

Reflecting on the HistBites Journey, and Our Edible Plans for 2021

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 and enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

Emma: Welcome to today's episode of HistBites. Today, we're going to meet the Winchester Heritage Open Days festival directors, Nicky Gottlieb and Becky Brown.

Welcome Nicky and Becky. It's a real pleasure to be able to interview you, I've known you for a few years now.

So let's start a little bit about the podcast series, which has been such a huge success since its launch last year.

What are each of your favourite podcast to date? Let's start with Nicky. What is your favourite podcast?

Nicky: Oh, gosh, there were quite a few actually, but I think the one which really comes to mind, which I learned a lot from, was the one about sea shanties and of course, you know Martin. So Martin Jakeman was interviewed as part of that. The podcast was all about where sea shanties come from, but actually what I think I took away from it was some of the sayings that we have in today's vocabulary have originated from sea shanties.

Part of the podcast probably isn't for the faint hearted, but you know, if you want to find out where - what's the saying? - 'Not enough room to swing a cat' comes from.

Becky: Oh, yeah.

Nicky: You need to listen to the podcast. I mean, Martin is just amazing. He just brings everything to life. He's just an extraordinary character.

Emma: Martin brings things alive and sea shanties are obviously becoming extremely popular, thanks to another digital platform with TikTok. So I think Martin was ahead of the curve there. What about you, Becky? What's your favourite podcast to date?

Becky: Do you know that I had to go all the way back to the start and it also happens to be our most popular one, actually, and it's Bring Back the Buses. For some reason I can't get that one out of my head when anyone asks me, and I think transport isn't usually my thing. And yet somehow listening to Bring Back the Buses and learning about the King Alfred buses, and where some ended up like an Irish field or across in America, I just loved it so much. And, you know, I'm not surprised it's the most popular one, it's just so much fun. And I think that's what our podcasts do, they just cover such a range of fascinating snippets of history, and you can delve into something, whether it's Matilda or Mary I or the pantry or going out foraging, there's something for everybody.

Emma: I enjoyed that episode, I have to confess. In impartiality here, I'm not going to declare my favourites in this capacity. But I think any successful radio broadcast, or any broadcast really is taking something mundane, like a bus, something you don't think is particularly exciting, and elevating that to something really exciting and generating your interest.

So, Becky, tell us a little bit about the team that you and Nicky head up. It's looking pretty good for this year, you've got a large team I believe.

Becky: We have. We've just finished a recruitment drive, by the time you're all sitting down and enjoying this podcast, or perhaps you're out jogging, we're going to have around 16 members of the team. It's quite extraordinary. We started last April, with the team developing, and do you know what? They are so amazing. We've got young students, we've got mature students, we've got local residents, and most of them have never met, and yet there they are, they're connecting, they're working from their own homes. We have fortnightly team meetings, which are just hilarious sometimes, and they're just the best. I just can't wait to see them all in person and just give them all a hug because they are making HistBites what it is. They really are extra special, They're just fabulous.

Emma: Well, that's the key to the success of the podcast, of HistBites, the incredible, strong team behind you, because there's a lot of work for anybody who's listening today, who's never participated in a podcast, never done a podcast before, there's a hell of a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes and to make a successful podcast.

Emma: Nicky, can you tell us a little bit about what we've got in store for season three of HistBites?

Nicky: Yes. I can't believe we're actually coming up to season three, which is fantastic, really exciting. I can't really go into too much detail 'cause we haven't done a lot of the recordings as yet, but we know roughly what's coming through. Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust have done an interview. They're going to be talking a bit about their work down on St Cross Meadows, Winnall Moors and up in St Catherine's. So they'll be talking about chalk and how that is very relevant to Hampshire basically, so they'll be talking about that.

We've got an interview with Dr. Carey Fleiner at the University of Winchester. She's a senior lecturer at Winchester in classical and medieval history. She'll be talking bit about her life really, and how she got into it all and what she does now, but she is an extraordinary woman. She's got all sorts of strings to her bow and it's not just classical and medieval history, she does all sorts of other things, but you'll have to wait and listen to the podcast to find out.

Other things we've got coming up are hopefully about the Chesil Railway and Hyde900, I think are going to be sharing a bit about their work and their dig they had last year. But some of the finds that they have there, so we'll be talking about that. John Pilkington, who some listeners may already be aware of, he's going to be talking about his travels along the Silk Road and how that connects with Whitchurch. What else have we got? Royal women connected to Romsey Abbey and last but not least, I think for the season, is going to be something on Florence Nightingale whose birthday's on the 12th of May.

So yes, quite a lot coming up.

Emma: I can't wait. I just cannot wait. Sometimes I have to sort of remind myself, Oh, yes, I'm organizing some events this year, but I just can't wait to attend other people's events, either in person or digitally or however that pans out in 2021. So, if we could look back perhaps now to 2020. Last year presented many challenges. Obviously, nobody expected to be putting on a festival, a heritage festival in the middle of a pandemic. Becky, could you tell us a little bit about how the success of last year's festival translated through, into the statistics?

Becky: We weren't too sure what to expect at the start. It was the first year Heritage Open Days had ever gone online, and we just didn't know how we were going to reach out. It was really quite extraordinary, Emma. I was watching what was going on, on Twitter, when it just took off completely. It was extraordinary. And then I began to see who was booking to attend some of our live streamed events and, do you know, we went international? Far more than we've ever been before. Over 6% of our audience, in the end, were from overseas. Many of whom were from America and a lot of them have since said, Oh, we're going to come to Winchester, we're going to come to a gallery. We had over 12,000 views of our online films, our podcasts, our live streamed events just within the 10 days of the festival. You can still watch loads of them. If you actually go to our website, winchesterheritageopendays.org, you can still see quite a few of them. But the thing that was really, really lovely was the feedback, with people saying that it had been a tremendous year and 92% have said that they found our content engaging, informative, and entertaining. Isn't that fab?

Emma: That's fantastic. That's the best endorsement of really the success and all the people behind the scenes that have worked really hard to give up their time and make sure that was a success under the most extraordinary circumstances.

Becky: Indeed, and I know, Nicky, you've got all sorts of thoughts about what was really good and how amazing our event organizers were.

Nicky: Obviously everybody had to think about the change with the pandemic and how we were going to put events on that were going to be, as you say, entertaining, and so predominantly they were online. There were a few in person events, but I think, you know, everybody really made an effort. We really weren't expecting the response that we had, and it was so encouraging and really fantastic to hear from everybody. And hopefully they'll want to take part again this year. But yeah, no, the films ranged from some which were really, really professionally done but also people did them on their own smartphone, so it doesn't matter, the festival is all about everybody taking part. It doesn't have to be a polished performance. It's all about community coming together and I think that's what we achieved.

Emma: You say about the community coming together, because I think that really was the buzz word just generally for life last year, the community coming together, so there's a perfect example of that with Heritage Open Days as well. You've got some new changes this year. You've set up a charity, I believe called the Hampshire History Trust.

So Becky, could you tell us a little bit about that and how it was set up, why it was set up?

Becky: For years, for most of our time, Nicky and I have worked as two independent volunteers who sought help from different organizations. And for a while, the City of Winchester Trust were fabulous. They looked after us and helped us apply for grants, but their passion is building. That's what they love. They love Winchester's buildings. Where, of

course, Winchester Heritage Open Days is about a bit more than buildings. It's about the whole realm of heritage. And also, Nicky and I, well, particularly Nicky, she's always got loads of ideas, but Nicky and I had lots of other ideas we wanted to explore. And we realized that if we were going to get the sponsorship and the grants and be able to expand, we needed to have our own organization. So we learned how to apply to become a charity. And we became a charity last year. The Hampshire History Trust came into being. We were approved by the Charity Commission, and it now exists. We've got so many ideas for going forward. I think Nicky can probably tell us a bit about them.

Nicky: Yes. So the festival comes under, everything really comes under Hampshire History Trust now, so the podcast is one of our projects, the Hampshire HistBites podcast. Heritage Open Days, we're hoping eventually will become a wider history festival, it will become the Winchester History Festival. That's a little bit further down the line. There's a lot of work to be done before then and a lot of funding as well, 'cause that's not going to happen immediately. And the whole idea is to make the festival sustainable. We've got to do a lot of research and work on that. But some of the projects that we have in mind to do, as I say, we're just really starting so that there's a lot of work ahead of us, but one of the ideas we've had is to have a proper system of blue plaques in Winchester. So really commemorating a lot of people that are linked with Winchester, that, you know, you pass a building that maybe someone's lived there. I mean, for instance, we had Josephine Butler who was part of our Extraordinary Women Exhibition back in 2018, and she was a social reformer.

And for the time that she lived in Winchester, she actually lived in the cathedral offices, in the close. Now, wouldn't it be wonderful to have a blue plaque up on that building to actually commemorate the fact she lived there? One of the other things that we noticed the other day, were there's some buildings on Romsey Road that have recently been demolished for development, and they also popped up in our Extraordinary Women Exhibition that was the Carlisle Memorial Refuge, which is where Eliza Pumphrey, who was the warden there, used to take all the female prisoners in their last six months before they're released. She used to take them in and look after them and really, really prepare them for moving on afterwards because it was tough for women, really tough.

So that building was demolished. And what we're wanting to do is try and when the new development goes up, is maybe approach, the owner of that building and obviously the city council, because we'll have to go through planning, to see whether we could get a plaque up on that building as well, because Eliza was such an amazing woman. She was extraordinary, ahead of her time.

So there are lots of things, there's that, there's lots of ideas as Becky puts it, I've got lots of ideas. Things like maybe a book to commemorate the extraordinary women that we featured maybe some more films relating to Hampshire's history, lots and lots of stuff.

Emma: Thank you ever so much. I mean this year is particularly exciting for me as a food and a social historian, particular food historian because the national theme for 2021 Heritage Open Days across the entire country is Edible England. A gift, a gift. Perhaps you could tell us a little bit more, Nicky, about some of the plans that you have for Winchester's response to this year's theme.

Nicky: Well we've only just really put it out to our organizers, that that is the theme. So we're waiting to hear what comes back, but I think, Winchester, Hampshire is very much the centre of the kind of foodie world. So we are hoping for some response to come back on that. And yes, if anybody's listening has got any ideas, then please do get in touch with us.

But, I mean, last year we did have a few things which related to food and the year before, in fact, we actually kind of, brushed the surface of food and drink in Winchester and Hampshire. So yeah, it's a plea really. Anybody out there, any chefs, any businesses, anything related to Hampshire's history of food. I mean, obviously Emma, you're going to be taking part as well.

Emma: As far as I'm aware at the moment, there are three potential food related events that I'm going to be collaborating on. I'm not sure how much more than that I can say at the moment, but they span from the medieval period to World War I, through to 21st century. So that's all I'm saying. That's all I can tease you with. Definitely working outside of my comfort zone, obviously, my specialty is early 20th century, so medieval is going to be extremely, ah, extremely exciting. And as I say, looking forward to finding out where I can source some Lampreys. It's an exciting theme, I think it's a very accessible theme, I think it appeals to all ages and making that link with your event, to any event, potential event organiser out there, any link back to Hampshire, obviously that would be key, but it's got a lot of potential, but it's early days yet and it may be digital platform that we're working on, it may not, who knows when we'll all be in September? That's the jeopardy of Heritage Open Days during a pandemic, I think.

Thank you ever so much, Nicky and Becky, it has been an absolute pleasure to hear some of your plans looking back, where we are at the moment and also looking forward. And I'm sure the listeners will agree this year's 2021 Winchester Heritage Open Days is going to be another rip-roaring success.

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, click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you.