

# Hampshire Cultural Trust: Linking the Past with the Future

**Intro:** Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts as well as enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

**Richard:** Hello, welcome to today's episode of Hampshire HistBites. I'm Richard North, your podcast host, and this episode is recorded from the newly opened Arc in Winchester, an exciting new cultural venue at the heart of the physical activities of the Hampshire Cultural Trust. I'm joined by Paul Sapwell, who is the Chief Executive of the Hampshire Cultural Trust. He's going to tell us a little bit about the aims of the Trust and its activities and give us a sense of some of the exciting new projects it has planned coming down the line in the rest of 2022.

Thanks very much for joining me today and talking about the Hampshire Cultural Trust. I wonder if you might start just with a couple of words on yourself, just to introduce yourself and tell us about how you came to the job.

**Paul:** Yeah. My name's Paul Sapwell, I'm the Chief Executive for Hampshire Cultural Trust. I've been working for the Trust since 2016. I joined the Trust then after having a career predominantly in hospitality and leisure, actually, but always with a keen interest in the arts and heritage. I joined as a Chief Operating Officer and then took over the Chief Executive role in 2018. So I've been in that role for just under four years.

**Richard:** And in terms of the Trust itself, it's a really exciting time, isn't it? It's a very dynamic organisation. It's undertaking a real breadth of work. Why don't we jump in and you can tell me a little bit about how the Trust is founded, what it's trying to do and what makes it unique.

**Paul:** Sure. Yeah, definitely. Definitely an exciting time, huge year coming up for us. The Trust itself was set up in 2016.<sup>1</sup> It comprises of what was the Winchester City Council Museums and Art Service and Hampshire County Council's Museum and Art Service. So they were spun out if you like into an independent charity. As an independent Trust we're one of the biggest in the country, certainly in terms of geographic spread. We took on 23 different venues ranging from museums to art centres. We've got three government indemnified galleries. One of which is obviously here in Winchester where we are today at the Arc. But the Trust was more than just operations and operating venues, you know, it was set up with the idea, 'Yes, for sure', in 2016 about helping culture become more resilient in the face of what was clearly gonna be a difficult time financially for local authorities.

But equally, as a charity, we were set up with the social impact that we have and the impact on communities, particularly those communities that are, if you like, the horrible term 'hard to reach', but communities that don't necessarily engage in arts and culture is a really central strand of what we're about as well, and that's important for our charity. The quality of culture in Hampshire as you know has always been incredibly high, but we were set up really to be able to invest back in it with the idea that we could be more successful financially and be able to invest back in our venues, invest back in projects, and we've been successful in doing so. And obviously those Winchester listeners will know

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<sup>1</sup> The Trust was set up in 2014, not 2016 – a verbal slip.

some of the shows that we've put on down here at what is now the Arc, that was Winchester Discovery Centre, you know, from Jane Austen 200 through to the Turner exhibition a few years back.

**Richard:** It's interesting. You talk as well about impact, you know, social impacts, and there's a really nice impact map, isn't there on the Hampshire Cultural Trust website that people can look at. And we'll put a link to that in our show notes if anyone wants to go and have a look. Are there any kind of specific examples of projects either that you've undertaken or coming up, that you want to kind of give us an example?

**Paul:** Our project with education centres - what were pupil referral units, if you like, young people who have been excluded from mainstream education, we are the only cultural organisation actually in the country that's had a, across a county, a relationship with all of those centres and we've had a programme called Horizon 20:20, which has been working with young people and artists to explore in those centres you know, artistic intervention in some of the problems that these young people have. And that's been really successful, and there's some incredible art that's come out of that.

And I think what's fantastic about what we have is the, here at the Arc, as it was Winchester Discovery Centre, we had two galleries. So we've got the big government indemnified gallery, and where we brought in Turner and the big loans. And for those who don't know, government indemnified means that you are suitably, if you like, qualified as a venue to take on the big hitters, if you like, and do it safely and keep them in the right condition. But we also have the City Space Gallery, which has more local shows, community shows, local organisations. And so we were able to showcase the young people's work from Horizon 20:20 in that gallery alongside the big artists in the main gallery, which, I mean, having been to a few of those and seeing what that means to young people who've got this interest in art and who would never have believed that they could have their art on show, let alone in the same building as an old master, it's, you know, it's phenomenal, really.

**Richard:** It's brilliant, isn't it? I mean, I know one of the things that the Trust says it wants to do is to change lives through culture and I don't think there's a better example probably than a project like that.

**Paul:** That's what it's all about, you know, it's as... We are the stewards of a huge collection, two collections actually, from Hampshire County Council and Winchester City Council. So we have that important, if you like, regulatory responsibility to look after the historic collections. Two and a half million objects between the two of them, it's a large collection. But for us as a charity, what's important is that we are using those collections, the resources that we've got, the venues that we've got, to impact on people's lives. you know, I strongly feel that keeping hold of so much stuff and nobody seeing it is such a waste and goes against really the idea that you can impact people's lives. And you know, that ranges from everything really from, you know, an experience where you see something fascinating, which prompts an interest in history and for anybody through to something like Horizon, where we are directly impacting the lives in a quite targeted way.

**Richard:** It's brilliant to hear about that sort of project work and the workshop side of things as well, because you mentioned you have 23 venues and they stretch from, I think it's Rockbourne Roman Villa at one end of the sort of perhaps chronological spectrum and at one side of the county, and then right up to kind of Farnborough in the north where there's been some really exciting projects around kind of community relations and the Gurkhas and then there's some exciting stuff going on, isn't there, down in Gosport, for example, rooting culture in the centre of the community in a different way there.

**Paul:** Yeah. I mean, Gosport's just an amazing place, isn't it? It's a sort of treasure trove of heritage and stories. And of course, you know, that's the bit that people are interested in. Heritage Open Days of course started in Gosport. That's something that Hampshire should be really proud of.

And we've been raising money for the last couple of years for a big redevelopment of our gallery and a museum down there bringing the museum collection into a small museum driven actually by what the community wanted to see. We've done a lot of community engagement to see what objects mean something to them and the stories that link people today with that. So there's gonna be a new museum and we've got a gallery there, which has put on really great shows. We want to provide better access to that gallery. At the moment, if you are familiar with it, it's quite difficult to find the entrance, which is never the best thing for a public art gallery. So we're gonna sort that out and renovate that whole building. So it's a large building, not without its challenges, but actually quite an iconic building in Gosport. And it's right in the centre there. And clearly, you know, being on the High Street there in Gosport is really vital obviously for our museum. But equally, you know, it's no secret what High Streets are going through at the moment in the decline of retail and culture has a really big role to play in attracting people to High Streets and the associated businesses, so it's a really exciting place to be there. And just brilliant that we've got this really great building and a new gallery and museum there. And that will open in late summer, we hope. Capital projects in 2022 always have that caveat, I'm afraid. There's so many delays to materials and things like that. But, you know, we are reasonably confident that we can make that deadline.

**Richard:** That's fantastic. I mean, I look forward to getting down there and seeing that myself. As you say, I don't know as much about Gosport as I would like to. So it's a really good opportunity to kind of open up a different side, perhaps a more hidden side of Hampshire's culture.

**Paul:** Yeah. Yeah. Loads of the stuff in Gosport was being sort of hidden behind kind of military infrastructure and certainly there's a willingness now to find other uses for those kind of spaces and welcome, you know, people into spaces that were previously behind fences. It's a lot of development and a lot of ambition in the town. And we are really pleased that we're part of what's driving that.

**Richard:** Yeah. As well as kind of bringing culture onto the High Street, bringing culture into people's lives, transforming lives and putting it at the centre of communities, we talked a little bit didn't we about innovation. I know that innovation's quite important to the Hampshire Cultural Trust and you've got some really exciting work going on that we can possibly say a little bit about now, possibly say a little bit more about later. Is there anything you want to share with us on the innovation side?

**Paul:** I mean, I think what's important for a cultural organisation is that, is like everything in the world, you know, change happens at pace. So we've always got to challenge ourselves with the way that we reach people, you know. I don't feel that, you know, in 50 years' time the chances of going into a museum that looks like museums do today is gonna be remote. you know, people aren't gonna want to engage with just great big cases of stuff. That has a role, don't get me wrong, but to engage new audiences who haven't engaged before you need to find other ways of doing it.

So yeah, we are looking at digital engagement, and of course that's now part of our programme, you know, we think about when we put a programme on, you know, whether that be a talk from a curator or something that we can put onto cultural course. So that's, it's been really important to be ready online, but equally to, you know, engage people in different ways in the venues.

So I think you're probably hinting at the big one, which is our project in Winchester this year, working with Ubisoft. The fourth biggest computer game company in the world actually. And our collaboration with them is about their latest version of Assassin's Creed, which is one of the top video

game sellers and their latest version of that being Valhalla, which you take on the role of a Viking invader coming into England and fighting the Anglo-Saxons. And a great part of this game is actually based in Winchester, and Ubisoft has recreated Anglo-Saxon Winchester, which for a museum and heritage organisation is phenomenal. And we've collaborated with them on a number of elements since we were put in contact with them by Professor Ryan Lavelle, professor at Winchester University who's worked with these guys as a historic advisor. And actually what they do after they've made this violent version of the game is they then make a non-violent version of the game, which they call the Discovery Tour, which is now available actually as a stand-alone product. If you've got the game, then you get it as a bolt-on. And that is very much a sort of educational exploration tool. So you can go and explore this landscape and you will find our objects in it, objects from our collections that have been digitally recreated and put in the game with links to where actually you can come and see them in Winchester.

So yeah, you know, the computer games, Ubisoft tell us that it's something like one in four people in the world regularly play computer games. I mean, you're talking about an audience of literally millions and millions of people and the guys who play Assassin's Creed, you know, they're interested in the history and so it's a really good link into, you know, engaging history.

**Richard:** This is really exciting. I mean, this is Hampshire Cultural Trust kind of at the heart of innovation in terms of heritage bringing the digital world in, bringing new audiences in and potentially creating a new incentive, I think, for people to come and visit Winchester. People that will have access to this game, but may not have direct experience of Hampshire's heritage, Winchester's heritage, might look through, see an object that's in our collections, our community collections, and be able to come in and see it. But they might not otherwise have discovered that. That is really exciting.

**Paul:** Yeah, we think so. It's gonna be better than that as well. We're going to bring a new experience to Winchester, which I can't talk about at the moment, 'cause we are still in commercial negotiations about, but there's gonna be a really exciting new way to access that stuff opening in the autumn in Winchester, in a really innovative form, where people will be able to access some of that content in a real world sense. And, yeah, we are really excited with that, because it's on the cutting edge of how you access objects and heritage through digital medium.

**Richard:** I mean, it sounds fantastic. I'm gonna stop myself asking you too much more about it, 'cause I know we're at the limit of what we can say today, but hopefully...

**Paul:** Yeah, I mean just watch this space. It's gonna be, it really is gonna be great. And the guys at Ubisoft are, I mean, their content is phenomenal, but the other partners involved in the project in sort of bringing that to life in Winchester, which is what we want to do are equally exciting partners to work with. So it's a real privilege to be working with these guys.

**Richard:** I suppose it would be remiss of me if I didn't ask you a little bit, as well, while we're speaking about the hidden work and the kind of behind-the-scenes amazing things that go on in terms of caring for those two and a half million objects that you said are in the Trust care. And also, for example, some of the ongoing resources that people in Hampshire can access. Hampshire Wardrobe is one very colourful example, but I know there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes too, in terms of curation. And that of course is, I suppose, arguably at the root of these amazing, innovative experiences that we're thinking about, that we're gonna bring out, but we couldn't do it without the amazing work that goes on behind the scenes.

**Paul:** Oh no. I mean, we've got a central collections team and a team of conservators, conservation guys who, frankly for me are, you know, best in class. We work out of our base at Chilcomb, just outside of Winchester, and we have an ongoing programme of conservation of the objects. That work

goes on every day. Fortunately, you know, we've still been able to support that work here in Hampshire, in house. A lot of county services no longer support that kind of work specifically. And, you know, it's really important to us that we do, and that's, you know, an absolutely essential ingredient for what we do.

And people can, you know, you can access that. you know, it's not as though it's all behind closed doors, you can get in touch with Chilcomb. Obviously we open those doors up and have talks from our experts, Heritage Open Days, but equally, you know, we're always ready to have an inquiry. I mean, if you talk to any of our collections guys, conservators, they'd be very excited to show off what they're doing. Show off's the wrong word, not show off themselves, but show off the work, you know, the love for the objects and what we do is really important. The heartbeat of any museum organisation, really.

**Richard:** Yeah. No, that's fantastic. Well, there's an amazing array of stuff there. And there's lots to look forward to this year. I suppose we should also just say a final word about Heritage Open Days, 'cause I know that Hampshire Cultural Trust is gonna be doing some exciting work around that. And indeed working with the Hampshire History Trust. Is there anything you'd like to kind of foreshadow around your cooperation there?

**Paul:** For us, it's such an important event and festival for people to come in and learn, and the associated talks and lectures and et cetera that go around it are a really important part of the annual calendar. And we are always delighted to be part of it, here in Winchester and beyond.

I mean, actually to be honest, we would like to see more stuff elsewhere in Hampshire as well. you know, the place that's, you know, there's a fantastic team of volunteers here, yourself being one of them, of course, who make this happen every year in Winchester. And of course this stuff really relies on volunteers. I should say, just on the volunteer part, the Hampshire Cultural Trust massively relies on volunteers as well. And actually heritage and arts generally does, you know, we are not a profitable industry, although we do make enough money now to sustain us. And that's part of what we've been set up to do, but we simply couldn't offer the breadth and diversity of work that we do without volunteers. And that's really important for heritage generally across the UK.

**Richard:** Well, that's really exciting actually, because I think you've portrayed quite an interesting picture. A really exciting picture of how the Cultural Trust is quite unique. It acts alongside the local authorities, but it's very much rooted in the community. And I suppose that volunteering aspect goes hand in hand with that arguably.

**Paul:** A hundred percent. Yeah.

**Richard:** And, if people want to get involved and would like to volunteer and to support the work of the Cultural Trust, how can they go about doing that?

**Paul:** Well, they can get in touch with us on our standard number and standard email, or they can pop into any of their local venues to be honest.

The best thing is to pop into to somewhere that you are interested in and talk to the people who work there, whether that be our managers or, you know, at Chilcomb, the collections guys, you know, people will be delighted to talk to anybody who wants to be part of it. That's as important to us as anything, as you say.

**Richard:** Brilliant. All right. So open arms for the community culture.

**Paul:** Oh yeah, definitely. Yeah.

**Richard:** Brilliant. Paul, thank you so much. It's been really, really interesting to hear properly about the work at the Hampshire Cultural Trust and to get a flavour of some of the really exciting things that are coming up this year in particular, as well as to get a sense of the amazing ongoing work that goes on behind the scenes to bring that amazing heritage that we have here in Hampshire, out into the community.

Hopefully we'll talk to you again, this won't be the last time we have a chat.

**Paul:** Of course. Yeah. It'd be great to have a chat nearer the end of the year when we can sort of talk a bit more about our Ubisoft collaboration and hopefully have something a bit more tangible to show you and your listeners. But watch this space, it's gonna be a... it's a big year.

**Richard:** Brilliant, brilliant. Well, an exciting time to be part of Hampshire's heritage and Hampshire's culture. So thank you very much for joining us today.

**Paul:** Pleasure. Thank you.

**Outro:** We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, [www.winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.winchesterheritageopendays.org), or click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you.