

Community conversations

When you have created a space
for community conversations to take place
what you can't do is go in
with a certain set of expectations
because who knows what will happen?
Sometimes you get moments
of tension and conflict
and other times you get
really lovely connections
and unexpected things
that you just wouldn't have ever planned for.
But what's important
is building in the time for you to be able
to reflect on that conversation,
so that when it comes to the point
where you decide whether it is
just a community conversation,
or whether it's a project
or something that we could action
and the museum could support
to take forward, you've got enough time
to go back to that community
and find out what it is they want
and to see how that aligns
with what the museum is doing at that time.
I think the successes of some
of Hackney Museum's biggest projects
has been in the lack of ego.
And that at some point in the process
you have to hand your project to somebody else,
possibly to move it upwards within the council
or to a completely different service,
but you move it in the way

that is the right way
for the project and the people
and not because you want to have
the museum's name next to it, for example.
As well as a wealth of experience working in the field
I think the other key skills that people have
are a real understanding of people, objects and stories.
And that you can have
a very limited collection,
maybe just one object,
but if you understand the potential of that object
to tell stories and help people
to unlock their own stories, then that's invaluable.
So by placing people's stories
in a historical context,
what you're doing is allowing those stories
to take on a new life, a new power,
whether that's an educational or a social context.
When you add to that the understanding
of how to create safe spaces for conversations;
difficult or unexpected conversations to take place,
then what you find is you have a museum
that's manoeuvred itself
to be at the heart of a community
and serving the public in a way
that you might not have ever set out to do
but you become something that's really crucial
for community conversations to take place.