

## **Intangible Cultural Heritage in the UK: promoting and safeguarding our diverse living cultures**

An ICOMOS-UK Conference  
20 September 2014

### **Speaker Abstracts & Biographies**

#### **Speaker**

Poet and author Patience Agbabi

#### **Title**

Telling Tales: Chaucer's Tales for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

#### **Abstract**

'On a Routemaster bus get cerebral/Tabard Inn to Canterb'ry Cathedral...' From the grime-inflected *Prologue* to the old skool rap of *The Parson's Tale*, award-winning poet, Patience Agbabi, presents a *Canterbury Tales* for 21<sup>st</sup>-century, multicultural Britain. Her keynote will explore her fascination with the original Middle English text and how she remixed its oral and literary elements in *Telling Tales* (Canongate, 2014). She will discuss how, through live readings and workshops on the *Telling Tales* Tour, she has engaged with a broad range of adult and teenage audiences enabling many to access Chaucer's masterwork for the first time. The talk will be followed by a short reading.

Patience Agbabi has performed worldwide on British Council-sponsored projects and all over the UK including Glastonbury Festival, Crossing Borders, The Royal Albert Hall, Edinburgh Book Festival and Soho Jazz Festival. Canterbury Laureate from 2009 to 2010, she received a Grant for the Arts to write *Telling Tales*. Her book has been described as 'A Canterbury Tales for a multicultural Britain...' (Helen Cooper); 'A poem on wheels. Inventive, risky, serious and fun' (Jeanette Winterson) and 'A compelling collection of story-portraits, at once contemporary and time-honoured' (Andrew Motion).

#### **Biography**

Patience Agbabi was born in London to parents from Nigeria and Benin and grew up in Wales with white foster parents. One of the UK's foremost poets and a former Poet Laureate of Canterbury, her writing and performance has appeared on radio and TV worldwide. She is the author of four books, *R.A.W.*, *Transformatrix*, *Bloodshot Monochrome* and *Telling Tales*. Patience is touring *Telling Tales* to festivals this year with producers Renaissance One. She lives in Kent.

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#### **Speaker**

Clara Arokiasamy OBE  
Chair of ICOMOS-UK ICH

#### **Title**

Our Intangible Cultural Heritage in the UK: What is it?

#### **Abstract**

The definition of intangible heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage includes five ICH Domains/specialisms: oral traditions; performing arts; social practices; rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. Between 1960 and 2000, many of these practices formed an integral part of local and central government strategies, defined as community arts/entertainment

programmes, urban and rural regeneration strategies, urban renewal programmes, and “Cool Britannia.” Lottery funding programmes (e.g. oral history and reminiscences programmes, small grants programmes, the Local Heritage Initiative, Young Roots, Awards 4 All, etc.) and the cultural sector’s audience engagement activities have reinforced this kind of thinking. Cultural Heritage NGOs have provided their own definitions of the practices they represent. Some academic studies argue for the ratification of the Convention by the UK in order to give intangible heritage the same status as tangible and landscape heritage. Others are less convinced of its merits. Using the Convention’s guidance, and noting the above trajectory in the promotion of intangible heritage, this presentation will explore the evolving conceptualisation of ICH from community projects to grants programmes to intangible heritage over the last four decades.

### **Biography**

Clara Arokiasamy is the Chair and founder member of ICOMOS-UK’S Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee and a member of the Executive Council. She was a senior manager in local government, Deputy Director of Operations at the Heritage Lottery Fund, a member of the Culture Committee at the National Commission for UNESCO, and chaired the London Mayor’s Heritage and Diversity Task Force. Clara works with ICOM International and is the Vice President of the International Committee for ICH at ICOMOS International.

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### **Speaker**

Dr. Anna Leask

Edinburgh Napier University ICH Team (Professor Alison McCleery, Professor Alistair McCleery, Dr Jared Bowers, Dr Anna Leask)

### **Title**

The Way Forward for Mapping and Safeguarding ICH: The Scottish Experience

### **Abstract**

This presentation explores the mapping and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Scotland. Scotland is notable for the richness and diversity of its ICH, which includes all manner of practices, ranging, for instance, from oral expressions and performance arts to crafts and social practices, rituals and festival events. Within these categories, an inclusive approach to what constitutes ICH in Scotland (as distinct from Scottish ICH) is needed which embraces the customs and practices of all communities. The ICH of Scotland requires to be accorded a status which is equal to that of the material culture of Scotland, an important step for safeguarding these fragile heritage resources. As part of this process, the creation of an accurate inventory of ICH in Scotland is considered to be an important step towards safeguarding its future. However, there are inherent difficulties in identifying the existence of, far less capturing the essence of, something which is not a material artefact. In recognition of these elements, the ICH team at Edinburgh Napier University reflects on the opportunities and challenges of mapping and safeguarding ICH, especially through the use of a database for public online access. The team will also review alternative ways in which ICH can be safeguarded, particularly through the vehicle of tourism.

### **Biography**

The Edinburgh Napier University ICH Team is at the forefront of UK ICH research. An initial scoping exercise funded by Museums Galleries Scotland led to a 3-year AHRC award investigating methods of safeguarding and recording ICH in Scotland. The team is currently working on a research project from Creative Scotland focusing on linking ICH with tourism, has recently briefed both the Scottish Parliament and the Dutch Government, and presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the UNESCO ICH Convention in Venice in 2013.

**Dr Anna Leask** is a member of the Edinburgh Napier University ICH Team. A Reader in Tourism Management, her research interests lie principally in the areas of heritage visitor attraction and World Heritage Site management. Anna has published in international academic journals and has co-edited

several key texts in the field of heritage visitor attraction management. Anna is a Fellow of the Tourism Society and of the Higher Education Academy.

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**Speaker**

Professor Tom Selwyn  
*School of Oriental and African Studies*

**Title**

Living Spaces: Anthropological reflections on sites of intangible cultural heritage

**Abstract**

This presentation considers the contribution anthropologists might make to the definition and understanding of 'intangible cultural heritage' (ICH). An introduction identifies terms used by UNESCO itself. These include 'cultural spaces' in which aspects of 'popular and traditional culture' may be located. The presentation looks at spaces and sites in which, as UNESCO puts it, forms of 'living cultural heritage' are found that draw our attention to 'creative genius', markers of 'cultural roots and identity', and the skills involved in the production of such spaces.

The presentation will thus focus on urban and rural space(s) and landscape(s) in which we can find ICH at work. There are, of course, an infinite number of these, and/but the presentation will identify several examples that will help us explore general principles. Our spaces/sites here include urban communal space(s), public libraries, museums, walks/trails in city and countryside, and spaces evoked musically. At the heart of these spaces lies a cosmopolitanism that speaks of the cultural value of partnerships with comparable spaces and sites elsewhere (a municipal library in Britain shares close kinship with partner libraries in Sarajevo, Mali, and Marseille, for example).

**Biography**

Tom Selwyn is a professor in the Anthropology Department at SOAS, University of London, where he is director of studies in the anthropology of travel, tourism, and pilgrimage. He has directed/co-directed research and development programmes of work in the field of cultural heritage for the European Commission in, amongst other places, Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Bethlehem (Palestine).

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**Speaker**

Robin Wood MBE  
*Chair, Heritage Crafts Association*

**Title**

Heritage crafts in the UK

**Abstract**

Britain is a nation of craftspeople. From Smith to Thatcher, Potter to Wainwright, our surnames tell the story of who we are. As the birthplace of the industrial revolution we were the workshop of the world and many of our major cities were founded on particular craft skills – Sheffield on cutlery, Birmingham on jewellery, silversmithing and gun-making, Walsall on saddlery, Luton on hat-making and Stoke on pottery. The need to make is deeply embedded in our national psyche and the heritage of making still exists. Unlike many other countries worldwide, craft skills have not thus far been recognised in the UK as part of intangible heritage and many are on the brink of extinction. The most pressing issue is in small one-person businesses where, despite high demand for products, there is no mechanism for passing the skills from one generation of skilled craftspeople to the next.

### **Biography**

Robin Wood is a traditional woodworker with a deep interest in all skilled crafts. For twenty years he has earned his living turning wooden bowls on a foot-powered lathe, studying heritage crafts and meeting a great many other traditional craftspeople. In 2009 he helped found the Heritage Crafts Association, of which he is chair.

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### **Speaker**

Izzy Mohammed  
*Audience Engagement Coordinator, Library of Birmingham*

### **Title**

Preserving a Way of Life: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Archives and Birmingham's Black and Asian Communities

### **Abstract**

The topic of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) presents an interesting challenge to the issue of the life and culture of migrant groups and, particularly, those that are longer settled. The particular focus of this presentation will be the settled Black Caribbean and South Asian communities of Birmingham (with opportunities for extrapolating wider). Some of the issues explored in this presentation include the possible relationship, and even tension, between the idea and practice of intangible cultural heritage and the notion of the potential for its documentation and archiving – and how this may be nuanced if not problematised further still when thinking about migrant or diaspora communities.

The presentation considers the distinct pathways and differences between diaspora cultures and their originating societies and possible implications (particularly in regards to ICH). The presentation draws attention to individuals, collections and materials at the Library of Birmingham, allowing for discussion about of the practicalities, opportunities and challenges that become apparent when bringing together the various concerns or elements – that is, the concept, discourse and practice intangible cultural heritage, contemporary diaspora communities and cultures, and the issue of documenting and recording for the purposes of archiving.

### **Biography**

Izzy Mohammed is Birmingham-based cultural engagement practitioner. He has a Museum Studies Masters (2001) and now currently works as an Audience Engagement Coordinator (Library of Birmingham). He is presently undertaking a PhD ('Culture, History, Diversity and Representation') at the University of Birmingham, where he is also an Honorary Research Associate. He is a trustee with the Group for Education in Museums, committee member with Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands and on the editorial board of the History West Midlands Magazine.

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### **Speaker**

Margaret Birley, Horniman Museum  
*Keeper of Musical Instruments, The Horniman Museum & Gardens*

### **Title**

Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Music Gallery at the Horniman Museum, London

### **Abstract**

ICH is inextricably bound up with the musical instruments that are acquired for the Horniman Museum in London. The total collection numbers over 8,000 instruments from around the world. When new instruments are collected, performances on them are captured mainly in the form of film footage for the purpose of documenting and illustrating their repertoire, performance techniques and cultural contexts for performance.

The Horniman Museum's HLF-funded Music Gallery showcases musical instruments used in different rites of passage in a variety of different cultures, illustrated by film footage. Different stakeholders were invited to film these rites of passage. In some cases they were participants, while in others they were the museum's curators. Their footage evinces one of the teachings of visual anthropology – that it is not only the agenda of the person behind the camera, but also their relationship to the participants in an event, that determine the very nature of the material that is captured. All the footage is highly valued by the museum since it adds an important dimension to the interpretation and transmission of the collections, and the different perspectives of those who captured it bring vivid contrasts to the projected films in the Music Gallery.

### **Biography**

Margaret Birley is the Keeper of Musical Instruments at the Horniman Museum in London, and was lead curator for the museum's Music Gallery. More recently, she chaired a consortium of European musical instrument museums in their work to update the Hornbostel Sachs classification of musical instruments, part of a project that was funded by the European Union.

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### **Speaker**

Katy Spicer

*Chief Executive, English Folk Dance and Song Society (EDFSS)*

Steve Roud

*English Folk Dance and Song Society (EDFSS)*

### **Title**

The Full English: Making archives relevant

### **Abstract**

The Full English (2012–2014), has been the largest individual project undertaken by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EDFSS). The project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Folk Music Fund, sought to make available 12 seminal collections of folk materials from the early 20th century through the creation of a free, online, searchable database, and in learning and participation projects.

The twelve collections came from EDFSS' Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, the British Library, Folklore Society, Swindon and Wiltshire History Centre, Clare College Cambridge, Mitchell Library and the University of Melbourne, and comprise 58,000 individual items of handwritten manuscripts, field notebooks, correspondence and photographs. They now form the world's largest online database of folk materials.

To make these collections more widely accessible and relevant to a 21st century society, a national programme of education projects has been taking place over the past year. Working with arts and arts education partners in each of the nine English regions, over 50 projects have taken place in schools, with teachers, in arts centres, in universities and in libraries, engaging with some 13,000 people from toddlers to grandparents. The learning programme culminated in a national conference and showcase at Birmingham Town Hall in June 2014.

### **Biography**

As the Chief Executive of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, Katy joined EDFSS in 2008 with professional dance and theatre management experience. Since then EDFSS has expanded its activities of outreach, programming and artists' support several fold, working nationally and internationally, its achievements recognised through funding support and cultural awards.

Steve is the creator of the Roud Folk Song Index and an expert on folklore and superstition. His has published many books including *The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, and most recently *The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* with Julia Bishop.

**Speaker**

Caroline Oates  
Librarian and Administrator, The Folklore Society

**Title**

The Folk and their Lore

**Abstract**

ICH is an intriguing formulation. It attempts to offer a legal enshrinement for some recognisable but nebulous practices and beliefs. ICH is not unproblematic, as it covers, in part, an area long identified as folklore. This presentation, therefore, will begin with a brief introduction to folklore and The Folklore Society (founded in 1878), one of the oldest learned societies dedicated to the study of the subject. It will look at some of the areas of folklore covered (and not covered) by ICH. This will be illustrated with aspects from Paul Cowdell's fieldwork, first with singers and subsequently talking to people about their beliefs in ghosts. From this the presentation will outline some of the issues and challenges facing those engaged in the research, teaching, safeguarding and transmission of folklore tradition. It will consider some of the ways we might take this forward.

**Biography**

Caroline Oates is Librarian and Administrator of The Folklore Society, which is based at The Warburg Institute, University of London, and has its library and archives at University College London. Her PhD thesis was on Trials of Werewolves in the Franche-Comté in the Early Modern Period; she has written articles on various aspects of magic and witchcraft, and, for many years, taught a course on 'Magic and Myth' at Goldsmiths.

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**Speaker**

Dr David Edwards  
*Project Leader, Forestry Commission*

**Title**

From commercial coppicing to Celtic revivalism: re-imagining Britain's woodland heritage

**Abstract**

Policy discourses around the cultural heritage value of woodlands tend to focus on tangible evidence of historic management such as ancient wood pasture, coppicing and pollarding, and associated features such as charcoal-burning platforms, blast furnace sites, saw pits and kilns. Together these represent important components of cultural landscapes that evolved organically over centuries, but are now largely relict. The recent past has seen a revival in historic practices, although the main driver has shifted from commercial benefits to the biodiversity value of a more diverse woodland structure. Many people also see the revival as a way to realise intangible values largely lost to our urbanised culture: a sense of connectedness between community, identity, nature and place. This motivation may also lie behind the rediscovery or reinvention of other woodland-related cultural beliefs and practices: Celtic pagan world-views, rituals and sacred sites, and the use of woodlands as settings for weddings and funerals. Neither the historic woodland management nor these new cultural expressions conform to an idealised notion of 'living heritage'. Yet together they represent elements from which to assemble new dynamic visions and practices for the future, potentially informing our responses to the global threat of climate change.

**Biography**

David Edwards is a Senior Social Scientist with Forest Research, an agency of the Forestry Commission. He has twenty years of interdisciplinary research experience of human-environment

relations in Europe, Africa and South Asia. His work seeks to ensure that social and cultural values are incorporated better into forest landscape decision-making.

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**Speaker**

Tola Dabiri  
*Cultural Heritage Independent Advisor & Consultant*

**Title**

Carnival Echoes: Intangible African Heritage and Carnival

**Abstract**

The history of Caribbean and S. American carnival that we see on our streets is both surprising and complex. It is the result of a particular journey, intertwined with the development of global exploration, commerce and colonisation. Many Caribbean and South American carnivals and Lenten celebrations travelled from Europe, became mixed with African and indigenous South American and Caribbean traditions, and have now been transported back to Europe where they have reinvigorated many local European carnival traditions which have become undervalued and overlooked in modern society.

However Carnival is more than procession, celebration and fun. Within Carnival are the voices and memories of kidnapped African slaves, which continue to link the African diaspora and contemporary Africans as one people. Carnival has become a vehicle which, through the oral transmission of knowledge and skills, has preserved elements of traditional African dance, language, costume and belief. Through modern Carnival we can hear the echoes of the singing, dance steps and drums of slaves and the intangible heritage of Africa and Carnival.

**Biography**

Tola Dabiri has worked in the cultural sector since 1995. Tola joined MLA South East in 2007, later transferring to MLA Council, where she was responsible for workforce development and equality and diversity policy. Recently Tola managed the HLF-funded Carnival Archive Project, which developed a digital archive. This unique resource documents the history of carnivals in the East of England. Tola is now a consultant in the cultural sector, specialising in project management, workforce development, equality and diversity meeting and discussion facilitation. Tola is a Board member of Watford Palace Theatre and Mandinga Arts.

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**Speaker**

Mike Forbes  
*Society for Storytelling*

**Title**

The art and craft of storytelling

**Abstract**

The work of the Society for Storytelling and its history and purpose in promoting oral storytelling in its different genres will be discussed. The main genre is the telling of traditional stories – myths, legends and folktales – which, of course, is directly relevant to the passing on of our intangible heritage.

An example of how a storyteller works will be given, with a discussion of the tripartite relationship between storyteller, audience and story. The need for respect for the story, ‘her’ age and ‘her’ cultural origins will be explained. The question will be raised of how the intangible nature of a storytelling performance can be safeguarded. There is a close interdependence between the tangible and the intangible. Storytellers draw most material from written sources: how does one deal with those written sources and safeguard them?

There is no established way of how to tell a story and there never will be. ICH can, however, provide a shared motive in why we are telling stories. The challenge for the SFS will be to promote the need to safeguard our part of the intangible cultural heritage among our band of disparate and independently-minded storytellers.

### **Biography**

Mike Forbes worked as a primary school teacher and is still teaching in a part-time capacity. He is presently Treasurer of the Society for Storytelling. He has worked in schools, libraries and clubs as a storyteller for eight years, alongside his day job. He runs a storytelling club for adults in Walthamstow, London.

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### **Speaker**

Carole Souter CBE  
*Chief Executive, Heritage Lottery Fund*

### **Title**

A lasting difference for heritage and people: celebrating HLF's support for intangible heritage projects

### **Abstract**

For more than a decade HLF has invested significantly in projects that have explored and celebrated intangible heritage in the UK across all of the themes identified by UNESCO – oral traditions; social practices, rituals and festive events; the heritage of performing arts; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

It is not just the extent and range of projects that is significant, however. HLF's approach in encouraging communities to define heritage for themselves is in tune with UNESCO's belief that intangible cultural heritage must be "recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it".

Carole Souter will give an overview of HLF's work in this area, highlighting the drivers for the projects as well as their outcomes. She will reflect on recent consultations with internal and external stakeholders to suggest how HLF's strategic framework can further support work in this area.

### **Biography**

Carole Souter has been Chief Executive of the Heritage Lottery Fund since 2003. She has over 30 years' experience of policy development and operational management in the public sector. She sits on the boards of Creativity, Culture and Education, the Kent Wildlife Trust and the National Communities Resource Centre.

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### **Speaker**

Dr David Thackray OBE

### **Title**

Concluding remarks

### **Biography**

David recently retired as Head of Archaeology for the National Trust. He is currently President of ICOMOS-UK, actively involved with Europa Nostra-UK, and is a UK Jury member for EN / European Union Heritage Awards Scheme. David is also Chair of the Richard Jefferies Museum Trust in Swindon.