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History in Public: Power and Process, Harm and Help

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Abstract

This introductory piece explains the choice of public history as a focus for this special issue of *History*, and its emphasis on the work of early-career historians. ‘Public history’ is a notoriously nebulous concept. We outline some of the most common ways in which it is understood, and discuss why we believe that its methods and approaches are of enormous value to all those involved in historical work, whether they would consider themselves to be ‘public historians’ or not. We also introduce the contributions making up the rest of this issue, which features the work of twenty-five mostly early-career historians and moves from Greece to England, India, Tobago, the United States, Norway, Northern Ireland, and online. The introduction provides an appetiser for some of the approaches, ideas and struggles emerging from public history, and the richness of this constantly evolving field.

I

This special issue of *History: The Official Journal of the Historical Association* showcases exciting new work from twenty-five largely early-career historians, organised around the theme of public history. Moving from Greece, to England, to India, Tobago, the United States (US), Norway, Northern Ireland, and online, these pieces offer a snapshot of some of the ideas, findings, challenges and experiments that are engaging with public history around the world.¹

As editors for this issue (and as recent Editorial Fellows and members of the journal’s Early Career Editorial Board), we were given considerable

¹ Note on authorship: the four authors contributed equally and collaboratively to this introduction (and to the special issue as a whole). Names are listed alphabetically by first name, which also facilitates Open Access publishing.

freedom to determine its content and format. We therefore made a deliberate decision to produce a special issue that would be united *not* by a sense of our own knowledge of the field and a desire to declare our own expertise, but by our collective enthusiasm for public history and our recognition of its broader significance. For reasons set out in more detail below, this leaves us eager to learn from the field and to introduce that knowledge into our own work as aspiring historians.

With few limitations but space, we issued an open call for proposals in late 2019. We encouraged prospective authors to think about public history in broad terms, critically examining its possibilities and potentials. We sought to showcase new voices, ideas and practices, and to inspire writing from those who may not usually think about publishing in a generalist history journal, or indeed, may not usually consider themselves to be public historians. We were also keen to open up the issue to contributions from those not based within university history departments. To enable this inclusivity, we urged prospective authors to explore alternative forms such as roundtable discussions, short focus pieces, and provocations. This flexibility was particularly appropriate for the topic of public history where, we felt, practices and ‘outputs’ often look rather different and where interaction and exchange are key. As such, this special issue is intended very much as part of this expanding conversation: a collection of personal, reflective and analytical voices, which collectively showcases the vibrancy of public history while simultaneously demonstrating its intrinsic value to the practice of every historian.

II

The term ‘public history’ is notoriously nebulous. It implies that some history is not ‘public’, which many of those working with history, if not most, would reject. Yet, if all historical work has some public element to it, then ‘public history’ risks becoming so expansive and inclusive that its potential to raise new questions and challenges is lost.² As public history experts know only too well, and as the discussion between members of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race and Community Engagement Centre in this issue demonstrates, there is ongoing disagreement over its meaning, its implications, and even its use or value as a concept.³

Tracing the roots of public history provides some signposts towards its distinctive qualities and its contributions to scholarship and society. One set of origins are to be found in the development of nation-states in

² A point made by Jill Liddington, ‘What is public history? Publics and their pasts, meanings, and practices’, *Oral History*, 30/1 (2002), pp. 83–93, at p. 84, and Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 3rd edn (London, 2019), ch. 7.

³ Safina Islam and E. James West, ‘Looking backwards, moving forwards: the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre and Education Trust, community activism, and public history programming’, this issue; John Tosh, ‘Public history, civic engagement and the historical profession in Britain’, *History*, 99/2 (2014), pp. 191–212.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, when history was deployed to build national identities and narratives. This was, as the editors of a recent collection write, ‘history with a public purpose’, and it became the foundation of much of the professional and university-based history known today.⁴ Another more recent origin is to be found in the US in the 1970s, when publications and conversations about ‘public history’ were used to draw attention to the successful employment in non-academic settings of those who were trained in, and making professional use of, historical insights and methods.

This American idea of public history met with criticism and modification in Australia in the early 1990s, and the distinctively Australian discipline that took shape as a result was, in turn, influential in Britain. Also important for the particularly British kind of public history that evolved from the 1960s was the History Workshop movement, emerging from the New Left and ‘history from below’ movements.⁵ This initiative was deeply interested in radical, left-wing and participatory traditions of history-making, and with some of its leading figures having actively contested some of the ideas of ‘heritage’ in circulation in the 1980s, it fed directly into the establishment of a Masters dedicated to public history at Ruskin College Oxford in 1996. Each national iteration of public history was, therefore, informed by each location’s particular preoccupations, structures and contexts, from graduate unemployment in 1970s California to battles over ‘heritage’ in 1980s Thatcherite Britain.⁶

The same remains true as ever more national and international perspectives become a part of self-proclaimed public history. So, for example, its rise in China has been associated with ‘a deteriorating, if not total collapse of national identity’ in recent decades, which has prompted public interest in the past as a route to finding new ways of belonging. At the same time, this has also entailed government investment in large-scale state-sanctioned public history projects to inspire national unity.⁷ In contrast, public history in Germany is, at present, a much more specialist academic endeavour. Meanwhile, practices in South Africa have been informed by the British History Workshop movement, and also by considerable government activity since the end of apartheid in 1994 to address reconciliation as well as nation-building.⁸ Public history in

⁴ Paul Ashton and Alex Trapeznik, ‘The public turn: public history today’, in Paul Ashton and Alex Trapeznik (eds), *What is Public History Globally? Working with the Past in the Present* (London, 2019), pp. 1–8, at p. 2.

⁵ See Barbara Taylor’s reflections on the history of History Workshop, <<https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/the-history-of-history-workshop/>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022]; perhaps the best-known example of the new social history is E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

⁶ Liddington, ‘What is public history?’, p. 85.

⁷ Na Li, ‘Public history in China: past making in the present’, in Ashton and Trapeznik (eds), *What is Public History Globally?*, pp. 51–61, at p. 52.

⁸ Thorsten Logge and Nico Nolden, ‘Public history in Germany: opening new spaces’, and Julia C. Wells, ‘Public history in South Africa: a tool for recovery’, both in Ashton and Trapeznik (eds), *What is Public History Globally?*, pp. 63–78 and pp. 131–44 respectively.

South Africa has had significant global impact. Ideas and practices flow increasingly swiftly between nations, particularly as public history gains global organisations, notably the International Federation, founded in 2012. Even so, national (and local) concerns and opportunities mean that public history's flavour is often still regionally distinct.

With all this in mind, we offer three interconnected ways of approaching public history: as its own profession; as part of academic history; and as a way of thinking about history as a whole. First, particularly in the US but increasingly elsewhere as well, public or 'applied' history is taught and practised as a more or less distinct sub-discipline with a strong vocational impulse, equipping its practitioners to work in fields other than university-based research. Although this orientation towards specific careers is less common outside the US, specialist modules and even dedicated postgraduate programmes are increasing in number around the world.⁹ Here, public history is concerned with the application of historical concepts and methods in contexts other than academic history, or 'history beyond the walls of the traditional classroom', as the US National Council on Public History puts it.¹⁰ Training and areas of professional practice cover fields as varied as policymaking and politics, tourism and entertainment, curation and preservation, heritage funding and management, oral histories, law, audience research, community-building, and commemoration. Although few of our contributors would see themselves first and foremost as professional public historians, many such activities are discussed in this issue, from Ola Innset's analysis of public events about historical moments, held at the National Library of Norway, to O'Neil Joseph's scrutiny of the role of public history in Tobago's tourism industry and economic and social development since the 1980s.

Second, another kind of public history is also (and increasingly, perhaps) expected of academic historians as an important adjunct to their research, writing and teaching. It has not gone unnoticed that public history gained traction in Britain just as 'political pressure was intensifying for historians to justify their work': it provided one clear route for such justification.¹¹ Here, the boundary between public history, public engagement and the 'impact' that researchers are required to demonstrate is blurred. Generating impact or undertaking public engagement work will almost invariably involve some kind of 'history

⁹ Some of the earliest outside the US include the public history Masters programmes at Monash University and the University of Technology Sydney (Australia), set up in 1988. More recent examples include Masters degrees in public history offered at Royal Holloway, Birkbeck, York, Queen's University Belfast, and Derby (UK); University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin (Republic of Ireland); Freie Universität Berlin (Germany); University of Amsterdam (Netherlands); University of Wrocław (Poland); University of Milan (Italy); University of Western Ontario (Canada); and graduate courses at Chongqing University (China), to mention but a few.

¹⁰ See 'How is public history used', on their 'About the field' page: <<https://www.ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/>> [accessed 2 Nov. 2021].

¹¹ Mark Donnelly, 'Public history in Britain: repossessing the past', in Ashton and Trapeznik (eds), *What is public history globally?*, pp. 23–36, at p. 25.

in public', in which research findings are reformulated for new audiences beyond the academy, or research itself is undertaken with collaborators or participants who would not usually think of themselves as historians. The distinction between university-based historical work and historical activities elsewhere can be overstated, particularly when academic researchers try to demonstrate exceptional reach and resonance beyond the university, but it remains the case that the audience for a lot of academic scholarship is small. In this issue, Fraser Raeburn, Lisa Baer-Tsarfati and Viktoria Porter make a powerful plea for reconceptualising the online conference as a form of public history that can bring together a much wider array of expertise than academic conferences usually achieve, with huge benefits for all involved. Similarly, the authors of 'Building Confianza' in this issue provide in-depth reflections on their approach to combining different skills and resources, including but not limited to those generated by the local university, in their efforts to preserve and promote the vibrant history of the Boyle Heights neighbourhood in Los Angeles.

Finally, public history is an area of theory and practice that is interested in history and historical methods as something made, practised and used by its protagonists: the public, or the people. As Huw Halstead reminds us in this issue, history 'suffuses everyday life': individuals and communities make meaning by using historical methods of analysis to draw on and tell stories about the past. These uses of the past can be highly self-aware and instrumental, as in the campaigning work of the Bloody Sunday Trust that Naomi Petropoulos describes in this issue, or the efforts that Portia D. Hopkins recounts in Fort Bend County, Texas, to (re)build an archive in order to challenge existing historical narratives of the region that ignore or sideline African Americans. They can also be enjoyable and enriching – even fun, as Anna Fielding's account of opportunities to participate in everyday rituals and practices from the past shows.

Many of those engaging with this third strand of public history – which is, of course, entangled with the other two strands we describe – emphasise that it should address not only the stories told about the past, but also 'the process of how the past becomes History' and the role of all sorts of people in making it so.¹² History is, in Raphael Samuel's memorable phrase, 'the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands'.¹³ Any interest in the processes of history-making requires close attention to the silences that are introduced throughout the various stages of historical production, highlighted so powerfully in the 1990s by Michel-Rolph Trouillot. These silences begin at 'the moment of fact creation' when sources are generated, to the final 'moment of retrospective significance', when records, archives and the narratives that they facilitate are given

¹² Hilda Kean, 'Thinking about people and public history', in Graham Dawson (ed.), *Memory, Narrative and Histories: Critical Debates, New Trajectories* (University of Brighton Working Papers on Memory, Narrative and Histories, 2012), pp. 7–17.

¹³ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1996), p. 8.

meaning.¹⁴ Alongside Portia D. Hopkins's piece on the archival record of St John Missionary Baptist Church, Texas, many other pieces in this issue are concerned with such silences, and with ways of identifying and filling them. Amorette Grace Lyngwa reflects on the stories told within museums about Indigenous life in Meghalaya, India, highlighting not only what is missing but also how these gaps and silences might be addressed. Erin Katherine Krafft, Rikki Davis and E. Denise Meza-Reidpath suggest one method of responding to silences in history education, by engaging directly with the components of these gaps. Public history can find common ground with many radical traditions, in which histories of marginalised groups and alternative ways of producing history have been championed as a means to effect social and political change.

III

As editors, we were drawn to the theme of public history by a shared belief in its significance as a way of thinking about the past. Here, we echo a number of public history experts who have highlighted the importance of the field for the practice of any and all kinds of history – including forms of academic work to which the label of public history would not easily adhere.¹⁵ We were keen to think about the value of public history beyond the obligatory snippets of promised public engagement that appear within funding and job applications, so prominent in the minds of early career researchers, and beyond the research evaluation metrics that quantify impact and reach. Conversations with our own students, for example, on assumptions made by historical institutions that white, working-class communities or elite, imperial administrations remain the predominant area of historical interest highlight the urgency of work undertaken by authors in this issue and, in particular, the emphasis on *community-driven* (rather than just community-centred or community-focused) methods. As the pieces here show, public history opens up possibilities for profound reflection on the nature and limitations of history itself, for radical innovation and inclusion and, most importantly, for change. These provocations from public history can help all kinds of history work acquire transformative power for the present and future.

This collective intention to enrich our own work as early career researchers by reflecting on the practices and theories of public history strikes a chord with the present public mood in many countries. Popular interest in the past – and critical attention to what kinds of history are in circulation today – is high, illustrated by the burgeoning numbers of public-facing festivals, documentaries, podcasts, heritage projects and

¹⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA, 1995), p. 26.

¹⁵ James B. Gardner and Paula Hamilton, 'The past and future of public history: developments and challenges', in James B. Gardner and Paula Hamilton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Public History* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 1–22, at p. 3.

activist initiatives. Speaking on this global public ‘hunger’ for information about the past and its relationship to present social issues, historian Brian Behnken has emphasised the power of this questioning ‘sentiment’ and discussed the wave of challenges that he has witnessed, within and outside the classroom, as increasing numbers of people ask ‘Why didn’t I ever learn about this before?’ and ‘What else do we not know?’¹⁶ The same questions can be levelled at institutions of power, as a demand for greater democratisation of knowledge.

This issue was developed against a backdrop of debate over the role of history in contemporary society and the kinds of histories that should be taught, celebrated, acknowledged, or publicly funded. In the UK, disagreement over the removal of statues – most notably, those of Edward Colston in Bristol, the plinth of which is shown in Figure 1, and Cecil Rhodes in Oxford – prompted renewed discussion, including at government level, about who and what is remembered in public spaces. Such ‘statue wars’ have been playing out globally for some time, as the introduction to a recent journal special issue on ‘Protest, public history, and problematic plinths’ makes plain.¹⁷

The vehemence in the UK of these statue wars and associated anxieties contributed to the launch in summer 2020 of the ‘Common Sense Group’ of parliamentarians, which vigorously criticised charities including the National Trust and Greenwich Maritime Museum for carrying out historical research into their organisations’ connections to slavery, empire and colonialism.¹⁸ In early 2021, prompted in part by these criticisms, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport summoned twenty-five heritage and charity organisations to an urgent (and private) meeting to discuss their representations of history to the public. This prompted a furious response from many historical institutions and associations at what looked very much like government interference in the activities of heritage organisations, charities and researchers.¹⁹ *History’s* own website hosted an open letter to the UK Home Office in 2020 that raised considerable concerns about the accuracy of historical material within the UK citizenship test, with similar questions about education and commemoration raised in many other countries and

¹⁶ Brian D. Behnken in conversation with Monica Perales, ‘Tweeting through race, policing, and social change’, *Public Historians at Work*, podcast from the Center for Public History at the University of Houston (23 March 2021), <<https://www.publichistoriansatwork.buzzsprout.com/>> [accessed 29 Jan. 2022].

¹⁷ Keira Lindsay and Mariko Smith, ‘Setting the scene: statue wars and ungrateful citizens’, *Public History Review*, 28 (2021), pp. 1–17.

¹⁸ Archie Bland and Jessica Elgot, ‘Dissatisfied Tory MPs flock to ERG-inspired pressure groups’, *Guardian*, 11 Nov. 2020, <www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/nov/11/dissatisfied-tory-mps-flock-to-erg-inspired-pressure-groups> [accessed 14 June 2021].

¹⁹ Geraldine Kendall Adams, ‘Government interference in heritage threatens freedom of speech, warn historians’, *Museum Association News*, 21 March 2021, <www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/government-interference-in-heritage-threatens-freedom-of-speech-warn-historians/> [accessed 14 June 2021].

regions.²⁰ Beyond the UK, perhaps the most striking recent example is the Russian courts' decision to liquidate the human rights organisation Memorial in December 2021, which has drawn widespread criticism and accusations of 'memory scrubbing', as the title of a recent documentary by independent Russian television channel TV Rain puts it.²¹ Memorial had been combining statistical and documentary methods of analysis with memory studies and visual, affective, material and object-based histories for years, tirelessly presenting histories of repression and honouring the memories of its victims.²² Historical narratives are often contested and always open to revision, but the close connection between narrative and nation, as well as the process of revision itself, has generated acute anxieties in recent times. History is in a very public spotlight. Each of the pieces in this issue offers different ways of responding to the challenges that this presents, using the techniques and insights that public history can provide.

Each of the following contributions thus holds important lessons for all historical scholarship. The subject matter addressed in this issue is diverse geographically and thematically and in the process takes in decolonisation, affect theory, early modern English commensality, history education, and African American history, to name a few. Contributors include those working in heritage and public history and early career researchers who focus on these topics, but also individuals who would not ordinarily consider themselves to be public historians at all. Diversity of subject and authorship is also reflected in the range of formats and styles on show, from short provocations and roundtable discussions to the more familiar long-form research article. What unites these contributions, as

²⁰ 'Historians call for a review of Home Office Citizenship and Settlement Test', published 21 July 2020, <<https://www.historyjournal.org.uk/2020/07/21/historians-call-for-a-review-of-home-office-citizenship-and-settlement-test/>> [accessed 14 June 2021]. See also Frank Trentmann, 'Britain first: The official history of the United Kingdom according to the Home Office – a critical review', 11 September 2020, <<https://www.historyjournal.org.uk/2020/09/11/britain-first-the-official-history-of-the-united-kingdom-according-to-the-home-office-a-critical-review/>>; Phil Mercer, 'Australia contemplates controversy surrounding its National Day', *Voice of America*, 23 Jan. 2021, <www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/australia-contemplates-controversy-surrounding-its-national-day>; Jonathan King, 'Simple solution to solve Australia Day controversy', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Jan. 2021, <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/simple-solution-to-solve-australia-day-controversy-20210124-p56whw.html>>; Nora McGreevy, 'Why is the Dutch royal family's golden carriage so controversial?', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 14 Sept. 2020, <www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/netherlands-retire-carriage-dutch-golden-coach-180975791/> [all accessed 14 June 2021]; Janaki Nair, 'Textbook controversies and the demand for a past: public lives of Indian history', *History Workshop Journal*, 82 (2016), pp. 235–54; Michael Belgrave, 'Brave new curriculum: Aotearoa New Zealand history and New Zealand's schools', *International Public History*, 3/2 (2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1515/iph-2020-2007>> [accessed 14 June 2021] (online only).

²¹ See the film screening and webinar held on 27 Jan. 2022, <https://www.us02web.zoom.us/join/register/WN_0qABCyTaQi6HZOO2kICcYg?fbclid=IwAR2q3dWip-A1s8L0M-xlr8OguITWQUi5hs684Jmw3xCJCKhooOikRc3avo0> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

²² Some recent examples of this work: <www.memo.ru/en-us/projects/vystavka-eto-lichnoe-predmety-iz-konclagerej>; <<https://www.memo.ru/en-us/projects/vystavka-material>> [both accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

we explain in more detail below, is not only their interest in public history, broadly defined, but also their ability to provoke significant questions and ideas about power and process, and about history's potential to harm and to help. These are questions that we believe all historians need to consider. We have been inspired by these contributions and have learned a great deal from them; we are certain that we will be drawing on these questions and ideas in our own historical work in future.

IV

The methods and approaches of public history draw particularly sharp attention to questions about who controls the stories told about the past. Historians are often adept at recognising questions of power and marginalisation as they operate in other times (and places), but are sometimes less attentive to the impact of the same forces on the present: on the kinds of history that are, and can be, produced and shared today. As many of the articles in this issue demonstrate, this is not something that anyone working with history can afford to ignore.

This issue is very much at the fore in Laura A. Macaluso's contribution, which reflects on one museum's short-lived display of a Civil War-era Battle Flag of the Army of North Virginia, also known as the Confederate flag. By highlighting which voices were heard in the process of deciding on and designing this display, who was *not* included, invited or involved, and where the final decision-making powers lay, this piece argues that an important opportunity to challenge the kind of history in circulation in and around the town of Lynchburg, Virginia, was entirely (and intentionally) missed. In an attempt to provide a 'neutral' display that would not prompt public outcry, connections between past and present were purposefully ignored and the dominant historical narratives associated with the flag went unchallenged. Similarly, O'Neil Joseph's article addresses the idealised narratives about Tobago's history upon which the island's tourism sector relies, to satisfy economic and political goals. The requirements of public policy are very much involved in shaping the dominant stories in circulation, which often fail to acknowledge the contributions of enslaved Africans, the role of European empire-building and the fact of slavery itself in Tobago. Good public history practice would, these articles argue, lead to different processes and outcomes (and already has, to some extent, in Tobago), but these issues are not only relevant to those working with history in public spaces. All historians need to recognise the cultural, social and political contexts in which they operate, and could benefit from reflecting on how this shapes – and perhaps restricts – their work. Direct external influence inspired by commercial or political interests may be easy enough to spot, but all historical research and its presentation to others are in conversation with a wider world in more subtle ways too.

As the roundtable discussion in this issue between past and present members of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race and Community Engagement

Centre in Manchester illustrates, those who work as historians in universities also need to recognise that they are a part of this context, and can wield considerable power. This is not only about access to academic resources, including funding (although that can be extremely important). It is also about the actual stories that academic historians produce about the past. Discussants raised concerns about historians 'extracting' material from local communities, and then imposing their own views about what matters and what stories should be told with such material. This has immediate resonance for anyone working with recent history, who may be participating in oral histories or accessing personal archives. It has broader resonance too, as corporations and organisations co-opt historical actors and their words or images. The use of Martin Luther King's words and image by businesses whose own practices and ethics stand in stark contrast to King's radical anticapitalism is one such example; so, too, is the troubling use of photographs of 'convicts' to sell wine.²³ Individuals will naturally bring their own ideas to any kind of historical source, but this discussion provides a salutary reminder that all historians should think carefully and critically about their own assumptions and beliefs, and about their responsibilities as those who control – at least to some degree – the kinds of stories that will be circulation in the future. Which versions of the past do we marginalise or ignore?

Museums are often a particularly clear embodiment of these decisions and the dominant historical narratives that are generated as a result. Many museums are now paying close attention to their own origins and how this has affected their collections and displays: some, including the Pitt Rivers Museum and Science Museums Group in the UK and Cultural AI Lab in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, are beginning to revise the language used to describe their collections, to present critical reflections about how they were acquired, and to encourage conversations that challenge received wisdom – albeit not without dispute at times from parts of the public and from organs of the state. Moving the focus away from long-established museums that need to address their entanglements with empire-building, racism and other iterations of power, Amorette Grace Lyngwa examines in this issue the curatorial practices of museums dedicated to community and culture in Meghalaya, in north-east India. Although these are relatively young museums that aim to centre Indigenous knowledge and communities, Lyngwa shows that the legacy of colonial museums is difficult to escape. This legacy restricts the kinds of histories that can be presented, even when Indigenous communities are themselves involved, in some senses, with the museums.

Fraser Raeburn, Lisa Baer-Tsarfati and Viktoria Porter's contribution to this issue examines one of the first 'born digital' history conferences,

²³ See Julia Laite's rich reflections on this, and other troubling uses of history – including the historian's impulse to 'rescue' people from obscurity, whether they might welcome the rescue or not – in 'The emmet's inch: small history in a digital age', *Journal of Social History*, 53/4 (2020), pp. 963–89.

the AskHistorians Digital Conference held in September 2020. In their insightful review of the planning, design and delivery of this ambitious event, the authors draw attention to the ways in which the conference built on the democratising principles underpinning the pre-existing AskHistorians project, and the vast public appetite for high-quality historical scholarship that this project had exposed. Sharing the successes, strengths and challenges of the conference, the authors argue that digital conferences have great potential to help overcome persistent inequalities within academia, and the barriers between academic historians and a much wider public of people eagerly crafting and consuming history. Such conferences can ensure that history is in the hands of a wider array of people, including students, keen amateurs and others who are often excluded, including academics in the Global South and those for whom disability, finance or caring responsibilities make conference attendance in person a real challenge. Exclusions emanating from professional history have been highlighted in numerous ways in recent times, the Royal Historical Society's recent series of reports on gender, LGBT+ histories and historians, and race, ethnicity and equality providing just one example.²⁴ More than ever, those working with history have the resources and information to ensure that their professional practices are not unthinkingly exclusionary, whether in the classroom, the learned society meeting, or indeed the conference.

Finally, as Huw Halstead argues in this issue, it is important to take seriously the histories that people create themselves all the time. These histories draw on and weigh up a range of evidence, from personal memories and experiences to shared stories, media reporting, school textbooks, cultural outputs and more. Everyone places these sources in conversation with personal and contemporary interests, to build stories that have value for their present. In telling stories about the past, including those that historians may consider to be factually incorrect or deeply flawed, Halstead's interviewees are 'active agents in the construction of their histories and arrive at the versions of the past that they do for a reason'.²⁵ For anyone to be able to intercede and engage with these everyday histories, these reasons are important. This is just as true for historians engaging with historiographical questions as for those engaging with a wider public: recent scholarship from within the history

²⁴ Nicola Miller, Kenneth Fincham, Margot Finn, Sarah Holland, Christopher Kissane, and Mary Vincent, 'Promoting Gender Equality in UK History: A second report and recommendations for good practice' (Royal Historical Society, November 2018); Frances Andrews, Pippa Catterall, Imogen Evans, Margot Finn, Katherine Foxhall, Alix Green, Onni Gust, Alana Harris, Mark Pendleton, and Andrew Spicer, 'LGBT+ Histories and Historians' (Royal Historical Society, September 2020); Hannah Atkinson, Suzanne Bardgett, Adam Budd, Margot Finn, Christopher Kissane, Sadiyah Qureshi, Jonathan Saha, John Siblon and Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change' (Royal Historical Society, October 2018). Available online at <<https://www.royalhistsoc.org/policy/gender-equality/>>, <https://www.royalhistsoc.org/policy/lgbt/> and <<https://www.royalhistsoc.org/policy/race/>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

²⁵ Huw Halstead, 'Everyday public history', this issue, p. 244.

of medicine has provided a reminder of the contingent and contextually specific nature of historical concepts and what constitutes historical evidence.²⁶ Why do certain ideas and methods gain acceptance and power at specific times? This is relevant to all those engaging with histories that prove difficult to dislodge – including those that exist in primarily academic spheres.

Although everyone has *some* control over the histories in circulation, in the creation of Halstead's everyday histories, not all forms of evidence – and not all histories and history-tellers – have equal purchase. Naomi Petropoulos provides an example, in this issue, of histories collated and shared as a direct reaction to more powerful narratives about the events of Bloody Sunday, which gradually attained their own power over time; Erin Katherine Krafft, Rikki Davis and E. Denise Meza-Reidpath allude to the marginalisation of histories of violence, slavery, policing and incarceration within US curricula, and describe one project that sought to address these histories in radical new ways. Historians can learn a great deal from public history methods and theories that reflect directly on questions of power, in the doing and making of history – and from other disciplines, too. History-adjacent disciplines such as sociology, economics, anthropology, statistics and geography have a place within historical approaches, as demonstrated by the *Annales* school of history, for one, and many such disciplines have engaged in explicit efforts to acknowledge and respond to issues of power and subjectivity within knowledge creation. Saidiya Hartman is one of a number of scholars who have also demonstrated the potential for histories that test the boundaries of history itself to reflect very directly on these issues, and to produce alternative stories about the past that acknowledge their presence and weight.²⁷

V

The work of public history also brings focus to the process of history-making itself: what kind of source material is created; what is preserved; who can then access it; what stories are finally told; and where do those stories appear, across all kinds of formats from scholarly monographs to heritage sites to novels to songs.²⁸ Often, as several contributions to this issue describe, public history work is closely involved in the first stages of the process, in which material is gathered or generated, and preserved. The work of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Centre and Education Trust is one

²⁶ Chris Millard, 'Concepts, diagnosis and the history of medicine: historicising Ian Hacking and Munchausen Syndrome', *Social History of Medicine*, 30/3 (2017), pp. 567–89, and Chris Millard, 'Using personal experience in the academic medical humanities: a genealogy', *Social Theory and Health*, 18 (2020), pp. 184–98.

²⁷ Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in two acts', *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 12/2 (2008), pp. 1–13; Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (London, 2019).

²⁸ This account of the process of history-making harks back to Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, and also Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*.

such example. The roundtable in this issue addresses the Centre's efforts to gather resources, including oral histories, to do with the history of racialised and marginalised communities in Greater Manchester. Thanks to the Centre's ethos of carrying out anti-racist work, this requires the active participation of the communities most closely connected to these histories. From Boyle Heights Museum in Los Angeles, Michelle Vasquez Ruiz also reflects on the artefacts and oral sources produced, held and circulated within and between communities and participants, and the methods and perspectives brought by Museum team members to the 'bridge-work' of co-creating new historical resources.

This work finds common ground with many other public history projects that generate new kinds of sources or encourage recognition and preservation of existing material that may be at risk of going unnoticed. While object handling and play are beginning to be incorporated into university pedagogy, pertinent examples in the UK include the activities of regional museums in Yorkshire, where curators and learning teams have sought to involve local communities in exactly these kinds of efforts. Scarborough Museums' 'Outside the Box' project employed object-based learning methods in 'reminiscence sessions', designed to build local residents' narratives into public memory and to foster community bonds through the sharing of personal historical testimony. Through the shared efforts of participants, volunteers and local students, an 'archive of living memory' was created, generating new historical resources and embedding new perspectives within the museums' curatorial work.²⁹ Similarly, Heritage Doncaster's 'Living Room Museums' initiative, devised during the national lockdowns and closure of museums, asked local residents to select and present objects from their own homes. This moved the traditional loci of heritage interest away from the authority of museum cabinets and towards the everyday, encouraging recognition of historical artefacts (and narratives) to be found all around.³⁰ Exhibitions contributed by the community included contemporary items and even pets,³¹ as well as items selected for a more obvious historical significance such as wartime love tokens and mid-century holiday gifts. Whether contemporary or historical, local or global in provenance, each photograph is itself a newly archived source, as is the description that accompanies it.³²

²⁹ Henry Irving, 'Teaching with objects in lockdown', *Social History Teaching Exchange*, <https://www.socialhistory.org.uk/shs_exchange/teaching-with-objects-in-lockdown/> [accessed 10 Jan. 2022]; 'Outside the Box' run by the Scarborough Museums Trust, <<https://www.scarboroughmuseustrust.com/outside-the-box/>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

³⁰ 'Living Room Museum', organised by Heritage Doncaster, <www.heritagedoncaster.org.uk/heritage-at-home/livingroommuseum/> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

³¹ Katie and Eby's Museum Part 1, featuring Eby the cat: <www.flickr.com/photos/188271275@N02/49922466573/in/album-72157714411051502> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

³² Examples of these include Harry's Living Room Museum, featuring a blanket, soft toy, animal encyclopaedia, toy penguin, novelty souvenir and ornamental dog: <www.flickr.com/photos/188271275@N02/49926084856/in/album-72157714420771321>; Simon's Living Room

Such efforts are also often sensitive to the material and people who remain absent from these exhibitions and stories, and the potential for paternalistic or patronising interventions and demands. Conscious of the potential of the pandemic to accentuate existing silences in their local historical narratives regarding women's histories and the region's links with enslavement, the Cotswolds Centre for Heritage and History, made up of staff and students at the University of Gloucestershire, adapted their techniques in the face of the isolation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, revising both the environments of their research and their research questions.³³ Sheffield's cross-organisational 'Roots and Futures' project, whose first phase was an app to map community engagements with north Sheffield's archaeological past, has sought to facilitate the telling of diverse histories told by different communities, through formal, informal and creative consultations. It has produced its reports in English and Arabic, helping to ensure that the history of the north of England is more widely accessible to its citizens.³⁴ A community-based impetus for the creation and preservation of historical sources is also strongly present in Portia D. Hopkins's focus piece, which details efforts to create an archive for the St John Missionary Baptist Church in Texas. Its own physical archive (and building) was destroyed by a devastating fire in 2006, and Hopkins shows an active congregation at work to locate and generate material about the history of their church and its founders who, as once-enslaved African Americans and Freedmen, have only a limited presence in state archives. This means thinking creatively about where material might be found and conducting genealogical work to build up individual histories; also essential to the project are oral histories, which are combined with textual fragments to produce new historical stories about the African American past in Texas. Hopkins presents a valuable model for other community-led public history projects seeking to produce and preserve the building blocks of new histories.

Amorette Grace Lyngwa tackles the processes of history-making as well, in the context of museums about Indigenous life. By comparing different approaches to cultural heritage, Lyngwa reflects on the kind of

Museum, featuring his grandfather's projector's and reels, and potentially featuring images of Simon's grandfather: <www.flickr.com/photos/188271275@N02/49854820872/in/album-72157714161607322>; Begona and Francesca's Living Room Museum, featuring family heirlooms, vintage cameras, childhood toys and mid-century furniture: <www.flickr.com/photos/188271275@N02/49937678926/in/photostream>; Tracy D.'s Living Room Museum, featuring a piece of the Berlin Wall collected by Tracy's mother, a Dutch Star of David Badge dating to the Holocaust, and a lead sailor with attached love notes from the Second World War, gifted by a family friend: <www.flickr.com/photos/188271275@N02/49923364522/in/album-72157714410705838> [all accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

³³ 'Lockdown Life Stories' Project, *Cotswold Centre for History and Heritage*, <<https://www.cc4h.co.uk/2021/03/31/lockdown-life-stories/>> [accessed 1 Feb. 2022].

³⁴ Roots and Futures Blog, <<https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/roots-and-futures/home>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022]; Roots and Futures App, <<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ace270a41ef34915906e78e5581bd9f2>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

resources that are most often recognised as ‘significant’ and preserved in these museums – objects such as clothing, weapons, baskets and musical instruments, thought to be at risk of becoming obsolete and disappearing for good. Intangible heritage – memories, stories, traditions, experiences, music itself – is often missing. This article also turns to the final stages of history-making as well: who accesses these resources and what stories about the past they tell. Inasmuch as they are located in static displays with little context, Lyngwa sees no connection between past and present in these museums, not least because there is limited exchange and interaction with local communities themselves. Within these museums, Indigenous communities are frozen in time: the stories told about them are a snapshot of one moment, with little insight into what this means today. Like Lyngwa, O’Neil Joseph also offers reflections on different kinds of sources and stories on offer in public spaces in this issue, describing the role of villagers in Tobago who share stories about silk-cotton trees. Trees and tales become historical resources, helping to overcome silences within the written archive.

Public history tackles many complex ideas about history-making, as Ola Innset discusses in this issue. Using a series of events held at the National Library of Norway in 2019–20 as a case study, Innset argues that even seemingly traditional events for the general public, such as a panel discussion about a well-known historical event, can encourage engagement with ‘metahistorical perspectives’. These perspectives include attention to the processes by which particular events or moments accrue meaning, and the circumstances that prompt those meanings to change. History is presented as ‘a contested and open-ended space’, created and altered by all those invested in the meanings attributed to the past.³⁵ In thinking about ways to present this potentially unsettling view of history to different audiences, public history demands close attention to the nuts and bolts of our stories about the past: how do they come into being (or not, as the case may be), and what sustains them? This connects with Huw Halstead’s reminder that history is ‘never singular, straightforward or authoritative’.³⁶ Public history directs attention to how and why particular stories gain purchase, and to the alternatives that always lurk in the sidelines.

The authors of ‘Out of the Ivory Tower’ also provide reflections on the processes of history-making, as part of their case for inclusive online conferences. The conversations that took place at the 2020 AskHistorians Digital Conference between a wide array of people interested in history – including academic historians, students, activists and curious enthusiasts – were themselves a part of this process. Discovering how to formulate useful historical questions; thinking of new angles on familiar topics; making new connections; noticing omissions or uncertainties;

³⁵ Ola Innset, ‘Metahistory as public history: on introducing metahistorical perspectives in events about events’, this issue, p. 393.

³⁶ Halstead, ‘Everyday public history’, this issue, p. 236.

hypothesising possible explanations; persuading others of their validity: these are all necessary parts of the process of historical research and analysis, and they were being undertaken on a large and collaborative scale throughout the conference, to the benefit of seasoned history-workers and novices alike. The authors call for all historians to recognise the potential for conferences – previously only accessible to a small number of professionals – to become a form of public history; in so doing, they direct our attention to the steps by which historical knowledge is produced, and the scope, or need, for these steps to be undertaken with others.

Anna Fielding draws attention in this issue to the involvement of front-of-house museum staff and volunteers, who can be under-acknowledged in heritage practice and are crucial to the development and delivery of powerful engagements. Reflecting on the impulses behind many institutionally led public history practices, Fielding's innovative re-theorisation of the elusive 'emotional impact' of National Trust early modern heritage sites asserts that beyond the immediate strategic benefits to collaborations between heritage practitioners and university academics, attention to the affective and embodied (rather than emotional) experience of heritage sites generates new, complex and challenging historical narratives. Sensory and physical activities, such as re-enactment (see Figure 2), embroidery, or gardening, or immersive and disruptive spatial layouts, offer such opportunities. Because they resonate powerfully with recent interventions on the political potential of hauntology in heritage studies, Fielding explores the intersections of material and immaterial assemblages, which generate history's affective qualities. O'Neil Joseph also highlights the power of physical engagement to generate memory as well as history, as Tobagonians gather and re-enact past events as part of the annual Tobago Heritage Festival. These rituals and performances 'become manifestations of memory' *and* methods for transferring memories, involving many community members as the keepers of historical resources and as historical storytellers. With its close attention to archival gaps, its willingness to actively generate or embrace new kinds of historical sources, and its emphasis on developing new historical narratives (and methods of sharing them) that resonate with other people, public history challenges all historians to think carefully and imaginatively about how, exactly, they make history.

VI

For those who think of themselves as historians of one kind or another, it can be hard to recognise that investigating and sharing histories is not always an unfettered good. Many of the articles in this issue provide reminders of the dangers of historical work that fails to consider its potential to cause harm. Many of those working with oral history are particularly sensitive to this, and have led the way in providing reflections



Figure 2 Italian Re-enactment Group demonstrates the *testudo* of Roman soldiers in the Archeon, Alphen aan de Rijn (the Netherlands) as part of the museum's sensory activities. Picture by Ziko: <https://www.commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2008-08_archeon_testudo.JPG> [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

on practical and ethical frameworks to protect those whose own past is implicated and the historians who work with them.³⁷

Often, in the context of public history projects that address the recent past, participants recognise the risks and this will limit the sources that can be generated or shared. In this issue, coercive border regimes make their presence felt on several occasions as one such risk. In the Boyle Heights Museum team's joint reflection, Cassandra Flores-Montaño recounts the decision of a multi-generational family of women who declined to be included in the Museum's exhibition on past and present local entrepreneurship, fearing the consequences for their safety as a family with mixed immigration statuses. This is mirrored in the RACE Centre's oral history and learning resource project 'The Distance we have Travelled', discussed in the roundtable in this issue by Jackie Ould. The project conducted interviews with Kurdish, Afghan and Somali

³⁷ Examples include Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, 'Who's afraid of oral history? Fifty years of debates and anxieties about oral history and ethics', *The Oral History Review*, 43/2 (2016), pp. 338–66; Emma Vickers, 'Unexpected trauma in oral interviewing', *The Oral History Review*, 46/1 (2019), pp. 134–41; Jessica Hammett, Agnes Arnold-Forster, Jenny Barke, James Dawkins, Hannah Elizabeth, Aleema Gray, Sophie Holley, Kate Mahoney, Claire Nunan and Yewande Okuleye, *Researcher Wellbeing: Guidelines for History Researchers* (June 2021), <<http://www.researcherwellbeing.blogs.bristol.ac.uk>> [accessed 17 Jan. 2022].

refugees in and around Manchester with the aim of confronting harmful ideas about asylum seekers in tabloid newspapers. Its activities were interrupted by the UK government's decision to return Kurdish people to Iraq, rendering any public use of their interviews dangerous for Kurdish interviewees, who requested that their accounts were not included.³⁸

O'Neil Joseph's article in this issue raises different questions about the scope for harm within public history and heritage. The Courland monument in Tobago, one of Joseph's case studies, was built in the 1970s and commemorates the Latvian colonists that arrived on the island in the seventeenth century. It is also now seen by some as a physical manifestation of enduring European power and influence, at the expense of African heritage and history on the island. The monument is a site that 'aggravates the wounds of the island's colonial past' and is 'complicated by emotional investments'.³⁹ Many tourists from Latvia come to Tobago each year but, as Joseph argues, they are presented with an idealised history of adventure and enterprise in the past, not slavery, colonisation and suffering. What is more, Joseph points out that white European tourists being entertained and served by Afro-Tobagonians also threatens to perpetuate extractive and exploitative colonial practices in the present day, re-enacting history in more subtle ways. Heritage may be lucrative, but in Tobago (and elsewhere), it has power to do harm at the same time.

Naomi Petropoulos also touches on the potential for public history to be deeply divisive. Public history is, as she points out, always political. In post-conflict societies and where communities remain divided, any engagements with historical events, artefacts and actors that touch on the sources of those divisions will prompt particularly strong feelings.⁴⁰ In the case of Bloody Sunday and the community in and associated with Derry, the public history work carried out by the Bloody Sunday Trust and Museum of Free Derry is not universally welcomed: they have been accused of prolonging tensions, making reconciliation impossible. From another angle, Laura A. Macaluso's discussion in this issue of the 2020 Confederate flag exhibition at the Lynchburg Museum in Virginia highlights the impact of a reluctance to engage fully with contested histories. As Macaluso argues, this display made no reference to the uses of the flag in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and lacked sufficient space for the community to reflect and respond. Political pressures and fear of community backlash led to an element of avoidance, rendering the museum complicit in perpetuating inequality.

The very instability and multiplicity of history that many pieces in this issue identify is itself a risk. The risks are heightened in heritage and public

³⁸ The educational resource that emerged from this project is by Simon Longman and Sam Kaluboliwa, 'The distance we have travelled', published 16 July 2019 and available online at <<http://www.racearchive.org.uk/download/the-distance-we-have-travelled/>> [accessed 4 Jan. 2022].

³⁹ O'Neil Joseph, 'History and public memory in Tobago: opportunities and obstacles', this issue, p. 258.

⁴⁰ See also Olwen Purdue, 'Troubling pasts: teaching public history in Northern Ireland', *International Public History*, 4/1 (2021), pp. 65–76.

history work, where the goals of interacting with a wide audience mean that its methods and messages have significant, often immediate, impact. This does not mean that the risk of doing harm is absent for those with less direct public interaction – only that the harms might be less visible, surfacing in more distant times and more subdued formats. History's dialogic and pluralist nature is an essential part of the discipline, and histories are never 'neutral'. Personal beliefs and contemporary concerns and pressures always shape historical work; all historians should be aware of these, and to minimise the risks of harm, should reflect on their own values, goals, and which voices or perspectives they do (and do not) include.

VII

This should not make historians despondent: far from it. As many of the articles in this issue have illustrated, there is a huge public appetite for history in many forms, and it can be an extremely powerful tool. The methods of public history and the stories that it generates can bring about major change in social and political life. Public history at its best can transform national and transnational narratives, with profound impacts upon how people see and inhabit the world. All historians – 'public' or not – can draw inspiration from this.

One clear benefit is the potential for public history to build connections and solidarity. This is at the fore in the collaborative reflection from Boyle Heights Museum team members Jorge N. Leal, Yesenia Navarrete Hunter, Michelle Vasquez Ruiz, Cassandra Flores-Montaño, Arabella Delgado, Rosa Noriega-Rocha, Isis Galeno, Ivonne Rodriguez and Alexander Polt-Gifford and in this issue. Reflecting on the importance of *confianza*, or trust, team members emphasise the importance of reciprocity and horizontal decision-making in developing *confianza*, and in the project's success. Overcoming potential barriers between ethnicities, languages, backgrounds and generations in the Boyle Heights community, the museum aims to celebrate the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood, document its struggles, and spotlight a history of mutual support and civic resistance. Responding to the community's needs, this project encourages participation and a sense of collectiveness and belonging. There are significant methodological reflections here, for anyone involved in collaborative work of any kind.

Similarly, for anyone involved in education there is much to learn from 'Public history and collective transformation' in this issue. RIOT RI, a charity based in Providence, Rhode Island, typically uses music as its mode of engagement to promote critical thinking and collaboration among marginalised young people and adults, but history provided the tools for the community project described in this piece. Here, history is a powerful vehicle: the authors describe their focus on 'histories of slavery, incarceration, policing, abolition and transformative justice practices' as a

pathway towards ‘confronting and dismantling systems of oppression’.⁴¹ Essential to this project was its approach to collaborative pedagogy, which focused on dialogue and communication within non-hierarchical groups. Drawing on the ‘problem-posing’ model of education put forward by Paulo Friere, participants learnt from each other and could reflect on the personal and collective resonance of the past in the present. This piece is not only a reminder of the transformative potential of history education, it also provides all history educators with important lessons about processes of knowledge *exchange*, rather than delivery, that spaces for learning should facilitate.

Relatedly, public history draws attention to the power of histories that are created by and with communities – and especially communities that have, or begin to develop, their own connections to those histories. In his analysis of the Tobago Heritage Festival in this issue, Joseph describes public history as an experience that ‘meets people where they are and affects how they make sense of their lives’. Tobagonians participating in the festival are affected, as ‘knowledge producers and framers of Tobago’s historical narrative’.⁴² Those involved in the Bloody Sunday Trust and Museum of Free Derry are also the producers and framers of history. Here, self-consciously becoming ‘creators and curators’ is a form of activism. In their challenge to official histories of Bloody Sunday, the historian-activist-campaigner-curators involved in the trust and the museum made use of public history, and particularly its potential to connect powerfully with specific places and to prompt emotional reactions, to achieve many of their goals.

Anna Fielding also draws attention to the affective and spatial elements of public history in this issue. In her case studies of National Trust sites that have engaged with histories of early modern sleep and commensality, Fielding argues that collaborations between academia and heritage can become particularly powerful when they make use of affective – rather than emotional – engagements, heeding the individual responses that visitors will have. Transmitting ideas about the past through embodied experiences of everyday events and rituals is powerful, and participants give and gain their own distinctive interpretations and experiences. These kinds of encounters with the past can provide routes to address disputed or divisive national histories.⁴³ Fielding’s findings complement the spatial and affective qualities of Boyle Heights Museum’s open-air walking tours, initially born of pandemic requirements but which have since become a mainstay of the museum’s work. These initiatives find company in the Black History walking tours of Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Cardiff, which operate alongside creative collaborations including art festivals and

⁴¹ Erin Katherine Krafft, Rikki Davis and E. Denise Meza-Reidpath, ‘Public history and collective transformation: a case study of un/learning the state’, this issue, p. 327.

⁴² Joseph, ‘History and public memory in Tobago’, this issue, pp. 265, 267.

⁴³ Michael Buser, ‘The time is out of joint: atmosphere and hauntology at Bodiam Castle’, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 25 (2017), pp. 5–13.

workshops to embed a deeper knowledge of local histories within the community, including histories of racism.⁴⁴

Public history has great potential to overcome boundaries of many kinds: between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ histories; between ‘expert’ and ‘amateur’ historians; across time; across space; even between the human and non-human. On a practical level, Ola Innset suggests in this issue that public history experts, such as the public events officer, can be seen as a valuable ‘go-between figure’ who bridges gaps that can exist between academic historians and a wide public. In another sense, and with an equally concrete example, Raeburn, Baer-Tsarfaty and Porter show that online history conferences can, if carefully conceived and delivered, dismantle boundaries between ‘historian’ and ‘audience’, in terms of who is learning and who is *creating* historical knowledge. Moreover, online spaces offer the possibility for the co-creation of historical knowledge to cross not only professional distinctions, but global borders. Online spaces are not without their own accessibility issues, but there is considerable scope for historical-making to be shared and undertaken more widely than ever before, with all the benefits that this brings. Together, these insights and methods from public history should encourage all historians to reflect on what their histories can do, and the methods through which this is achieved.

VIII

Collating this issue has been informative and enriching for us as an editorial team. We began this issue hoping to provide a forum for early-career scholars to showcase their expertise, and to demonstrate the value of their work in ways that would transcend its justification through institutional metrics. We have been humbled by the expertise and intellectual generosity of the contributors to this issue, including our many peer reviewers, from whom we have learnt a great deal. The curation of this issue has increased our own awareness of the methods and philosophies of public history enormously and has prompted us to think in new ways about our own research, teaching, ambitions and practice as historians: we hope that this brief introduction has been able to convey some of this richness.

We do need to note the limitations of this issue, and more importantly, to draw attention to the potential they offer for further inquiry. Although we have endeavoured to include a broad range of geographical perspectives, the focus of this issue remains somewhat skewed towards Anglo-American histories: as public history continues to grow, insights

⁴⁴ Heritage Corner Leeds’s Black History Walks, <<https://www.heritagecornerleeds.com/>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022]; Black History Wales, <<https://www.bhmwales.org.uk>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022]; Scotland Group: Black History Walking Tour of Edinburgh, <<https://www.icon.org.uk/events/scotland-group-black-history-walking-tour-of-edinburgh.html>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022]; ‘Episode 1’, *Slavery: Scotland’s Hidden Shame*, BBC Scotland 2018.

from elsewhere in the world – and from public history projects that start with transnational vantage points – will be invaluable. There is also little in this issue about history and policymaking, for all that many of the case studies and analyses are concerned, however indirectly, with matters of public policy. Public history often seeks to effect change at the local level and in conversation with marginalised communities, and many historians do take steps to engage with policymakers and other influential people.⁴⁵ What might these two strands of practice have to learn from each other?

It is striking – although perhaps not surprising – that very few of the histories under scrutiny or comment in this issue make reference to the pre-modern era. Although archaeology and public history have begun to develop close connections, it remains the case that the more recent past often lends itself more readily to the modes of thought and practice that public history promotes.⁴⁶ As Fielding points out in this issue, histories beyond living memory can demand different approaches. Family history, too, makes only passing appearances in this issue, although cross-generational exchange is central to the work taking place at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre and at Boyle Heights Museum and the Museum of Free Derry too. And, although access and activism are recurring themes throughout this issue, the field of disability history is conspicuous in its absence. Methods and concepts from these sub-fields all have much to offer. Nevertheless, we hope that the interventions made by this issue form robust starting points for more creative and daring historical practices; for collaborations between practitioners and researchers of all backgrounds, for solidarity and co-creation, and for new areas of enquiry into the relationships between people and between the present and the past.

This issue confronts the inescapable stakes involved in ‘doing’ history, and public history in particular. As noted by Erika Dyck, to ‘do’ history – to make, write, tell history – is an inherently political act, imbued with unequal power relationships and bringing considerable responsibility.⁴⁷ The context in which this issue has been produced, during 2020–1, has exposed more than ever some of the fault lines in societies around the world. It is our hope that the work presented by this issue establishes engaging grounds for the production and protection of decolonial histories that have value for the communities that need them, and for historians of all stripes to reflect on their methods, their role and their responsibilities.

⁴⁵ To see some of the scope for connections between history and policy, see the work of History & Policy: <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/>> [accessed 31 Jan. 2022].

⁴⁶ On archaeology and public history, see for example Tracy Ireland, ‘The archaeological archive: material traces and recovered histories’, in Ashton and Trapeznik (eds), *What is Public History Globally?*, pp. 187–98.

⁴⁷ Erika Dyck, ‘Doing history that matters: going public and activating voices as a form of historical activism’, *Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences*, 57 (2021), pp. 75–86, at p. 76.

History is, as we have shown, a collective endeavour. We are truly grateful to all of the contributors to this issue for sharing their inspiring research, under some extremely challenging circumstances, and always on schedule. Nor would we have been able to deliver this issue without the assistance of the many colleagues who agreed to review one or several articles during particularly trying times. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge their invaluable contribution and to thank them all: Shahmima Akhtar, Benedetta Albani, Ellie Armon Azoulay, Gönül Bozoğlu, Hester Dibbits, Tyler DeWayne Moore, Ann-Marie Foster, Elizabeth Goodwin, Erika Harlitz-Kern, Julie Holder, Henry Irving, Laura King, Sarah Kenny, Modupe Labode, Lindsey Passenger Wieck, Nick Sacco, Margo Shea, Rosie Spooner, Brenna Spray, Bess Williamson, and those who preferred to remain anonymous. We also very much appreciate the time and insights of those who reviewed the issue as a whole. Last but not least, we are extremely grateful to the team at *History* and particularly the journal's editor, Becky Taylor, for her generous support and unfailing encouragement.

PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/1468-229X.13273>