

# The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at [www.seapn.org.uk](http://www.seapn.org.uk) and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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## Did you see ...?

### ***Museums Journal***

The Jan/Feb 2024 issue<sup>1</sup> includes:

- Clare Hunt “New network will help armed forces museums address legacy of colonialism” [p15], which outlines the beginnings of a new joint development
- John Holt interviews the “Museums Change Lives 2023 Winners” [pp24-27]

### ***The School Librarian***

The latest issue<sup>2</sup> includes:

- Derek France “Supporting Neurodiversity” [pp10-12], which looks at ways in which the school library can support students who are neurodivergent, including reorganising the layout and rearranging the shelving, seating and tables; looking at lighting; face-out displays of books; having a selection of fidget toys, paper, pens, noise-cancelling headphones and other items to make ND – and all – young people feel welcome; a listening station.

Derek France particularly recommends the “Neurodivergent Umbrella”<sup>3</sup> which visually shows who might be included in any definition of ND.

### ***ARC Magazine***

The latest issue<sup>4</sup> includes:

- “ARA publishes its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Direction report” [ARA News], which notes the publication of this important new report [see below] [p10]
- Lizzy Bullock “Accessible online collections: building an archive for everyone” [pp20-21], which “[...] looks at how the UK National Archives approached the question ‘what should or could a modern, accessible archive be like for all our users?’ And how asking this question led to changes to the website to make it accessible to everyone, particularly those with specific needs due to disability, long-term impairment or condition.” [p20]
- “‘It’s All a Show: Fairground Showmen, Identity and Mental Health Exhibition’ is Awarded a £10,000 Grant by The National Lottery Heritage Fund” [news item]

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<sup>1</sup> *Museums Journal*, Jan/Feb 2024.

<sup>2</sup> *The School Librarian*, 71 (4), Winter 2023.

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.livedexperienceeducator.com/resources>.

<sup>4</sup> *ARC Magazine*, 396, Jan/Feb 2024.

“The exhibition will explore the Showmen communities’ complex array of identities and the ways in which this relates to mental health. It will showcase the first specific statistics and research on the mental health of this community within the UK and Ireland alongside oral histories, photography, artwork, a live performance and archive material from the NFCA from the Showmen’s perspective.” [p25]

### ***Focus on International Library and Information Work***

The latest issue<sup>5</sup> of this journal from CILIP’s International Library & Information Group includes:

- “Books Unbanned: Protecting the Freedom to Read for America’s Youth” which has been co-written by the Communications Teams of both The Brooklyn Public Library and The Seattle Public Library [pp16-20]. This gives a brief background:

“While censorship in the U.S. has an extended history, it has reached new heights over the last few years. In March 2023, the American Library Association’s (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom reported [...] that 2022 saw a record number of censorship attempts to library books and resources. More than 2,500 unique titles were challenged, a 38% increase since in 2021. 48% of book challenges targeted materials in public libraries. In August 2023, the ALA released preliminary data documenting a continued increase in censorship attempts across public, school, and academic libraries during the first eight months of 2023, with 695 attempts to restrict or ban over 1,900 titles.” [p16]

and then goes on to look at the work being undertaken in the two library services, particularly with the development of the “Books Unbanned” initiative<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Focus on International Library and Information Work*, 54 (2), 2023, [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/group/bd35bb32-65ad-475f-82be-dcfe36e1ec69/focus/focus\\_54-2.pdf?utm\\_campaign=1020685\\_Focus%2054%282%29%20UPDATE&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=The%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Library%20and%20%20Information%20Professionals&dm\\_i=6WFS,LVKD,9VBO9,2UPEV,1](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/group/bd35bb32-65ad-475f-82be-dcfe36e1ec69/focus/focus_54-2.pdf?utm_campaign=1020685_Focus%2054%282%29%20UPDATE&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Library%20and%20%20Information%20Professionals&dm_i=6WFS,LVKD,9VBO9,2UPEV,1).

<sup>6</sup> “**Books Unbanned** is a United States library program that issues library cards nationwide from regional libraries in order to give electronic access to the library’s digital and audio collections to teens and young adults living in U.S. locations where books are being challenged. Initially established by the [Brooklyn Public Library](#), it was created in response to a wave of book challenges against schools and libraries in 2021 and now encompasses five libraries across the United States.” Taken from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books\\_Unbanned](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_Unbanned).

## **Books for Keeps**

The latest issue<sup>7</sup> includes:

- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O'Connor “The Power of Exhibitions” in their excellent “Beyond the Secret Garden” series, which looks at how recent exhibitions around children’s books and writers focus on Black and racially minoritised writers working in Britain [pp14-15]
- Fabia Turner “Inclusive Books for Children: promises, prizes and plans for 2024” [p21]:

“It has only been four months since they launched but UK-based charity Inclusive Books for Children [<sup>8</sup>] has achieved a great deal in a short space of time, thanks to the dedication and drive of cofounders Sarah and Marcus Satha and their 10-strong reviewing team. Head of Content, Fabia Turner, reflects on the young charity’s achievements and looks ahead to 2024.”

- Nicholas Tucker “Obituary: Benjamin Zephaniah 1958–2023” [p22]
- Linda Newbery “Obituary: KM Peyton 1929–2023” [p23]

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## **Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies**

### ***Who decides? Influence and inequality in British democracy***

This new report<sup>9</sup> from IPPR received quite a bit of media coverage.

To start with some conclusions:

“People in this country are not politically equal. Put differently, the democratic principle of ‘one person, one vote’ does not hold true. Inequalities in power and influence are generated and reinforced across the policymaking process. This is at the heart of explaining the growth in economic inequality, the erosion of trust in the competence and fairness of democratic government and the rise of populism. Despite that, political inequality remains a blind spot for progressives.

To bring it into view, economic and political reform must march together in the new politics of security.” [p26]

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<sup>7</sup> *Books for Keeps*, 264, Jan 2024, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BfK-264-Jan-20241.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.inclusivebooksforchildren.org/>.

“Inclusive Books for Children is a charity that aspires for mainstream children’s books to be inclusive, and for inclusive children’s books to be mainstream. Along the way, we hope to nurture a new generation of open-minded and inspired young book lovers.”

Taken from: <https://www.inclusivebooksforchildren.org/about>.

<sup>9</sup> Parth Patel. *Who decides? Influence and inequality in British democracy*. IPPR, 2023, <https://ippr-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/who-decides-nov-23.pdf>.

As the report outlines:

“For first time since the birth of democracy in this country, people do not expect their children to be better off than them. Wages are falling after flatlining for a decade. It’s now far from certain a doctor or police officer will be there in our hour of need. The continent is once again at war and the planet on fire. This is the age of insecurity.

In the face of insecurity, people naturally want control. Most obviously in their private lives, but also in public life. Seen from this perspective, the rise of populism is less surprising; people want to ‘take back control’ of a political process that is not working for them.” [p5]

In addition:

“There are real differences in who gets their way in democracy. Studies across a range of democracies consistently find that policy is more responsive to the preferences of those at top of the income distribution compared to those in the middle and bottom.” [p5]

The report looks at: who speaks? Who listens? And who amplifies?

### Who speaks?

“Some voices are louder than others. The turnout gap between the top and bottom third of the income distribution, between renters and homeowners, and between those who did and did not attend university at general elections in the 1960s was negligible. In the 2010s, the turnout gap had grown to 18 per cent between top and bottom income terciles, to 23 per cent between renters and homeowners, and to 15 per cent between those who did and did not attend university.

Differences in who speaks in our democracy extend far beyond voting. Almost one in three university graduates has directly contacted a politician, while around one in 10 has joined a protest or lawful public demonstration. By comparison, only one in seven people without degrees have contacted a politician and fewer than one in 25 has joined a protest.” [p6]

### Who listens?

For example:

“The attitudes and positions of politicians also most closely mirror the views of citizens at the top end of the income distribution. If those with decision-making power come from affluent backgrounds and hold attitudes that most closely mirror those of high income and highly educated citizens, it is not surprising that policy is most responsive to the preferences of those groups.” [p6]

### Who amplifies?

“Money and organisation can heighten voices in a democracy. Money is channelled into the political process through parties and interest groups. The largest 10 per cent of donations account for over half of the total donations received by the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour parties. Moreover, party funding is becoming more concentrated. The share of party donations coming from those donating more than £100,000 has grown by around 8 per cent over the past decade.

The relationship between campaign spending and votes won has also strengthened in recent years, creating greater incentives for interest groups to finance political candidates. They also financially support sitting MPs. One in five MPs has private sector earnings over £1,000, while those with second jobs earn on average around £40,000 on top of their MP salary.” [p6]

The report calls for an overhaul of the political and economic systems “[...] with a new model based on state direction, a different kind of internationalism and a sharper focus on distribution.” [p6]

This is very useful background reading – we can see the vital importance of making sure that people have free access to reliable information and resources to help re-build trust and fairness.<sup>10</sup>

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## **LGBTQ+ issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations**

### **Banning of LGBTQ+ books and other library materials [continued] and Protests against Drag Queen Storytimes**

**“‘It’s an ongoing challenge’: Will the culture wars come for Britain’s books?”**

Just in case you haven’t seen this important article<sup>11</sup>:

“Books that discuss race, racism and sexuality are being banned or censored across America, igniting further conflict across the political spectrum. It’s happening in the UK, too, if – so far, at least – to a lesser extent. But should we be worried [...]”

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<sup>10</sup> Source: email from The Equality Trust, Dec 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Francesca Specter “‘It’s an ongoing challenge’: Will the culture wars come for Britain’s books?”, *Independent*, 2 Dec 2023, [https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/book-bans-uk-us-censorship-b2456957.html?utm\\_campaign=981847\\_Copy%20of%20Fortnightly%20newsletter%2013%20December%202023%20-%20MEMBER&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=The%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Library%20and%20%20Information%20Professionals&dm\\_i=6WFS,L1LJ,9VBO9,2PWQC,1](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/book-bans-uk-us-censorship-b2456957.html?utm_campaign=981847_Copy%20of%20Fortnightly%20newsletter%2013%20December%202023%20-%20MEMBER&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Library%20and%20%20Information%20Professionals&dm_i=6WFS,L1LJ,9VBO9,2PWQC,1).

It draws together some recent examples, and includes commentaries from Nick Poole (CILIP) and Alison Tarrant (SLA), as well as quotations from Jacqueline Wilson (concerns about “the prospect of US-style children’s book censorship over race and LGBTQ+ issues”) and Anthony Horowitz (worries “around the posthumous editing of authors’ books, most notably the new editions of Roald Dahl books released by Puffin”).

### **“The nine queerest moments from the Emmy Awards 2024, from kisses to ‘evil gays’”**

A great comment from RuPaul:

“We have released into the wild hundreds of drag queens, and they’re beautiful. On behalf of all of them, we thank you.’

He added: ‘And listen, if a drag queen wants to read you a story at a library, listen to her. Because knowledge is power. And if someone tries to restrict your access to power, they are trying to scare you.’”<sup>12</sup>

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## **Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations**

### **“Contested heritage” and “Culture wars”**

#### **“Heritage professionals respond to ‘woke archaeology’ claims”**

This article<sup>13</sup> outlines the claims made in Parliament of “woke archaeology”:

“The row began following the publication of a peer-reviewed bioarchaeological research study in November by the Museum of London examining the ethnicity of 14th-century plague victims.

From a sample of 145 skeletons taken from London plague cemeteries, the museum’s researchers concluded that Black women of African descent were more likely to die of plague. While acknowledging the small research sample, the team said that these higher death rates may show the impact of “premodern structural racism”.

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<sup>12</sup> Marcus Wratten “The nine queerest moments from the Emmy Awards 2024, from kisses to ‘evil gays’”, *PinkNews*, 16 Jan 2024, [https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/01/16/9-queerest-moments-2024-emmy-awards-niecy-nash-rupaul-elton-ayo-edebiri/?utm\\_source=piano&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=pL4\\_ASNVJqAAhufNpjOwS4uR70.2WcF5d\\_XnyrBqpxtmpeywF83n5HHF5VtYXD76.xli0aBzlw#page/3](https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/01/16/9-queerest-moments-2024-emmy-awards-niecy-nash-rupaul-elton-ayo-edebiri/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pnespid=pL4_ASNVJqAAhufNpjOwS4uR70.2WcF5d_XnyrBqpxtmpeywF83n5HHF5VtYXD76.xli0aBzlw#page/3).

<sup>13</sup> Geraldine Kendall Adams “Heritage professionals respond to ‘woke archaeology’ claims”, Museums Association, 19 Dec 2023, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2023/12/heritage-professionals-respond-to-woke-archaeology-claims/#msdynttrid=Rhp-RVaeiuWOvOPP3NDxhVEYXn8QcsguKM0QpeHN-Rk>.

The report's findings were criticised by some politicians and commentators, including the business and equalities secretary Kemi Badenoch, who subsequently wrote to the museum with her concerns."

### **“‘Woke’ is meaningless, says the National Trust’s communications lead”**

This is a positive interview<sup>14</sup> with Celia Richardson (National Trust’s Director of Communications) where she looks at the media attacks on the NT (especially via the Restore Trust organisation).

As she says, some arguments can be dismantled with evidence:

“They’ve often said that we have hidden objects because of their link to slavery, when in fact they’ve been on loan to another museum or gallery.”

but some are harder to deal with:

“Nebulous accusations about going ‘woke’ are particularly difficult to deal with. ‘Journalists will always talk about wokery because it’s easy,’ she says. ‘The Charity Commission chairman has asked people not to complain to them about charities being “woke” because it doesn’t mean anything. Charities are there to do virtuous things.’”<sup>15</sup>

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

ALA = American Library Association  
ARA = Archives and Records Association  
NT = National Trust  
SLA = School Library Association

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This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

John Vincent  
Wisteria Cottage  
Nadderwater  
Exeter EX4 2JQ

Tel/fax: 01392 256045  
E-mail: [john@nadder.org.uk](mailto:john@nadder.org.uk)

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<sup>14</sup> Emily Lawford “‘Woke’ is meaningless, says the National Trust’s communications lead”, *Prospect*, 15 Jan 2024, [https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/views/people/64486/woke-national-trust-restore-trust-charity?mc\\_cid=a77ab9feba&mc\\_eid=e91604b40f](https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/views/people/64486/woke-national-trust-restore-trust-charity?mc_cid=a77ab9feba&mc_eid=e91604b40f).

<sup>15</sup> <sup>15</sup> Source: Left Foot Forward *Right Wing Watch*, 20 Jan 2024.