



S2:E7: Lisa Di Tommaso, Librarian at the Morrab Library.

Transcript

00:00:14 Molly

Hello and welcome to tales from the Leeds Library. The Leeds Library's Podcast series in which we talk to members of our extended community about their lives, their work and their relationship to books, libraries and literature. Founded in 1768, the Leeds Library is the oldest surviving subscription library in the UK and throughout this series we will also be diving periodically into the library's rich history to find out what makes us and our members one of the most interesting and unique cultural institutions in Leeds and the UK.

I'm Molly Magrath, the projects assistant at the Leeds Library and today our guest is Lisa Di Tommaso. Lisa is the librarian at Morrab library in Penzance, the 6th largest independent library in the UK, which is now over 200 years old. Originally from Brisbane, Australia, Lisa moved to London in 2002, firstly working for the National Trust before becoming a special collections librarian at the Natural History Museum. Prior to moving to Penzance in 2018, she was the head of collections at Durham Cathedral, managing the library object collections and its new Open Treasure Museum.

00:01:25 Molly

Hello and welcome, Lisa. Thank you very much for talking to me today on the Leeds Library's podcast. So we're gonna talk about the Morrab library where you're the librarian a bit later but I firstly just want to ask you a little bit about your background in libraries and literature and why were you drawn to librarianship in the first place, what was your journey into libraries like?

00:01:49 Lisa

Ah, well, thank you for having me, Molly. It's a real pleasure. Librarianship was a funny journey. I fell into it, really. In my last year at university back in Australia, during my history degree, my mother passed away and I was at a bit of a loss after that about what to do next and the opportunity of a librarianship masters came up, so I took it. And really, I haven't looked back since then. I do remember being a little offended at the time. At high school though, because my classmates voted me the most likely to become a librarian and I really being horrified at the prospect. But obviously they knew a lot more about me than I did at that time, so here I am.

00:02:26 Molly

So funny, I had this idea a while ago to do a kind of a roundtable of librarians discussing the stereotypes of being the librarian and what was true and what wasn't. But then I thought it might become dangerously, it might reinforce those stereotypes maybe, have the opposite effect. But then I guess you don't seem like your stereotypical librarian, and nor is Jane our librarian here.

00:03:03 Lisa

So yeah, that's true. We were determined when I was at university, at Library school as we called it, but when I was at library school with my colleagues, we all decided we were very scared of the librarians at university. They were a scary bunch of people and a bit unapproachable. So we decided in 1988 that we were going to be the Young Turk librarians who were going to change the world of librarianship and be friendly and approachable, and that's in a way. With me it's quite funny, but we always say no we need to be able to welcome people and make them feel like no question is too silly and it's always been in the

00:03:36 Molly

Yeah, yeah.

00:03:37 Lisa

Back of my mind, actually.

00:03:38 Molly

Well, there is this stereotype that librarians are very cold and scary, but actually I've not found that to be true. Every librarian I've met, has been incredibly kind of warm and generous.

00:03:48 Lisa

I think I think we're always keen to show off our knowledge, yeah? And to help be like, no, you must know this. We know this. So you must know this as well. We must be able to help you find what you need. It's definitely a service role, it's definitely a need to help people.

00:04:04 Molly

Yeah, and you've worked with some fantastic collections in the UK, including the Natural History Museum, can you tell me a little bit about working with the special collections there?

00:04:16 Lisa

I will yeah, so I was extremely lucky I fell on my feet when I arrived in London, I came for a late in life gap year.

00:04:22 Molly

Ah, OK.

00:04:23 Lisa

And that was 20 years ago. I kind of never went home. But some, but within those 20 years I was very privileged, privileged to work at the Natural History Museum for almost 10 years alongside some amazing colleagues and helping the scientists and curators with their research. So, I got to work with collections like the artwork from Captain Cook's three voyages around the world. The art of the convicts and the officers from the First fleet, when the convict colony was established in Australia in 1788. I worked with pages from Charles Darwin's Origin of Species Manuscript, beautiful botanical art from France Bauer, who was the Keith albums artist? Manuscript collection of the fossil collector, Mary Anning. Works by Audubon and Humboldt and Carl Aeneas. It's all a bit surreal when I think back on it. And so we curated and cared for the collections. And we made them available for

researchers and for exhibitions. And I even got to do some international Courier trips around the world.

00:05:24 Molly

That's amazing, oh my goodness, where did you go?

00:05:24 Lisa

That was a time. Well, I was lucky enough. Whenever there was a trip to Australia in order my lovely boss let me take the paintings back to Australia. But I also got to go to a few places in Europe, Delft which was amazing. I went to Vienna. It was just marvellous, terrifying. The responsibility is enormous, you know, getting these things on and off flights and not losing them. Just marvellous opportunities.

00:05:52 Molly

Yeah, and you published a book with the the Natural History Museum? the art of the First Fleet. Can you tell me a bit about that?

00:06:01 Lisa

That's right, during my time at the museum we established a permanent art gallery at the museum where we displayed the artwork for various collections and I was lucky enough to write the exhibition catalogue relating to the First Fleet exhibition, which involved choosing all the images that went on display and then writing captions for each. And then also writing an overall introduction to the subject. So it was the first time I'd written anything like that. It was a huge challenge, but really rewarding. Actually, really rewarding.

00:06:31 Molly

How does, I'm kind of wondering, so obviously the Natural History Museum is a museum, so you're working not necessarily working just with text, but with objects and other kinds of materials. How does that compare to being a librarian, would you say?

00:06:51 Lisa

It was fascinating really, because while we primarily looked after the books and helped with the archive collections and were the conduit to the text and the information behind the specimens that the scientists working with it meant we also got access to a lot of the actual physical collections as well, which is such a joy. And it kind it brought this subject to life a lot more by being able to physically handle the objects that were scientifically illustrated in a book or talked about. Like for example, I got to hold Charles Darwin's finches, which he made amazing discoveries from and wrote up in his book you know. From a subject librarian's point of view it's an extraordinary opportunity to sort of see that all these words actually did mean something, and we're still relevant in a way to scientific research today.

00:07:48 Molly

Hmm, that's really interesting and I suppose also it's then incredibly different working for this really big national and kind of internationally renowned institution than working with much smaller collections and libraries. So how did you find that difference and do you have a preference? Or are they both kind of equally good and bad?

00:08:12 Lisa

It often feels like chalk and cheese. To be honest, I think the main difference I found is that it's all around resourcing, so in a large institution like the museum and at Durham Cathedral where I also worked, there are a team of specialist colleagues on hand, and we all worked together for the aims. So, there were cataloguers and conservationists and fundraising teams, and marketing experts and subject specialists all sort of on tap and I'm finding now at the Morrab, like most other independent libraries, you don't have that team around you. You're pretty much on your own. You have to try and manage many of those aspects yourself. So even if you don't do the work yourself, you have to take the lead and at least need to look like you know what you're doing. Because you're like inspiring others or directing others.

00:08:59 Molly

Yeah, you have to be really dynamic.

00:09:01 Lisa

You do, and in an independent library I think you have to trust yourself more to make appropriate decisions and look for different ways to collaborate with people who can help me because they're just not in the next office, there's not that luxury of having all that knowledge on tap. But at the same time that can be a good thing because you end up having a little bit more control over things, and you can work with the trustees and others over how the library is managed and deciding what we can offer. And you can also try and do things a bit differently to the norm. You're not, you're not beset by the constructs of what a standard library is meant to behave like or meant to offer.

00:09:40 Molly

Yeah, well that no, that's really true. You have to be flexible and you have to be dynamic. But that means that you can be different and you can, uh, you know the turnaround for projects is much shorter because you can have these ideas and then you know if you have the capacity you can make them happen now.

00:09:59 Lisa

Ah yes, that works the other way too though. Projects do take a really long time because you don't have all the people on board to be able to do them very fast, but that's fine because independent libraries are unique animals and amazing places, and I think that's why people like them so much. They offer something different.

00:10:19 Molly

So tell me about how you discovered the the Morab library and how you came to be the librarian there.

00:10:26 Lisa

Oh again, I feel lucky. I was so lucky that the first three places I worked in when I came to London on this year gap year that got longer, I only worked in beautiful buildings so my first job was at the National Trust Head Office in London. So that was a grade two listed building right by Saint James Park and Westminster Abbey and had a croquet lawn that played at lunchtime and everything it was just bonkers and crazy and I loved it. And then after that I ended up at the Natural History Museum which speaks for itself. And then I moved on to the absolutely stunning Durham Cathedral. So when I

was looking to leave Durham hand on heart I was determined I was just never gonna work in a boring building again or with a boring collection.

00:11:16 Well, I saw the advertisement for the Morrab and I was smitten by the images of the library and when I came to my interview, I quickly fell in love with the ethos of the place too. So then once I realised how lovely all the staff and the members and volunteers were. That was it. It's a love affair.

00:11:31 Molly

And it is very beautiful, that part of the country is so beautiful, isn't it? The Morrab is in Penzance.

00:11:43 Lisa

That's right, we're two streets from the sea and there are sea views from the top windows.

00:11:44 Molly

Yes, it's almost kind of like subtropical, isn't it down there so you have all these amazing plants and palm trees and things. It looks really nice. It's a different country altogether.

00:11:59 Lisa

It's certainly amazing gardens. Yeah, it's set in these beautiful subtropical gardens. So, in the summer, when everything's just bursting with life, the plants sort of come in through the windows when you open them and it's that amazing and all you hear is birdsong and buzzing bees and it's all a bit magical really.

00:12:21 Molly

So, it was established in 1818, the Morrab and it's the only surviving independent library in Cornwall. But can you tell me a little bit more about its history and how it kind of has changed over the years? And then I guess also what it is now, how it functions at the moment.

00:12:39 Lisa

So yeah, we were established in 1818. It was by the great and the good of the town like the mayor and the head of the bank, and all those who wanted a library. Obviously it predates public libraries, so this was all there were. And we kicked out various locations for 70 years. We kept expanding and moving into different places and falling out with shared premises like the Geological Society that we fell out with. At the same time this beautiful house we're in now, was built by a family in the 1840s. They were wealthy Brewers, which was a good industry to be in in Penzance back then, with all the mining and the fishing industries. So they owned the house and all of the land around the house and in 1889 when they sold up the council bought the estate so they could turn the gardens into public gardens. They were determined to be like a civilised seaside town and have a dance stand and tennis courts and all the things that a good seaside resort should have. And but they didn't know what to do with the house, so they put it up for rent and the library, who again was looking for a bigger premise somewhere else more permanent to move to competed with the YMCA to take over the premises and we were just, it was decided we were more civilised so the the Morrab library moved in in 1889 and we've been here ever since. So essentially, we've moved into a family home and there's still a lot of the original fittings. The wallpaper on the wall and the light fittings and the fireplaces are all sort of the original family homes, so it's just a really beautiful place, so the library just kept growing and growing and survived a lot on donations from various benefactors over time. And so here we are now. And I'm now in a position where I have no room. We built an extension in 2013 and all that space has been taken up.

00:14:34 Molly

It's so interesting how independent libraries, they're so different from one another and some are like wildly different, and I think it's part of their nature that they're a bit quirky and an off centre. But actually in a lot of the stories of how they've grown and developed over the years, there's so many parallels. There's so many parallels between the the Leeds Library and the Morrab kind of expanding and moving, and you know they're established by the same kinds of people, and it's so interesting to think about those parallels.

00:15:07 Lisa

And I think too after that, the way it progresses in more modern times, that's almost more to do with the community that's around you because the Penzance community is far different to the Central Leeds community that you that you serve. And so your service almost evolves to meet what's needed in the community I think at times, so if you're doing your job right, that's what it's doing.

00:15:34 Molly

That's really interesting that you say that what the Library has evolved to be is kind of that's done in conjunction with the members of the public that it serves and the people in its kind of local community. So, with that in mind, I guess what is the library doing at the moment? What kind of events do you have? I've had a look at your website and some of them look really exciting. Some of your programming, and you are also like us a member library, but are you a borrowing library or?

00:16:17 Lisa

Yes, we are. We run as a normal library and then with sort of extras on top if you like. Membership is kept deliberately low to reflect the social economic status of the of the area which we serve and it means we have a brilliant eclectic membership and all sorts of people join, which is great. So yeah, so a normal week in the library is quite bonkers but good fun so people can come and borrow books. So we get lots of members popping in and out to look at the book collections. Or they can also use tables that we have reserved upstairs so they can get on with their work and write and create while they're staring out to sea and having a cup of tea. So, we're very relaxed about tea drinking here too. We run on tea at the moreover. Normally, each week there'll be at least one or two classes running, so we have a regular Shakespeare group that's been running for 15 years where Mary takes classes through plays each term, and then there's often an art, or sometimes a philosophy course or things like that running as well during the week. We also have a poetry group that meets fortnightly and then we also have a talks programme where at least monthly, often more we run talks for the members on various topics. All sorts of topics. And then we host all of our volunteers as well. We have very few staff but around 70 volunteers without whom we wouldn't open our doors and they do the cataloguing the conservation. There's scanning of photographs. They work at the circulation desk and they do everything else in between. So there's always a number of them here working away on various projects as well so they're an incredible bunch of people.

00:18:04 Yeah, but there's also we pride ourselves on sort of a personal service here where we know people or we know their stories and so we always try to make sure there's at least some time in the day to stop and chat with members and volunteers. Make sure they're OK or find out what's going on because it's as much about being a drop in place for a lot of members, we have some members who just pop in and have a cup of tea every day, maybe never borrow a book, but it's where they meet their friends or where they sort of get stimulation in other ways. So, it's quite lovely.

00:18:38 Molly

Yeah, definitely. I think some libraries are actually a really, I remember being at university and the library was kind of a place where you'd go just to hang around and not really do that much work and just chat to people. No, I mean everyone's university experience is different, but yeah there was certainly a good social element of it for me and I think that we can see that in the Leeds Library as well. It's definitely kind of a hub for people.

00:19:11 Lisa

It it's a safe place to come, you can make yourself a cup of tea, you can read the paper or you can chat to anyone about any subject you can find interesting people to talk to you know, doing specialist research or put people in touch with each other's shared interests as well. That's another thing that happens here. Like someone will come in and say, well, what have you got on industrial mining technology or you know? Some sort of quite good subject and we'll be oh Cedric knows the answer to that I'll put you in touch with him and it's marvellous, you know.

00:19:44 Molly

Yeah, and I think that that means that the libraries again like we were saying, they come to reflect the people who are members there and the history of the people who are members there and the history of the area. And that's one thing that I think it makes them so unique because you know, you go to a Public Library, maybe to find information about the rest of the world. But maybe an independent library to find information about the history of the area. And I know that you guys have a really extensive Cornish collection. So you've got 3000 books printed in the 16th and 18th centuries. Manuscripts relating to various local families, long runs of periodicals, and local newspapers, prints, engravings, and a Cornwall photographic archive. Uhm, can you tell me a bit about that? This is from your website this information, but it sounds really amazing that you're kind of able to tell the story of readers and reading in your local area and yeah, I think we also have a kind of similar collection at the Leeds Library, I think that's one of the real arguments for independent libraries to exist.

00:20:51 Lisa

I think you're right, the Cornish collection here is really quite extensive and is used heavily by researchers here. Actually, visiting researchers who come from further afield, but also many local people who are interested in researching their area. Between the book and the photographic and the archive collections, we hold a really eclectic and rare selection of resources mostly because many of them were acquired by donation over the last 200 years, and that still continues today. So while we still obviously purchased new books over the years to supplement the collections, the archives are largely donated and there's some real treasures amongst them with within the Cornish collections generally. I think what makes them really special is that they tell the individual stories of local people. So, we have an 18th century logbook of a farmer's meteorological readings on their farm and scrapbooks of literally glued in seaweed collections that reflected the shoreline and

00:21:53 Molly

Yeah oh wow.

00:21:56 Lisa

Moss and other things as well glued into these books and diaries of people's travels and letters from the big families of Cornwall and all their correspondence and ledgers and and I think it helps us develop our understanding of individuals who lived in work in Penwith, which is what we call West

Cornwall. They're like tangible people. And it's not just statistical information or you know how many fish were caught in this year? If it's telling people real life stories, that's what I love about the Cornish collections here. And I think it paints a really good picture of the resilience of the people of Penwith and all they've dealt with, the tough work that was required of them in the mining and fishing industries. And when they were both booming but also now that they're not, and it really shows the Cornish to be a proud hardy group of people who really look out for each other and what I love about the collections is that sort of really, it's reflected and you can see that tangibly as we look at our collections.

00:22:59 Molly

That sounds so amazing, and do you have a guest, do you have members who can come in and trace their families. If their families have been members in the past, we sometimes have that here where people come in and they find their kind of relatives who were members in like the 1800s or something.

00:23:19 Lisa

Well, we're not so good on that. Our membership records are appalling.

00:23:26 Molly

OK.

00:23:26 Lisa

What we have is an amazing number of, let's say, more mature members who remember the library back in the 1950s. Or remember the President who was still around in 1940, or something you know and the stories they have about the library and its past and it's amazing and my predecessor, Annabel, the previous librarian here, was here for 30 years so there wasn't anything she didn't know about the library and she still has this amazing memory for names and places. So she'll still tell me amazing stories about members from the past and how they connected now to people and it's just awesome I love it.

00:24:11 Molly

And the photographic archive has over 15,000 prints and negatives of antiquities, places, people and events in West Cornwall which is really amazing and, is it, was it made into a book? Was there a book published with these photographs in? I just say that because it might not be, but my my grandparents live in Cornwall. I remember a book of really these amazing black and white photographs of Cornwall in their house. It might be something different.

00:24:43 Lisa

It might have been another one. I think we've we've published books on the Treasures of The Morrab which includes references to the photographic archives, but I think the plan is still in place to try and publish a book in the future.

00:24:53 Molly

Yeah, but well, no because I was going to say you have this amazing online archive which is really incredible and you can just go through and look at all of these images and actually, in a way that's much more accessible to a lot of people than a published book. And so yeah, can you tell me about the photographic archive and the kind of digital archive you've got on online?

00:25:18 Lisa

Absolutely, yeah, I'm like the other collections it really started with donations. We were really lucky to be gifted the Richards family collection and there were three generations of a local professional photography family so that started as the basis of the collection and then people have been giving us their photographs and slides and negatives ever since so that is why we've got to as many as we have now. But what I really love about the photo archive is that it's a great shining example of a brilliant community volunteer project. From the manager down everyone who works shifts in there are volunteers. And we have people that scan the images, but we also have others who write the metadata that goes with it. And as I mentioned before, they're often now more mature members who remember what that house looked like in 1952 and can recognise the people who lived in it, so they know faces and places, and so they provide that sort of story behind the picture wherever they can. There's also an awful lot we don't recognise, but we are gifted with that extraordinary knowledge of the local people. To add to the, to add to the knowledge we have and all other images that we scanned so far and I think about 2/3 of the collection has been scanned in the last 10 years or so. They're all available for each of you on the library website. So and they're used extensively again by local people researching their sort of family home and their family history right through to the BBC looking for images for documentaries and things.

00:26:46 Molly

Yeah, Cornwall has this kind of really as you were saying, this kind of rich and amazing history. And actually, it has a, real literary history as well. And it's been home to some fantastic writers both who were born in Cornwall and who have come to live and write there from other places. But because of how geographically far away it is from most other places in the UK, I imagine that often the work you do or that kind of history and heritage can go a bit unnoticed, or at least provide some barriers to engagement so I wonder how you've found that your location affects the work you do and how you kind of work around that and and engage the local community. And also I guess the rest of the UK in the work that you do. I mean, we've just talked about the digital archive, which is amazing and that you know, I think we've all kind of learned over the lockdown digital resources mean that library's work can be accessed anywhere in the world, which is amazing. So I wonder if you have any thoughts on that?

00:27:54 Lisa

We are getting there. You're absolutely right, Cornwall is such a long way from anywhere but interestingly even within Cornwall, it often feels that there's distance between us here in West Cornwall and with everyone in the north and the east of Cornwall like going beyond Truro, which is like 40 minutes up the road, that's like a massive road trip. So yeah, there's an interesting culture, I think within West Penwith. That said, we are really at the very end of the world in some ways, because we're closer to Land's End than anywhere else. So obviously yeah, the biggest barrier for us is distance. It's hard to partner up and collaborate too widely. This is not just the time you need to travel anywhere to make those connexions. So we do tend to work locally together. Uhm, we've built some really wonderful networks within Penzance. There's other institutions like the Hypatia Trust. There's the lovely Public Library and there's also Penlee House museum here in town. And we also have Kresent Kurnow, which is the Cornish archives just up the road in Redruth. So we're always looking for ways to support and collaborate and promote each others work where we can, and building sort of this idea of this like Penwith or Penzance culture, you know hub if you like, but we also work closely with local writers and artists and look for ways to support them too. So we host artists in residence here and I'm looking to establish a writer in residence programme soon to make

sure that the local talent is promoted and people know about them and we are also kicking and screaming our way into the 21st century. The Morrab is a bit behind on that. Apart from the photo archive. But we're working really hard to enhance her expertise to allow more digital collaborations which would help them mitigate that tyranny of distance. So we're putting our archives records onto the National Archives database so that the whole world can search for what's held in the Morrab Library archives, that's a volunteer project. We're cataloguing our books. Finally, 'cause we currently use the card index, and we're slowly, probably over about 10 years transforming that into a digital catalogue that will be made available so people will know what books we hold here, so it's all. It's all happening slowly. We're embracing it very slowly.

00:30:23 Molly

Yeah, no. Well, you talk about these amazing networks that you've managed to build up and I know that volunteering and your volunteers are such a such an integral part to the work you do and The Morrab as a kind of culture and a space. And you gave a really amazing talk at the Independent Libraries Association's annual conference, which we had here at the the Leeds Library last summer about lockdown and the work that Morrab did over lockdown and the kind of the amazing response that you had from members of your community, both volunteers and and members. Uhm, so yeah, could you briefly tell me about that? 'cause it really was one of the kind of the memorable points of the conference. I think 'cause it was so warm and you got this real sense that you guys wer such a strong community and had this real spirit.

00:31:22 Lisa

That's so kind, thank you. Yeah, well when we closed in March we all thought it was a couple of months and then we realised t was going on for a lot longer. I was genuinely concerned about how we were going to maintain contact with the members. As I just mentioned, not having a digital catalogue or anything, we weren't able to offer anything like click and collect as an option and I sort of felt like we were just going to disappear down a hole and so my staff and I got together and we decided that we'd start sending a weekly email to our members, which is basically a list of all the free things you could do online while you're trapped at home. So it was when streaming became free for everything, so we were streaming links to classical music concerts and theatre and films and but also like silly things like watching ancient grandmas in Italy making pasta and ballet for over 50's.

00:32:15 Molly

Is that Pasta Grannies, the YouTube channel. I love that channel, I love it!

00:32:20 Lisa

Oh, really cool. They went down really well so we every week we just sent out these links going oh if you're stuck at home you might try this, or here's a nice blog about this. And it became really eclectic and also kind of cultish so the members were like hey this is great and when lockdown stopped we were forced to continue that because they won't let us stop it because it was such a good thing. So we still do it. But also I was aware that you know a number of our members were very vulnerable and very much on their own, so we kept in regular touch with them. We phoned them and emailed them and just made sure they were doing OK and occasionally I would, you know, get some books out from the library and hand them over to them on a street corner or something you know just so they didn't run out of reading material and things like that and also just to have that connexion. But my biggest issue was that out of our over 600 members there were 130 that weren't on email. And who were really in many, in most cases, the most vulnerable and the elderly. You know who would

never embrace technology. So they were used to getting a newsletter a couple of times a year from us, but I started writing to them quite regularly like every few weeks. I had no news for them, but I just wrote them a nice letter to say we were thinking of them and that the library missed them and I'd send photos of the library and I asked them to keep in touch and let us know how they were doing and I started receiving all these beautiful postcards and cards and photos saying no, I'm OK here's a picture of me in my garden and we're OK. Don't worry about us, and what I found, it became a really beautiful mutual support network. So I was getting so much and strength and from these people 'cause I was a bit lost about you know I think all of us were like what's gonna. What's the future? How's this all gonna work out and having their support and their love makes such a difference to me. And I think the whole upshot of all of this was, what was also really cool is that there was no question of anyone not renewing their membership even though the library was closed. People renewed in droves 'cause they were determined that the library wasn't gonna suffer or close or they wanted to make sure that we would still be there at the end of all of this. And if it makes sense, I really feel like it brought us all closer together. I feel like I got a better understanding of the membership and what they got from the library. What they found valuable about it. And that's helped shaped my decision making about future programmes and projects from the library because I now have a better idea of what the members find important and value the most and I think it probably focused their minds a bit too about how the library influences them or helps them. So it's terrible, all this mutual love isn't it? So it's all really lovely, so we're almost sort of back to normal now. Just so happy to be back I think.

00:35:30 Molly

Yeah, it was a really amazing story and I think it really highlighted actually a lot of the mutual struggles and joys that all independent libraries face. And you know whether that's to do with technology and accessibility. Or, you know, demographics of members and communicating or what have you. There is so much kind of, you know, mutual struggle but you know rewarding aspects as well. But I wonder, with that in mind Post COVID and looking into the future what do you see as the kind of the struggles that independent libraries will face in the coming years?

00:36:19 Lisa

I think front of my mind here at the Morrab library and I suspect it's likely the same for most other independent libraries. It's just the biggest struggle is resourcing and the lack of both staff and money. We're at a constant look out for ways to increase our income and be sustainable and finding the funds to maintain a grade II Listed building and all of that sort of stuff going on. So that's just the standard I think that we all face. But I also think there's a slightly wider issue about our need to remain or become even more relevant to the community around us. We touched on this before, but I think being a resource that's vital and useful now, but also not losing a sense of what got us here and what makes us so special and unique is a really difficult balance at times and it's important that we just don't become a historic relic or a museum that people like looking around 'cause it's pretty. We still need to be relevant to the Community and provide things that they need and they want and I think post COVID that's even more important in a way, people need somewhere they feel safe to come and enjoy and want to be. And so I think that's an important consideration as well, and that's a big struggle for us because often you need money and resources to be able to deliver different projects or reach a wider audience and so you're spending a lot of your time trying to find ways to increase the revenue so that you can do these other projects, but then that doesn't leave time to do the projects so it's the usual joy, but we will get there. In the end, I think we just have to be patient. I do have to say though, that the ILA collectively over the last few years has been a maintaining their

support and the willingness to share ideas and information has really strengthened that. We've become much more of a unit. I'd like to be, you know, and I hope that continues to develop.

00:38:18 Molly

Yeah, and also it's interesting and inspiring, I think, to see all of the work that other independent libraries are doing with their collections and their collections are so different and unique to the places. I think, was it the the Linenhall who had, they have an amazing kind of collection of Irish political pamphlets or posters that they're working with. And yeah, your Cornish collection again, and all of these kind of really the ways that independent libraries have found to work with these collections and make them accessible whether that's digitally, whether that's through exhibitions, is really fantastic. But yes, talking of the the future, one of the projects that you've worked on recently is the Penwith Future's book which was really uhm, one of the projects that I found most exciting looking at your website, So what was the Penwith futures book and how did it come about?

00:39:15 Lisa

It's still very much an ongoing project that runs the course of this year. Uhm it started. Originated around the time of Cop 26 last year when we all became even more acutely aware of the the climate emergency and the challenges that face the world, but also will have a really profound impact locally. I think in Cornwall we really, we're surrounded by all this loveliness, so we can almost see what might happen in the future, and all the risks and everything that comes with climate emergency. So we've created something called the Penwith Futures Book project. So over the course of this year we're asking all of those who live or work or have an interest in Penwith to think about their vision for the future of the land and the community, and put pen to paper or create some art or poetry, or anything that expresses thier vision abou how we might deal with this and move on into the future? So we're gathering submissions and continuing to do so. And we at the end of it will create a book for our archive collection that shares all of those stories and images, and artworks and poems which we can share with the Community but also share with decision makers in the area as well. And then keep it as a resource for future generations to see as well so.

00:40:36 Molly

I really like this project because I think it, we're at this stage as well of thinking how can we translate the kind of original purpose of this library into the 21st century. How can we remain kind of relevant and useful for people? And I think that this project is a really clever way of encapsulating that because you're, you know you are supporting local creativity and the Cornish literature tradition you're you know you're taking in local history and local voices and producing a piece of work that can be, you know, seen and read by anyone. And you're also looking towards the future and you're looking at sustainability and you're looking at contemporary issues and how you know you can have an effect on those, which I think is fantastic.

00:41:29 Lisa

Oh, thank you. Yeah, we're really proud of it and we hope we can pull this off. I'm about to start our approach to schools and particular groups to try and get everyone involved and get as many submissions as we can. So, so I mean, I think it's on everybody's mind and everyone's got an idea about it. I'm thinking about, you know, climate change and global warming. So even the whole issue around second homes in Cornwall and sustainability of communities and villages and things as well.

So there's a lot of issues here that will affect a lot of people, so and everyone's got a view so we can capture them as a point in time, but then also it's adding a new piece of information to our archives.

00:42:16 Molly

Yeah no, it's interesting thinking about how you how you archive the library today. Yeah, I think that's another really interesting project 'cause we have amazing members archives of all of our old members and the kind of history of the library. And then post sort of 1970 nothing.

00:42:39 Lisa

It's so true. Even our library minutes don't sort of give us the information that the minutes of 1818 did, and I agree it's around the 60s and the 70s when all these names are sort of on list, but we don't know who they are and we don't really know what happened in the library. It's really sad in a way so we're trying to think of ways to sort of capture more the life of the library as much as everywhere else as well. 'cause it sometimes gets a bit forgotten, doesn't it? In 100 years you will want to know how the library got through the pandemic.

00:43:13 Molly

Well, exactly yeah.

00:43:15 Lisa

But there may not be much written down about that. It's important to think about these things.

00:43:19 Molly

Yeah, well, definitely for anyone listening. Keep your eyes peeled for the Penwith futures book. I can't wait to have a look at it, actually. So yeah I guess thank you so much for talking to me this has been so fascinating and it's always nice to talk to someone who works in another independent library 'cause you do have those kind of like, yes, that's exactly the same with us moments, it's true. Which is really nice.

00:43:47 Lisa

No, it does remind me that yeah I'm not the only person working in a bonkers world, yeah.

00:43:56 Molly

Yeah exactly, uhm so I guess to wrap it up, do you have any kind of anything you'd like to share with people or information of how they can find out more about you or upcoming events or anything you'd like to let people know about.

00:44:15 Lisa

There is a couple of ways that you can keep in touch. If you keep an eye on our social media platforms on Instagram and Facebook and Twitter. We post a lot of pretty pictures of the library and also pretty pictures from the collections as well, so it's a good way of seeing this beautiful place and also on our website, we even have a gallery of images from the library there too as well lots of information about the library. But also, we have just started and bear with us 'cause our cinographic skills aren't quite Jane Campion. We're starting to film some of the talks we do and they're now available online to have a look at as well. So you can see sort of a flavour of what some of the local talks are about and some Cornish history while you're at it. So yeah, and if you're ever all the way down, here in Penzance everyone is very welcome to pop in and have a look around and say hello.

00:45:09 Molly

Wonderful, OK. Thank you so much Lisa. That was yeah really great. Thank you.

00:45:13 Lisa

Oh, thank you for having me. It's been it's been a real joy.

00:45:16 Molly

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