



## Tales from The Leeds Library

season 2

### S2E11: Jed Aitchison - Project Manager at Buy Nowt LS6

#### 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 of its kind 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 my guest is Jed Aitchison from Buy Nowt LS6 Leeds's his first Library of Things. Jed is an engineer by qualification and a teacher by trade. He first heard about libraries of things in 2017 and he describes this as a road to Damascus moment. Alongside his colleagues Sarah Mark and Lee, who all met in 2020, Jed worked to found the Library of Things in Leeds which opened in October 2021.

**00:01:09 Molly**

So hello, thank you very much for chatting to me today, this is a slightly different podcast from usual because we are talking about a library, but it's not a library of books, it's a library of things. So can you firstly tell me a little bit about Buy Nowt LS6 and what you do?

**00:01:27 Jed**

So, Buy Nowt LS6. Library of things is like a book library. But instead of being books, media, CDs etc. it's all the things in people's lives that they don't use super often, so classic example being a power drill, you only use that once or a few months once or a few weeks and.

**00:01:44 Molly**

**Or never in some cases.**

**00:01:46 Jed**

The anecdote we always quote is that the average power gets used for 13, a power drill gets used on average for 13 minutes in its lifetime, which is a complete waste of resources. And so there's so many things like that that we don't use super often. And why should we have to store them, buy them and you know, look after them when we don't have to, and that's what we do at the library, we lend them to people.

**00:02:06 Molly**

**So you're based in Headingley. Is that right? You're based in the church.**

00:02:11 Jed

Yeah, so we rent a lovely room from the Headingley Methodist Church and it's about 50 square metres. So uh, a bit bigger than the room we're in right now. But it smells pretty similar, though they both have a kind of, you know....

**00:02:22 Molly**

**OK, this kind of musty old thing smell.**

00:02:27 Jed

It's 1908, our room was built and the whole church is 1845, it was built. So not quite as old as your one.

**00:02:34 Molly**

**Not quite well. Yeah, well, as I was saying, we're kind of in a new section. But it's not that new. It's over 100 years old.**

00:02:42 Jed

Yeah, it's great. So we've got a lovely room. We're in Central Headingley, So we're on Chapel Street, which runs parallel to North Street and it's just off of the Otley Rd. And we put signs out on to Otley Rd when we're open, so we're relatively easy to find and easily accessible, and we're open on Fridays, four to six and Saturday one to four. Those are constrained times, we understand that, but a. we're partly all volunteer run and be most of the libraries are open not super often, 'cause if you lend it for a week you don't need to be open every day 'cause you've got your stuff out, you can't really do anything.

**00:03:13 Molly**

**But you also have a great online catalogue which I was having to scroll through. There's some really good bits in there. Birdfeed costume was my favourite.**

00:03:20 Jed

Yeah well, what's funny about the stuff we get is it is random because it's all donated. So, while we have like plans for some things we'll hardly ever refuse to take something. And so we just get the kind of flotsam and jetsam. And so all the costume stuff was actually given to us by someone that worked at like a production company that they're trying to like offload some of their set department stuff. So you know, it's these wonderful things you just get given because yeah, a production company does have a lot of old costumes they don't need anymore, and we can hopefully make better use.

**00:03:49 Molly**

**And so much nicer to have like a costume that has a bit of a story behind it than just like something you're gonna wear on the Otley run and throw away.**

00:03:57 Jed

Speaking of the Otley run I would really like it if you know not only people use us for the other run, but I'd love to be able to offer like a custom exchange almost where you give us one good costume,

and we'll give you a new one. Like not even put it in the library but like costume in costume out and like we'll have a constant turnover, and it would just be a much better way of dealing with what must be a huge amount of waste clothing and waste costumes that sit in people's bedrooms.

**00:04:13 Molly**

**That's such a good idea.**

00:04:21 Jed

Or get thrown away in the big clear out when all the students move out.

**00:04:24 Molly**

**Library of costumes.**

00:04:25 Jed

Well, there is actually two already in the city. There's one at the Leeds Playhouse and there's another one at The Leeds Community arts thing. So there's actually two library costumes and they're somewhat fancier ours are, but there are technically two costume libraries already in Leeds.

**00:04:39 Molly**

**I mean, it's interesting that yeah, I suppose libraries of things do exist in various guises, although**

00:04:47 Jed

Or they're called like tool rental places. You know what's really weird is if we talk about libraries, is libraries of things is so much more common in North America than it is in the UK.

**00:04:58 Molly**

**OK.**

00:04:58 Jed

A lot of libraries in the US have like there's an odd thing they have there like a cake pan section, so if you're making nice cake and making ice bake or whatever you could borrow a cake pan and they've really pushed at the library of things component. And some of them have, um, I was doing some research a few weeks ago to buy some stuff for our library and there's some machines called a cricket machine, which is like a crafting machine and loads of libraries in North America, or you know, a few dozen libraries in North America have these machines already that you can just borrow to do a creative project with so the North American content is far more ahead of us than we are with incorporating libraries of things into normal civic libraries.

**00:05:31 Molly**

**Yeah, I mean we'll talk about it a bit later, actually, but I think it's it the the concept of a library of things is funny in a way because I think that when you, it's nice because it kind of builds this a sense of community, but actually there's only that lack of sense of community 'cause we live in these weird kind of isolated 4-bedroom houses and no one lives with their extended families and we don't have that to start with. But anyway, yeah I've got some questions about that later, so I kind of want to ask you about actually the idea behind the library, how it got started. So, you've been open since October. What was the story behind setting it up?**

00:06:12 Jed

It's a pretty simple one. I was sent an article about it by my mother and I thought it was, it was 2017 when I read it maybe 2018 and it was like a road to Damascus moment, I think I said that my email. It was like, it was the most wonderful thing I'd ever heard of, and I was 20 something at the time and it was an alien concept which is fine, but I learnt about it. It just captured in my brain. I put it on ice to have a sort of a career in education and stuff like that and then came to Leeds. And what's quite fortunate is lockdown happened or Covid happened, and I had substantially less work to do by virtue of working from home, and so I had more kind of mental brain space to do library of things stuff. And it took, I was working around for about six months and then I met my wonderful team, Sarah Mark and Lee and we started working in late November of 2020. And it took us about 10 months from flash to bang, so we had some ideas and some documentation and some resources at that point, but from that point to opening our doors, it was ten months which I, maybe that's good, maybe that's bad.

**00:07:14 Molly**

**That I mean it seems yeah. And how was the first six months being ish open? Has it been six months?**

00:07:19 Jed

Well, well, I think you can probably yes, 7 seven months and seven months and probably 18 days since we've been open. Not that I'm counting. Our first day open was the 8th of October. Uhm, like a birthday. It's like I remember a loved one's birthday.

**00:07:33 Molly**

**Yeah yeah, your second birthday.**

00:07:38 Jed

Yeah well it's the birth of the Library.

**00:07:38 Molly**

**You're a Libra. I think I don't know.**

00:07:44 Jed

What are you saying?

**00:07:45 Molly**

**No, the library of things, the library of things. Not you, I wasn't trying to guess your star sign, don't worry.**

00:07:51 Jed

You could split it into two parts. Like it was, you know, I won't say it's like been exponential growth but you know it takes a while for things to get working like the beginning was slow, really slow, and there's a lot of, not iterative things, it was just we didn't make a lot of mistakes but there was just a huge amount to do So we opened maybe a bit prematurely and we were open and we were doing loans and we were also doing a lot behind the scenes stuff at the same time. And now we've kind of hit, not our stride, but things are going substantially better now, partly because of spring, partly

because of the lack of COVID. And just, you know, it really helps that we've got 1600 Members now, and in January we had about 600. So, in in in the last three months, five months we've got 1000 new members. And what's really cool to me is in the last seven weeks we've got 650 new members. Yeah, 'cause we were on the BBC which really helped. I post a lot on Facebook and I just did some really good marketing and we also, you know, I'll say thank you to them here but Leeds recycles, which has about 7000 followers on Facebook, did a story about us or pushed out some material about how we can help with recycling about waste reduction and so the Council Department there that runs that is our dear friend. And so all those things in the last seven weeks combining together 1669 members as of this afternoon.

**00:09:21 Molly**

**I think that says really nice things about Leeds actually, that people are really interested in looking at kind of different sustainable models of living and buying and actually that institutions are prepared to support that as well, I think that's really positive. But can you tell me a bit about you and kind of, I guess how .... You mentioned that your mum sent you this article. Were you always interested in sustainability and kind of?**

00:09:45 Jed

Yeah, I did civil with environmental engineering at university and so I've always been interested in sustainability, but I didn't know how to turn it into a career or what facet of it to focus on. and you people can be interested in sustainability, which I am, but I also really don't like the idea of waste. Waste irks me. To reduce waste is obviously a really useful tool or to reduce consumption and reduce waste, so I yeah, there's not, you know, people always ask and say this is the best idea, you know, why aren't we doing more of it? But there really isn't, in the UK at least, single downside to a Library of Things. There's no one really losing in the UK. You could say that maybe Chinese factories are pumping out less goods now, but I don't care for the growth projections of Chinese factories. I care more about people having access to things in the UK and saving money and carbon. That's one real downside is in theory, there's less production in places like China and in developing nations. But in the UK at least, it's a win win win. There's not a single downside.

**00:10:51 Molly**

**And can you tell me a bit about your collection? I call it a collection because that's what we call our collection here, I guess it's your....**

00:10:58 Jed

We call it an inventory. I think we have a bit more of a, you know, a pragmatic approach.

**00:11:02 Molly**

**Yeah, well I suppose, what are the objects that you would expect to find that you have the most of and then are there any kind of weirder ones that surprised you?**

00:11:12 Jed

So I'll talk in broad terms about all libraries but you know the most popular stuff is basically high value, infrequently used, irreplaceable items. So, in most libraries the number one most borrowed item is a carpet cleaner or like a wet and dry vacuum. They're very expensive. They're used infrequently, and you can't really replace it with anything less expensive. That is the core, if you can calculate A Library of Things in one object it's a carpet cleaner, but then you know probably second

or third most popular are stuff like: pressure washers are very popular, wallpaper steamers are very popular, our power drill is very popular, our air mattresses are quite popular. Our disco ball is surprisingly popular. It's also all these things that just, you know, make things that little bit better and you just can't do without. Or our ladder is really popular, our folding ladder, we've got a really nice ladder. Or the Garden Shredder we've got is really popular because you can't replace it with anything else. You don't use it super often, and it's expensive. People aren't going to borrow something you use all the time, or if it's cheap or if they can get a cheaper equivalent. And so that's where a library fits a niche.

**00:12:24 Molly**

**That's a really interesting way to look at it actually. Has anything surprised you with how popular it's been?**

00:12:28 Jed

The disco ball, yeah. I mean I loved my disco ball and I lent it to the library. I bought it for a 1970s party that I had and you know it's been lent out nearly 10 times now, which doesn't sound like a lot, but we've got items which have never been lent out, and so it's great. And what's becoming more popular is our Karaoke Machine is becoming increasingly popular because that's again, you can't really make it up with something else. Our pizza oven that we bought with some grant money, you know it's booked out or it's reserved until August 'cause it's really expensive, it's a really fun thing to do, and you aren't going to use it super often, and it's quite bulky as well, and it's just a wonderful thing to have, and it's letting people have these really fun barbecues. Our folding tables and gazebo's are becoming increasingly popular. Our camping stuff is becoming increasingly popular as the weather improves and as we grow and it becomes camping season so yeah that kind of stuff is the best I'd say.

**00:13:27 Molly**

**I didn't know you had a pizza oven, and I mean maybe it'll be booked up till September soon when I get on the website.**

00:13:29 Jed

It's £330 to buy a pizza oven, for something you might use once every once a month or something. It's stupid to buy it.

**00:13:37**

**Yeah yeah, yeah, that's amazing. And so this is from a kind of a library point of view actually, how do you organise everything? That's what I'm curious about.**

00:13:48 Jed

It's a little bit better than organised chaos. Everything has a lot. Actually, every library operates differently. Every library has a, uh, cataloguing system. That's not bespoke, but they figure it out, and so we went with lot and then a three digit and soon to be 4 digit number. And then we have sections of the library. So we don't have a Dewey decimal system, but we have code. Like one item could be 001 and then 002 could be completely different, so that doesn't really help us, but the sections of the library really help us, so we've got like a camping section, a DIY section. We've got specific shelves for specific items. You can get pretty course. You can find it coarsely pretty darn quickly. And then what's different to a book library is, I was thinking when you ask me the question, is you know

all books look pretty similar, but we can visually identify. Oh they need the powerdrill? We'll get that one. It's not that we have to look on the spine and the small text. It's like, oh that's a garden shredder, it's pretty obvious.

**00:14:46 Molly**

**Yeah, yeah, that makes sense actually.**

00:14:49 Jed

So, whilst as an organisation system it worked, and we've lost a few things in the library, but then re found them, but I've never not been able to find something for a borrower.

**00:14:57 Molly**

**I'm sure we've lost things here as well.**

00:15:00 Jed

But it yeah, organisation isn't the hard bit. What's quite nice as well is you'll pick something off the shelf and you'll see the number on it, and then you'll go to the checkout area and then you'll ask them, oh what's the number on your item? Then you'll type it in. So it's an elegant system.

**00:15:17 Molly**

**And yeah, I mean actually the online catalogue is really good and usable. I've said it before. I just was really impressed by it.**

00:15:23 Jed

Oh, I completely disagree.

**00:15:23 Molly**

**Do you?**

00:15:31 Jed

Yeah, but I see all the time. I know there's some, not *big* problems, but we've got some badly categorised things. If you really dig into it.

**00:15:31 Molly**

**Some things are difficult to categorise.**

00:15:38

Yeah, well yeah, but that's not an excuse. And our descriptions can be a bit half assed. We need to do better descriptions. For some items it's fine, like a screwdriver is pretty self-explanatory. We've got some items that we need to describe better.

**00:15:46 Molly**

**I suppose also there's kind of an element, maybe of being like 'you might not think you could use this, but actually this is a really useful thing'. Or something like, you know, maybe a power washer someone might be like 'I don't know how to use that and maybe it's kind of letting people know that it's easy and useful.**

00:16:04 Jed

One of the things we also try and do or I try and do in shop is like say oh you're borrowing this, do you need anything else? Know you advocate for the other things you have to make the event even better, even easier.

**00:16:17 Molly**

**One of the things I really like about the concept of the library of things is that it kind of it really democratises the ability to do things and I think maybe students who want to do projects but can't afford the equipment. And I think one of the things I love about Leeds is that it has such a strong DIY scene and independent scene, so I suppose with that in mind, are there any projects that have been facilitated by the library of things so far that you can think of that wouldn't have been able to happen without it? or I mean, I guess yeah, any events or even like parties or things?**

00:16:56 Jed

Yeah, I mean so I'll give you a few good ones I think. So this weekend actually we had a guy come in and he borrowed a large camping backpack, a really nice one that we had donated to us, and a waterproof jacket because he was going to Brazil backpacking for a month. And so he gave us some money and then you know he saved £130 by borrowing instead of buying, which is just great. So, we've made it easier for him to do backpacking in Brazil. We've had people borrow our pizza oven to do an Eid celebration, so obviously they celebrate Eid and they had a pizza one, which is quite fun. Or we're getting some people who are going to borrow stuff for a wedding. We've got people borrowing stuff for the Jubilee events and the Jubilee street parties. We've had a person, a woman, a single mother, could have fled some domestic abuse or something, and she wanted to go camping with the kids for the weekend. And so she borrowed £400 worth of camping stuff like the whole kit and caboodle. And coming back to pay she didn't make a donation 'cause she simply couldn't afford to. And so we've made it possible for a child or children and a mother to enjoy and have a great experience together that they simply wouldn't have been able to have had before.

**00:18:13 Molly**

**That's amazing, and it's great that you can actually quantify how much money you're saving people as well. I think that's a real benefit of it. But I saw in one of the other kind of interviews that you've done that you could see how much, you had this statistic about how much carbon you've saved?**

00:18:31 Jed

So there's a carbon footprint calculator, and if you do some assumptions you can basically equalate 1 kilo, or excuse me, one pound of money spent equates to 1K of carbon produced, and so basically for every pound you save, you save a kilo carbon and so we've saved people.... It's hard to give an exact number, but it's at least £16,000, probably closer to 20 now. So you say to people 20,000 pounds in seven months and that means 20 tonnes of Carbon.

**00:19:05 Molly**

**Yeah, that's amazing.**

00:19:07 Jed

Yeah it is. And you know now that's one library in its first seven months. And we're going to get to the point where you know, we'll probably get to a point in the next month or two where we are



saving people £10,000 per month 'cause we'll grow in membership and we'll be much busier 'cause of summer season and I suspect we'll get to the point where we're saving people £10,000 a month and 10 tonnes of carbon a month.

**00:19:32 Molly**

**Mmm, but the sustainability aspect of as well is amazing and it makes me. I mean, it makes me think of, you know you get to like July and all the students move out their houses and there's just loads of kind of old mattresses and old blankets and things left on the street.**

00:19:44 Jed

They're not great for a library though. That's the problem.

**00:19:47 Molly**

**That's true, that's true.**

00:19:48 Jed

A lot this stuff. This is the problem. I love the idea of the big clear out and I've done some of the work. I've done some stuff going around, picking up stuff from it, but the problem with it is it's not good for a library, but it would be great. I've if you allow me to indulge me, I've got an idea about the big clear anyway. I'm convinced that if you collect up all the student stuff like the cutlery 'cause I think, and I'm speaking as a kind of third party, if all the student houses have to be completely cleared, they don't even they don't come furnished with like crockery and plates and stuff as far as I'm aware and correct me if I'm wrong, that's what I know and so they have to be completely cleared out. So why couldn't you collect up the plates and crockery and pots and pans? And just simply collect them, some organisation or something and then give them out to the new students in September. So, you wouldn't lend it out for a week or two like we do at a library, you could lend it on a long term basis. So, we give them the sort of second-hand stuff and then ten months, 11 months later we get it back and then we give it back out again. That to me would be a more, it's still lending, but it's a much more long-term lending system. That to me would be the best solution to deal with the big clear.

**00:20:54 Molly**

**No exactly.**

00:20:58 Jed

Well, really the best solution would be to change the landlord's legislation or change the way they view furnished properties and at least just let the crockery stay or let the plates and stuff stay so they don't have to be completely cleared out.

**00:21:11 Molly**

**Yeah, absolutely. But I think that it's one of those, I mean, the problem of stuff and overproduction and overconsumption is so huge anyway, that actually it's really nice to see successful examples of like agile and innovative thinking and ways of getting around that I think. But I mean, when I was researching this podcast and I was thinking about the library of things as a concept I was thinking it's kind of indicative of our current moment and generation as well. Actually, I think for a lot of people under 30 the possibility of buying a house is quite slim, at least while they are under 30, more people are likely to travel for work, more people are unlikely to be**

able to afford expensive equipment to do DIY projects or to have like fun parties or to create, whatever their artistic content is. And so my question then: I mean so I can see that there's an obvious value for people who you know, like the example you gave of the mum who took her kids camping, for people who need that stuff, who wouldn't have access to it otherwise. But my question is then kind of for people who can afford that stuff. People who do have loads of space. What is the value and use of a library of things? When you can afford to buy more stuff, what's the point of not, what's the point of buying less?

00:22:41 Jed

Yeah, I thought about that question and my response is, you know, just buy something else. If you want to buy stuff and have the money and space to buy it? Great, I'm not against consumption if it's something you want and need and can afford. But you know, instead of filling your house up with the stuff you don't use super often, instead you can now afford to buy better stuff or more fun stuff. You know, people have this idea about what a library is. One of the concerns you could say, which will come back to what you said is people think, oh, you know they're not buying all this stuff what about the High Street, jobs can be lost, you know? Some sectors are going to in theory get less customers because of what we do but my response to that is now the consumer, the borrower, the user of the library now has more money to buy something else instead. So, all that happens is the economy now shifts. Or the shop fronts shift to things that people do actually want to buy. There's so many things in our life that we don't want to buy. I don't want to buy a lot of things, but I have to, you know who wants to buy toilet paper? You have to. Who wants to buy all these things that we don't want to, we just need to. And now if we allow people to not buy the things they don't want to, they can now spend the money or spend their time or spend their resources on something they really do want to do. And that could also just be saving money as well. You know anyone can use it, and if you don't need it, don't. But you could certainly divert some better resources to a better place than having to buy something that just sits in a shelf.

00:24:14 Molly

**And you can support like local independent makers and you can support people who aren't big corporations. And it's interesting, I think 'cause we've had that shift of mindset in terms of work and jobs and finding roles that aren't, you know, when things become increasingly automated. We've had a shift of mindset where we've kind of changed the way that we work in that we do more information-based work and we do stuff that's not just, you know, like producing stuff that machines can do, so I mean, it's an interesting thought in terms of sustainability, but perhaps we can have another mind shift like that. You know, perhaps we can focus on buying things and spending our money on sustainable projects and local economies. So yeah, I don't know. Maybe we've just solved the climate crisis. I don't think. So one of the points that I particularly liked in the principals in your handbook was we value people and their stories and narratives above the stuff, which I thought was interesting 'cause you are a library of things. But so much of our identity is tied up in the stuff that we have. I love stuff. Are you a minimalist or a hoarder and do you think that, I mean this has just occurred to me, do you think that the idea of swapping out your possessions helps us live a life that is more free of stuff? Or do you think it just it kind of increases our reliance on stuff?**

00:25:50 Jed

Uhm, I really enjoyed that question when I read it, and I have a few opinions about stuff and what I am. I would call myself, I'm a hoarder, but what I do is I'm a hoarder who never buys anything, so

everything I have sits in like an equilibrium. So I have a lot of stuff, but it doesn't grow and it doesn't shrink.

**00:26:09 Molly**

**Big relate.**

00:26:09 Jed

So I don't like buying things, but I like the stories, that everything I have has meaning. And I know that's like a hoarder mentality, which is I think it's a bad part of it, but I don't have a lot. But you know, the things I have with stories they're few and far between. Which is fine because it grows very slowly. And so, I'm a hoarder who doesn't really buy anything. But I have things I've had since I was a child that I refused to throw away, partly because it's like I like it and I care about it and I want to tell a story through it and I'd like to tell the story about why I have it or what it does or what it means to me. But also it's like a caretaker relationship with it, and that you know, I'd like to think that one day I'll give it to my child or my grandchild, or find a worthy place for it. Which is another hoarder mentality, they don't want to see things go to waste or they think that it could become useful one day, and I do hold that opinion. I really don't like to get rid of things because it could be useful one day. Or they could have its best use one day, 'cause if it just goes to landfill or something ... I know there's better ways of getting rid of things. The only thing I would call myself a collector of is Army surplus jackets and big puffy jackets. Big Army puffy jackets. I really like a nice big parka. I like pockets. I like things with pockets on. I like as many pockets I can on things.

**00:27:28 Molly**

**That sounds like a man who loves stuff. Lot's of pockets for lots of things.**

00:27:38 Jed

I do! But I mean you have to have my mindset to do the library though. Like it's not in a selfish way but the library is like, have I curated the collection? I have to decide what I think people use and what I would use, and think other people would probably use it if I wanted to. So is the library extension of my hoarding? Probably, but it's like the most useful hoarding you can do.

**00:28:04 Molly**

**But I like that like tension. I think I feel it definitely in myself as well. I love things. I love things that tell stories. I love old things, but I hate feeling like cluttered.**

00:28:16 Jed

But that's just a question of organisation. Clutter is just some things that are unorganised or not in the right place.

**00:28:21 Molly**

**But it's nice not to feel like tied down with the amount of stuff we have, you know, but I think that's quite, uh, I mean, do you think it's useful to attach a moral value to the amount of stuff we have or our relationship with stuff?**

00:28:34 Jed

I mean, that's a I think that's such a, it's not a loaded question, it's like who can say how much stuff one person needs? It's a bit of a flippant response, like, well, depends how much stuff you need, but I do think that. I'm not going to get, I don't think anyone's worse or better for having less and more stuff. A family or career that requires a lot of individual items justifies having more. I think it's just about too much or things are being wasted. What I think you could attach on value is all the things you own being used to the best of their ability and perhaps also are you looking after your things?

One of the things we do at the library and why I think a library is a great thing is that we can a. invest a bit more time in the maintenance of items that perhaps one individual wouldn't because we serve so many people with it. And also we can also invest in acquiring really high quality, well made, long lasting products. So, instead of 10 people buying 10 bad drills we can afford to buy two really high quality ones which in the long term will save more money, more carbon than buying 10, badly made ones and we can also have a maintenance kind of routine and procedure where we look after and repair our things. A bit like repair cafes do, so I also take pleasure in, you know, high quality items that I own and the idea of taking care of them. Again it's this caretaker mentality. We're so lucky that we have these things I'm so lucky to be able to afford these things and be given these things and acquire these things by hook or crook and it would be a shame and it would be a waste to not treasure it and to not make it last as long as possible. And then that comes back to like what comes first? Do I love it because I care for it? or because I've cared for it I end up loving it. Or do I care for it 'cause of the story? Or does my care and longevity of it mean it accumulates a longer and better story the longer I have it? it's like a self-fulfilling prophecy of you know the longer it lasts, the better it is. The more stories you gain from it the more it means to you.

**00:30:30 Molly**

**Yeah, it's interesting and I asked this question about kind of ascribing moral value to not having very much stuff 'cause I think there is a whole kind of .... with minimalism I think it often does the opposite of what it sets out to do, in that it encourages people to buy cheaply and to dispose of things in order to not have very many things because they're you know they're trying not to feel, weighed down, but actually that ends up kind of creating this disposable lifestyle, which doesn't help anyone and is often worse than you know, being a hoarder in a way I think.**

00:31:10 Jed

I don't know. I've never seen a house collapse because of minimalism. You've seen houses collapse because of hoarding.

**00:31:12 Molly**

**Well, that's true. That's true, I just yeah, I don't know. I kind of associate it with this. I, I guess, a kind of silicone valley like techie like maximising your potential at all times kind of lifestyle.**

00:31:27 Jed

But there's that there's that really funny picture, just like you see on Twitter. It's like 'men think it's OK to live like this' And it's just like a chair and a video game in the TV.

**00:31:33 Molly**

**Yeah yeah, yeah, exactly.**

00:31:34 Jed

But like I kind of sympathise or I kind of lean more towards that because if that's all you need to make you happy. Then there's the other side, which is, like you know, how many pillows does like a married couples bed need? It's like is that one the bad attitude with like too much disposable stuff? Or is it the minimalist with just everything needs or can afford?

**00:31:56 Molly**

**I think it's fine to like having things if you, yeah again, it's about this attitude of having good quality objects that you're a caretaker of and that you know things are useful. Things allow you to create things and allow you to learn things. Things allow you to express your interest in your hobbies, but if we're not taking care of them, and if we're disposing of them like....**

00:32:24 Jed

And even if you are disposing of them, which is fine, it's part of things, but at least dispose of it in the in the best way you can.

**00:32:31 Molly**

**So, in terms of environmental impact, the many benefits of a library of things seem obvious, which is why it surprised me to learn that there were only 10 in the country. I think. Uhm, what do you think are the biggest barriers to popularising this model of consumption?**

00:32:46 Jed

There's kind of two questions and answers there. There's actually well above 10, they're just very hard to find. I actually found one two weeks, you know that I just didn't know existed, and I've been doing this for 18 months. And I'll give you, actually I made a note. The first one could depend on how you can test it, but the very first in the UK at least was Glasgow. Excuse me, I tell a lie, it was in Edinburgh. There's now also one in Glasgow run by the same kind of broad organisation and what's cool about Scotland is they've actually put in kind of a grant fund to start up libraries and things across Scotland for it's about £300,000 or libraries of things and repair cafes to get going. Yeah, which is great.

**00:33:26 Molly**

**So repair cafes are, that's where you can take broken things?**

00:33:30 Jed

Yeah, precisely, it's kind of skilled crafters, repairers and they meet. Leeds has one and, Leeds actually has to kind of 1 1/2 'cause it's got the Leeds one generally, but also some people Headingley are trying to start a monthly Headingley one as well as one across the city. And so repair cafes are where you get experts in like a field of technology or sewing or craft or mechanics, and they will help to teach you. Normally they won't fix your stuff, they will, but it's mainly about empowerment of letting you learn how to fix your own stuff. You don't feel very confident or even if you want to fix it yourself, you can go there, use their tools to then fix it yourself, and I've used it to repair some stuff to then use in the library which is obviously really really nice. So, Edinburgh, Glasgow in Scotland and what's really cool is there should be a lot more in the future 'cause the Scottish national Parliament has been this big grant body which is great and I think they should be brought frankly into the entire UK. Anyway in terms of ones it's South of the border. There's one in Hull, there's one in York which opened about two weeks here, so it's brand new. Although it's attached to a pre-existing organisation, there's one in Leeds. There's one in Liverpool which is a tool library technically. So

Liverpool tool library. There's one, I'm going to go north South, there's one in Birmingham which is called Borrow don't Buy which is like a café and a library of things, there is soon going to be one in Manchester. I think in Levensham. Anyway, there's gonna be one in Manchester soon. There's one in Oxford. They're soon, hopefully going to be one in Cambridge. They're in their sort of trial phases right now. There's one in Exeter. There's going to be one in Lewisham. There's soon going to be one in Cheshire. They email me or they email us, 'cause you know you can count the number on two, you know it's two dozen, so you get quite a lot of emails. People saying I'm starting. Anyway, so there's loads on the horizon. Ah, like I said, Cheshire, I think there's one. There's about 8 in London, all over London, and there's one in Kentish Town. There's one in Crystal Palace.

**00:35:37 Molly**

**Well, it reminds me of like Facebook groups like Freecycle though and stuff. I mean it's not the same obviously, but there's a kind of similar mentality. But you mentioned that you've got a lot of emails. What are the kind of tips that you you've given to people for setting up these types of things?**

00:35:52 Jed

I will do that after I finish my list. Then there's one in Plymouth. There's one in Kernow. There's one in Bristol. There's one in Bath. There's one in Lewis. There's soon to be one in Brighton, and that's it. OK, so there's actually a relatively large amount. I mean, there's not one in, say, Nottingham or in Newcastle, but give it time.

**00:36:12 Molly**

**You could probably. I mean for most maybe not you know from Land's End or John O Groats, but you could from most places in the UK drive to one of those as well.**

00:36:20 Jed

Yeah, but then you get the question of is it is the juice worth the squeeze? OK, is it worth you driving an hour to borrow pressure washing? I mean if you earn.

**00:36:29 Molly**

**Well depends how much people value their cupboard space I guess.**

00:36:31 Jed

Yeah, and it depends how much people value their time and carbon, and so it's tough. You know, if you look at the stats about where borrowers come from. There's a stat from London, which is a bit skewed because of the density of the population, but something like 80% of the users come from within one mile, and there's a good heat map that I've generated which looks like about 50% come from within one kilometre. And from our experience, people are not willing to go super far to borrow something cheap. They will come far to borrow something expensive, which is fine. That's just the nature of time versus resources in and out. People are willing to invest the time to save all this money. They're not going to invest that time which is equivalent to money for something cheap. So, we get people coming from further afield to borrow high value items, whereas we've had, you know, no one would come from Beeston to borrow screwdriver, but they have come to borrow our dehydrator, which is a very expensive item. People come from right across the road to borrow some screwdrivers, but you know, so it's about resources in and resources out. And that's at people's discretion to make that choice like I want as many people to use it as I can, but I'm not

going to force anyone, nor am I going to, you know, disparage them for not coming when they bought one instead because it wasn't worth their time and energy and money to travel. So that's libraries of things in the UK, and they're all across the Western Hemisphere, so the UK is not particularly special. I think that we have more than, say, Europe, the continent. There's certainly quite a lot in Australia. There's a lot in Canada, there's lot in America, and America has obviously this culture of libraries of things within normal civic libraries, so even if I said there is, you know 100 libraries of things in the United States, which there aren't, they are probably going to be thousands more library like things, library like components in normal civic libraries. So, my top tips or what I tell people is I think the format to make a successful life is very easy. It's easy, it's hard to do. It's easy to say. All you have to do is get a large number of people and a large number of high value items that people want to borrow. That's literally it. That is, you get high value items that people want to borrow, things you want to borrow, and you tell enough people that it exists so that they use it frequently enough. OK, and you know obviously it goes without saying that you want to be open at the correct time. You know you want to be open frequently enough. You want to be in the right location. You want to be easily accessed. You want to be easy for people to park and get to and. And you want to make it easy for people to use it i.e. the right pricing model, the right kind of publicity about it. The right check in and check out procedure, you don't want to make things harder than needs to be, but at the end of the day it's a question of volumes like any business. It's a question of having stuff that people want and having the people that want to borrow the stuff. And then what's cool is you obviously start growing in terms of items. So what's amazing to me is you have a little surplus one month you can invest in a new item which results in a new borrower which results in more money next month which is also a new investment. And so it's this beautiful cycle of growth that you get, which we're kind of at the beginning of now and we can start re investing and growing and getting these items that we don't have yet because no one donated them and we haven't got a grant for it. And we can invest surplus into acquiring new items which gets us more members, which gets us more money, more stuff, more Members more. It's a beautiful circle of growth.

**00:40:12 Molly**

**So we have at the library a kind of acquisition policy where Members can suggest books and pretty much within reason will buy them. Is that kind of what you hope to do with the library of things, or do you kind of do that? How I guess receptive are you to people's kind of suggestions?**

00:40:30 Jed

Yeah, I want people to tell me I love it. I love suggestions 'cause there's lots of ideas that I don't have because I'm one brain. And so we do it on a more ad hoc basis. We have asked before what they want, and then we do a survey. But people just ask us, do you have this? And I'll make a mental note and think, no, maybe I should get it. And you can look what other libraries have. So again, we stand on the shoulders of giants. And we're not the youngest library, so there's huge amounts of data that we pick up on and take up to help us grow so we can use other data to predict how we will grow and other data of their demand to predict what we should get for our one, even if no one's asked for it yet. It's kind of like a cockroach, if you see one, there's probably a dozen more you can't see. If there's one library that wants it, I suspect other people in other places want it. Because people across the UK, by and large, are similar.

**00:41:17 Molly**

**I would be so interested to see the variation and what kind of items people want in different countries and different places, and I think that's really interesting. One of the things I like about**

**the collection here is that it really tells the story of the kind of reading habits of Leeds, because it's suggestions, so it would be nice.**

00:41:33 Jed

Did you have a real spike of EL James when that came out and then it dropped off?

**00:41:33 Molly**

**I don't know, I'm not sure actually.**

00:41:39 Jed

Wasn't it the bestselling book ever? It didn't answer the Bible.

**00:41:39 Molly**

**I don't know. I think so? Yeah, well, no. We have kind of more kind of niche collections, so we've got a lot of cricket books, there used to be a librarian that was very into cricket. We've got a lot of 70s books on magic, I think, I might be wrong, and so yeah, it's nice when people kind of impose their personalities on the collection a bit. And I think there are gaps like we have nothing on certain topics.**

00:42:06 Jed

Well, yeah you can't help but put your stamp on it. I mean I can tell you now that our library probably has a lot more cooking stuff in it than other libraries. I'm not gonna say I'm an advocate but I like cooking experiments, I like trying new things. And so I very deliberately kind of push that narrative or pushed an emphasis on getting new fun cooking stuff because I know that I wanted to do it. And you know, I assume other people do too. But yeah, we definitely are unique. Every library is unique, but you know, and what's cool is the area like, people have told me you know power drills, you're going to get loads of borrowers for power drills. We've had hardly any, and that's a I think 'cause we've got a wonderful mix of people in Headingley, but we have a lot of home owners, and a lot of old homeowners and a lot of renters, and so renters can't do DIY by virtue of renting. And the homeowners who are old already have the drills. So actually, we're in kind of a perfect impasse. We've I honestly think we've had as many drills donated to us as we've had borrows. We could have afforded, not that I wanted to, but we could have literally just taken a drill and given it to someone else just 'cause of the disparity. What we have really gotten, I don't know why, don't know how, we've suddenly curated this collection of what I call event stuff or like party stuff or whatever. So we have, you know you could deck a whole party of stuff we've gotten. I don't know any other library that has the same angle about like you know, having a great party or having a great event with us, but we've got, you know, folding tables and gazebo's and fun cooking stuff like the pizza oven and candy floss machine and a chocolate fountain and bunting and fairy lights and drinks dispensers and this great kind of glorious event, and the karaoke machine, which is also a speaker, so we've really kind of cut out a niche which is like event stuff. What's cool is now that we know that, maybe we'll expand into more stuff in the future.

**00:44:00 Molly**

**You can invest in that in the future, yeah.**

00:44:02 Jed



'cause if we know the demand is there, I'm probably not going to buy a power drill or like a really super duper power drill because I don't think people are going to want it. They are gonna want like a bouncy castle or a really big gazebo or a bubble machine.

**00:44:09 Molly**

**Yeah, yeah, wow in a few years Headingley is gonna have the best parties ever.**

00:44:10 Jed

Yeah, maybe.

**00:44:17 Molly**

**Are there any misconceptions that people might have about library of things?**

00:44:20 Jed

Well, I think our one is that people think it might only be for LS6 residents or something. It's in the name, but no, we just use that as a kind of an area. It would be stupid to call it Buy Nowt Leeds because whilst we're in Leeds, where is Leeds? There's lots of places in Leeds. So we do call ourselves by now LS6 but we will happily welcome anyone to the library. Um misconception? I don't think there is one. I think it's pretty, does what it says on the tin. We lend you a thing and then you bring it back and you use it. I think there could be a misconception of what we hold. There could be assumptions, but if you ask us we'll get back to you, and we'll tell you, and you'd be surprised how much stuff we have. And even if we don't have it, we can also do substitutions is what I tend to say. We don't have this, but maybe this and this will make up for it. So, I don't think there's any misconceptions. We just want more people to use a library, enjoy it, embrace it. And perhaps the other thing worth talking about. One of the things I want to achieve or have achieved with the library is, you know, could, if libraries are and rightfully so democratised access to knowledge, and the Internet somewhat superseded that, now at one point library was like a gateway to knowledge and allowed people to grow and develop and get new ideas. And that's a wonderful thing. And how many fantastic ideas have come from the democratisation of knowledge that libraries allow us to do? Could a library of things be an equivalent for stuff? Could we, if a library of books unlocked people's kind of mind potential, could the same potential be unlocked by lending you the tools to do what you want to do? If you want to start a business or create a project or create something new. You can use our resources to let that happen.

**00:46:10 Molly**

**But I think that's actually so valuable because in the last few years we've seen maybe a decrease in the amount, of or maybe a crisis in the number of students who go to university because they think that that's, you know, that's what they've been told to do. Or that's how they're going to get the best job. And then as a consequence maybe people have less practical skills or less knowledge, less trade knowledge and you know less ability to actually go and make things, and potentially like you know, and I think we all know the benefits of the Internet, like you said, that it's democratised knowledge, public libraries, everyone knows how wonderful they are. But I think we maybe take for granted the value of knowing how to do things physically in the world. You know, knowing how to use a power tool, knowing how to use a green screen, knowing how to use a pizza oven.**

00:47:04 Jed

Yeah, I think that the how is now the easier bit. 'cause you can learn how on wiki, you can learn how and just Google, you know 'power drill tutorial'. What the hard bit now is simply the material acquisition of these things. Yeah, that's the hard bit, or that's certainly harder than just watching a tutorial on YouTube. Like I said, the Internet has democratised knowledge, but what we haven't democratised is simply the physical access to these items because we're stuck in a kind of 20th century consumption model, which is that you either buy it or you don't. Tough if you can't afford it. And what we do is we give you a third way. This is broadly what I like to call the 3rd way. You know. I'm not gonna say it's a revolution, but you know it's a new model of consumption. You're still getting what you want. You're still using the thing, but you're not have to pay for all of it.

I'd love, you know if libraries have allowed people to think, oh, I don't need to buy that book, I'll see if I can borrow it instead, you know libraries change people mindset about books. I'd like to think the people's first thought when they think of a book, well maybe it would work better 20 or 30 years ago, their first idea with the book was 'I shan't buy it I shall borrow it instead. I'd love if libraries could at least intercept people's idea processes and they think 'I don't need to buy it, maybe I can borrow it instead'. I'd love if we could change people's mindset to think about that for certain items. It won't fit for all of them, but for certain items what I'd really love to achieve is that people in Leeds, their first thought when they think 'oh I need to do something' is where can I borrow it instead? That's what I'd love to be able to do with the library.

**00:48:41 Molly**

**Well, you're so right because it's such a simple concept. But actually, when I heard about it, I was like of course that makes so much sense. Why didn't I think of that? You know what I mean?**

00:48:49 Jed

Because we're stuck in a 20<sup>th</sup> century, and I say 20th century kind of... We're stuck in an old school 'we think we need to use things we have to buy them' that that we've been told. I'm not criticising capitalism but a tenant of capitalism or consumerism is, you're told to buy things. Then you buy them, then you use them. End of story. Consumption. But you know it's not in consumers best interests for us to borrow instead of buying 'cause we spend less money. It is not in consumer, you know, seller's interest if we don't define ourselves by what we own. That if we start defining ourselves by what we do and how we associate ourselves and what we create, then that would you know be deleterious for someone's bottom line. So why? I'm unsurprised by the narratives.

**00:49:36 Molly**

**But ultimately everyone buying everything; one set of everything, one set of crockery, each once ever per person isn't sustainable. And actually it can't.... it's in no one's best interest because it can't go on forever you know, we don't have the resources.**

00:49:49 Jed

And even if we are talking about the economy, like I said at the beginning, you know, just 'cause people don't buy one thing that just means they've got now more time or resources to do something else, or it means they can now afford to buy organic food instead of normal because they save the money here or they can afford to insulate their home. Now they save money here or they can afford to get the like low carbon energy package tariff rather than the expensive one. So, money saved here could be money spent on a really beautiful thing elsewhere.

**00:50:18 Molly**

**Yeah, and I also think once you once you kind of begin that process of thinking about treating things as valuable and not to be discarded that will kind of leak into other areas of your life. I think so. We're running out of time, I guess, but I probably could talk about this for ages. What's next for Buy Nowt LS6? Do you have any upcoming projects and how are you planning to grow and develop over the coming months and years?**

00:50:47 Jed

More and better. Basically, I mean we don't have .... the thing about the library is we don't have projects, I wouldn't say we have, we don't have events. We don't have projects. We sit underneath other people doing other things. We are like a foundation or a bedrock upon which community events happen because of us. So, we just sit underneath, doing our thing and hopefully more and better and more items. We don't really ... well, no we had a celebration in November of 2020 when we open on Black Friday or the Buy Nothing Day and will probably happen again. And you know, we maybe have some ideas about like offering classes on like how to maintain the items you do have or how best to use the items you do have or how best to use our items in terms of cooking, or how to use power tools that we hold so. You know we want people to use our stuff more and make it easier to use us. Maybe we'll offer delivery service 'cause some people don't have cars and they want a big heavy thing and they shouldn't be denied that because they don't have a car. We should in some way get it to them. Now that could be any cargo bike. It could be an eVan or whatever, but that's something I'd like to think about doing. You'd be able to do delivery to make it easier for people to borrow and still save money. And then in in the works we're looking at, I'm looking at opening one in South Leeds too. It's cruel to have just the one in the city when there's multiple communities that could benefit.

**00:52:21 Molly**

**Yeah yeah yeah yeah and you say that you know it's open to everyone in Leeds, but actually ideally you would have all in every post code I guess, wouldn't you?**

00:52:33 Jed

Yeah, yeah, I don't personally think there'd be one in every post code. I think that that's still that's a bit too, I mean maybe one day, but right now I think, no it wouldn't be every post code. It would be every quadrant I think.

**00:52:45 Molly**

**OK.**

00:52:46 Jed

I don't know how many people it takes to run it, but this is what's, the last thing that's scary about libraries is....

**00:52:51 Molly**

**But you think about library libraries. You have a library in pretty much every post code.**

00:52:56 Jed

Yeah so, but that gets a lot of funding from the Council, whereas we have to kind of pare and win, so you need the volumes simply.

**00:53:05 Molly**

**You're not planning to be on top of a huge empire of libraries of things in Leeds.**

00:53:11 Jed

No comment. But the one thing that scares me about libraries, is like the thing that makes me nervous is, not about us particularly, but I don't think they could work. Our model of library like a quite a really big, quite robust one, couldn't work everywhere because I just don't think you'd get the demand. Because you know a small village could have a few things to loan out, but we wouldn't have a 50 square metre room. And if you have a small library, where do you fit that in? Now what would be great, I think, is if like community hubs in smaller areas or public libraries incorporated library things components into them because there can't be a dedicated library. You could certainly have you know the top 20 items. That would take up very little space that could fit into, you know, it could fit into a normal shop. Frankly, you could have your corner shop that also does the lending of these as well. That's the only thing that makes me nervous about small ones, small places, is the libraries there have done substantially lower volume of borrows than we have, which simply impinges on their ability to pay their own way.

**00:54:16 Molly**

**Well, I suppose it's kind of going back to this idea that they fit so perfectly into a lifestyle where you're moving frequently and you're travelling for work and you know.**

00:54:26 Jed

And it does fit, yeah, I think it's about new. It's not for pre-existing organisations or pre existing homes, it's for transitions and new and growth and things like that. That's where it really benefits, so a place that's sort of like on a demographic decline or democratic stagnation. Then that place wouldn't really have it. 'cause those people really already own it. It does really help a young place or you know, it's a city where there's a lot of turnover and churn over.

**00:54:49 Molly**

**Yeah, absolutely. Finally, my final question is how can people find out more about you? How can they become members and how can they get involved in the work that you do?**

00:55:03 Jed

Well, our website is [ww.bynowt1s6.com](http://ww.bynowt1s6.com). We're highly active on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. And what's cool if you want to get involved is membership is pay as you feel so you can make a monthly donation if you want to support us that way. But you're more than welcome to make a £0 per month donation, then donate as and when you use the library and if you want to get even more involved, you can obviously you know, give us some stuff if you have any stuff that's lying around that you think would be useful, or you can volunteer with us 'cause we're always looking for people to sort of help out and get involved, and we've got a number of roles that people can sort of do to volunteer both sort of in person and online. And I guess just use it. You know we have this wonderful stuff. It's really, really expensive, wonderful stuff that's you know, have an experiment. Try before you buy it, you know, do something you couldn't do before using us, so we've got maybe the best or the really exciting ones for me are the like I said, this cricket machine which cuts 300 materials. So if you've got an art and craft project or want to become some crafty entrepreneur borrow that, we have a 3D printer, dehydrator, pizza oven, the karaoke machine. All the power tools you could ever really need or the gardening equipment. We've got several families worth of camping stuff that you

can borrow from us, and we're looking to get more and more and more of these really exciting things to allow people to do these fun projects so. You know it's an exciting place to be in and join in. Borrow the stuff, donate stuff and tell us what you think. Tell us what we what you think we should get or help us help us out and achieve it.

**00:56:37 Molly**

**Wow, wonderful, it's so exciting. I actually can't wait to come and have a little browse around. Thank you so much for chatting to me, yeah thanks.**

00:56:48 Jed

Thanks for having me.

**00:56:48 Molly**

**This has been a podcast from the Leeds Library. Links to more information about our guests and any works talked about can be found in the description. If you'd like to find out more about the Leeds Library or any of our upcoming events, please visit our website at [www.theleedslibrary.org.uk](http://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk) or you can follow us on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook at the Leeds Library. Thank you for listening and keep your eyes and ears peeled for more tales from the Leeds Library in our future episodes released every Wednesday.**