of slate that we found on the floor and scooped him on. He was crawling a little bit. So I kind of scooped it on.

Meg: Were you scared?

Sara: No because it's tiny. Like, no one can see this. But it was very small. Took him to the vets and the vets were really good because they basically just stayed open for me because I rang them like 'what do I do with this bat' and then a lady rang me and she sort of rears bats that have been abandoned or have fallen out of their roost and she has 3 that are from Temple Newsam. And now this one, that I added to the collection, so she's got loads of little baby bats that she's just like, looking after because mum didn't come back for it.

Meg: What an unbelievable woman honest to God. And do you know what's weird about that as well, is that you found it in a cemetery.

Sara: I know.

Meg: What if it was Dracula?

Sara: I know, well. It was a very tiny, very meek looking Dracula if it was. But, How was your week?

Meg: I have to think really long and hard about what I'm going to say. Literally today, I had 3 choices, one of them was that I found my lip balm, that I'd lost. You know when you lose a lip balm and then you put a coat on that you haven't worn in a while and you find it and it's just really good. My other thing is that you dropped round that camping stove, but in my notes it was 'Sara came round and dropped off a big bag of gas'.

Sara: Oh. Yeah. Nice. Ok.

Meg: And that was that really. Far less full of bats than yours.

Sara: That's the only thing that happened.

Meg: Smez tell us who we've got on today. It's a good one today isn't it.

Sara: Conor, from off of the National Videogame Museum based in Sheffield, the second greatest city in the world.

Meg: Yep. Conor's great, Conor's very very good. I think this is going to be one of our best ones. I'm going to put it out there.

Sara: Yeah because I was a bit nervous because I don't know anything about videogames, but meh, maybe that's a good thing.

Meg: Yeahhh. You'll be fine. Right, here is Conor Clarke's episode of Museums n'That everyone, enjoy.

(theme music)

Meg: So firstly Conor, thank you very much for coming on the pod.

Conor: Thank you for having me. I'm on the Museums n'That podcast! I was really excited when you first reached out.

(laughs)

Meg: You literally are. I was really weighing it up like do I, I was like are you going to be like eugh no worst podcast of all time, but you know here you are.

(laughing)

Conor: No I watched, or listened, to every episode of the first season and it was really good. Really fun.

Meg and Sara: Awhh. Thanks.

Conor: Well done, it's a really good show, and I was so excited. I was like, to my partner, 'Oh I get to be on the Museums n'That podcast!'

Meg: Smez, are you listening to this!

Sara: Yeah I know! Actually famous.

(laughing)

Conor: I'm buttering you up so you ask me really nice questions, that's what it is.

Meg: Yeah, well, the good thing is that you've listened to it, so you know the calibre of questions that this is going to be, so that's a good thing.

Sara: And Meg and I have panicked for the past few days going 'we know nothing about video games, we know nothing about video games' and the other thing that we realised was, because I'm just a little bit older than Meg, it tells quite a lot in the sort of video games that we remember from being kids. So that's interesting.

Meg: Before we start, I've just realised that we haven't introduced you, which is a really good start. Yep. This is again, this is the calibre of the situation. Conor, please will you tell the lovely podcast people who you are. Who the flip are you?

Conor: I am Conor Clarke, and I am the Marketing and Communications person at the National Videogame Museum in Sheffield. Best city in the world.

Meg and Sara: OHHH.

Conor: *(gasping)* I know, sorry, that's me fishing there.

Sara: Yeah, I mean, you were doing so well talking about buttering us up and then you just lost all those points.

Meg: Honestly, there's not a lot of things that people can say on this podcast that are going to wind us up, but Conor I'll be honest, that's a right blooper. That's a right stinker from you there. Shocker.

Conor: *(laughing)* I'm not even going to take it back.

Sara: (*laughing*) Actually, I admire the confidence, so let's see how this goes.

Meg: Conor what is the National Videogame Museum? What's the deal?

Conor: So we're a new museum actually, we're a baby in museum terms.

Meg: A cute baby?

Conor: Cute baby. We only opened in November 2018 so we're actually less than 2 years old. We kind of did some stuff before it, we used to be based in Nottingham actually, we had like a big kind of arts centre arcade kind of thing. And then we went, 'na, we want to be a museum' and now we are the kind of, the museum in the UK that is dedicated to video games and video game culture.

Meg: Yeah. Well done. Congrats.

Conor: Ah thank you. It's been a journey. Because, you know, video games are an odd one to think of a museum for, because everyone thinks 'oh, video games are new, you're not saving anything ancient'.

Meg: Yeah.

Conor: And we're not, but in the last couple of years we've seen how people tend to value video games and the culture as their own personal history as well. So yeah, it's been great to see.

Meg: Before I rudely cut you off earlier, Sara was saying that me and her have been planning questions and stuff for you and we've realised there's a little bit of an age difference between things that I've suggested and things that Sara's suggested. Do you find that? Do you feel like you can age someone based on the video games that they want to play?

Sara: This isn't a very fun game.

Meg: Yes it is.

Conor: Ok, so if I say, Crash Bandicoot?

Meg: Yes that was mine! That was mine.

Conor: (*laughing*) Ok.

Sara: We're not that far apart. But yeah, Crash Bandicoot's still...

Meg: Eons.

Sara: Alright.

Conor: So Sara, what are we talking? Are we talking Sonic the Hedgehog?

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: That's amazing.

Conor: They're the icons. We have a big Sonic statue in our museum and people love taking photos of it. Big photo opportunity.

Meg: Sick.

Sara: I used to want to live in - is it the Green Hill Zone?

Conor: Yeah!

Sara: Yeah, I just thought that looked like heaven. Because, you know, you kind of just run around and collect rings. It's great.

Meg: Conor if you could live in any video game, what would it be?

Conor: If I could live in any video game?

Meg: Yeah.

Sara: This is an off the cuff question. This isn't even on the questions.

Meg: Yeah we have a question sheet, this is not on it.

Conor: Right if this is an off the cuff one then I'm not looking forward to the other ones.

(laughing)

Conor: There are some really nice video game worlds. I really like anything like Sonic the Hedgehog, really nice blue skies, green hills. Mario: also, aside from all the dangerous goombas running around trying to hit you, that is a beautiful world, the Mushroom Kingdom.

Meg: What about Rainbow Road?

Conor: Oh, I hate Rainbow Road. Who wants to live on Rainbow Road?

(laughing)

Meg: Do you know, I played a drinking game - I don't know if I'm going to be allowed to - do you know what, it's fine. I played a drinking game in the Lake District a few months ago...

Sara: A water drinking game.

(laughing)

Meg: Yeah, I drank water. Where, you know in February - you know how 2020 has basically just been a mess? And you know how February was just rain? There was nothing but rain. Went to the Lake District and we were just like 'God, what do we do?'. So we played Mario Kart, and we played Beerio Kart. So it's like where you start a race and you've got some, you know, glasses of water...

Conor: Oh yeah.

Meg: And between the start and end of the race you have to have drunk all of your water, but you're not allowed to drink and drive. So, you have to put your controller down as you drink, and it's amazing.

Conor: It's funny that they call it Beerio Kart when you're drinking water isn't it.

Meg: It's crazy, yeah. So, Conor, when people go to the museum, what do people experience? Is it basically like a very sexy arcade?

Conor: It's a good way of putting it, yeah. It is similar to an arcade, because one of the things we think is really important when you're looking to preserve and collect video games is that video games are a medium that are designed to be played, they're designed to be interacted with. So we have - I think we have just over 100 different playable games within the museum. So you come in, and there's a controller, you just pick it up, sit down and have a play. And that's really important. And that goes across eras as well. We have some old arcade cabinets that are like, Space Invaders for example or Donkey Kong, and then we have some newer stuff, including new stuff like Gang Beasts which is a Sheffield made game that's really fun. Also stuff that isn't actually released yet, so we have a part of our museum called The Lab which is all about game development, so as a part of that we reached out to individual creators and were like 'oh we really like this game that you're developing, can we have a beta version' (you know, the version that isn't fully finished or fully polished yet) and then we let people just play it and test it. And it's really fun.

Sara: That's kind of cool as well because then you're effectively start up business and wannabe game designers - I don't know what the terminology is - but you know, those people. And it kind of also gives a good legacy starting point for the museum because like you say, people might question well why do you have a museum, you don't have loads of ancient stuff. But actually,

you can turn it on its head and say well actually, we're the future of what museums could potentially look like, because we're generating new stuff and we're contemporary collecting. And I know that that's something that in our service that's something that we're always striving to do but perhaps because we are that like, older school mentality, we find it trickier to make that happen. So, that's a really good way of going about it, just kind of getting people involved and going, 'have a go'.

Conor: Mm. For sure. And that community aspect as well is a big part of getting people together and just saying - a lot of the stuff we have in the museum is actually about local history, so we have a bit around Sheffield games, and we like to showcase new Sheffield games as well, so you know, because we're based in Sheffield, a lot of our audience are from there.

Meg: Second greatest city in the world.

(laughing)

Sara: She can't help it.

Conor: But, you know, we like to bring people together and say look, this is what's going on inside Sheffield as well. Contemporary collecting is super important for video games, because we're arguing that video games and video game history, even though it's quite new - like, the oldest thing we have in the museum I think is 1971...

Sara: It's older than me, so it's fine.

(laughing)

Conor: But so, stuff is disappearing. Video games are disappearing because they are constantly put on storage media that is constantly burning out quickly. Even though games are a digital product, that digital-ness, those 0's and 1's of the binary, they have to be stored somewhere. And a lot of those storage devices are breaking really quickly, or they're being made obsolete by the fact that new technology is coming in and replacing the old tech, so the old tech just can't be played on anything anymore. Like if you've got a game on a floppy disk for example, how are you going to play that game? Because I don't know anyone that has a pc with a floppy disk in it anymore. Aside from proper archivists.

Sara: I was just going to say that we play a bit of a swear game in the office when someone says 'I've got a CD and I need to take something off it' and I'm like, good luck with that.

(laughing)

Sara: Yeah, it's true. You don't think about it until it's there and the tech's obsolete. Like, earlier, how I have been having so many problems with mic and sound, so I thought I'd get another

mac, and now I'm on my third computer, trying to do this podcast. Which is in fact not mine, and my other half has had to go out and not do work so I can do this.

Meg: It's for the greater good. It's for the greater good Smez. I feel like, have you guys seen Jumanji? The new one?

Sara: Yes.

Meg: Right, it's a great film. This is like the start of Jumanji when they're like ew what's this old game, it looks really old, and then they put it on and it's crazy and I feel like, there's probably a way of linking it back to it somehow, but I haven't quite got it, but I just wanted to bring up Jumanji.

Sara: So is it like the difference between me and you is that I'm like the first version of Jumanji and you're like the second one?

Meg: Exactly.

Sara: Great. Great. I've dug my own hole there.

Meg: A lot of people are safe from Jumanji because Jumanji isn't developing fast enough for people to play it widely.

Conor: Oh I prefer the first Jumanji anyway.

Meg: Do you?

Sara: Oh of course, Robin Williams...

Conor: Yeah, Robin Williams, amazing. Yeah.

Meg: I was actually really pleasantly surprised by the recent Jumanji though.

Sara: Oh it's hilarious.

Meg: I watched it on a whim, and then I paid to watch the second one because it was so good. And also Danny Devito's in the second one which is so perfect. And Nick Jonas! Anyway, like the contemporary collecting side of it, it's interesting because on the surface you're collecting video games but you're also essentially collecting, like, social history and like, since the lockdown - we're recording this now whilst we're on lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic - but like, all I've seen, is stuff to do with Animal Crossing and Animal Crossing is a way that museums are digitising their collections and getting people engaged with it so it's just

like a really interesting thing where you'd also be collecting, kind of, museum development at the same time, as a museum. It's very inception.

Conor: Mm. For sure. Yeah we're actually putting together a project right now that's looking to collect evidence of that impact that Animal Crossing has had. Because it's had a cultural impact over the last month, 2 months, it's been crazy, you know. Everyone is talking about it, people have used it to help get them through the lockdown, and it's just had such an amazing kind of, social impact in this country and I'm sure in other countries as well, that it's worth kind of documenting and collecting that stuff.

Meg: I've also, I've never played it.

Conor: You should give it a go! It's fun!

Meg: I know.

Conor: I've got my switch right here actually. It's right next to my desk, so you know, working from home...

Sara: This is the thing we worried about. We were like oh it'll be fine recording remotely and then we said but genuinely, what if the guests hate us, or they're bored, or they don't want to do it and they just go off and do something else? We can't do anything about it. We haven't locked them in a room like normal. We don't lock people in rooms...

Conor: So I could just take these headphones off and walk off.

Meg: Yeah! 'Sorry Meg, my internet's just cut off. Sorry about that'. And just leave.

Sara: Close your laptop and off you go.

Meg: To be fair, I wouldn't blame you.

Conor: Sorry, you're breaking up...

(laughing)

Meg: You know... So if people are playing video games in your museum. Have you ever had to break up a fight? You know when people get really passionate about it and when they lose and stuff. Have you ever had to break up a fight?

Conor: *(laughing)* I've not. However, I bet some of the crew and the gallery crew that monitor games have had to deal with disagreements. In particular, because we don't set a time on how

long people can play the games for. And actually, our entry is all-day entry, so people pay when they come in. The average time people spend in the museum is actually 3 hours and 1 minute.

Sara: Woah.

Conor: Yeah which is pretty mega. And that's because they will sit down and they'll play a game for 15 minutes. But some of the most popular games like, Gang Beasts, which I mentioned earlier, which is like this wrestling game...

Meg: I don't know why but the name of it makes me laugh a lot. Gang Beasts. That's sick.

Sara: It's just like someone's gone, what are two cool things we can think about that we can shove together?

Meg: Gang beasts.

Conor: It's the most kiddie-friendly and goofy game as well. The name just doesn't seem to fit when you look at it out of context. But also we have a Sonic racing game. Sonic and Sega's all star racing, that's in this big arcade cabinet where you sit in a racing seat, and they're really popular. So we don't really enforce queue times for people that want to play on it, but when we get quite busy we do get people that get mad that someone's spent half an hour playing one game and won't let anybody else play. So on busy days we have implemented a queue system, like you know 'ten minutes only please, please let somebody else go on' but only when it's really busy.

Sara: I think it's quite nice that you can have the autonomy and flexibility to say, yeah we're going to do it this day and we're not going to do it some days. I mean, we're a bigger organisation and we have to follow rules and regulations - for good reason! - but it's not practical for all organisations to do that but yeah, I do think that's a really nice way of going about it. And like you say, it kind of helps with that community aspect, if people feel that they're comfortable enough to just wander in and spend 3 hours in there. That's a good chunk of someone's day. That's really quite a nice thing to have from an audience perspective, to see those people just hanging around in there, and not just there for the toilets. We don't get any of that...

(laughing)

Conor: For sure, I mean like I said about community, and we're looking at incentives. We were looking at incentives before lockdown happened, to kind of bring people back weekly as well, get people together and have like a book club, but for games. Or bring people that just all love playing Nintendo games together and having a Nintendo Club, that kind of community stuff. It's really fun.

Meg: I think, it's interesting when you think about, like, stereotypically I'm going to get a lot of hate here probably from gamers, but like, stereotypically, gamers are portrayed as not being, very... hm...

Sara: Sociable?

Meg: Yeah portrayed as not being very social, or sociable, and there's that classic trope of a kid in a movie who's just got his headphones on and is just playing on his gameboy or whatever and is just ignoring his family, and actually when you think about it, video games are so sociable. Even when you're playing a video game you're talking to people inside the game, right?

Conor: Yeah, yeah. I've been doing it a lot recently. In the past 6 weeks or so, I've been jumping on Call of Duty - you know, free game online - with some old school buddies to catch up.

Meg and Sara: Yeah.

Conor: But it's been nice kind of, you know, just talking along with them and catching up with them which I would not have done otherwise. I'm not the kind of guy to pick up the phone and have a chat. But if we say, 'right let's play some Call of Duty' we just end up saying, 'how's your day going? How are you feeling, are you alright right now?'. There's that support network we've built for each other, via the game.

Meg: I wonder whether that stereotype will change because of this lockdown and the fact that people are having to communicate this way all the time anyway. I don't know. On that though, as well, one of my other questions was... Have you ever been playing a game, and you've started talking to a celebrity?

Sara: Because that happened recently didn't it?

Meg: Did it?

Sara: Yeah, a celebrity came into a game and tried to trade something...

Conor: It was Elijah Wood wasn't it?

Sara: Yeah! Elijah Wood, yeah.

Meg: Wait, what happened?

Sara: I didn't know whether you knew about that. What was he even playing? Conor, you could probably tell the story better than me.

Conor: Animal Crossing.

Sara: Animal Crossing! There we go.

Conor: Yeah, someone just tweeted out saying 'oh, I think my turnip prices are really high' - and so the way the turnips work in the game, is there's like a stock market. They call it the stork market. And basically you buy turnips at a certain price, and you have 1 week to sell them at a higher price, and Elijah Wood bought all these turnips, and couldn't sell his turnips, but you can go to other people's islands and sell them on their islands. And someone tweeted out saying, 'Oh, I've got a really high turnip price, does anyone want to come to my island', and he tweeted them back just saying 'yes please I need to sell all my turnips' and just went and visited their island and had a chat and had like a chinwag.

Meg: Oh my god, that's literally amazing. I saw as well that there were these guys who were trying to get a celebrity, or as many celebrities as they could on a zoom call. And just contacting everyone they knew like, this is our Zoom ID this is our password just send it out to as many people and just see if we can get as many celebrities on. And it was all people from like Geordie Shore and stuff, and then just out of nowhere Judi Dench gets on it. And it's Judi Dench.

Sara: Amazing.

Meg: Yeah. So Judi Dench's grandson is really into Tik Tok and stuff, and he's been doing loads of cool stuff with Judi Dench and she's been doing all these dances and I'm like, uh. Judi Dench. I know, I loved her before but now I LOVE her.

Conor: Talking about Robin Williams, he was a massive video gamer. And there's stories about him playing with some people on Counter Strike, an old PC game, for like 3 years. He'd play with them every week and he didn't speak much, or he'd speak by typing, he didn't use his voice chat. And one day he just messaged one of them just saying, 'can I tell you something?' and he was like 'yeah yeah of course just jump on a phone call' and chats to this random Counter Strike player just saying 'yeah I'm Robin Williams, I've been playing with you and having a really fun time and I just wanted to, you know, reach out'. He'd been been playing with them for years and they didn't know. They didn't know that they'd been playing with a worldwide celebrity.

Sara: Ohh, wow.

Meg: Oh my gosh, that's lovely, they didn't know that they were playing with Mrs Doubtfire. That's so sweet.

Sara: But yeah, have you had any celebs?

Conor: No, not at all.

Sara: Have you had any celebs... probably not a great question.

(laughing)

Conor: No, afraid not. There's a load of celebrities that love video games, like Dara o'Brien absolutely adores video games, talks about them a lot. Charlie Brooker, he started his career as a video game journalist, he wrote some really funny video game reviews and loves them still. So yeah, I want to catch up with them.

Meg: In terms of your collection then, how do you choose what you collect and what you have in the museum? Do you collect based on what the video game is, or would you say, collect a video game or console belonging to a celebrity that was like Dara o'Brien or Robin Williams or someone like that.

Conor: There's a level of provenance that makes certain objects really important. One object we have in the museum - one of my favourite objects actually - is a bottle of Larazade. I don't know if you remember Larazade, but it was a marketing campaign done by Lucozade and Core Design who made the Tomb Raider games. And they changed the name of Lucozade to Larazade and had Lara Croft on the front of it. It's unopened and I really want to open it to see what it tastes like. But the reason it's important is because it was owned by Ian Livingstone, who is huge in the games industry.

Meg: You got him to do your fundraising campaign, right?

Conor: I did, yes. He's the front of our fundraising campaign. He's the Chair Trustee as well, he's on our Trustee Board. And yeah, he kind of owns that. Because he played such a significant part in the creation of that game - you know, Lara Croft was massive at the time. So that's a really interesting object there. The way we collect objects in general, is difficult because there's so much video game stuff. And particularly when we put out calls to say, does anyone have anything they would like to donate to us, and we'll get a thousand copies of FIFA '08 for the Xbox from 2016, and you don't really need that many copies of that game to be brutally honest with you. So yeah. We don't have an open Collections Policy at the moment, we're kind of playing each thing ear-by-ear basically.

Sara: Cool.

Conor: I kind of skirted around the answer there, I don't feel like I answered that for you...

Meg: I feel like you answered that pretty well Conor.

Sara: Yeah. I agree.

Meg: Yeah. Don't put yourself down. Sorry I'm just going to shut my window because my neighbours are really loud. One second.

Sara: She does this every podcast. There's always a problem.

Conor: I live on a small street, and I've got building works on the top of the street and building works on the bottom of the street, so I either get to enjoy some fresh air or have a headache.

Meg: Sorry - I could hear that with my headphones in. Anyway. So we briefly touched on it then, but I feel like we need to give you a big shoutout for that wonderful crowdfunding campaign that you've just done.

Sara: Yeah definitely.

Conor: Thank you very much.

Meg: Can you tell us about it because, podcast listeners and friends, Conor has just raised an insane amount of money to keep the NVM going whilst we're all in lockdown, right? So, Conor, do you want to just tell us a little bit about it?

Conor: Sure, yeah. So as I said earlier, the museum's a baby. It's a new museum. And for that reason, we don't really have any kind of safety net for funding. We're not even fully accredited yet to be brutally honest with you, we were kind of in the process of that. And what that meant was, when every museum had to close, and we even closed voluntarily a bit early because we knew we were a hands-on museum. We basically found that a lot of the funding pots that were going out, we just wouldn't be eligible for. Which was scary for any museum with a small team, we thought, this could be the end of the NVM because we can't really afford to have a lockdown for 6,7 months or however long it's going to be. So we launched a JustGiving campaign to help raise money to keep us going throughout the lockdown. We put a target of £80,000 and I think at - I've not checked it actually in the past couple of days - I think it was about at £165,000 which is over 200% of our target thanks to donations from so many members of the public and also some big games companies as well have stepped in to help us survive throughout this.

Sara: That's incredible.

Meg: I literally can't believe it. I feel like that's amazing and also once the pubs are back open, you should be bought a lot of pints Conor.

(laughing)

Conor: Oh I hope so, I hope so yeah.

Meg: I obviously follow you on Twitter and stuff and it's just been - it's been everywhere, and it's been so lovely seeing all the support that people have given you and the little comments that people write and it's just been really nice. It's been such a lovely campaign to just see people get behind. So congrats.

Conor: People have been so supportive. Yeah, thank you. People are very much aware that this is their cultural heritage, and this is their history, and so many people have grown up with these games. And the idea of losing that history and not being able to learn from that history, for future generations, I think it's just been amazing to see so many people that have gone 'no, this is a really important part of our cultural heritage, we need to save it, and here's our few pennies in what is a testing time for everyone, please stay open'. And that has been massively massively heartwarming, and I don't want to think about it too much or I might have a little cry.

Sara and Meg: Aw.

Sara: No, it's a testament to really understanding your audience and what people want from a museum and the cultural sector and how - like you said at the beginning - people go 'well why would you collect it, what's the point', and well obviously a lot of people think there is a point. It's a different outlet for people as well and I think that's really important. You know, we gather at these different places, and social interactions work differently and especially now more than ever, the fact that you've absolutely smashed that out of the water is amazing. And it's just down to you and your team's work so yeah, massive congratulations.

Meg: Conor, maybe they'll make a video game about you doing this one day.

Conor: I've always thought that if there was a film about my organisation, the National Video Game Museum, who would play me? I don't know. I don't know if you've ever thought about this. Who would play you in the film of Leeds Museums & Galleries.

Meg: I think it would be Dwayne 'the Rock' Johnson.

(laughing)

Sara: Yeah.

Conor: Straight off Jumanji 3 right?

Meg: Yeah just straight off. I feel like the abs. Visually.

Sara: Gary Oldman.

Meg: Sara fancies Gary Oldman.

Conor: Gary Oldman could play everyone.

Sara: I have a massive amount of respect for him and I just think he's an excellent actor. Also very suave, so yeah.

Meg: Did you know there's a gallery in Oldham called Gallery Oldham but it's really hard to say because in my head when I see that and I hear it all I can think of is Gary Oldman.

(laughing)

Meg: Gary Oldman. Gallery Oldham. It's just too much. Conor, who would play you?

Conor: I have no idea. Who would play me?

Meg: I feel like you remind me of the animated character in How To Train Your Dragon.

Conor: Ok, interesting.

Sara: The kid?

Meg: Yeah.

Conor: A bit of my history is that I was very nearly professionally compared to an animated character as well actually. So, I don't know - did I ever tell you this Meg? I think I might have done. I used to work at Disney Land!

Meg: Yes! I said this to Sara!

Sara: Oh yeah, I forgot about this!

Meg: I was like yeah I hope he talks about this, I'll have to ask him about it. Tell us.

Conor: I used to be a character actor performer at Disneyland back when I was - I think it was my gap year before I went to university - because I did a lot of acting, I had my own theatre company and stuff. And yeah so I had this job at Disneyland Paris. I lived in Paris for a couple of months and I was always the characters who were in the massive costumes bouncing around, so a lot of Woody, a lot of Baloo. And then this was just before the film Tangled came out. And there was talk about whether I was going to become a face actor, which was the characters that basically have their faces on show and full make up, and that I'd be Flynn off of that. Is it Flynn? I think it's Flynn.

Meg: Yeah!

Sara: I was really hoping you were going to say the Rapunzel lady, but...

Meg: Yeah that would be good. Or isn't there like a horse in that? That would be good as well.

Sara: I'm going to google it. I'm going to see what Flynn looks like.

Conor: Flynn is it?

Meg: Flynn off of Tangled.

Sara: Oh yeah! Very good. Wow, he's got some expressive eyebrows that man.

Meg: He does doesn't he.

Conor: Do I have expressive eyebrows?

Sara: Ooh yeah! Yeah! That's good!

Meg: I didn't know you could do that. Can I just say, do you know what's weird is that we were talking about actors, and we've just gone for animated characters with you. We haven't gone for an actual real life person.

(laughing)

Conor: I'm happy with that.

Sara: You already told us what was your oldest thing in the museum which was cool, but is that the oldest example of a video game or of the format more widely? Because I suppose arcade games came first didn't they?

Conor: Yeah, kind of. So that object we have is the Magnavox Odyssey, which was from 1972, which was the first video game console - the first home console that people would buy and plug in to their TV. And it's a really clever piece of kit actually, because you plug it into the tv and it only had enough power in it to display I think 2 white lines and maybe 2 or 3 white dots at any one time, which doesn't really make for an exciting video game, it's not that fun to watch. So what the box came with instead, is you had these really colourful overlays that you would stick onto your TV screen with static electricity, and then the white dots would go behind it and it would be like a roulette table, and you'd see the white dot go around this overlay or roulette table and you've got yourself a home casino.

Sara: Wow!

Conor: For the first ever video game console it's really innovative and has some really cool ideas. That's not the first video game though. And nobody really knows what the first video game was. Because there's no real set definition for what a video game can be, but it most likely was in the 1950s, maybe the late 1940s on these massive, huge computers. Space War is often thought to be the first game, Tennis For Two, on these huge huge things. You can actually play Space War on Google I think. You have to type it in - there's a way to play the original Space War which some people will argue is the first video game, others maybe not.

Sara: Well me and Meg were going to do - well this is another thing about us and showing our age - a comparison between 2 video games and what I'd pick.

Meg: Yeah, would you rather. Right. Smez you can go first because you're older.

Sara: Right. Fine. Ok yeah. Best start. Also, better games. Sonic or Mario?

Conor: Sonic or Mario! Ooh. You see there are layers to that question. There are massive layers. Because then you've got Nintendo or Sega, and then you've got an NES Drive or a Master System. So my first console was a Master System, and I had Sonic the Hedgehog on it. It wasn't a very good version of Sonic the Hedgehog. So I'm going to go Sonic. It wasn't very good, but it was my first one.

Sara: Everyone likes a blue hedgehog.

Meg: Brilliant. I wonder if there is actually a blue hedgehog that exists. Ok, mine was a bit niche - Crash Bandicoot, or Simpsons Road Rage Conor?

Conor: *(laughing)* Simpsons Road Rage! I thought you were going to say Spyro! I thought it was going to be Crash or Spyro.

Meg: No. I spent a lot of my time playing Simpsons Road Rage. And not even doing the rage parts. I would just drive along nicely.

Conor: Yeah. I did love Simpsons Road Rage for that reason. Crazy Taxi is arguably better though as a crazy taxi game. But then again, you did have Simpsons Hit and Run which is just a rubbish GTA. You know what? I'm actually going to go for Simpsons Road Rage, because I love that game and I remember that there was a joke in it that has stuck in my head all the time and it's when you drop someone off - I can't remember whether it was Groundsman Willie or something - and he says 'Here's a tip! Drive better'.

(laughing)

Sara: Amazing.

Conor: I was like arghh. But that's the joke that's been stuck in my head, so.

Meg: Smez, do you think it's time for our final two questions?

Sara: Yeah ok, go. Do you want me to do this one?

Meg: Yeah, go on. I'll let you.

Sara: Ooh. How exciting.

Meg: Well actually, you should be anticipating these Conor, because you're a listener.

Sara: Yeah, you should.

Conor: Oh yeah, I know these questions. I wrote down notes, hang on.

Meg: (*gasping*) Did you write down notes?

Conor: Well kind of. Because I knew it was coming. Bullet points.

Meg: Urgh. I love that so much.

Sara: So first one, in your current role - although, people go off-piste with this, but it's fine - what's been your favourite day at work?

Conor: My favourite day at work. Is it being asked to be on the Museums n'That podcast?

Sara: That is the correct answer!

Conor: Maybe. I think there have been a load of really good days. One really good day that springs to mind is when we made a documentary about the history of British video games last summer, and then we got to have a premier of that documentary in the museum and we invited some people that were on it, and I even got to do a panel, where I got to interview them, and I got to chat with the Oliver twins, who I think have got the Guinness World Record for the most prolific 8-bit game designed ever. They've made like 80 different games. And I got to chat with Ian Simons, who's actually our cultural director, but I got to interview him on a public stage which was really fun. Kish Hirani, Aoife Wilson who was presenting the documentary, she was there, and just kind of like some really nice and friendly people who are also really influential in the games industry, and in UK games history. And being able to show that to the audience that came along was great, and there was lots of free beer. Sorry - free water. Which made it even better, so yeah, I'd say that day.

Meg: That's a good day.

Sara: Brilliant. Great answer.

Meg: Ok so next set of questions Conor: what, from what you've just said, would you want listeners to take away from this episode.

Conor: mm hmm. I've got 2, aimed at different audiences right.

Sara: You know this guy works in audiences.

Meg: You're a schmoozer Conor.

Conor: The first audience is those people that play games. Or have played games in the past. I think they understand the value of games, the cultural value of games. And, obviously, the economic value of games as well. So they know that games need to be saved because games are disappearing, they really are, at a quick rate due to obsolescence and lots of other reasons. So preserving that history is super super important and I hope people think about games in that context a bit more, as opposed to the whole 'oh, the next game is the best one, don't worry about last week's game, that was rubbish'. No. Games are an art form and you need to treat them as such. And those that haven't played games and that might not know about games at all, or maybe haven't played one since Pong in the 70s or whatever - have a look at games history! Because games are such a varied and broad medium and there's so many brilliant ideas and brilliant people working in games, and I think it deserves a bit more attention. So yeah.

Meg: Gosh. That's lovely. I feel like I need to edit some sort of beautiful piano music over that.

(laughing)

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Ok then, you know it's coming. By natural extension Conor, what is your favourite takeaway?

Conor: My favourite takeaway is in Leeds.

(gasping)

Meg: Of course it is. Classic.

Conor: It's MyThai, up by the Merrion Centre.

Meg: Oh my gosh, I love MyThai!

Conor: I'm going tonight. I've got free delivery on Deliveroo, so...

Meg: Conor, what do you order? What's your order!

Conor: My order is a pad nam prik pow which I think is number 36. I've had it a lot. With beef.

Sara: *(laughing)* I 'think' it's number 36.

Meg: Yeah, like roughly. Roughly around 36.

Conor: It's really spicy, and I've got a thing for spicy food. Yeah, my other passion outside of video games is burning my mouth in multiple different creative ways.

Meg: That's such a good answer. I'm so excited about that. I think that might be one of the first ones that I've actually known. Or I've actually been to. My MyThai order, MyThai if you will, is the yellow curry. Tofu yellow curry. Banging! Conor that's so wonderful. What a perfect way to end your episode.

Sara: I could totally go for a snack actually.

Meg: Yeah. A Thai snack.

Sara: Or a brownie.

Conor: My kitchen is like 2 metres that way. It is horrible working here when you're right next to a kitchen! I've eaten so much.

Meg: It's bad isn't it. Conor a huge massive thank you for coming on and being our first actual guest! Our guest guest! Our outside guest!

Conor: Ah, I'm so honoured. Thank you so much for having me, it's been a lot of fun.

Meg: You've been cracking.

(theme music)

Sara: That was ruddy excellent.

Meg: Yeah, I knew it. Conor pulled through.

Sara: He's just very good at speaking; he was very organised, you know. There's a natural conversation flow. Unlike now. Where I'm struggling for words apparently.

(laughing)

Meg: Brilliant, yeah, Conor's really good. I think I might make him one of my best friends. I've decided, but he doesn't know that yet.

Sara: I don't know if that's how it works. I don't think you can just force - well no, you can, that's true... ok.

Meg: Sorry, how do you think that I make friends?

(laughing)

Sara: Force yourself upon them!

Meg: Yeah. this is what Emii - off of our Assistant Registrar - this is what Emii would call a target friend. I am target friending Conor. Do you know what, maybe I'll target friend Conor and then maybe he'll be my new co-host.

Sara: Oh right ok. Fine.

Meg: Just bump you off, get rid of Smez, get Conor on.

Sara: No Smez, no Dimple. That's the rule.

Meg: No Smez, no Dimple, no bats. I need to unlock my laptop because it's stopped and how many times have we done this? This is episode whatever now, and I don't even know... and they're my friends. God Meg. For God's sake. Right, what was your best bit about that episode?

Sara: Well, it was just a real joy to talk to him actually, but I quite enjoyed talking to him about the social element of gaming, but especially since lockdown and Covid and stuff I think it's become a really interesting accessible way for people to speak to their friends. You know, Conor said himself, he wouldn't necessarily have spoken to people had it not been through the format of gaming, so I think that's really nice. And there's certainly been formats that have come out, like Animal Crossing, that have paved the way for creating that environment. So that's really interesting from a dorky audience point of view I suppose. So how about you? What was your favourite learn?

Meg: You big dork. My favourite learn. To be honest, my best thing - I liked the Robin Williams thing, I thought that was a lovely story, but also my favourite thing throughout the whole of it was that he's actually a fan of the show. Our Conor. He's actually listened to it. And when he was like: my best day at work was being asked to come on Museums n'That, I was like - ugh God, we've made it Smez.

Sara: Couldn't have written it ourselves really could we.

Meg: No I know. I didn't tell him to say that by the way everyone, he did - that was natural.

Sara: Yeah it was. You've got to post his cheque though remember.

Meg: Will do.

Sara: I might have gotten away with that except for the fact I said post a cheque, and no one posts cheques anymore.

(laughing)

Meg: Apart from my Nana. My Nana listens to this actually.

Sara: Aw bless her.

Meg: I know it's really sweet. Janet if you're listening, hello. Thanks.

(laughing)

Meg: Right so anyway, this is sad because I've actually got to look at my notes to see who we need to thank. Do you know what it is as well? Because we do these in such a weird order.

Sara: It's hard.

Meg: We're recording this now after we've recorded the intro and the outro to the next episode. Sara you actually recorded this on it was your Dad's birthday wasn't it?

Sara: It was, yeah.

Meg: Huey Lewis.

Sara: I can't remember how old he is. I don't think it matters.

Meg: *(laughing)* Also, you really - you did not acknowledge that. Just to confirm, Sara's Dad isn't Huey Lewis.

Sara: Oh no, no it's not. Different one.

Meg: Happy birthday Hugh. Have a great day, exactly a month ago.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Right so thank you to Al Finney, who did our cover artwork for us. You're great thanks very much. I saw Al actually at the weekend. Anyway, that's Al. Thanks Al. Thank you to Timmy Bentley, who did our theme tune. In fact, Tim's about to be a Dad.

Sara: God it's all happening isn't it?

Meg: Transcripts are on the website if you'd like to read those, and please can you subscribe and leave a review that is really nice. Smez where can they get hold of us.

Sara: They can get hold of us on landline 0115 - no... They can find us on Twitter...

Meg: What's 0115?

Sara: Nottingham. Because that's the last time I had a landline, when I lived with my mum and dad. So you can find us on Twitter. We are @LeedsMuseums or @MuseumMeg or @SaraLMerritt.

Meg: Very good. Landlines are weird.

Sara: Aren't they. You know when you used to get them for free as a bonus gift when you bought the internet.

Meg: Yeah, why? I always wanted that burger phone off of Juno.

Sara: Ooh yeah.

Meg: The thing is though, is that I would never have picked it up because I never ever pick up the phone to people. Especially when I was back in the day - I would literally do everything I could to avoid picking up the phone if it was ringing and my mum would get really annoyed at me. I think that's a millennial thing though isn't it.

Sara: It is yeah. What is handy though is that on the new phones, they have a thing on the front of them that's a screen, and it shows who's ringing you. So you can choose.

Meg: There's actually so few people that I pick the phone up to. You're on the list but there's just so few. Literally, if you're ever thinking of ringing me, don't. Just text me instead. There's nothing you could say to me that wouldn't be better off in a text.

Sara: *(laughing)* Yeah that's fair.

Meg: Honestly. You'll get more out of me as well. I feel like on the phone I'm just really uncomfortable and awkward. Anyway, right - enough of this. Who have we got on next time Smez?

Sara: Right ok, so next time we are speaking to John McGoldrick who is off of Leeds Industrial Museum. He does Industrial History, and Leeds, and stuff.

Meg: Do you know what as well - he loves trains. John McGoldrick loves trains. So hopefully he'll talk about them but he's got an exhibition called Leeds to Innovation, which is like Leads. But Leeds. Right, Smez, I need to go tweet about Bees. Alright kids - see you next time.

Sara: Byyyyeee.

(theme music).