

2020: an online festival, a world shrunk by the internet, and a quest for abandoned bathtubs

2021 has not got off to the start we were hoping for, with us once again confined to our homes and Council for British Archaeology (CBA) staff working remotely. For me this is the new normal, having arrived as executive director on April 2 last year in the first week of lockdown. It is looking likely that I will go a full year without meeting CBA staff in person. Yes, we have been

2020 also highlighted how the CBA can better support our members and affiliate groups. In November and December, we held several In Conversation zoom sessions with groups from around the country, aimed at understanding how we might better promote archaeology, the challenges faced by groups, and how we can help people get active again. Two things

were fortunate to be with her during her short illness – she chose her timing well, falling ill between the first and second lockdowns. She was able to be at home, and my sisters and I were with her at the end. This was the first time I had seen someone die. It has changed my world, as you might imagine, but it has also led me to reflect on place and memory. Mum loved nature, the natural environment, trees and the world around her. It was Mum who inspired our curiosity and inquisitiveness. At the time she passed away I did not know how I would fill the void; how would I replace her conversations, and how would I test my thinking and ideas if it was not with Mum? I should not have worried, because her legacy is all around me in the places and memories I have of her, and in how she influenced the way I see the world.

This became apparent in two events over Christmas.

Firstly, my daughter, sister and I spent Christmas Day in a small wood Mum owned in the village we grew up in. Mum loved this place, it's where my dad's ashes are and where we spent many hours as children. To celebrate Mum we had a bonfire, made the family chocolate log and had the best Christmas dinner – al fresco – I have ever had. It was simple, full of memories and inspired by the place – it could not have been the same anywhere else, and



Source: Independent evaluation report, Scott Sullivan Associates & Resources for Change, December 2020

having weekly team Zoom meetings, but I miss the direct conversations that are part of working in a small office.

How quickly we return to normal activities will be a key consideration for us over the next few months, not least for the 2021 CBA Festival of Archaeology. We rapidly adapted our 2020 Festival to an online digital programme in July, but our much hoped-for return to on-the-ground events in October was not possible. We did manage to create some brilliant self-guided activities, such as our Local Explorer Challenge, but they do not replace face-to-face events. Evaluation of the Festival showed that across 18 days of activities in July and October it shrank by two-thirds compared to 2019. Notably, volunteer coordinated events dropped from 67 in 2019 to 12 in 2020. Helping local groups get active in 2021 will be a key strand of our work. Overall, we had over 500,000 participants and a digital reach of over 24 million. It will be fantastic to replicate this in what will be a hybrid festival this year comprising both on-the-ground and digital activities.

made a real impression on me. Firstly, how the internet shrinks the world: in one Zoom conversation I was able to talk to participants in Devon, Sheffield, Northern Ireland, Derbyshire and Northumberland. Secondly, how happy people are to share their creative ideas and solutions from their own experiences with others. This is important in developing the CBA's work – we need to help facilitate these conversations, and maximise the benefits of bringing people together from across the UK. The In Conversation meeting I ran not only allowed me to talk directly to members as individuals, but in an hour, I covered more parts of the country than I ever could in person. Zoom will not replace in-person activities or face-to-face contact, but it has opened new ways of working that will bring us closer to our members and supporters.

Exploring place & memory

For me 2020 will always be remembered as the year my mother passed away. Her death was not covid-19 related, and we

