



Isolation and Loneliness – opening up new stories and interpretive experiences at Calke Abbey

Stage 2 Report

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A list of RCMG research projects is available from
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About the partners

Calke Abbey

Calke Abbey is a National Trust property located in South Derbyshire. Taken over by the Trust in 1985, it is characterised by its peeling paintwork and overgrown courtyards. Calke Abbey tells the story of the dramatic decline of a grand country house estate through its conservation philosophy of repair not restore.

Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG)

As part of the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, RCMG combines academic rigour with practical experience of museums, galleries and heritage sites. Research teams are brought together to meet the specific needs and requirements of each project and their work to date has enabled RCMG to develop a unique set of skills, experiences and perspectives in capturing, analysing and interpreting the perspectives, experiences and voices of users, and non-users, of cultural organisations, alongside staff and volunteers at these sites. Over the past 15 years, RCMG has developed considerable specialist expertise in this area, bringing academic rigour and innovation in research methods to bear on the challenge of understanding how museums, galleries and heritage sites effect change – in some form or another – in their audiences and teams.

Research team

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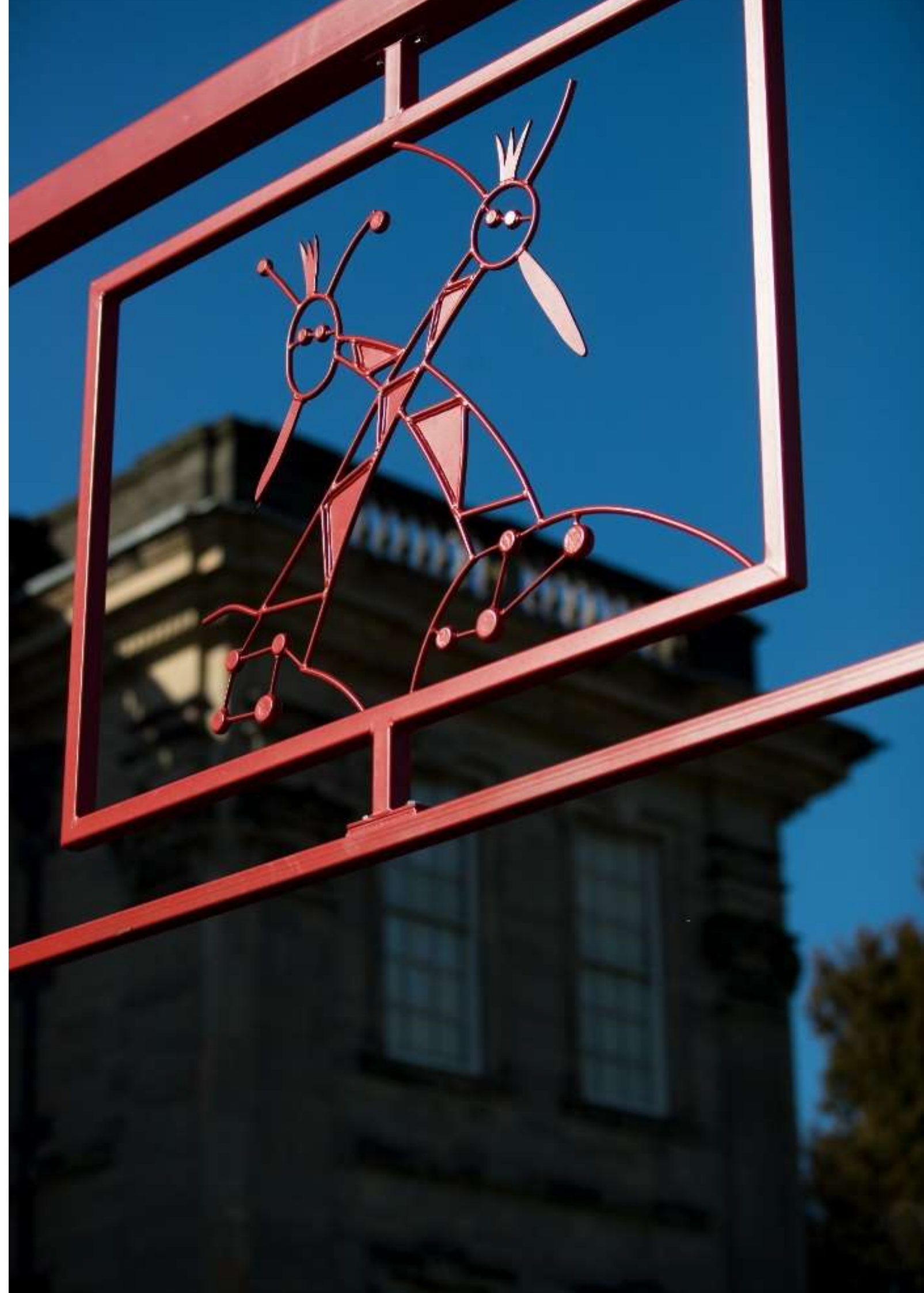
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Introduction

Calke Abbey is a beautiful and highly atmospheric National Trust property in South Derbyshire, UK. It comprises a large historic house and stable yard, formal gardens and rolling landscape. It is particularly important for its woodland habitat. Unlike the majority of National Trust properties, Calke is marketed as ‘the un-stately home’ and is maintained in a state of disrepair – as it was when it was taken on by the National Trust in the 1980s. Calke has a dedicated team of staff who run the site as well as a large group of 500+ volunteers who occupy roles from gardening to staffing the shop and engaging directly with visitors on the history of the house and gardens.

Isolation and loneliness – opening up new stories and interpretive experiences at Calke Abbey emerged as part of the Calke team’s desire to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of Henry Harpur Crewe, 7th Baronet of Calke Abbey who was reputedly dubbed ‘The Isolated Baronet’ in his own time. With an ambition to make a contribution to discussions and campaigns surrounding the contemporary issue of loneliness and to the lives of people who might be struggling with loneliness, and aware of the need to enter this space from an educated and thoroughly researched perspective, Calke approached RCMG to ask them to ‘think with’ Calke about the potential opportunities and pitfalls of work in this area and to help Calke plan this work in such a way that it would: generate new and ongoing community relationships; deliver Calke’s ambition to deliver high quality and sector leading interpretive practice; result in an exceptional visitor experience and programming for 2019/20; and leave a legacy of increased expertise, creativity and confidence amongst staff and volunteers to develop this and other work in the future.

Jointly led by Alison Thornhill from Calke Abbey and Professor Suzanne MacLeod from RCMG, the first phase of this research was undertaken over a 4 month period in the final

months of 2017 and a Stage 1 Report was generated setting out important research around loneliness and isolation and recommending an approach to work in this field at Calke (MacLeod et al 2018).

The second phase of the project – Stage 2 – ran from March 2018 to December 2019. At Stage 2, a complex and energetic programme of activity was developed across the site and its range of functions and involving a large number of staff, volunteers, researchers and artists in a participatory process characterised by an ‘all in’ philosophy. In addition to a public talks programme, a buddy system and alumni scheme for volunteers, a programme called Chatty Play aimed at parents or caregivers with young children who are struggling with feelings of isolation and loneliness and where children can play together while adults are able to chat to others in a friendly, safe and welcoming environment, a programme of community relationship building, staff training and an invigorated discussion about organisational culture, Stage 2 resulted in HumanKind, a new visitor experience which opened in Spring 2019. HumanKind fundamentally rewrites long-established narratives at the site and purposefully introduces a focus on loneliness and deep human connection. It invites visitors to Calke to join the discussion, become more aware of themselves and those around them, and to prioritise kindness and compassion. This report describes the work undertaken as well as the findings from the Stage 2 evaluation of the project.

PART 1



Figure 1: Sir Henry Harpur, 7th Baronet, miniature by Sir Thomas Lawrence, Calke Abbey.

1.1 The project

Stage 1

The 4-month Stage 1 process of thinking, learning, discussing and reflecting ended with a report detailing the research findings (MacLeod et al 2018). Key findings included important work defining loneliness and social isolation and understanding the relationship between feelings of loneliness and transition points in our lives. We learned that not all visitors to Calke pick up on the sense of isolation others feel in the physicality of the place and that staff value so much. We also noted some rather judgemental and stigmatising language (in relation to Henry Harpur (Figure 1) and his descendants) in the Guidebook and in the person-to-person interpretation delivered by staff and volunteers onsite. These narratives focused on the perceived 'eccentricities' of 'The Isolated Baronet' and even suggested that there was a genetic trait in the family which marked them out as 'odd' and 'different'. A large number of anecdotes about the 'anti-social' behaviour of family members circulated at Calke. When combined with the sense of decline and decay embodied in the physical site, these stories made for a compelling, though limiting and potentially stigmatising experience. Stage 1 also involved two Strategic Workshops where key partners were invited to help us refine the research focus and were able to feed in areas that they felt deserved more attention. Key relationships were established with, for example, the Campaign to End Loneliness and Derbyshire CVS.

A key outcome of Stage 1 was a detailed plan for the work we aspired to develop at Stage 2. Seeking to generate an ambitious organisation-wide engagement with the project and support a process of organisational development and upskilling, the Stage 1 Report recommended that we

generate activity across three overlapping and inter-related areas of activity:

1. opening up moments of reflection on and awareness of questions of loneliness and social isolation which are felt, physically and emotionally;
 2. working to create opportunities for staff, volunteers, visitors and programme participants to avoid loneliness by asking Calke to think deeply about how it could be social in everything it does and how it could manifest its ambition to be welcoming, sociable and prompt small acts of kindness in and through its physical and human resources;
 3. ongoing research and development as the Calke team learn more about what matters to them and push their work and capacity forward.
- Stage 1 ended with the diagram below (Figure 2) which identified key actions the team would take against each of these areas.

Opening up moments of reflection on and awareness of contemporary questions of loneliness and social isolation

There is a real *stigma* surrounding loneliness, meaning that many individuals find it difficult to admit to feeling lonely, not only to themselves, but to others. *Talking about loneliness* is key to tackling loneliness. A key part of our Strategy is to generate debate by providing a platform for discussion and deep reflection.

- Generating debate
- Providing a platform for discussion
- Posing questions
- Chalk boards and other small text-based interventions around the site – start a conversation about loneliness and isolation in response to the spirit of this place
- Events – hosting talks
- Work with hand-picked creatives to respond to Calke and create a small number of powerful and evocative installations which prompt reflection on contemporary questions of social isolation and loneliness
- Co-production of creative interventions

Creating opportunities to avoid loneliness

In relation to loneliness and social isolation, *prevention* is key and small interventions and moments of empowerment can have big impacts. A key part of the Strategy is to embed opportunities for visitors, volunteers, staff and a range of people working with local organisations, to *build 'thin ties'* and enable others to do the same. This has great potential to be embedded across the visitor experience and in a whole range of projects.

- A warm welcome for everyone – modelling inclusive behaviour across all areas of work
- Being sociable in everything we do – what might this mean?
- Recognition that some people come alone to Calke because they feel safe here
- Chatty Cafe – the addition of 'Chatter and Natter' tables at key points during the visit
- Rewriting the Guidebook to remove judgemental language and stigma
- Directing existing programming at groups already working with people at risk from loneliness and social isolation in order to share the wellbeing benefits of Calke with others
- Making space at Calke available to specific local and community groups in order to enrich their ongoing activities
- Introduce a buddy system for new volunteers
- Introduce more opportunities for teamworking – volunteering can sometimes be too solitary an experience
- Introducing support for individuals as they transition out of volunteering – a volunteer alumni scheme
- Encouraging visitors to take action – small acts of kindness which can make a big difference by using the simple card system (other opportunities will follow once we start!)

Research and development

As the team at Calke works through the outcomes from this research and plans the work that will take place at Stage 2 of the project, there is clearly significant potential for *organisational learning and capacity building* from internal sharing and innovation, to working with and learning from others, undertaking new research, and planning in targeted professional development opportunities.

- Form a steering group
- Identify internal champions to drive Calke's work around loneliness and social isolation
- Professional development – targeted visits to see how others are working
- Build new skills and knowledge amongst the team
- Consolidate research about the people who lived at Calke and identify new areas of research
- Building understanding of local groups and how Calke can work with them
- Building a deeper understanding of visitors – becoming experts in who visits, who doesn't, and how we can develop an in-depth understanding of the visitor experience
- Increasing understanding of Calke's values and what matters to the people who work there

Figure 2: A programme of activity for Stage 2. Stage 1 research findings

1.2 The Stage 2 process

At Stage 2, the team worked hard to generate a deeply human process, philosophy and ethical framing of its work. Recognising that connection was the route out of loneliness, the project team set out to build an approach to the work which prioritised relationships and interaction, equity and transparency. Importantly, we would aim to draw on people's expertise, but not overly define roles to the detriment of spontaneity and collaboration. With an 'All In' attitude, we aspired to support everyone to become a researcher and a designer, to join in where they wanted to, and to do as little or as much as they were able to.

Working in a process developed by RCMG and later dubbed 'structured creativity', we organised ourselves around 16 working groups tasked with driving forward specific aspects of the project (Figure 4). Each working group had 2 leads (no-one working on their own!) who were given autonomy to drive work forward. The 'All In' philosophy meant that staff and volunteers could choose to be members of as many groups as they wished and that membership could change over the life of the project. Driven by a determination for absolute transparency and equity, groups worked hard to be non-hierarchical and inclusive. In the majority of cases, this approach was embraced by participants and was successful, though there was a lack of activity in 2 groups where a more directive approach might have been more productive and a lack of transparency in another group where excellent work proved difficult to share for the working group leads. The 16 work packages covered all of the main areas of work identified in the Stage 1 report with Working Groups reporting to a monthly Steering Group chaired by Alison

Thornhill. Rather than directing action, Alison worked hard to ensure that the Steering Group was a focus for sharing and monitoring progress together.

Key to Stage 2 was an emphasis on the physicality of Calke. Returning continually to the research and understanding generated at Stage 1 – about loneliness but also about the very specific nature of the spatial and social landscape at Calke which sets up certain possibilities for social relationships and experiences and closes off others – the process ensured that the physical site as well as the team's growing understanding of space and design in experience, remained not just at the forefront of our minds but central to our practice.



Figure 3: Volunteers exploring the archives.

<p>Chatty Café</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> To establish the Calke chatty café (using the chatty café scheme); the Staunton Harold history café; The Squirts café for parents and carers targeted at specific groups at risk of loneliness; and any related activities</p>	<p>Staff and volunteer Alumni Scheme</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> To develop and establish an active alumni scheme for staff and volunteers</p>	<p>Staff and volunteer Buddy Scheme</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> To develop and establish a flexible and workable buddy scheme for staff and volunteers</p>	<p>Opportunities for Team Working amongst staff and volunteers</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> To explore opportunities for team working amongst staff and volunteers, test them with colleagues and establish a series of pilot projects</p>
<p>Large-scale interpretation</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> working directly from the Stage 1 findings, develop the major interpretive interventions to be installed at the site in December 2018/January 2019.</p>	<p>Seating and welcome</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> to analyse and rethink the visitor welcome/use of seating across the site and throughout the visitor experience.</p>	<p>Small-scale interpretation</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> working directly from the Stage 1 findings, develop the small-scale interpretive interventions to be installed at the site in December 2018/January 2019</p>	<p>Creating connections: making space available to groups and organisations</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> Making space available to specific groups in order to enrich their ongoing activities</p>
<p>Public Talks</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> to plan a series of talks for the year which draw attention to the social issue of isolation of loneliness, debate the role of culture in tackling such issues, and contribute to the awareness of staff and volunteers.</p>	<p>Editing the Guidebook and leaflets– changing the story</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> to review the content, remove stigma, and change the story to reflect the fullness of the people who lived at Calke and to be more specific/precise on questions of isolation and loneliness</p>	<p>Team training – modelling inclusive behaviour across the site – ‘thin ties’</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> to take the ethos of the project and the research into a series of training initiatives for staff and volunteers (might include visits to other organisations, workshops to rethink the welcome/consider what it means to be inclusive, etc.)</p>	<p>Creating connections: exchange</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> Building understanding of local groups and how Calke can work with them</p>
<p>Internal and external communications</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> to develop a varied programme of internal and external communications related to the project which reach staff, volunteers, the Trust more broadly and which position the project in national and international debates/scholarship</p>	<p>Action points - generating small acts of kindness</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> to ensure that the opportunities for visitors to understand how they can help tackle loneliness and isolation through small acts of kindness are present across the project; to generate specific action points from where we can trigger small acts of kindness</p>	<p>Creating connections: working with groups and organisations</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> working with specific groups over 2019; directing existing programming at groups already working with people at risk from L&S; informing and feeding into Stage 3 of the project</p>	<p>Stage 3</p> <p><i>Focus:</i> begin to develop Stage 3, identify funding and develop application</p>

Figure 4: A process of structured creativity – 16 working groups.



Figure 5: Project leads Alison Thornhill and Suzanne MacLeod explore Airmyne Jenney's journals and books for the Guidebook working group in the Calke book store.

Three short examples drawn from the Guidebook working group, the Interpretation working groups, and the Connecting Communities working groups, are helpful in understanding more about the process and how the project progressed.

The Guidebook Working Group

A relatively small group comprising the Regional Curator, three volunteers deeply involved in research at Calke, two researchers from RCMG and the project designer, the Guidebook Working Group began by spending a week together in the archive (Figure 3 and 5). Tasked with looking at the stigmatising language in the Guidebook, the group began to work together on a number of resources (letters, journals, diaries, photographs). Importantly, and bearing in mind the team's challenge to be sociable in everything it did, a decision was taken to work as a group and always in discussion. Very quickly, the group realised that the archive challenged the narrative of a socially isolated and dysfunctional family. Rather, the archive revealed a very privileged but in many ways very ordinary family who loved one another deeply, who lived full and interesting lives and who, like all of us, experienced moments of great loss and loneliness.

Over the course of the week in the archive, the team began to build a deeper understanding of a handful of family members and servants and to make sense of how such a limiting and stigmatising caricature of the family could have become so ingrained. For the volunteers involved, the discussions began to make sense of the contradictions they felt in the interpretation at Calke and their own part in underplaying aspects of key individual's lives at Calke. It gradually became clear to the group that in a bid to save Calke for the nation

in the 1980s and as the remaining family faced impossible tax bills, a group of historians and family members constructed a story which would mark Calke out as significant. Interestingly, unlike many other stately homes, this story would not only focus on the land and the built forms (which in themselves might not be considered significant enough), but would highlight the perceived eccentricities of the Harpur-Crewes. The story proved compelling and the government stepped in and provided the monies needed for the National Trust to take over.

A key outcome of this collaborative research and the group's realisation that the core narrative at Calke was at the very least an exaggeration and potentially even a fabrication, was an Ethical Framework to guide research and thinking. The Framework emphasised detail, accuracy, the words (often handwritten) of the individual and deep reflection on the language we use and the ways in which our choices might affect the feelings and value judgements of visitors to and workers at Calke today (Figure 7). To really emphasise how the approaches and emphases embedded in the Ethical Framework demanded that we work and think differently and to encourage a constructively critical approach amongst the team, the team also produced a Framework for Unethical Interpretation (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Unethical Interpretation at Calke Abbey – a framework developed to generate a critical approach and illustrate the demand for new ways of thinking and working.



Figure 7: A Framework for Ethical Interpretation at Calke developed following a week of research in the family archive.

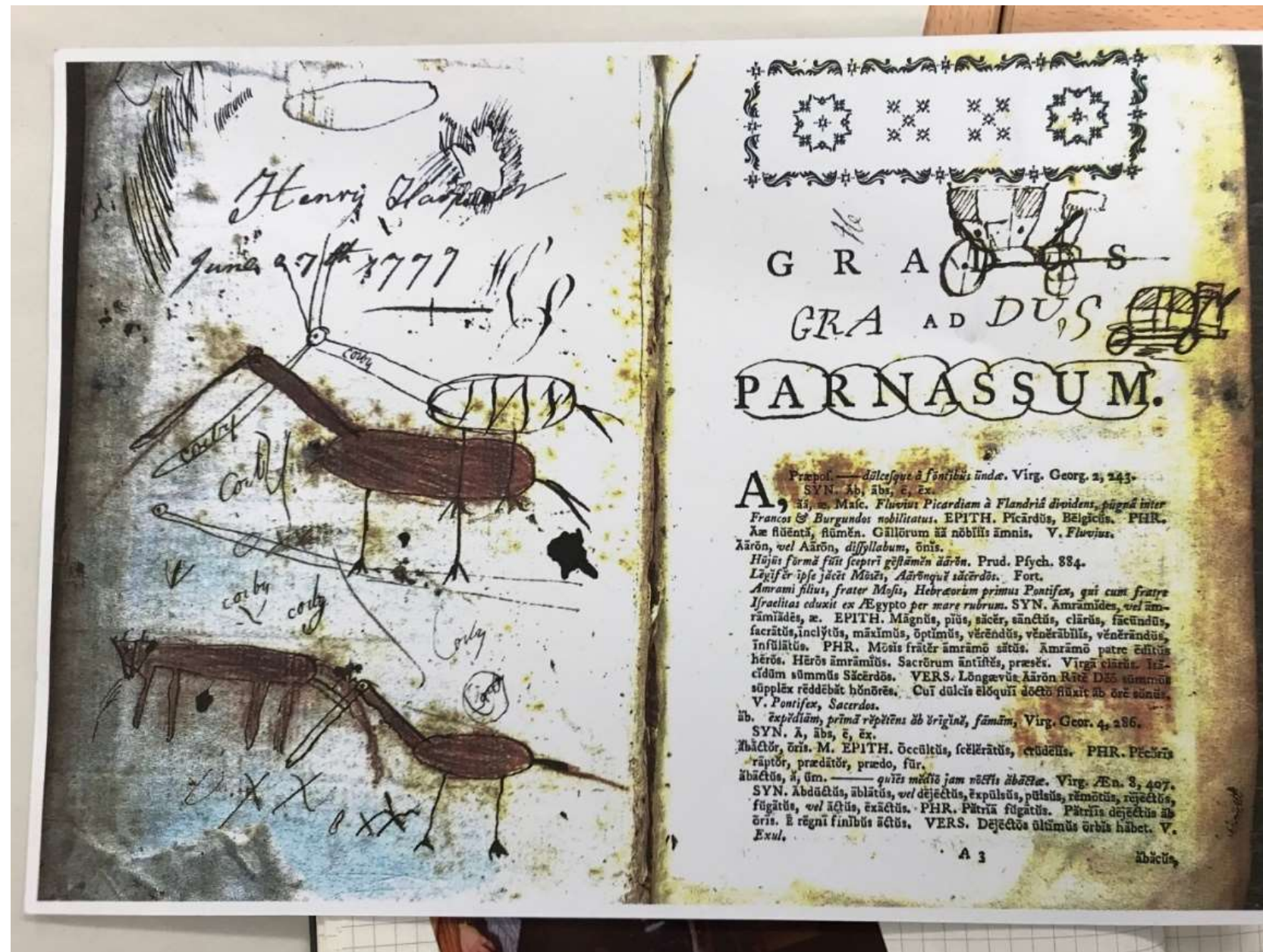


Figure 8: As a 13-year old boy, Henry drew strange beasts in his dictionary of Latin prose, *Gradus Ad Parnassum*, by John Carey, 1806.

As the Guidebook working group began to make sense of what they were finding, attention began to coalesce around six stories: a story of bereavement, a story of the love between a mother and a child, a story of separation between a mother and a child, a story of depression and an imagined suicide, a story of injury and the need for care from others and a story of stigma and prejudice, focused around Henry Harpur (Figure 1). All of this research fed directly into a new Guidebook (where we also addressed the lack of representation of women's and servants' stories), provided content for the Interpretation working groups and generated understanding between as well as deep and ongoing relationships amongst members of the research team who supported one another along the way – for example, two research volunteers were hosted at the University of Leicester by Professor MacLeod to explore research processes with genealogist Professor Kevin Schurer.



Figure 9: Julie Howell presenting early stage ideas to members of the HumanKind project team.

The Interpretation Working Groups

The Interpretation working groups included a larger group of staff, volunteers and researchers. Numbers swelled beyond the core team as the project progressed and ambitions for the on-site interpretation grew. Working throughout with designer Julie Howell who was tasked with listening, supporting, and enabling the team to design with her – a process aided by Julie's involvement in the Guidebook research – the group worked to explore how the new stories might be told in ways which challenged both the established narrative *and* the rather linear and limited visitor experience. Both the Small and Large Interpretation working groups (these groups merged as the project progressed) would develop ideas in workshops – sometimes stimulated by a story and sometimes by an idea from Julie or one of the team (Figure 9 and 10). Discussions were documented through brainstorming



Figure 10: Julie Howell and Frances MacLeod develop drawings based on the teenage doodles of Henry Harpur.

activities and visual representations as well as note taking. Between meetings and creative workshops, Julie would work up the ideas produced and then share them back for comment and adjustment. In the final months of the project, as media and approaches were selected, the Interpretation working groups focused their energy on producing *HumanKind* which comprised a series of small displays in the family apartments (a section of Calke Abbey lived in by the family up to the 1990s), 3 large landscape rooms where visitors could spend time with one another, 2 pledge walls and a series of activities and programmes to generate connections and support visitors, volunteers and staff to avoid loneliness.

At the start of the project, the Interpretation working groups were thinking, still, in a linear way about the visitor experience – we plotted an on-site journey from movement up the mile-long drive, through arrival, parking and orientation, through a landscape room, into the house and through the exhibition before moving into the café and engaging with the pledge wall. As the project progressed, however, we began to expand this approach by thinking more creatively about spheres of activity (exploring and spending unstructured time in the landscape rooms, intimate encounters in the exhibition, moments of curiosity and reflection in the house, engagements with the contemporary issue and invitations to action at the pledge walls and during activities around the site) as parts of a visit which prioritised the lives and experiences of visitors as much as it prioritised the stories and usual activities (visiting, looking, reading, listening, eating and drinking and shopping) at Calke.

The work undertaken in the Interpretation working groups demanded a huge amount from staff, volunteers, designers and researchers, asking them to continually question the decisions we were taking and push beyond the

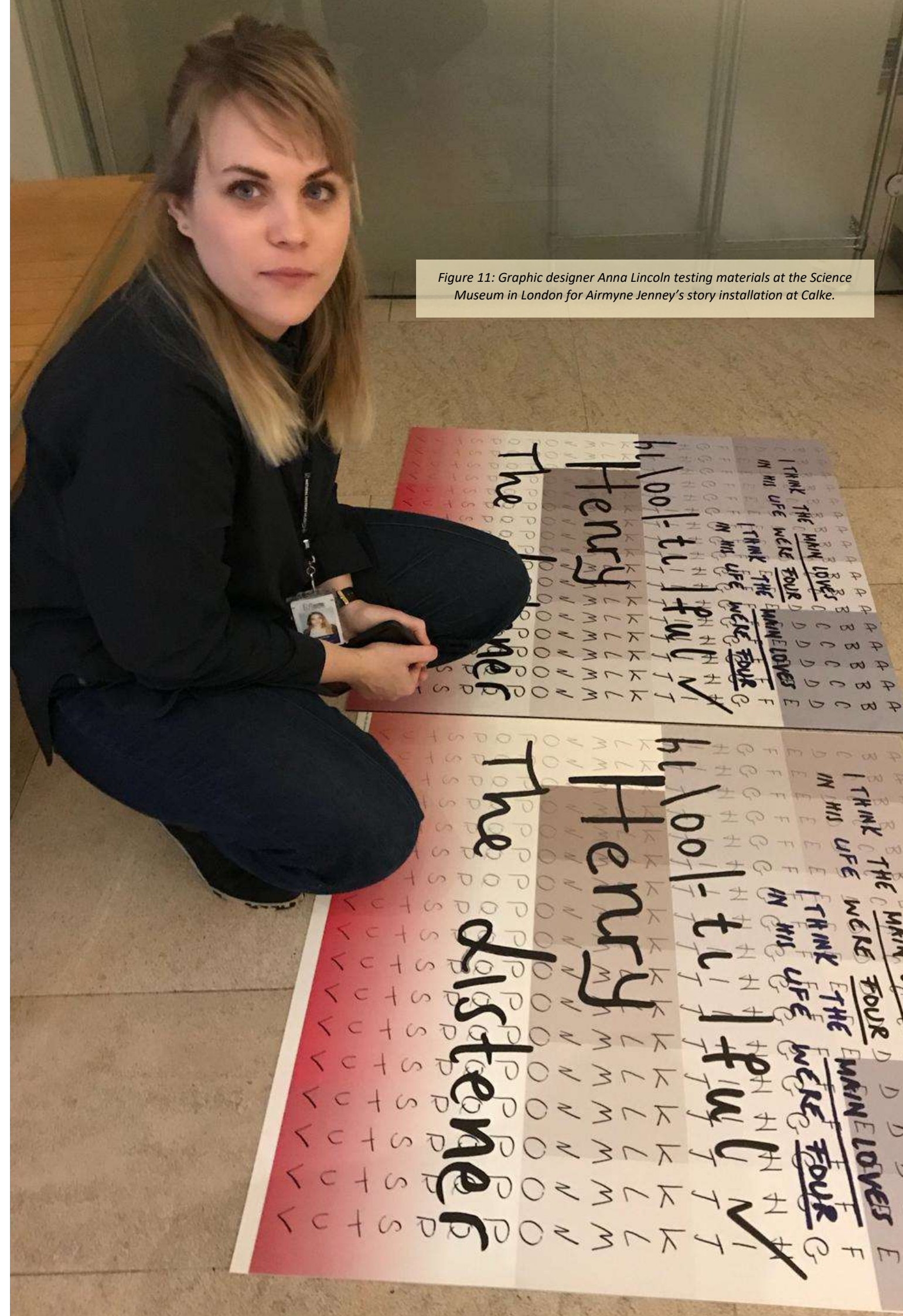


Figure 11: Graphic designer Anna Lincoln testing materials at the Science Museum in London for Airmyne Jenney's story installation at Calke.

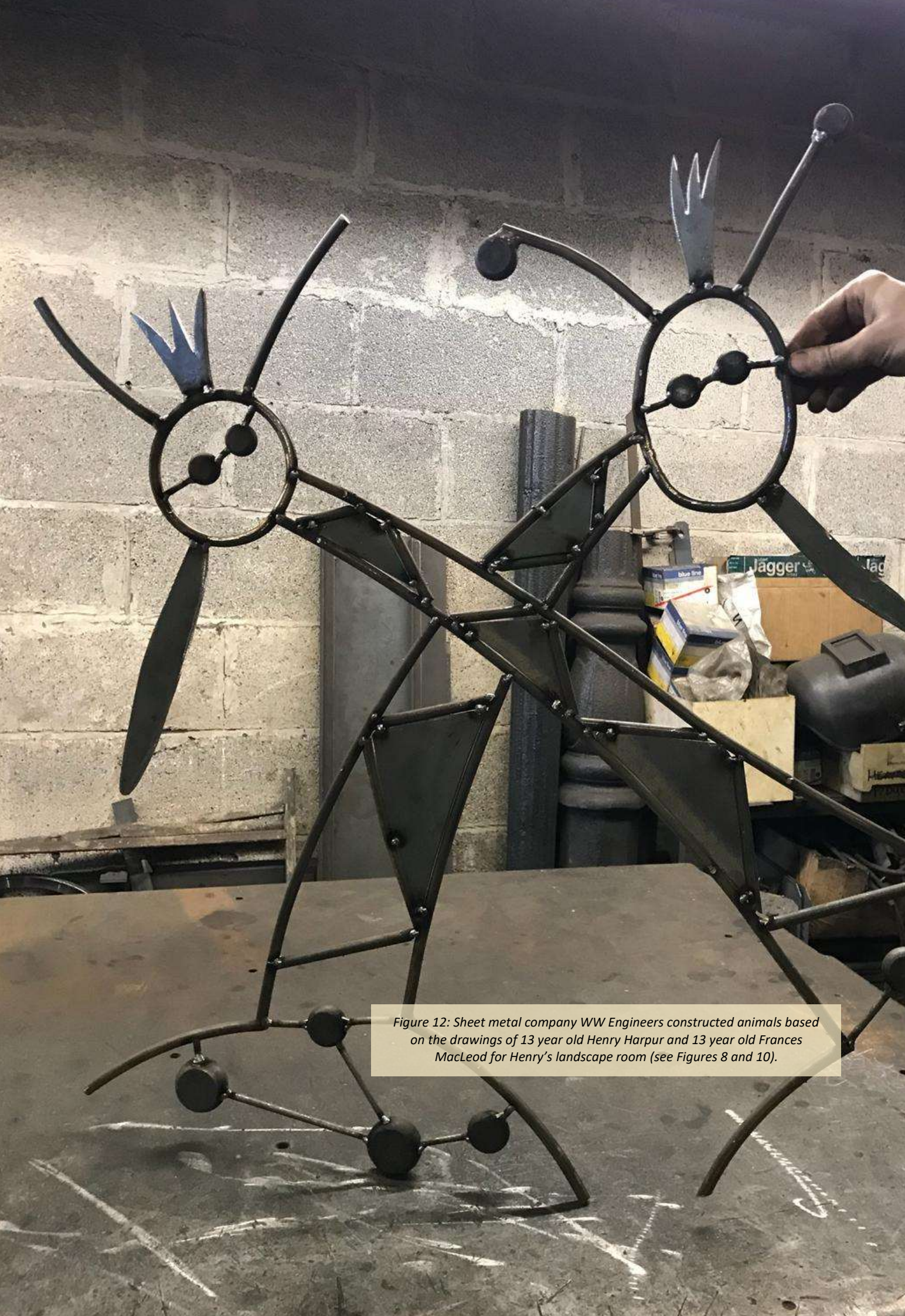


Figure 12: Sheet metal company WW Engineers constructed animals based on the drawings of 13 year old Henry Harpur and 13 year old Frances MacLeod for Henry's landscape room (see Figures 8 and 10).

conventional ways of working and thinking. It placed new demands on all the team members to work in the context of Calke and enable the design of spatial and social landscapes arising from the interactions of a very large number of people. As well as complicating the story told at Calke for 30 years, the team gradually worked towards an interpretive approach that aimed to support more 'intimate encounters' (Bonnell and Simon, 2007) with Calke, with self and with others; to prompt personal reflections on loneliness, empathy and understanding about loneliness, and a desire to act to tackle loneliness.

Slowing the rhythm of the visit and interrupting the conventional ways of being at Calke, the team shared stories through gentle immersive films, intriguing installations (in the family apartment and in the main house) and even a beautifully stitched version of a more conventional text panel. Driven by our desire to expand the visit and prompt discussion and action, we purposefully avoided putting stories on text panels and 'delivering content' to visitors. Rather, we worked hard to generate installations which might draw visitors in and prioritise their relationships, discussions and deliberations (Figures 11 to 18). In the family apartment, the six story displays were drawn together with a contemporary film co-produced with Deaf-led organisation Remark!, flipped to prioritise BSL (British Sign Language) as its first language, and explaining not only the devastating impact of loneliness and isolation on three 'at risk' groups – older people, young men and deaf people – but also how we can all help. In the landscape, the Interpretation working groups placed three large rooms based on the dimensions and architectural details of specific rooms in the house which signalled that something new was happening, carried small amounts of content, and extended an invitation to visitors to sit down and spend time together. Finally, two pledge walls and a

series of ongoing activities encourage human connection and seek to prompt small acts of kindness (Figure 16). The outcome of a huge amount of effort from all those involved, the displays and installations opened in April 2019.



● Georgiana,
Lady Crewe
(1824-1910)

● Vauncey
Harpur Crewe
(1846-1924)

● Harriet Phillips
(1823-1895)

● Henry Harpur
(1763-1819)

● Winifred Harpur
Crewe
(1879-1953)

● Airmyne Jenney
(1919-1999)

● George Crewe
(1795-1844)

Figure 13. Residents of Calke Abbey whose stories are told in HumanKind, used as an introduction to the project

Figure 14: View from the top of a staircase showing one of the installations (Airmyne's story)

I THINK THE MAIN LIVES IN [HENRY'S] LIFE WERE HIS SISTER, AIRMYNE - TO WHOM HE WAS A MOST DEVOTED BROTHER. PUTTING HER WELL-BEING ALWAYS FIRST.

Make Sentences

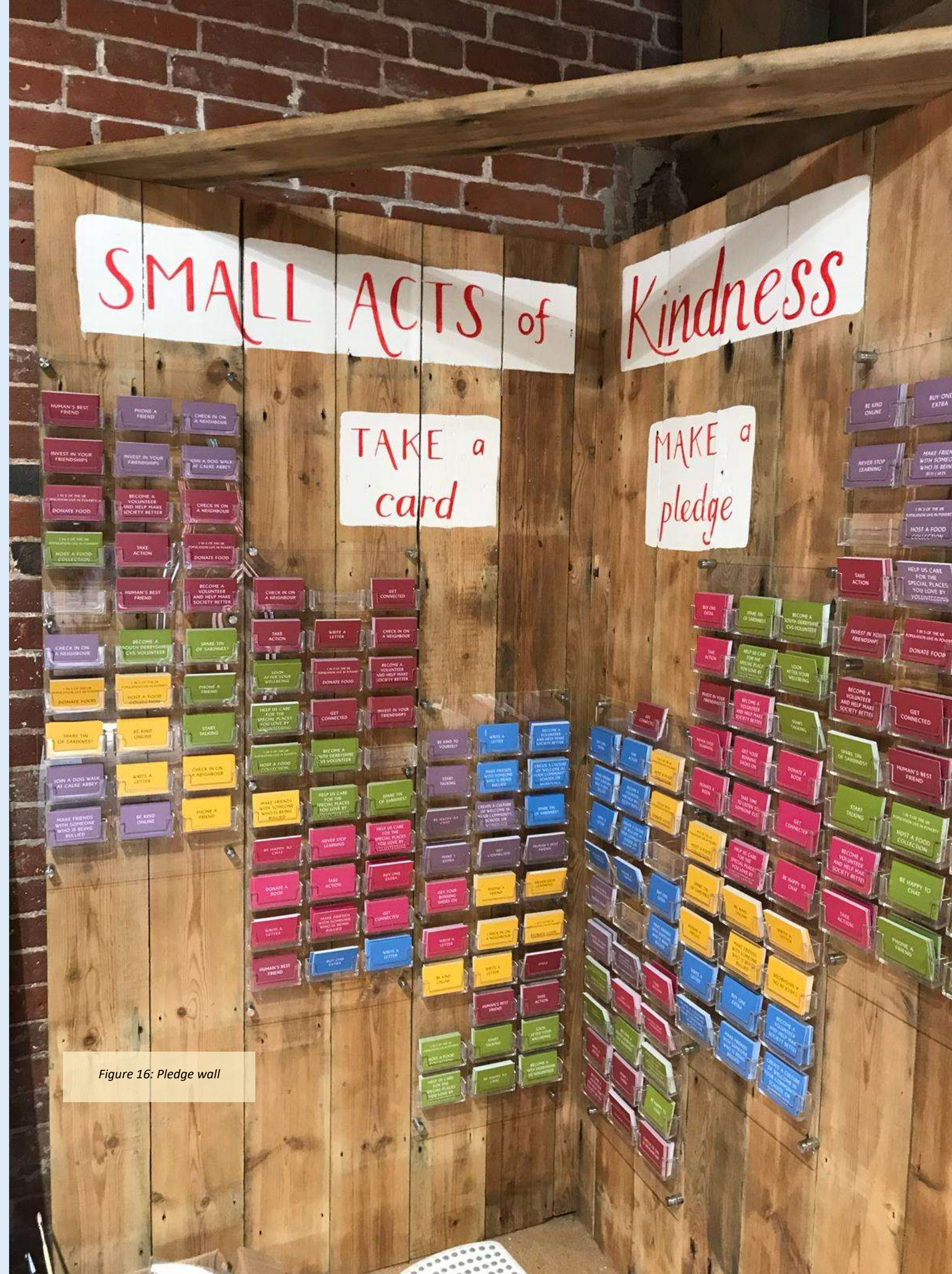
- 1) Which do you like best an apple lemon or orange ✓
- 2) If you want an egg a pot, you must keep some hens ✓
- 3) I like men who smoke a pipe ✓
- 4) Put some water in the kettle ✓
- 5) Let us go down to the sea, and bring the net with you to get some shrimps ✓
- 6) My pen wants filling with ink ✓
- 7) The kettle is boiling over ✓

Henry Hen
The



Figure 15: Servants' Hall, where one of the HumanKind videos played





SMALL ACTS of

Kindness

TAKE a
card

MAKE a
pledge

Figure 16: Pledge wall

Figure 17: Landscape Room





Figure 18: Landscape Room, detail

young carers – this enabled very quick ideas to develop; an Easter Egg hunt was perfect for a day out away from caring responsibilities.

As relationships between Calke and the groups developed, a number of issues became increasingly apparent: transport to a place which is inaccessible by public transport; accessibility for many but specifically for many disabled people; and the costs of entrance fees. Together with a number of other issues, this growing awareness led the Connecting Communities working group to develop its own Ethical Framework for working with community groups which sought to prioritise a flexible approach focused around the needs of the group.

Creating Connections at Calke Menu of Offers	
<p>PROGRAMMING</p> <p>Humankind (interventions & talks)</p> <p>Calke Explore</p> <p>Squirts</p> <p>50 Things Activities</p> <p>Costumed Interpretation</p> <p>Easter</p> <p>Halloween</p> <p>Christmas</p> <p>Opportunity - Harvest</p> <p>EVENTS</p> <p>Kite Flying</p> <p>Dine and Discover</p> <p>Apple Day</p> <p>Pumpkin Party</p> <p>Lambing</p> <p>Heritage Open Day</p> <p>Bear Hunt</p> <p>Dancing - Tea Dance, Country Dancing, Maypole Dancing</p> <p>CAFÉ</p> <p>Café, Restaurant, Courtyard, Calke Explore, Staunton Harold Café, Pop-up Café</p> <p>Chatty Café</p> <p>History Café</p> <p>RIDING SCHOOL</p> <p>Fairs (eg. Vintage)</p> <p>Possibilities for further programming in Easter and August</p> <p>CHURCH</p> <p>At Calke and Staunton Harold</p>	<p>HOUSE</p> <p>Tours</p> <p>Calke Unlocked</p> <p>Conservation Tours</p> <p>Family Apartments</p> <p>OPEN SPACE & NATURE</p> <p>Calke Explore Hub - with accessible trail</p> <p>Walking for Health</p> <p>Photography Walks</p> <p>Park Guide Walks</p> <p>Downloadable Walks</p> <p>National Forest Walking Festival</p> <p>Benches</p> <p>Gardens - sit and enjoy; produce to buy; participation</p> <p>Tunnel Tours</p> <p>Garden Tours</p> <p>Perimeter Tours</p> <p>Deer Park Walks</p> <p>Bat Walks</p> <p>Dawn Chorus Walks</p> <p>VOLUNTEERING</p> <p>Social Groups</p> <p>House</p> <p>Gardens - Guides, Gardeners</p> <p>Park - Maintaining the Park</p> <p>Visitor Experience</p> <p>Events</p> <p>Buggy Drivers</p> <p>Administrative</p> <p>Research (eg. book team)</p> <p>Fundraising</p> <p>Conservation</p> <p>Costume Interpreters</p> <p>Squirts</p> <p>Stableyards</p> <p>New opportunities - Calke Explore, minibus driver, Creating Connections</p>

Figure 20: A menu of possibilities drawn up by the Connecting Communities working group.



Figure 21: The Connecting Communities working group generated a framework for ethical working with groups to help guide their work.

PART 2



2.1 Evaluation methodology

In Summer 2019, RCMG undertook an in-depth evaluation of *HumanKind* and conducted fieldwork at Calke Abbey gathering responses to *HumanKind* and the wider project from a number of participants, including visitors to the exhibition and installations, participants in the Creating Connections community partnerships activity, key team members such as the project designer, as well as Calke's staff and volunteers. The RCMG team conducting the fieldwork comprised Jocelyn Dodd, Sarah Plumb and Cesare Cuzzola. A larger team was brought together to collaboratively analyse the findings, comprising Suzanne MacLeod, Jocelyn Dodd, Richard Sandell, Sarah Plumb, Jenni Hunt, Cesare Cuzzola and Ceciel Brouwer. Two opportunities were also created for project co-lead, Alison Thornhill, to feed in to the analysis.

Evaluation focus

The evaluation set out to enable Calke Abbey to understand and capture evidence of the impact of *HumanKind* and the wider project on visitors, participants, volunteers and staff, specifically in relation to two key questions:

1. Did the project stimulate debate, reflection and action around loneliness and social isolation?
2. How has the project made a difference to Calke's and the National Trust's working processes, thinking and practice?

Part 2 of this report describes the evaluation methodology and shares its key findings. The research set out to capture the fullest range of responses to the project and to listen to and understand all views and opinions. In particular, we were interested in understanding the impact of the project on people's thoughts, feelings and actions surrounding issues of loneliness and social

isolation as well as the difference *HumanKind* has made to Calke's working processes, thinking and practice.

Research methods

A mixed methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods, was utilised to generate data from diverse sources and multiple perspectives. This approach provided both breadth and depth to the evidence: quantitative research methods proved remarkably effective in revealing the overall proportions of positive and negative responses to *HumanKind*, in particular from visitors, whilst qualitative approaches were essential to generating the more nuanced understanding of engagement and response which comprise the bulk of this report.

Research methods included:

1. Self-completion comments cards.
2. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews.
3. Visitor feedback from Calke's General Visitor Survey and social media responses (Twitter and TripAdvisor).
4. Self-assessment pro-formas (staff and volunteers) and emails sent about the project to Calke by volunteers.
5. Feedback gathered at the May team briefing (mainly volunteers).

Self-completion comment cards

Self-completion comment cards were designed, administered and collected by Calke staff and volunteers. 611 visitor comment cards were collected between

March-August 2019. 145 volunteer comments cards were collected in March 2019 as part of a prototyping and feedback exercise before the public opening of *HumanKind*.

When *HumanKind* first opened, the comment card (Figure 22 and 23) initially asked visitors and volunteers to: 'Please share any comments or suggestions about *HumanKind* with us here'. In mid-April, the comment card was redesigned (Figure 24 and 25) to gather further data from visitors. Questions included: 'How would you rate your visit today?', 'How often do you visit Calke?', 'Please share any comments or suggestions about Calke Abbey with us', and 'Has '*HumanKind*' inspired you to do anything when you leave? What?'

Responses were firstly analysed by RCMG to understand the overall proportions of positive and negative responses to *HumanKind*. These broad categories can be understood as:

Positive – to distinguish responses which were predominantly positive in terms of support for *HumanKind* and Calke exploring the themes of loneliness and social isolation.

Negative – to distinguish responses that were predominantly negative in terms of a lack of support or demonstrating objections to *HumanKind* or to the themes of loneliness and social isolation being presented at and explored by Calke.

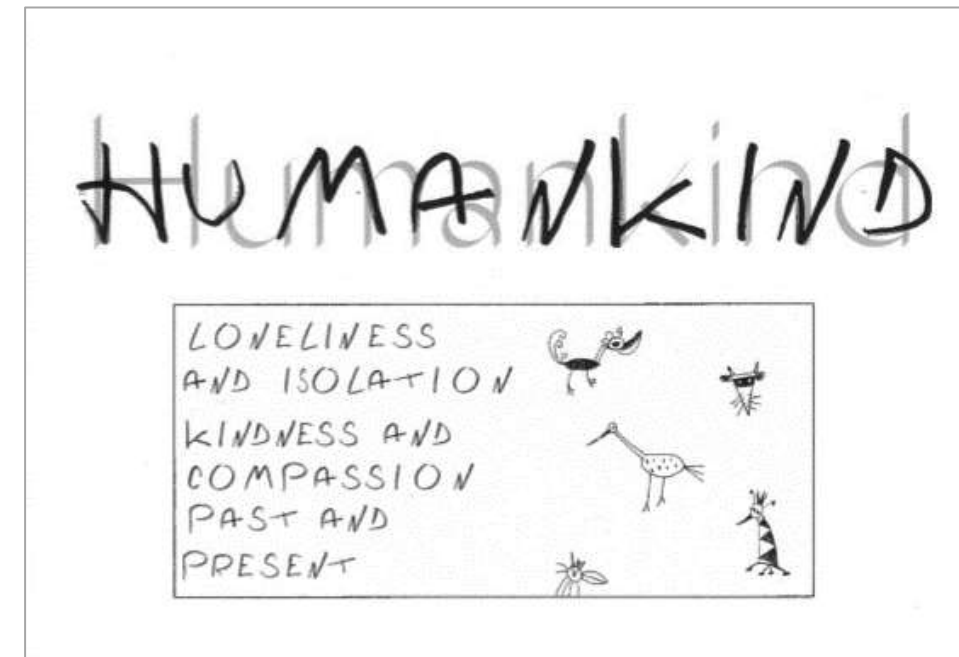


Figure 22: Front of the *HumanKind* comment card (March – April 2019)

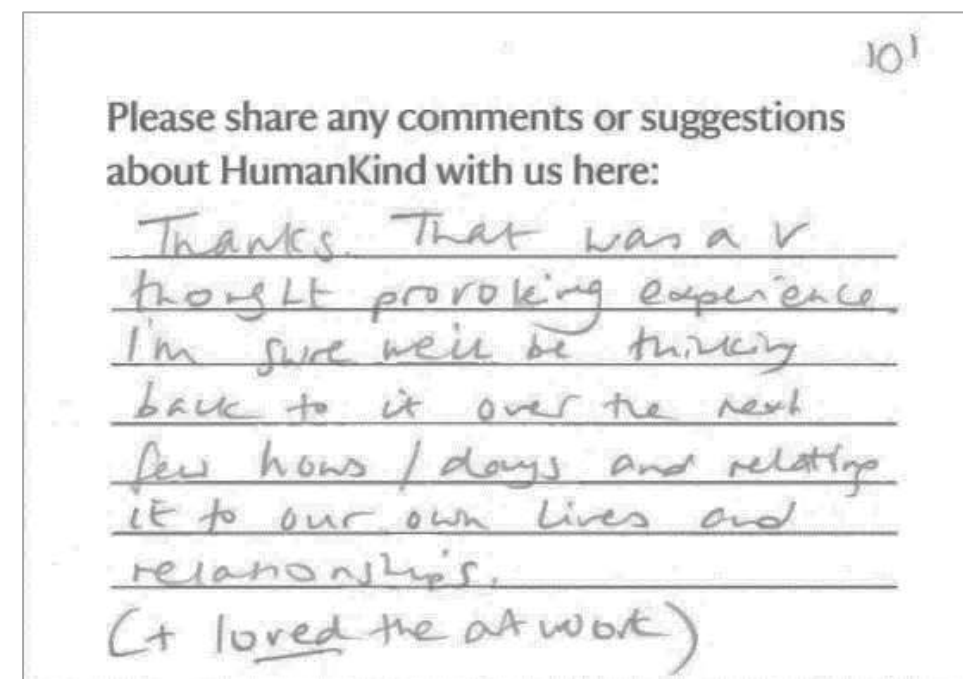


Figure 23: Back of the *HumanKind* comment card (March – April 2019)

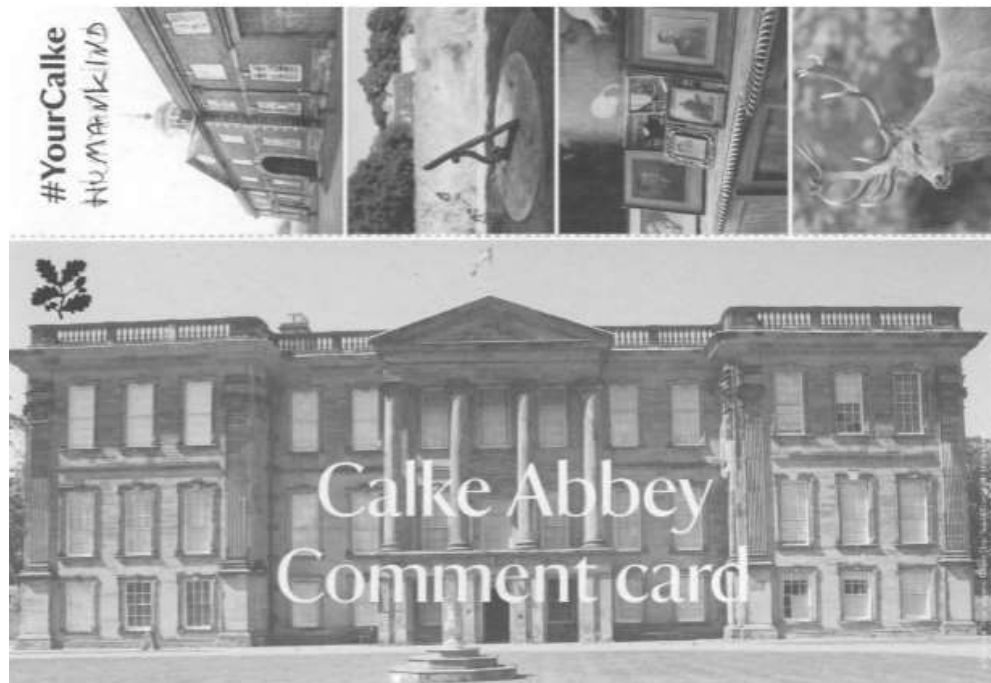


Figure 24: Back of the HumanKind comments card (April - August 2019)

#YourCalke HUMANKIND

@NTCalkeAbbey

NTCalkeAbbey

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/calke-abbey

calkeabbey@nationaltrust.org.uk

Bookmark Calke Abbey to stay in touch

Please tear off and keep this free bookmark with our compliments – fold over and carefully tear down the perforation.

How would you rate your visit today?

Very enjoyable Acceptable
 Enjoyable Not enjoyable

How often do you visit Calke?

First time
 Regularly
 At least once a year
 Rarely

Please share any comments or suggestions about Calke Abbey with us Date: _____

IT IS SUP TO DO

Has 'HumanKind' inspired you to do anything when you leave? What? yes and say heloo

Figure 25: Front of the HumanKind comments card (April - August 2019)

Ambiguous – to distinguish those responses that proved difficult to categorise as either supportive or critical, which were judged to be irrelevant to the programme or the theme, or could not be interpreted due to being illegible.

The categorisation of comments cards as either 'positive', 'negative' or 'ambiguous' inevitably relied on the researchers making a judgement regarding which category the responses 'best fit'.

Comments were then analysed in an open-ended way to interrogate the ideas emerging from them – these ideas were then developed into thematic categories to explore the experiences and impact of the programme.

Semi-structured interviews

Data was also collected in the form of semi-structured interviews that were approached in an open and conversational manner. Importantly, the process of interviewing created opportunities for reflection on people's experiences and enabled participants to begin to work through emerging thoughts and ideas. The process elicited rich, nuanced, and considered responses. The research aimed to create opportunities for visitors, participants, volunteers and staff to express their views openly without censure or judgment. Care was taken to avoid leading questions, enabling a wide array of perspectives, opinions and viewpoints to emerge.

Over five days, 51 in-depth interviews with 101 visitors were carried out by RCMG researchers. They took place in May and June 2019, and were conducted during term-time, during half-term, during the week and at weekends. Visitors were interviewed directly after experiencing *HumanKind*. Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to just under an hour and were carried out

with the visitors in the way that they had visited, for example – individually, in couples, and in small groups of family and friends.

Eight Chatty Café participants were interviewed, six through a focus group conducted after they had taken part in a Local History Café session, and two as individuals (one Local History Café participant and one Chatty Play participant). One key partner – Katherine Brown of Crafting Relationships who initiated the Local History Cafes in the region – was also interviewed. A further 23 individual interviews (both face-to-face and telephone) with Calke’s team were conducted during this time, as well as a telephone interview with *HumanKind*’s creative practitioner Julie Howell. Where visitors, participants, staff or volunteers did not consent to having their real names attached to their words, we have used a pseudonym in the report.

The interviews explored peoples’ responses to and experiences of *HumanKind*, as well as their perceptions of Calke’s role in exploring issues of loneliness and social isolation. Staff involved in the project were asked additional questions that focused on the processes of *HumanKind* and the difference the project had made to Calke’s thinking and practice. Responses to the questions raised in the interviews and conversations elicited as a result of the interviewing process, were analysed without a prior framework or structure to explore emergent ideas and themes, which were then categorised and applied across the responses.

Calke’s General Visitor Survey and social media responses

Visitor data from the General Visitor Survey and social media responses on Twitter and TripAdvisor was also collected and analysed by the team at Calke. Over 1300 visitors responded to specific questions about *HumanKind* in the

Survey between March-May 2019. Visitors were asked to respond to questions with multiple choice answers, including: ‘Were you aware of the *HumanKind* project prior to your visit?’; ‘Did *HumanKind* have a positive impact on your visit?’; and ‘How relevant do you think it is that the NT raises awareness of contemporary issues such as loneliness and social isolation at its properties, such as Calke?’. The data was analysed by Calke through a marketing-led and customer-service orientated approach that, in part, seeks to understand and rate the level of service and experience of the visitor.

Self-assessment pro-formas and emails

Staff and volunteers were given the opportunity to complete a self-assessment of *HumanKind*, reflecting on their experiences and perceptions of the project. The pro-formas were distributed widely to the whole of the Calke team, regardless of whether they had been directly involved in the *HumanKind* process and working groups. Staff and volunteers were asked to respond to three open-ended questions: ‘What have been the opportunities and challenges of *HumanKind*?’; ‘What has *HumanKind* made you think about loneliness and isolation?’; and ‘How do you feel about Calke Abbey and the National Trust, as heritage organisations, exploring the contemporary issue of loneliness and isolation?’. Uptake of this was very poor, with only two members of the Calke team completing and returning the pro-formas, raising questions about the point at which this proforma was circulated.

Alongside the interviews, comment cards, and self-assessment pro-formas, a small number of volunteer responses from emails sent directly to Calke about *HumanKind* were also collected and analysed as part of the research.

Team briefing

In May 2019, approximately 70 members of the Calke team, mainly volunteers, attended a team briefing. As part of the session facilitated by Calke, participants were invited to reflect on *HumanKind* and respond to the following two statements, using post-it notes: ‘What works well?’; and ‘What’s not working so well?’. The post-it note responses were collected and transcribed and have been analysed alongside the other volunteer and staff data.

Who took part in the study?

Visitors and participants

The research focused on working with adult visitors and some children and young people attending with their families during half-term. Other participants similarly reflected the demographic make-up of the visitors, but were visiting as part of a specific activity, such as the Local History Café or Chatty Play sessions. Visitors and participants covered a range of ages, but most were adults and many were retired. The majority were white and British. They came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The overwhelming majority of visitors and participants in the research were National Trust members. A small number of interviewees also worked or volunteered at other National Trust properties.

There was a mixture of visitors who had visited Calke before and those visiting for the first time. Many were motivated to visit Calke whilst on holiday, some lived locally taking a trip to walk the grounds and gardens or were looking for a ‘nice day out’, and a number were making the most of their membership since retiring. A few were heading home on their way back from a holiday or en-route from a personal event, such as a wedding.

A number of people visited Calke with the specific aim of engaging with *HumanKind*, many of whom had seen the project promoted in the National Trust membership magazine. They often stated that they were motivated to visit to find out more about the family and were interested in the new narratives. However, significantly, the majority of the interviewees had not visited specifically for *HumanKind* but had come across it as part of a general visit and National Trust experience.

Volunteers and staff

RCMG worked closely with Alison Thornhill, Project Co-Lead and Community and Engagement Manager and Julie Griffith, House and Collections Manager to invite staff and volunteers to participate in the research. Nine staff and 14 volunteers were interviewed, working in a variety of roles and settings including – visitor experience; community engagement; collections, curation and research; marketing and social media; the house; grounds and gardens; café and restaurant; stableyards; retail; and at Calke and regionally. Staff and volunteers who were directly involved in the collaborative processes of *HumanKind* (the steering group and 16 working groups) were asked to participate, as were volunteers and staff who hadn’t necessarily been involved in the working processes, but have been working with *HumanKind* since the public opening in March.

Qualitative and quantitative findings

Quantitative analysis of the visitors’ comments and through the General Visitor Survey proved helpful in gauging the overall proportion of support for *HumanKind*. These findings are set out in chapter 2.2. However, visitors’ engagement with, and responses to, the project were diverse, complex and multifaceted. Further open-ended analysis of visitor responses from the

comments cards, alongside a qualitative and emergent analysis of interviews, feedback from the May team briefing, a small number of self-assessment pro-formas and emails sent by volunteers and staff, revealed a field of diverse points of view, alongside complex and nuanced reflections.

Structure

Following the sharing of top level quantitative data, the following chapters capture the key themes and learning to emerge from the evaluation firstly in relation to the impact of *HumanKind* in getting people talking about loneliness, generating reflection, challenging stigma and prompting small acts of kindness and, second, in relation to the difference *HumanKind* has made to Calke's day to day work.

2.2 Quantitative findings: the big picture

The following quantitative findings are drawn from the data collected as part of the research and evaluation of *HumanKind* by RCMG and from data collected and analysed by the Calke team. Whilst lacking in detail, they provide an interesting, top-level view of responses to *HumanKind*.

Visitors

- 81% of visitors responded positively to *HumanKind* through the comments cards (Figure 26);
- 12% of visitors responded negatively to *HumanKind* through the comments cards;
- 7% of visitors offered ambiguous comments about *HumanKind* through the comments cards.
- Of the 81% of visitors responding positively using the comments card, 45% specifically mentioned the concept and the idea of Calke exploring the issue of loneliness and social isolation, as part of their positive response;
- Of the 12% who were negative about *HumanKind*, 9% were critical of practical elements of the installation.
- The majority of visitors (70.2%) (Figure 27) responding to the General Visitor Survey had not come to Calke to specifically experience *HumanKind*, rather their experience of *HumanKind* formed part of a broader visit.
- 33.7% of visitors responding to the General Visitor Survey think it is highly relevant, and 24.2% relevant, that Calke explores the

contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation, giving a majority of 57.9% (Figure 28);

- 9.5% of visitors responding to the General Visitor Survey think it is not relevant at all, and 7.4% less relevant, that Calke explores the contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation;
- 25.2% responded in the middle, neither committing to its relevance or irrelevance.

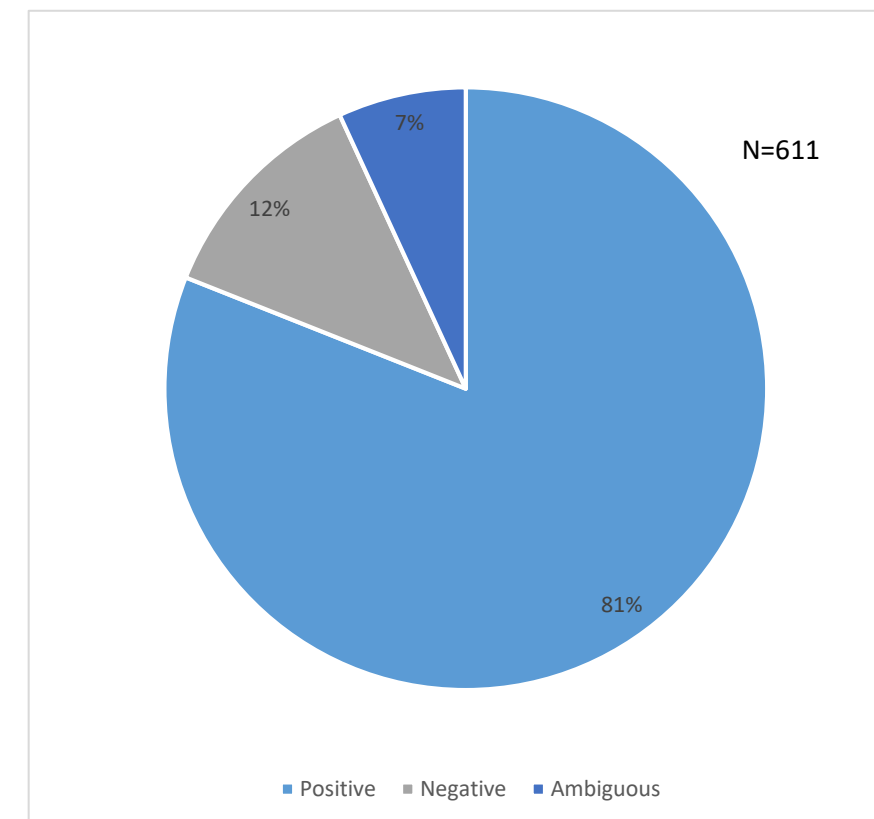


Figure 26: *HumanKind* responses through comment cards.

N=1,371

1: Were you aware of the HumanKind project prior to your visit?

- Yes: 24.9%
- No: 70.2%
- Not sure: 4.9%

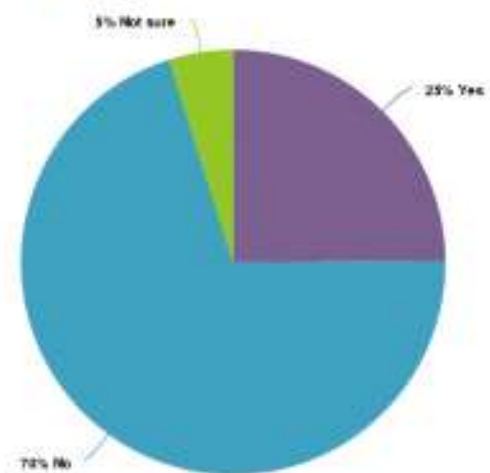


Figure 27: Visitor responses collected from Calke's General Visitor Survey, March – May 2019. Analysis by Calke's team.

N=1,384

3: How relevant do you think it is that the NT raises awareness of contemporary issues such as loneliness and social isolation at its properties, including Calke?

- 1 (not relevant): 9.5%
- 2: 7.4%
- 3: 25.2%
- 4: 24.2%
- 5 (highly relevant): 33.7%

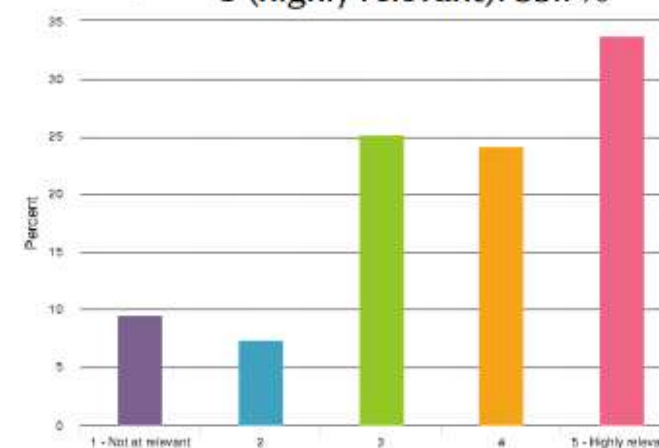


Figure 28: Visitor responses collected from Calke's General Visitor Survey, March – May 2019. Analysis by Calke's team.

2.3 *Isolation and Loneliness*: how can cultural organisations play their part in tackling loneliness and social isolation?

The overarching aim of *Isolation and loneliness – opening up new stories and interpretive experiences at Calke Abbey* was to explore the role culture can play in addressing the contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation. Shaped directly by the findings from the Stage 1 research, Stage 2 of the project set out to get people talking about loneliness and isolation, raise understanding and awareness of this still taboo social issue, tackle stigma and prompt small acts of kindness.

The evaluation showed that cultural organisations can play a very significant role in addressing loneliness and social isolation in both the stories they tell, and, importantly, through the opportunities for reflection, connection and action they actively enable.

Participants in *HumanKind* showed high levels of awareness of the issue and, having experienced *HumanKind*, showed high levels of interest in discussing and reflecting on it. The stories explored in *HumanKind* resonated with a large number of visitors, with some acknowledging that the experience felt different from a traditional National Trust visit, offering a ‘fuller experience’ which enabled connections between Calke Abbey’s residents and the contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation. *HumanKind* prompted

action, through the pledge wall, informational videos, and on-site activities, prompting visitors, staff and volunteers to small acts of kindness and with a number of visitors commenting that they felt stimulated to do more. The emphasis on immersive and varied – from the didactic to the felt – forms of interpretation felt welcoming and inclusive of the diverse needs amongst visitor groups.

The project also prompted many reflections on the role of the National Trust in tackling contemporary issues and the political implications of doing so. As visitors expressed in comment cards, they appreciated the National Trust’s efforts to ‘branch out’ and offer a different type of experience by tackling such important contemporary issues in new ways. For a small number of visitors and volunteers, the new stories, contemporary resonance and new forms of interpretation at Calke challenged their perceptions of both the National Trust and ‘a nice day out’.

Opening up moments of reflection on and awareness of the contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation

Getting people talking: an outpouring of emotion

For many staff, volunteers and visitors, the project was highly emotive, drawing challenging feelings to the surface and opening up new opportunities for reflection and connection with others. An incredible number of people—visitors, participants, volunteers and staff—shared their experiences of loneliness and social isolation (personal or professional), or their friends' and families' experiences of these issues. In interviews these reflections were often made before being prompted or asked specifically whether they had any personal connections to the subject matter. From the researchers' experiences of the interview process, the sharing of such intimate information on this scale is quite unusual, indicating that both the *HumanKind* exhibition and the wider project provided opportunities for reflection, to talk openly and discuss these issues in public, which perhaps aren't offered elsewhere.

HumanKind elicited many varied reflections on personal experiences of loneliness, as the following comment card shows:

'This is important, thank you. I was lonely for a long while. I'm not any more but I feel that I have learned how important to talk and smile to and at people, to start a conversation to make a difference to someone's day. Thank you.'

Comments ranged from the difficulty of being a busy single mother, to the consequences of retirement, and the value of volunteering opportunities.

Some also pointed out how impairments and ageing can affect our ability to participate in what, for some, are vitally important activities, such as volunteering and other social activities.

One member of staff at Calke, shared in a profound way an especially difficult period in her life when she suffered with post-natal depression:

'I've actually experienced loneliness and isolation. When I had my children, I suffered with post-natal depression when I had both of them and worse with the second. [...] Hence why I fully support the project. I think it's good to get people out and about as much as you can to encourage them, which is where Chatty Play has come from, from my experiences as a lonely mum. My husband went to work in Belgium for four months after I had my son, so I was really on my own with him.'

The willingness of participants to share their personal stories demonstrates the power of *HumanKind* to elicit people's innermost thoughts surrounding their personal experiences of loneliness and social isolation.

The themes covered in *HumanKind* prompted many visitors, volunteers and staff to reflect on often life-changing experiences that either they or those close to them had been through. One of the management team at Calke spoke about 'a tough time with splitting up with my wife' and reflected that 'actually and as men, we don't talk about it, we just barrel it all up and get on'. He spoke about how *HumanKind* had 'provoked more conversations' and enabled him to speak more openly about his feelings, alongside encouraging his male friends to also open up.

For this member of staff, *HumanKind* supported him on a journey, both professionally and personally, equipping him with a new set of tools for talking and listening to colleagues, friends and family with compassion. Similarly, several visitors, staff and volunteers used their experience of *HumanKind* as a way of starting a discussion with friends and family members around the issues of loneliness and social isolation, as well as interrelated issues that might affect how connected someone might feel.

Quite a few members of staff and volunteers noticed a shift in their interactions with visitors who would share more personal stories related to their experiences of loneliness. As a result, some team members at Calke Abbey themselves felt inspired to be more open with visitors, free to share part of their own experience, and not just historical information about the estate, gardens and stable yard.

Alistair and Julie

Alistair and Julie live close by to Calke Abbey and visit regularly. On this occasion they came specifically to see *HumanKind* and to explore a 'more human side' of the family. After visiting the interventions in the Family Apartments, they openly shared their loved ones' experiences of loneliness and social isolation, as well as their personal experiences of feeling 'cut off' because of a difficulty in hearing, making strong connections with the final video produced in collaboration with the Deaf-led organisation Remark!.

HumanKind reminded Julie and Alistair of the importance of social connection and they were moved to talk about the considerable amount of voluntary work they do for the Derbyshire CVS, as a befriender and voluntary community driver (taking people to hospital and doctor's appointments, as well as activities and luncheon clubs), respectively. They chose to volunteer since retiring and had seen the benefits first-hand, with Julie's father making use of the volunteer driving scheme. Alistair stated that:

'We saw how that benefitted him and us. The voluntary driving, taking people to appointments, there are people in the same position as us where it doesn't just help the individual, it helps the whole family. Because if you don't have social care, then someone would probably have to have time off work to have to do it. That's how we found it. It gives a benefit to everybody... That's why I chose to do that because it doesn't just help the individual. It's wider than that.'

They were also particularly pleased to see that the interpretation in *HumanKind* was accessible and offered in multiple forms of communications, with Alistair sharing that:

'... one of the benefits for me, because I have difficulty in hearing, I didn't need to hear to get the information 'cause even in all the displays and everything, it was there and then, there was the subtitles on the video at the end. Whereas a lot of places, I don't pick it up because it's spoken and I don't get it...'

Julie elaborated that: 'any background noise at all, he can't hear what's going on' and that going 'for a meal or to the pub for a drink with friends' is especially difficult. She considered this further, imagining that if: 'you're a person on your own and you go, you're not going to mix with anybody because you can't hear what's going on. That is very isolating, that is.'

Alistair went on to discuss the significance of participating in a lip-reading class, which he described as more of 'a social event', which offers broader benefits beyond learning a skill. He drew comparisons with *HumanKind* in terms of raising awareness, knowing that you are not alone in your experiences and signposting visitors to other support organisations. He stated that:

'We find that the people that go there, they bounce each other's problems off them. It's more of a social thing of not really teaching you, so much, to lip read but what you can do to help and what's available... [*HumanKind*] is a similar sort of thing, making people aware that these things are there... I mean, I wouldn't have known half the things if I wasn't going to the lip-reading class. It led me into lots of other things. It doesn't make my hearing any better, but it makes it more understandable that there's lots of other people, got the same sort of problem.'

Some shared anecdotes from their time working on *HumanKind* and remarked how visitors had the opportunity to approach tough subjects in a safe and understanding environment. For instance, Steve (Food, Beverage and Retail Manager) noticed a poignant interaction between a mother and daughter, which had been triggered by the Pledge Wall:

'There was a really touching moment with a little girl pulling [a card] off the wall. Something around be kind to your dog. Her dog had died six months previous, but it actually provoked a really nice conversation between the mother and the daughter about what they'd like to do and how they'd like to commemorate the death.'

'Probably, quite a tough thing to talk about, as we've learnt through all the research that we've done, prior to this project. But [...] we saw it there, very raw with a young girl who it's probably quite difficult to bring and approach that sort of subject'

However, not everyone responded in this way. A small group of volunteers who had direct experience of isolation and loneliness, found *HumanKind* too emotive and 'raw'. Some volunteers had recently been bereaved and, in part, volunteered at Calke as a way of avoiding loneliness, not wanting to think about their personal experiences at work. They disengaged and distanced themselves from the project, as Gemma, Assistant House Manager, shared in her self-completed proforma and volunteer day leader Pam explained in her interview, respectively:

'More people are lonely than I realised and for different reasons – it's important not to judge. Even some of those volunteers who are

opposed to the project are opposed because they are lonely themselves and don't want to talk about it.'

'There were two volunteers who have been recently bereaved and they said we don't want to talk about isolation and loneliness. That's not what we want to talk about. We've not come here to talk about isolation. We've come here to meet with people.'

Just a small number of visitors, volunteers and staff, when specifically asked how the issues affected them personally, did not offer up a reflection, or responded with 'no, it doesn't affect me personally' or 'no I've never felt lonely'. In some cases, those who hadn't had any personal experience found it more difficult to empathise with the stories presented in *HumanKind*. Ron, for example, visiting with his wife and a group of friends, initially stated that he and his wife hadn't experienced loneliness, but with further probing reflected on his older sister and how she might feel isolated caring for her husband with dementia.

An even smaller number categorically stated that they had had no personal experience of loneliness and social isolation, and in extreme cases lacked empathy with those who were experiencing it, describing those people as less resilient compared to back in their day, 'when they just got on with it'. Visitor Alistair, although aware that everybody might feel lonely at some point in their lives, believed that responsibility lay with the individual and that those who couldn't 'snap out of it' or 'lift themselves up', were less stable. Others spoke about how loneliness hasn't affected them personally as they came from a 'good family', or a 'very outgoing family'. These responses suggest that some people are still hesitant to open up about personal experiences. They

also reveal, in a small number of cases, a latent sense of judgement, shame and stigma surrounding loneliness and isolation.

Raising awareness

A very large number of people involved in the research shared reflections on how *HumanKind* can raise awareness around issues of loneliness and social isolation. Within this group, a small number of visitors, staff and volunteers expressed that *HumanKind* urged them to think about these issues for the first time.

At the same time, the project generated a more in depth understanding for several visitors and members of Calke Abbey's team, including new knowledge around the complexities and interrelated issues surrounding loneliness and social isolation. For example, the video shown in the Servants' Hall was particularly striking to those who had not given a lot of thought to the fact that some people are more likely than others to experience loneliness. Others were not particularly surprised that people experience loneliness today, but they were taken aback by the sheer number people affected. One visitor in particular, prior to viewing the video, had not given much thought to the idea that people who might not seem likely to be affected by loneliness - such as 35-year-old men - are actually some of the most vulnerable. This final room of the exhibition, in particular, heightened reflection and increased knowledge around the contemporary issue, with several visitors directly responding to information shared in the video. Access to statistics and data about loneliness provided visitors with a clearer understanding of risks and the importance of seeking and offering support. As written in a visitor comment card: *'Loneliness can't always be noticed unless we look carefully when we talk to people.'*

Mike and Nikki (mental health professionals in the NHS) commented on the capacity of *HumanKind* to raise awareness of what people – anyone – can do to help prevent suicide. The importance of small helpful acts emerged from the discussion and the difference it can make in someone's life:

'It's a little bit like the stuff we do in suicide prevention, because you don't have to be a professional [...] You can just reach out to somebody and say "are you alright?" and it's a simple thing. It doesn't have to be complicated. I thought they got that point across well because often people might think, "oh my goodness in the face of something like that what can I do?"'

This point is particularly relevant in the context of *HumanKind* and Calke Abbey, as it speaks to the role of staff and volunteers in approaching some of the subjects covered in the installation. Some volunteers for example, have been reticent in fully engaging with some of these issues due to a perceived lack of professional skills around social isolation, loneliness and suicide. However, as Mike and Nikki expressed here and echoing the advice provided to the project team by the Campaign to End Loneliness at all stages of the project, it is critical that openness, kindness and empathy exist alongside professional help to combat these issues. From this perspective, *HumanKind* can be recognised as a potentially empowering project for volunteers which allows them to connect with visitors on a more fundamentally human level. For cultural organisations more broadly, such discussions open up awareness of the potential of cultural spaces as public places where contemporary social issues can be explored and discussed in supportive and open ways. As *HumanKind* illustrated, these new relationships and new forms of interaction, demand new forms of knowledge and partnership working.

HumanKind made people aware that loneliness and isolation...

... is nothing new

This often led some to reflect on how these problems are part of the human experience. As Stephen shared:

'It made me think that there's nothing new under the sun is there because I'm really interested in time in general, it kind of tapped into that train of thought as I was going around because all these things have always been there, the way people are. Actually I got a few waves of sadness as I went around because of the very different way some of the things we suffer with now would have been viewed in those times. The time's already gone, there's nothing you can do to fix it, but we can do something now.'

Marina, a university student in her 20s with an interest in history said:

'You actually realise, loneliness has always been there, and it hasn't really changed that much over the last 150 years. I think it's important that we can reflect on what has been and use it to take care of ourselves. Especially with the acts of kindness. I think that's really poignant.'

HumanKind encouraged people to think of loneliness as a universal part of the human experience, and that 'being lonely is not a new thing'.

... and it can affect anyone ...

Most people who mentioned that HumanKind made them more aware of the consequences of loneliness also explored the idea that it can affect anyone, often drawing this conclusion from the six stories presented in the exhibition and sometimes mentioning the quote by Jo Cox at the start of the exhibition. Visitors were made even more aware of the fact that these issues can still affect anyone, regardless of social standing or background.

Ollie spoke about how we can sometimes make assumptions about who is likely to experience loneliness and social isolation:

'I guess the other thing [HumanKind] tells you, we need to be a bit careful of stereotypes of assuming it's going to be older people who are lonely... Actually, anybody could be.'

For a number of visitors, it was the specific context of Calke Abbey, a stately home, that really made them think about the relationship between socio-economic background and loneliness. As Lucy stated:

'Because they've got a stately home you think that they've got money. You think that they've got everything. You wouldn't have thought they're lonely and thinking things like that.'

Stories of the occupants of Calke Abbey, in particular, sparked this type of reflections:

'I work at the hospital and I see lots of people coming in who are very isolated, but you think about a house like this and think about somebody that had lots of power and wealth and servants and it doesn't always affect those people, but it can affect anybody in any walk of life.'

... but some people are more at risk than others

HumanKind raised awareness around who is more at risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation. Some mentioned autism, age, dementia, or simply being different as important risk factors. In relation to the video specifically, several shared new thoughts on how barriers to communication faced by the Deaf community increase the risk of experiencing isolation.

'Yes, the exhibition especially, there's a bit around deafness isn't there?... And how a lot of life is inaccessible to them until they've got someone to interpret for them. That just stood out for me, that we don't often give it that much thought as to whether they are isolated more than any other disability. They seem to be the most vulnerable in some ways.' (Majinder)

A number also reflected on the increased risk in men aged 35 years. As articulated by Graham:

'Just the fact that younger people can be lonely. That will be one fact that I think about. I'll be more aware that there is a possibility that someone out there who you do know is lonely, even though they don't appear to be.'

Alistair thought more deeply about experiences of men, after watching the video in the final room. It got him thinking more about men and the risk of loneliness due to being less likely to participate in a club:

'I thought it was interesting about how men don't get into groups and clubs like women do. We've always talked about that. You go to the Women's Institute and there seems to be lots of things for women but less for men but if they were there, would men do it?'

Danielle, visiting with Kevin, has a background working as a Headteacher at a Special Educational Needs school. Airmyne's story in particular highlighted this for her and made her reflect on her experiences at work:

'You tend to think of loneliness initially of being in old age, but in fact that's not true. That can be at any stage where people can be isolated for different reasons, and it also strikes you, the importance of the family. [...] As I said, it can affect any age. Also, it can be like the young lady with the speech difficulty. You can be isolated by the way you look, the way you sound, the way you don't sound, and I think young people our days are very much affected by image and how the world perceives them.'

Challenging stigma

There is a real stigma surrounding loneliness (Goodman *et al* 2015: 4), meaning that many individuals find it difficult to admit to feeling lonely, not only to themselves, but to others. Recent research by the Campaign to End Loneliness found that a staggering 92% of people find it difficult to tell others they are lonely. The reasons for this stigma relate to a fear of being negatively judged (eight in ten people) and a belief that others will think there is something wrong with them (33% of people) (Campaign to End Loneliness, 2016). Because of this, many individuals feel unable to ask for help (Jopling 2015). By raising awareness and getting people talking, *HumanKind* has begun to break the stigma surrounding loneliness and social isolation. It brings it to the surface and supports people on a journey in questioning deeply held beliefs and entrenched levels of judgement surrounding the issues.

Visitor comment cards and interviews showed the full range of responses to the stigma surrounding loneliness. While some responses conveyed some of that stigma (*'If you choose to live on your own there is something wrong with you'*), an overwhelming majority acknowledged the need to combat prejudice and commended the National Trust for its work in this area.

Stigma and language

It is important to note that for some visitors, stigma – whether conscious or unconscious – still exists and is easily perpetuated, especially through language. Some of our interviewees, for example, described loneliness as a 'problem', or stated that they didn't feel lonely because they 'come from a good family', implying that you might only feel lonely if you didn't 'come from a good family'.

A large number of visitors raised the story of Henry Harpur as a way of exploring the issue of stigma and reflecting on how *HumanKind* challenges stereotypes and simplistic caricatures of individuals. Fran spoke about 'a cycle of perception' of Henry being shy and marrying someone who at the time was considered not to be of his class. Alistair (visiting with his grandson Charlie) was particularly interested in the idea of 'gossip' and how 'mud sticks' when committed to print. He shared that:

'When you were talking about the seventh Baronet, how people back then gossiped and if it goes to print, people read it, people believe it. [...] It strikes me that the guy, from what I was reading, had been quite a good character. He actually did an awful lot, but he wasn't overt about it.'

Here we see *HumanKind* beginning to break down the stereotypes and show a more complex side to Henry, broadening the reductive story of him told in the past at Calke.

Volunteer Day leader Phil felt the new narrative challenged negative stereotypes and presented a more nuanced view. Similarly, volunteer Celia stated that: *'the stories that we've told here at Calke have all been very stereotypical, and it's proved that [the family] weren't as stereotypical as we thought.'* By breaking down the stigma surrounding the family, *HumanKind* was able, in turn, to start breaking down stigma surrounding issues of loneliness and isolation with many visitors able to connect the discussion of stigma to their own personal experience or attitudes. Some recognised how stigma often stems from making quick judgements about other people, which is something we have to actively make an effort to avoid. One visitor in

particular expressed how *HumanKind* inspired her, by giving her more confidence to say she is *not* lonely, and that she is happy on her own. She identified with Henry, stating *'I know I've definitely faced judgements like that throughout the years'*.

These reflections demonstrate how, while the stories explored in *HumanKind* are about past attitudes towards loneliness and isolation, they still resonate today. Some of our interviewees emphasised how *HumanKind* is *'keeping Calke current'* as loneliness is a very timely topic. They also acknowledged that talking about loneliness is becoming less of a taboo. In response to this particular kind of stigma, one of our interviewees, Majinder, highlighted generational attitudes towards loneliness:

'I feel like a lot of people that you see, where the demographic are a bit older; I think these issues were not discussed very much in their generation [...] I think in our time people are speaking out, seeking help... It's a bit more made alright, the taboo a bit is taken off. But I think that generation, they view it as a weakness to feel loneliness or depression, and you have to just 'man-up' and deal with it. [...] I think a lot of that generation could do with just the weight being lifted off, so it's like, 'It's OK, we are normal, we just need to seek some help.'

Projects such as *HumanKind* can help tackle the spread of loneliness, by fostering a positive environment in which people are able to reflect on the issue, feel free to discuss it, and find actionable information to mitigate it.

Loneliness vs. Mental Health Issues

When discussing loneliness and social isolation – especially in reference to stigma – easy connotations can be made, with the assumption that feeling lonely inevitably involves mental health issues. It is important to remind ourselves that while loneliness can be an important contributing factor to mental health issues, the two terms are not interchangeable. These simplistic equations can even add to the stigma, and lead to quick judgements being made, as expressed by some of our interviewees.

Creating opportunities to avoid loneliness

A key aim of *HumanKind* and the wider research project was to create opportunities for people – staff, volunteers, visitors, participants – to avoid loneliness. This ambitious aim was approached through the project process – no-one working on their own, a culture of sharing and togetherness, an 'All In' philosophy – and through specific work packages, interpretive elements and activities e.g. Creating Connections, a buddy scheme and alumni scheme for volunteers, Chatty Play, Chatty Café, and Local History Café, small acts of kindness activities and the pledge walls.

Feeling lonely is a human response telling us that there is something that needs to change about our current social connections (Campaign to End Loneliness 2016). Responding to loneliness requires an understanding of what loneliness is and what we can do – initially at an individual level but also at a societal level – to prevent it. Once loneliness is understood as a signal reminding us to be mindful of and attend to our and others' social ties, it is possible to see how there are steps one might be able to take to prevent the effects of loneliness.

For a number of visitors and members of the Calke Abbey team, *HumanKind* elicited reflections on how their own situations could change in the future, and what they could potentially do to lessen the effects of loneliness and social isolation. For volunteer day leader Albert, *HumanKind* got him thinking about his and his wife's future and their relationship with the local community. *HumanKind* reminded them of the importance of building relationships with people who live close-by and how that could prove to be beneficial in the long term, even if it only involves regular check-in with neighbours.

Martha

Martha volunteers at Calke Abbey as a Room Guide. She also participates in the 'Local History Café' – a specialist interest group established by the organisation Crafting Relationships and organised in partnership with Calke Abbey as part of *HumanKind*.

Martha values the social opportunities afforded by the café, as well as 'loving Calke Abbey' and working with 'lovely people'. She was hugely positive about *HumanKind* acknowledging the importance of 'care and compassion' in helping people through difficult times of loneliness and social isolation.

Most importantly for Martha, *HumanKind* has given people permission to talk about their own experiences of loneliness and social isolation. She shares one recent encounter when working as a Room Guide, where a visitor disclosed that a friend had only just committed suicide. She described stopping what she was saying, listening, and giving space for the visitor to talk about their experience. As she stated, *HumanKind* 'has allowed people to talk'.

HumanKind has also had an impact on how she communicates and talks about issues surrounding loneliness and social isolation with her family. Martha shared how she used one of the pledge cards as a

stimulus to start a conversation with her grandson around contributing factors that might affect how lonely or isolated someone might feel, in turn beginning to reduce some of the stigma surrounding these issues. She elaborates:

'I took one of these little red cards and it said – 'Make friends with someone who's being bullied'. My only grandchild lives in Australia and I phoned his mum and said, could I talk to Jacob about this? He was seven. I showed him this card and he said, 'Oh yes granny, I can talk to people that are being bullied'. And he understood about being bullied. I only see him twice a year. Without the card I wouldn't have spoken to him about bullying. And this card now, it should be well on its way to Australia and he's really looking forward to it and taking it to school. I've got two or three other cards that I'll send to him, drip feed them in.'

Several visitors and participants spoke about creating opportunities for themselves to avoid loneliness (*'I need to take up offers to do things when opportunities arise. Sometimes I am alone but not lonely!'* Comment card), whether this was through maintaining and further developing their current social networks, or joining a specialist interest group or club. For participants taking part in the social opportunities in *HumanKind*, building social networks was an important motivation for participation.

One of the initiatives that Calke Abbey partnered with is the Local History Café which was set up to help older people keep loneliness and social isolation at bay by providing a friendly environment where people can come together through a shared interest in history and heritage. Jacqui, participant of the Calke Local History Café shared the reasons for her participation:

'I like history. I like Calke and I only live down the road. I was very interested in meeting people. That was the main thing because I was very, very lonely. Where I live, I'm very lonely. Although it's in a row of seven cottages, my neighbours aren't friendly. Even the man whose door is right next to mine doesn't speak. Yeah, so I don't see anyone. Never saw anyone for months and then, heard about this history café and decided to ring up and got booked in.'

Jacqui further expands on the difference the Local History Café makes to her, and how it can change her outlook and mood beyond the experience of participating. She describes initiatives like the History Café as 'vital', as they provide a space for people to get together and talk, as opposed to the 'debilitating' alternative of staying home, especially when physically impaired. Her perspective on life changed, as she had something to look forward to that

made her feel *'wanted and valued'*. Jacqui raises an interesting point talking about the History Café, as participating in these sessions gives her a sense of purpose. The meetings are meaningful to her life and the social element was of particular importance to her.

All of the participants of the Local History Café spoke about the importance of the social opportunities the café afforded and the importance of refreshments – the environment and atmosphere created felt crucial. Sue, a recently retired teacher who is now bringing up her young grandchild, describes it as *'like almost a highlight of my calendar for me' ... it 'make[s] me go out of the house and... find other people to talk to.'* Later describing it as:

'I'm a single parent and I'm having to rediscover a social network or a diary, almost and this has been, not a life... Lifeline is probably a bit strong but at least, this is one of the only groups that I have found that operates during the daytime that is convenient to me and fits my constraints that I have.'

Chatty Play also played a similar role for some of our interviewees, who described the initiative as a much-needed addition to a network of events that allows parents, as well as their children, to meet other people. Claire, a mother who was participating in Chatty Play with her two sons shared the importance of these activities for her family, especially for her son Thomas who has special needs. Chatty Play provided a welcoming and accepting space:

'You're not on edge, worrying about your child's behaviour. Are they doing something that people are going to find unacceptable? I think

that can be a barrier to people going to places when they've got a child with additional needs, sometimes.'

Chatty Play also signposted Claire towards other support networks. Through Chatty Play, she found out useful information, such as information about National Trust carer membership. Most importantly, Claire talked about the need to be 'proactive', to join these initiatives as an act of self-care.

Prompting small acts of kindness

A high number of visitors mentioned the value of small acts of kindness and were often inspired to talk about them after having visited the Pledge Wall (Figure 16). A large majority of visitors were already taking action and embarking on acts of kindness in their everyday lives and many reflected on these before being prompted. They discussed – to varying degrees – how they made an effort to connect with friends and family, check in on neighbours, volunteer, and support people who might be at risk of loneliness and social isolation. Examples included being a befriender, a community driver, or a volunteer for an organisation that supports older people. For these participants, *HumanKind* affirmed the actions they were already taking and acted as a helpful reminder to continue what they were already doing. For a very small number of these visitors and volunteers, the approach aggravated them. They felt patronised, or that *HumanKind* was almost suggesting that they weren't already taking these actions.

Despite the large number of participants who were already taking action and embarking on acts of kindness in their everyday lives, many spoke about making more effort to interact with people, neighbours and strangers, as well as the need for kindness and simple gestures such as smiling more; *'Smile.*

Make eye contact. Listen. Don't be afraid to be shunned, ignored or turned away. Make time. Kindness, sensitivity, empathy' (Comment Card). Elizabeth talked about the importance of *'being a little more open with people. A bit more aware of what people's situations are and, hopefully, a little bit kinder.'* For another interviewee, *HumanKind* was a *'wake up call'*.

A handful of visitors also mentioned actionable goals, such as being inspired to learn sign language, whereas others spoke about being moved to volunteer. Young people spoke about how *HumanKind* had inspired them to be on the lookout for peers at school. Lucy (12 years of age) and Toby (teenager) both shared how when they notice a peer who is 'lonely' or 'looking a bit sad', they will now be more likely to sit next to them and have a chat. For Stephen, who is a vicar, *HumanKind* inspired him to think about how he could adapt elements of the approach back into his work, and how he could share what he learnt from the visit with his community, especially the importance of welcoming people who might feel lonely or isolated. *HumanKind* provoked Ollie, who works with people in prison, to think beyond the practicalities of leaving prison and to think more about the social elements and connections that we all need.

Participants raised a number of societal issues which mitigate against this collective approach. Several visitors raised the negative impact of social media and new forms of communication (texting and emailing) on the depth of connections and friendships. One visitor, David, described friendships on social media as *'shallow and unhelpful relationships'*. Katy also shared that she did not think social media interaction could be considered equivalent to actual human contact, and that more often than not, social media environments are not conducive to a healthy, positive mind-set. Most of the visitors discussing

digital spaces were particularly unhappy with the sensationalising, picture-perfect ideals promoted by social media websites. Teenager Beatrice, visiting *HumanKind* with her mum, reflected on the pressure to appear happy and create a perfect version of yourself on social media. Whilst studies have shown that some digital tools can be valuable in fostering and maintaining existing social connections (as we see with Martha's relationship with her grandchild in Australia above; see also Campaign to End Loneliness, 2012), participants in the evaluation concentrated very much on the negative aspects of digital culture.

Other visitors made the connection between the political climate and significant cuts and public services being withdrawn due to austerity measures, recognising a link between these and an increase in loneliness and social isolation, as Victoria considers in relation to the experiences of one of her neighbours, who requires a carer. She points out that '*people are having to rely more and more on relatives and friends and family to help them*' emphasising that the decrease in political accountability and collective concern resulted in a shift towards individual responsibility in dealing with these issues.

Ultimately, although it would be difficult to measure how people decided to put these aspirations into actions, *HumanKind* offered a place to reflect on kindness, what we can do as individuals (and as a community) to create and develop a 'culture of kindness' and how we can have a positive impact on others. Dave's reflection perhaps best summarises this idea:

'I think the word in itself says it, doesn't it? HumanKind. It makes you take that step back and think – hang on a minute – what can I do? Can

I help anybody else? Obviously I've needed some help and we all need some help at some point and without those friends and people around you, it is lonely and you don't know where to go.'

Gayle and Ollie

Gayle and Ollie, who had recently joined the Trust as members, were visiting Calke Abbey whilst on holiday staying at a nearby campsite. Gayle had never visited before and Ben last visited in the late 1980s and was 'interested to see how it's changed.'

They described *HumanKind* as giving the occupants 'a humanity that you wouldn't otherwise have known about' and that you 'don't necessarily connect that sort of human story with a huge house like this'. Ollie felt that the interventions, and in particular the final video in the Family Apartments, 'brings the whole issue of loneliness up to date', and he thought the whole of *HumanKind* 'made the house more relevant'.

Like many visitors, *HumanKind* 'sparked off some ideas and thoughts around loneliness' in Ollie and Gayle's minds 'that they wouldn't otherwise have thought', describing it as 'a real bonus for coming.' Ollie saw the potential of reaching a 'captive audience', who 'probably in the main, are people who are coming up to a stage in their lives where they're perhaps more likely to experience loneliness.'

Both of them through their professional work (as a mental health nurse and social worker working with people mental health problems and people in prison), have insights into working with people who experience loneliness and stigma and isolation, sharing an empathetic and thoughtful view of the surrounding issues. Gayle recognised that:

'... loneliness has not really been talked about or discussed until relatively recently. Think of the number of people who are living longer and families becoming more separated by counties or continents and perhaps, less social service provision. I guess it means there's going to be a lot more people living more singular lives for a lot longer.'

For Ollie, *HumanKind* also inspired him to think in more depth about the importance of social connection for the people that he works with. When asked what he would take away from his experience of *HumanKind* he stated that:

'It's more about being more aware in what I'm doing already, that's something really, to take into account and how important social contacts can be for people's wellbeing. I'm going to be setting up a project for people leaving prison and we tend to concentrate on the practical stuff like housing and money and those things that you think that are really important to people. There's the risk of neglecting just the importance of feeling that you belong in a society, I suppose. That you are valued by other people. I think I might have to think a little bit about how important it is to include that dimension in what we're actually going to put together as well. I think that's quite useful, actually. You've got me thinking.'

Opening up the conventional heritage visit

One of the findings that emerged from the evaluation was the capacity of *HumanKind* to offer a different experience for visitors. Driven by a recognition that *HumanKind* would demand a new set of spatial and social relationships at Calke (new ways of interacting with one another, with the National Trust and with the site), *HumanKind* set out to expand the conventional heritage visit – to signal that something new was happening and open up opportunities for what Bonnell and Simon (2007) describe as an intimate encounter; ‘an exhibition experience which offers visitors the potential for insight that may support new ways of relating with and within the world around them’. The approach - developed through a range of interpretive approaches from the immersive to the didactic and which purposefully set out to challenge the delivery of information to visitors and instead prioritised highly personal and emotive stories and affective installations - prompted a significant number of comments, the key strands of which are expanded upon below.

Human stories

An overwhelmingly common theme in the research was the interpretation of the six stories told in the family apartments. A large number of visitors and volunteers noted that *HumanKind* was using a very different tone compared to other properties, which one visitor described as positively ‘*un-National Trust-like*’. When asked to elaborate on this perceived difference, many mentioned the fact that by visiting *HumanKind* they felt like they got to know the six residents better, that the stories felt more personal:

‘I feel like these people are more real to me and I also feel that it’s connected to me personally on deeper level than just going and hearing about some baronet. They speak to everybody’s experience

rather than a few people’s experience. I was surprised in a good way.’

Maria

Visitors who described these stories as more personal attributed this quality to the fact that the interpretation did not stop at the re-telling of accurate historical information, but rather offered the visitor a more holistic storytelling experience. In particular, visitors appreciated how the approach to storytelling in *HumanKind* enabled a deeper emotional engagement. This made the history of the Calke Abbey residents ‘*touching*’ and ‘*more identifiable to you personally*’. Others described this approach as something new and refreshing, ‘*bringing the stories to life*’, in contrast to more conventional approaches which were described as boring, and even ‘*dreary*’. As expressed by Stacey, below, this approach was particularly successful because it added novelty to the experience of visiting a heritage site, where the history is often devoid of emotion and person-centred storytelling:

‘I think I’ve learnt more about the people here than I’ve learnt from any other house tour before because it was personal. Even the fact that it’s not chronological, I liked that because quite often, you’re given dates of things and it was this person and then, it went into this man’s hand and then, that man’s hands and I don’t really care. This stuff is interesting, this is good.’

Inclusion and a breadth of interpretive approaches

The range of interpretive approaches utilised in *HumanKind*, from the informational and didactic and with a strong emphasis on the abstract and the felt, meant that many visitors were very positive about the inclusivity of *HumanKind*, with most visitors able to find something that worked for them.

The presence of subtitles in all the videos was appreciated by visitors with hearing impairments and the choice of BSL as the first language of the film at the end of the *HumanKind* experience was noted positively by many.

The new interpretive approaches found in *HumanKind* were often described as ‘immersive’ and ‘engaging’. While some were surprised by the unconventional displays, many visitors enjoyed the change of pace and novelty offered by *HumanKind*. The first room in particular, which centred around the relationship between Georgiana, Lady Crewe and her son Vauncey and included an immersive experience with wall projections, music and sounds, generated very positive responses. Visitors who shared their view on this room mentioned how they appreciated the invitation to sit on the sofa in front of the projection and reflect on the story, rather than hurry through the installation after simply reading interpretative text.

Some visitors perceived the space as a calm and relaxing experience which ‘slowed your thought down’, like James who said:

Sometimes you come to something and you just start reading things and then you’ve had enough of that and you go somewhere else. You just hurry through sometimes, whereas that slowed you down and made you take notice. I don’t know if it’s deliberately done that, but it worked anyway, for me.

HumanKind purposefully incorporated a wide variety of interpretative approaches. As a result, visitor reactions to *HumanKind* as a whole were not clear-cut with some of the elements – particularly the more abstract installations and the new formats such as the landscape rooms – challenging

some visitors. In particular, Harriet’s story - the most abstract of the installations in the family apartments - perplexed some, who relied on the *HumanKind* leaflet to make sense of the story. While they appreciated the addition of authentic documents and letters, those visitors who struggled with the interpretation in Harriet’s room admitted that more context was needed for them to fully understand her story. As one visitor expressed:

‘An interesting idea in principle but there was little opportunity to identify with the characters, who were not sufficiently fleshed out - no pictures, quotes, etc. The exhibition added little or nothing to the information on the leaflet. Perhaps the absence is intended to emphasize loneliness but I am unsure that that would be picked up by the average viewer.’ Comment Card

The landscape rooms also elicited a spectrum of responses. Whilst some visitors described the Landscape Rooms as sparking their curiosity, or prompting them to think further, others relished the ‘open’ nature of the interpretation and the opportunity to interpret *HumanKind* in their own way. As Bunty and Perry share in their reflections on experiencing one of the Landscape Rooms:

Bunty and Perry happened upon Henry's red Landscape Room at the side of the House whilst walking through the grounds of Calke Abbey. Invited to reflect on their experiences of the installation, they were asked a series of simple questions and probes, including 'what is your initial reaction?' and 'what does it make you think?'; as well as being encouraged to spend time looking closely and reflecting.

Bunty shared that she 'was confused at first' and that she 'didn't quite realise what it was'. Perry was also initially puzzled, but 'did think they were quite impressive.' After spending some time sitting in the installation and looking, Perry shared that she 'liked the little details on each one of them', she went on further, sharing that:

'It makes me think of everyone getting together. I liked the idea, where I first saw it. We said it together, didn't we? We said, 'oh that's a lovely place for people to get together and have a picnic' 'cause although they're standing out on their own in the different places, there's places to sit and, the thing I liked the most about it was that, wherever there is seating, it's all facing each other. Although each of the structures are in a certain shape, they're not enclosed at all.'

Bunty and Perry had encountered Airmyne's pink Landscape Room in the Stableyard earlier on in their visit, where Perry described feeling curious about the installation 'because there wasn't really anything to read around it, so I just kind of saw it and I was like, okay – they want me to interpret it how I will, so I'll enjoy it for what it is.' She felt this approach enabled her to 'interpret this in my own way and I can see it how I want to see it rather than having to conform to it.'

However, not everyone felt as comfortable with the Landscape Rooms as Perry and Bunty, with some visitors and volunteers sharing both their dislike of the modern aesthetic of the Rooms and a desire for more information about their meaning. As Caroline, a volunteer stableyard guide noted, some visitors found the landscape rooms and the idea that they were just there to be used and enjoyed difficult. [T]hey *'do not realise just what it is', 'Currently, they'll walk in, they'll see the outside installation, they'll have seen Winnie's on the way in and they'll say, what's this monstrosity?'* However, she see this as an opportunity, stating this: *'is your chance to talk to them'*. Acknowledging the difference facilitation makes to visitors' experiences, she continues:

'I looked at it today and I thought why haven't we got the sign outside this saying Miss Airmyne's room, linking to HumanKind? If they had that, people would come and talk to us more. As it is, you had to approach them, I have to approach. I'll look around and I think they're looking puzzled. Go and ask them. Then, yeah, then they will open up. Once you start to explain, then they say oh, oh we've seen the pledge board and we wondered what it was.'

While accessibility was appreciated across the board, some argued that it could have gone even further. Accessibility was hindered by the site itself, where, for example, *'the lighting makes it more difficult to walk on the uneven floor'*. Some projected written text in the first room as well was not read out loud, making it less accessible to children who could hear but not read. The feedback received by the overwhelming majority of visitors however, demonstrated that the different interpretation approaches in *HumanKind* offered increased opportunities for meaningful engagement and connection. Different visitors connected to different elements of the interpretation and

even when they shared some scepticism about part of it, they were still positive overall about their experiences with almost everyone taking something away from it.

The parameters of cultural visiting and the role of cultural organisations in tackling loneliness and social isolation

A recurring theme in participant responses was the focus on a contemporary issue and the relationship of such themes to the role of cultural organisations and the interpretation of shared heritage.

Visitors made various observations on the role of the National Trust, as a cultural organisation, in tackling social isolation and loneliness. Some reflected on the broader part cultural organisations, especially the National Trust, which reaches an older demographic, can play in raising awareness around loneliness and isolation. Several visitors also recognised the Trust's huge reach through their membership body and described their possible role as a platform for wider social issues. These reflections were taken a step further by some visitors who brought up the political aspects of an issue such as loneliness and social isolation. For the majority, the idea of organisations like the National Trust tackling contemporary issues and linking them to the history of the site is a positive approach to take, adding depth and new meanings to our shared heritage. As illustrated by interviewee Patrick's comment:

'It's good that large organisations like the National Trust take that on board and link it to the historical context of, in this case, this house. It makes it more real. It would be very bland if it was just a story without

a background. Being able to connect the history of the house to that concept of loneliness.'

However, for a very small number of visitors the 'political nature' of the subject matter felt a step too far, falling outside of the Trust's perceived remit of 'preserving things for the nation as part of our heritage'. One comment card, simply put: 'Do not like PC National Trust', whilst friends Hillary and Jane described *HumanKind* as: 'jumping on the bandwagon of mental health awareness'.

Interestingly, a higher proportion of volunteers than visitors expressed their opinion that *HumanKind* and the issue of loneliness and social isolation was not an area the Trust should be focusing on. Similar to the small number of visitor comments above, this feedback stemmed from a specific assumption about who and what the National Trust is for. That's 'perhaps, not what we've come here to do' (volunteer, speaking anonymously); 'I don't think it's what the National Trust is for' (Wendy). For this group of volunteers 'visitors come to our properties to see nice houses, nice things, nice places' and that is what the National Trust is 'charged with doing, taking care of those places'. These comments rarely focused on how the National Trust was trying to approach the issue of social isolation and loneliness and rather questioned whether the Trust should engage with social issues at all.

One caveat that would continually arise during the research, even amongst staff, volunteers and visitors who were wholly supportive of the work, was that such themes and experiences ought only to be developed at sites where there was a 'natural' link to the story of the site. Three visitors and one staff member felt that exploring the issue of loneliness and social isolation worked

specifically at Calke (due to the isolated nature of the property and the stories of the family and occupants), but that it wouldn't work elsewhere. For one member of staff, *HumanKind*:

'... seemed particularly pertinent because Calke is an unusual property, the way it's sort of hidden away in a little hollow, and all the rest of it, and with the story of the family here. I think just doing something, almost trendy, for the sake of it is not a good idea. I think there needs to be some actual connection, strong connection, with the property.'

In a similar way, Alistair, visiting with his grandson, describes:

'The way [HumanKind] relates to this house and the people in the house and things like that, yes. They should do things like that. Yeah, that's fine. I can see that. It's good... But I don't think the National Trust's brief is to explore those kinds of issues unless it relates to a particular place that they are managing.'

Interestingly however, as the research illustrated, what was considered to be integral to the site for some – a deep sense of isolation at the site and a story of an isolated family – was shown to be in all senses a consciously constructed story. Not only do many visitors not pick up on the sense of isolation in their felt experiences at Calke (Stage 1 report), but the new historical research undertaken as part of the project revealed a family who were full of interest, lived complex lives and cared deeply for one another. More than this, the

outpouring of sharing on the part of visitors points to the human nature of experiences of loneliness and isolation and to the need for public places which facilitate deep, thoughtful and kind conversations about such pressing social issues. As one visitor to *HumanKind* stated: *'it's nothing to be politically correct about, everybody is lonely at some time.'*

Conclusion

HumanKind was successful in generating awareness of and reflection on loneliness and social isolation. It got people talking and created an environment in which staff, volunteers and visitors felt inclined to connect with others and take action. As such, it provides an exceptional case study of how cultural organisations can play their part in tackling loneliness and isolation by telling powerful human stories, opening up contemporary discussions and opportunities for new forms of experience. More than this, and in a way which perhaps moves discussion on beyond the 'only where it is relevant' argument, visitors valued the vital and rare public spaces where difficult conversations, deep reflections on the human condition and new connections can be nurtured in an increasingly divided and confusing world. Cultural spaces can normalise this kind of sharing and reflection, enabling it to become part of our daily lives. Research shows that such an approach is not only positive for individuals, but is a significant contribution towards the larger social good.

2.4 A legacy of increased expertise, creativity and confidence amongst staff and volunteers

Central to the development of *HumanKind* was an ambition to introduce a new way of working that would enable staff and volunteers to increase their expertise, creativity and confidence through a collaborative ('learning through doing together') and democratic ('equitable and transparent') working process. The desire to realise the project within a non-hierarchical structure was driven by an emergent research methodology developed by RCMG and later described as 'structured creativity'. The process was structured around 16 working groups which brought together volunteers – from room guides to gardeners – with Calke staff – including, for example, the Food, Beverage and Retail Manager, Curator, and House and Collections Manager – and external partners – researchers from RCMG and a range of creative practitioners. It purposefully drew across the established areas of Calke activity, including house, gardens and countryside.

By cutting across organisational structures and hierarchies and demanding ongoing collaboration, *HumanKind* was a decidedly different way of working for Calke and the National Trust, one in which a degree of decision-making power was shared by volunteers, staff and partners. Calke already had a very strong organisational culture – the concept of 'one team' was strong and the team was confident in sharing authority. That said, staff and volunteers still

worked very much in separate groups (house and garden, for example) and within clearly defined roles/hierarchies. The benefits of the *HumanKind* approach revealed themselves throughout the process: Calke's team learned more about what matters to those contributing to the estate beyond their own team's concerns, while pushing forward the collective work and capacity of the Calke team.

Central to *HumanKind*, was a focus on the participatory process, rather than a fixed outcome with working groups clustered around the areas set out at the end of Stage 1 (see Figure 4). Working groups were not provided with training from external professionals or partners, but became places for actively learning together, of dialogue and mutual exchange as new forms of expertise were drawn into the groups and existing expertise was valued and explored. As they developed the guidebook, community partnerships, team training, buddy scheme, alumni scheme, chatty café's, installations, landscape rooms, pledge walls and a public talks programme, this approach set out to engage volunteers and staff across Calke to contribute and, collectively, develop new research and interpretation skills. In fact, the impact of the approach reached much further, resulting in a reinvigorated discussion of organisational culture

at the site, which has had a significant impact on day-to-day working practices for many.

Working collaboratively – nurturing expertise

Being involved from the start enabled volunteers to take ownership of the project, creating a ‘feeling of empowerment’, according to Project Co-Lead and Community and Engagement Manager Alison Thornhill. In practice and as expected, Calke’s workers adopted different degrees of commitment and engagement. ‘The way we worked was as important as what we delivered’, Curator Becky Harvey reflects. Becky explains how the process presented ‘a major shift’ in Calke’s practice and thinking by ‘bringing in different perspectives and democratising how we think about our places’. Becky took part in the Guidebook Working Group which brought together highly experienced and less experienced researchers to explore the archive together and sense check the stories and stigmatising language used in the Guidebook. The experience had a significant impact on the professional lives of volunteers and staff. Becky talks about the way in which the process consolidated her ambitions for Calke, and those of the Trust at large, providing the professional development she needed as a curator for engaging in contemporary debate:

‘[HumanKind] has given me very hands-on, practical experience of how stories at our places can link to contemporary issues. It’s something that the Trust is really keen to do more of, and something that I was quite excited about when I took on the role. So, it was something I was feeling quite confident about, but not necessarily having a huge amount of practical experience in. And actually, it’s shown how very quickly, and from a small amount of research, we can make contemporary connections in really effective ways.’

For volunteer Sue Styche, her ‘*absolute highlight*’ was developing her aptitude for research with mentorship from Professors Suzanne MacLeod and Kevin Schürer during a study visit to the University of Leicester. The shared process of skill and capacity-building that Becky and Sue describe was designed to bring both volunteers and staff on board and to involve them in a process of collective exploration and learning. The team found that when involving people with different backgrounds, skills and experiences, the stories told proved richer for drawing on the unique experiences each individual brought to the project. The histories that the Guidebook Working Group uncovered were more diverse and inclusive, which, in turn, helped Calke explore its relevance to a wider audience. Similarly, the process of genuinely working together to review archival sources through discussion and sharing, proved transformative for all involved.

Collaborative working – energy and creativity

Stable Yard Coordinator Fiona enjoyed the creative momentum that built throughout the process and which drove projects forward at a high pace despite the practical challenges that teams sometimes encountered: ‘That’s the exciting bit. It’s moving it forward’. A number of other staff commented on the energy brought by the project: ‘I’ve felt more inspired in my work during this project than before’, describes House and Collections Manager Julie Griffith, while Community and Engagement Manager Alison Thornhill comments that the process of collaboration ‘really freed me, I suddenly felt this weight lifted, we can do something different’.

The majority of Calke Abbey’s workers saw *HumanKind* as something that reinvigorated Calke and valued how collaboration with externals provided new insights for both volunteers and staff. *HumanKind* stimulated productive

discussion about the interpretative directions and alternative histories that National Trust properties have the potential to explore. There is a strong consensus amongst Calke's workers that the participatory process pioneered by the project positively challenged long-established practices, breaking new ground for Calke as an organisation. From her perspective as an outsider, creative practitioner Julie Howell recalls how this was often a challenging process through which members of the team supported each other: 'It became about the work and our process together rather than the individual'. As an artist, Julie often works in isolation. The strength of *HumanKind* 'is definitely the experience of not being on my own for the majority of the work'.

Interviews with staff and volunteers revealed the direct link between working in new ways and opening up new ways of seeing. Project Co-Lead Alison Thornhill reflects that working together as part of the 16 working groups introduced a creative idealism that can only be achieved through a diversity of voices. One of the vital lessons she learnt from *HumanKind* is 'that working in partnership is always stronger'. The collective time and energy that volunteers and staff dedicated to the project introduced a clearly visible degree of detail, complexity and nuance into every section of the project.

Valuing the skills of all participants in *HumanKind* and encouraging everyone to get involved, resulted in a depth of research and the volume of outputs that would have been impossible within the old structure and process. As Marketing and Communications Officer Caroline Icke suggests, the symbiotic relationship between researchers, artist, volunteers and staff resulted in a productive harnessing of the huge people resource at Calke; sharing opinions,

skills and ideas helped Calke's workers delve deeper into the stories they uncovered and utilise them in more creative ways.

By working towards a shared goal, learning through doing and modelling behaviour between volunteers and staff, *HumanKind* became a place for engaging with ideas and opinions about the future of Calke and empowered everyone involved to act as ambassadors for the project. Caroline praises the collaborative process for creating a collective sense of ownership from the onset and explains how the commitment of both staff and volunteers prevented an 'us' versus 'them' mentality that surfaces when change is rigidly implemented from the top:

'It means that there's ownership and that buy in, which then obviously didn't entirely filter down to the wider volunteer community, but it did mean you had some incredibly strong advocates in your corner for the beginning so that when those conversations started to happen you had that support there. I think that was really important rather than it being an 'us and them' mentality.'

Similarly, General Manager Stewart Alcock muses that the cross-property approach to the project enabled *HumanKind* to take hold more substantially, leaving a legacy of mutual understanding and deepening the range and impact of the programme:

'It's the fact that it's been collaborative and involving and shaped by people from across the whole property. That in itself helps cement relationships, it builds ways of working and support for our work.'

The project and the process cemented the possibility of engaging volunteers and staff in innovation and change; it provided all participants with a stake in the future of Calke. The collaborative process raised a number of questions for the participants. How are ideas and opinions selected in this collaborative process? Who is in charge of preserving the fine details or protecting the boundaries of what can be made possible? And who is responsible when operational challenges arise? As Project Co-Lead Alison Thornhill reflects on her own role:

'Mass views can be more difficult sometimes, so it's about having that someone that has to make that decision which is where you've got to have somebody leading the project, I guess, who has to make a decision in the end.'

Sharing decision-making with external partners

As artist Julie Howell points out, the team at Calke Abbey formed a 'temporary community' with researchers, creatives and other professional partners working together closely. *HumanKind* invited external partners to join an equitable process and develop a sense of shared ownership over areas of work that are traditionally managed by property or National Trust workers, like the Trust's central guidebook team or decisions about interpretation in the House. Moving away from standardised working processes allowed Calke to forge new and more intimate relationships with RCMG, creative practitioners, as well as the allied partners who contributed their knowledge to the pledge wall and co-produced a video for *HumanKind's* concluding room. For staff, the value of involving university, community and creative partners primarily lies with the authenticity and integrity that research and expertise introduced into the process. For Alison working with RCMG was like

having a 'weight lifted' that has freed up Calke to do things differently. For Becky, the structured process introduced by RCMG and the ethical framework ensured that focus remained firmly on target:

'From the way the project was set up, on those really firm research questions, and a very clear set of principles that were fundamentally steering us as we went along and ensuring that we delivered on what we set out to do.'

Asked whether *HumanKind* had inspired her, Becky explains that the less isolated, shared process of research introduced a dynamic that felt unprecedented.

'Definitely. The whole ways of working. I don't think I've ever worked on a project quite like it, where it was such a collaborative project with a chance to learn from everybody. That week we were at [the County Archives in] Matlock, that we spent researching as a team, that kind of way of working was really inspiring on a day to day basis.'

Working with RCMG has given Calke the capacity to do something the organisation would not usually do, agrees Head Gardener Heloise Brooke, providing a refreshing outside point of view that encouraged Calke to be bold and innovative. Working with internal and external stakeholders presented a welcome challenge for an organisation that '*can be quite stuck in its ways on how it shows things*', as Food, Beverage and Retail Manager Steve Butterworth suggests. Partners who entered the project from outside the National Trust, like RCMG, challenged deeply entrenched ideas on how things have always be done and provided a project methodology that demanded

that the team work in new ways. These fresh perspectives helped break through long-established assumptions and ways of working that members of the team took for granted. For someone like Steve, who talks about needing to work more collaboratively and generally prefers to operate in a solitary way to 'get things done' and 'get on with it', *HumanKind* demonstrated that the collaborative process can do all of those things – and more. Taking the collaboration with artist Julie Howell as an example, he recalls meeting in the middle to reconcile Calke conventional working practices with Julie's competing tendency to think big and unrestricted by tradition:

'I think having Julie's views gives you a complete extreme to what we would normally do. I feel like we've met in the middle quite nicely on that. I don't think we would have been half as successful without a collaborative plan on that.'

Curator Becky Harvey, who joined Calke more recently and is less invested in what have become fixed ways of working, witnessed how external perspectives drove transformational change from the outset. Being new, she explains:

'It perhaps wasn't a shift from accepting those perceived wisdoms, it was more from day one of kind of thinking 'Ah. There's opportunities here to do something different'. But I can see that within the wider team as well; I think it's helped us to come together as a team...It's probably quite early days still, but to start to think differently about how we think about Calke.'

Taking a research-led and collaborative approach has inspired some team members to embed 'structured creativity' into other areas of their work and practice. *HumanKind* has also cemented the importance of placing research at the heart of the narratives, and being open to a process led by questions, rather than purely based on delivery and outputs. Celia Sanger, who has volunteered at the estate in different capacities, is now dedicating her time at Calke exclusively to undertaking and archiving research to make it available for future projects. In her role as Regional Curator, Becky is adopting the inquiry-led approach that *HumanKind* modelled to benefit the interpretation of the natural heritage collections at Upton House and Gardens. Over the next two years, Upton's team will be exploring the potential role of its collections in the present day, embarking on a fluid and unfixed process of inquiry that Becky feels confident in tackling.

New skills and knowledge

Working together sparked creativity, but, on a long-term scale, also created space for the team to develop new skillsets and become more comfortable with trying to achieve something unconventional. In asking volunteers and staff to move away from a conservation-led narrative – the view that the estate is a 'time capsule' – *HumanKind* inspired Calke to adopt ways of thinking, talking and writing that embrace feelings and emotions, being immersive and experimental and not having all the answers. Between collaborating with each other and gathering skills and knowledge with external partners, Calke's workers expanded their understanding of the estate's histories and learned how to use new and existing knowledge in more dialogical, dynamic and social ways.

Gemma Davis, Assistant House Manager, describes her team's growing belief in its capacity to think more innovatively and independently. *HumanKind* has given the House Team confidence to tackle subjects that feel more in touch with the everyday realities of visitors:

'As a House Team, it seems to have encouraged us to also think more innovatively about interpretation and exhibition and showed us that we can experiment, we don't have to let the House speak for itself and let Spirit of Place restrict us. In fact, HumanKind embraces Spirit of Place. HumanKind has also put Calke in the limelight as being somewhere that talks about issues that are relevant to people which is so important.'

Some volunteers continue to find the emphasis on experimentation and the invitation to develop new skills challenging. Volunteer Audrey suggests that volunteers potentially feel disempowered because they don't hold all the 'knowledge' or all of the 'answers'. She describes how House volunteers might be used to being in the 'expert' position and struggle to embrace the uncertainty of an approach that calls for people to be open, and sometimes open to not knowing:

'I can see that part of this is just about engaging with visitors about all types of stuff. We get asked all sorts of stuff, and I don't know the answers to 90% of it. So, either you wing it, or you put the questions onto someone that does.'

Some volunteers are less comfortable 'winging it' or find it difficult to engage with visitors in a more personal way, without being armed with all the facts.

This more open approach demands a different set of skills and, as volunteer Celia Sanger explains, self-belief. *'The truth is most of them are so experienced that they could do it in their sleep. I think its confidence more than anything else...'*

Confidence in addressing contemporary social issues

By addressing a contemporary social issue through the lives of Henry Harpur, George Crewe, Lady Georgiana Crewe, Harriet Philips, Winifred Harpur-Crewe and Airmyne Jenney, *HumanKind* ventured into relatively new territory for Calke and the National Trust. General Manager Stewart Alcock is keen to adopt this approach in future projects too – he describes finding ways to relate to the contemporary world as 'stepping over the threshold'. Stewart is not alone in this ambition: across the team, he identifies a growing confidence in addressing contemporary issues.

Curator Becky Harvey, for example, speaks about feeling more confident in putting the skills and knowledge learnt during her MA in Museum Studies into practice, creating an opportunity for her to work in ways that are socially engaged:

'I think it's making those links between the research, and those stories we have at Calke... And how that curatorial role is not only about sharing those stories but thinking about how Calke and those stories can be told, in several resources we have, to think about combatting loneliness... Obviously when I did my masters at Leicester, that was very much a focus of what we were looking at, but it doesn't really mean I've had the opportunity to be part of it, working in a local authority museum. So, it was exciting really to see that the Trust was

actively looking at social themes and issues, and how we can be part of those conversations.'

The expertise brought in by external partners solidified this sense of security. Collaborating with a University partner that was so deeply engaged and present at Calke, as Julie Griffiths explains, gave the project 'the integrity to be able combat negative comments that might come'. More so than creating confidence, *Humankind* created a sense of resilience in the face of the adversity or pushback that staff experience when evolving practice and venturing off the well-trodden paths. This feeling of being better able to defend creative and intellectual decisions is specifically described by a number of workers, but seems shared across the board. Marketing and Communications Officer Caroline Icke, for example, talks about growing more resilient simply by becoming more experienced in talking about contemporary issues with people. That not everyone will subscribe to this change in direction is something Calke is learning to accept, explains General Manager Stewart Alcock. Calke (and the Trust) usually come from a position of wanting to please everyone and they are growing in confidence in recognising that this will not happen, and that pleasing everyone – visitors, volunteers and staff alike – is not necessarily the desired outcome.

Curator Becky has begun to think in a broader way about contemporary issues as a result of working on *HumanKind* and feels empowered to take this way of working forward in new areas of curatorial practice:

'I think it's given us confidence to think about contemporary issues, to perhaps continue thinking along the lines of Humankind, or to think about different contemporary issues. It's difficult definitely as we've

not had any definite conversations about what comes next, but to my mind there's lots of opportunities. For example in the natural history collection, of thinking about that not as this kind of strange bizarre collection, but actually as this incredible resource that allows us to tap into conversations around biodiversity and climate change today, and what the role of that collection might be in the 21st century.'

For many volunteers, the contemporary focus of *HumanKind* has given the assurance that talking about the ways in which Calke's stories touch the lives of visitors is a valid part of their job.

'I think there might have been at the beginning, I'm not sure if there is now, some concern that if anybody's got an issue and they want to talk to someone about it; well, we are not there to be social workers. Obviously if somebody is very distressed, we are going to help them, but we are not going to solve their problem for them.'

This concern often reflected a disconnect between the actual and perceived expectations placed upon volunteers. Throughout the project, Calke has proceeded with thoughtful caution and relied upon partnership organisations to provide specialist expertise, making resources available onsite which volunteers could signpost people to, if necessary. For Celia, reassurance about her roles and responsibilities as a volunteer were all that was needed to resolve her discomfort: *'no one is expecting you to be Sigmund Freud. Nobody is expecting you to know all the answers. But just being prepared to listen and be sympathetic is often enough.'*

There is, as Curator Becky Harvey notes, a world of possibilities in between looking at a social issue and acting as a social worker. For Calke and its workers, the project was about responding to issues of loneliness and social isolation and attempting to make a difference by opening up the conversation and demonstrating that small acts of kindness can be a powerful way for cultural institutions to affect change. She notes:

'What Humankind has enabled me to think about is simple, practical steps that could be taken to help to combat loneliness, in a very relatable way. Has it changed the way I thought about it? I think it helps to see the connection between my role as the Curator, and the very simple steps we can take to help to resolve loneliness.'

Like Becky, volunteers and staff overwhelmingly commented how highly they valued the opportunity to engage with visitors, to form emotional connections and to challenge the idea that the past is an exclusively fact-based, untouchable 'perfect' story that cultural institutions conserve.

A new openness and readiness to challenge 'Spirit of Place'

Prompted by the identification of stigmatising language in the Guidebook at Stage 1, Stage 2 began with new historical research to 'sense check' the stories and anecdotes told at Calke. The archive quickly revealed the fictional nature of many of the stories and challenged the overarching narrative told at Calke for the last 30 years of an eccentric family disconnected from the world and from one another. The new research, aided by the collaborative nature of the research process, has been shared widely across the teams at Calke and has opened up new and exciting conversations about the history of Calke and

what has been understood as the spirit of place. The process has encouraged a new, exploratory approach to the site and both its interpretive and social potential.

Curator Becky is particularly positive about the new attitudes to story and research at Calke. She commends *HumanKind* for changing the 'Grand Narrative', arguing that the project 'discarded the perceived wisdoms' and demonstrated the importance of remaining fluid by keeping the interpretation open for new stories to emerge and develop. Becky describes how *HumanKind* has debunked a number of longstanding myths, which were kept in place by an overreliance on the Spirit of Place and the idea that it cemented Calke's narrative about the family as eccentric and odd:

'Before, the stories about Calke were from a male perspective, they were wealthy, from a class perspective, and there was very little from elsewhere. They missed the opportunities to see from another perspective, which at Calke can be closed down really, as being insignificant. That narrative of eccentricity really prevented us from looking any further. The real significance is that it has fundamentally challenged that, despite some of the perceived wisdoms that we had about Calke. It's given us the opportunity to look again and to think in new ways, and to ask different questions.'

Workers in visitor-facing roles too, have witnessed the impact of opening up the stories told at Calke to highlight the multi-faceted lives that residents led, particularly the outward focus that it enables. Talking openly about difference, loss and loneliness has elevated the spaces to 'more than just a nice place to visit', argues House and Collections Manager Julie Griffith. One

particular interaction with a visitor, who was prompted by Airmyne's corridor to recall her struggle to communicate as a dyslexic child, made her realise that 'we have such a gift in the places that we care for and the things that we can do'.

Others described how the project has challenged their established way of thinking. Day Leader Phil Askham remarks that 'those little vignettes or installations actually challenge the thinking that, certainly in the last five years, I've been bought along with'. For him, the label attached to Henry Harpur as the 'Isolated Baronet' always sat uncomfortably with some of the other things known about him and contradicted Henry's achievements as a musician, collector and innovator: '*you know, there was an extremely brave man who did something exceptional, and also did a lot for the house and the family, you couldn't just paint him with that brush*'. The more personal approach and the different perspectives included in *HumanKind* drew these stories out of the shadows and challenged the consistent stereotypes that Phil self-admittedly held too. 'And actually', Phil adds, 'one of the things about doing the research from primary sources, like diaries and letters, is that you learn that that one dimensional view is not appropriate.'

By revisiting the archives and rethinking established truths, *HumanKind* has opened up a more exploratory and research-led approach at Calke, a questioning attitude amongst the team and an openness to ongoing learning about Calke and the people who lived there. It has challenged the caricatures that circulated at Calke for many years and called out stigmatising language and storytelling. Most significantly, the team, rather than shying away from these challenges, met them head on and are now ready to continue learning and sharing more about Calke. Importantly, building on the confidence gained

around loneliness and social isolation, they are keen to do this in ways that resonate with contemporary lives and engage in contemporary social issues.

Organisational change – a 'culture of kindness'

Whilst *HumanKind* was embarked upon as a change process – to build the skills and confidence of the whole team at Calke in engaging with contemporary issues and generating leading edge approaches to interpretation – the wider impact of the project on organisational change emerged as the project and the realisation that the stories told at Calke were in themselves stigmatising grew, and as the integrated process enabled all members of the Calke team, including its senior managers, to join the conversation and re-examine their core values.

For General Manager Stewart Alcock, the 'heightened awareness' and 'heightened understanding' that the project generated, amplified the idea that staff – as individuals and a collective – have agency in enhancing the lives of those around them. This sentiment was described by other members of staff too. While reflecting on her own learning, Alison Thornhill suggests that *HumanKind* created a strong desire to look outwards, rather than inwards, taking as an example her determination to be 'less remote' for community groups and potential partners. By developing the skills, expertise and interpretative tools to navigate this territory, many began to see the relationship between Calke and loneliness as something they can affect through their professional lives. For curator Becky Harvey:

'I don't think I had a very clear or articulate understanding of how organisations or how museums could make a difference in combatting loneliness. I'm fully aware of the severity of the problem, and aware

that it was a growing issue that museums were starting to think about dealing with; but not what we could actually do.'

For Becky, the confidence and skill built through the participatory process opened up larger questions about the ways in which cultural institutions could play a role in tackling social issues. She feels that the project has empowered her – through skill and expertise – to take action – a feeling that was shared across volunteers and staff. 'Even if it can change one person in each property you've made a change', notes volunteer Gina Smith.

For Stewart, the project was framed by a growing awareness of the importance of kindness as a device that could drive organisational change. As he describes, there was a moment for him where *HumanKind* changed from being a defined project to something much more large-scale and embedded.

'I suppose there was a tipping point in time where it moved from an interpretive project, portraying stories of the place and bringing them to life for people, to one that has much more contemporary meaning in terms of how we live our lives today. [...] I particularly started thinking about how we bring this into a reality – in terms of how we operate as a property team and respond to individuals on an everyday basis – and the notion of a culture of kindness, and how this fits alongside, or is embedded in, how we behave and how we do things.'

HumanKind encouraged Stewart to reflect on kindness as a value and behaviour that could shape how staff and volunteers interact with one another and with visitors. In practice, he explains, this might mean not *'getting too wrapped up in I need to follow this process, that procedure, or this*

particular requirement' and starting, instead, from a foundation of being kind. Adopting kindness as a key value means advocating a supportive work environment and creating awareness of other people's needs. This renewed awareness and mutual understanding of wellbeing, as Curator Becky Harvey argues, has been one of the most poignant and all-encompassing legacies of the project:

'I think Humankind will continue beyond the duration of the project. Even when the interpretations have been taken down, it's a way of working, it's a culture of kindness, it's a way of thinking how we design spaces, and the way in which we work together.'

Other staff members echoed this observation and pointed towards subtle, but important changes that the project has inspired in the way they interact with visitors. Head Gardener Heloise Brooke comments that *HumanKind*:

'...made us a bit more conscious when people stop and talk to us that we might be the only person they have spoken to that day, and how important it is to them. I suppose it's just made us all, for want of a better word, a little bit kinder, rather than impatient, when people stop and want to go on and on.'

For Heloise, the team's willingness to go beyond superficial customer-service also became evident in discussions about British Sign Language, which some of Calke's volunteers indicated they would like to learn to better support deaf visitors. Embedding kindness into the everyday experiences of visitors and staff makes Calke a more compassionate and human organisation, one that is both understanding and inclusive of diverse experiences.

Whether they had been intimately involved with the project or not, a significant number of people indicated that a renewed focus on the fundamentals of human interaction meant their everyday interactions were no longer just about ‘serving a customer’ or ‘service delivery’. For example, Selina, who works in the restaurant, describes how she now no longer feels anxious when speaking ‘too long’ with a visitor. *HumanKind* has given her permission to act in the way she would naturally – with kindness, care and consideration (see vignette). She no longer feels like having to police the time she spends talking with members of the public.

By embracing the spirit of innovations like the Chatty Café in everyday interactions, other staff too indicated a structural change over the course of the project which created more time for customer care and changing perceptions of what’s acceptable when it comes to interactions with the public. Caroline Icke, Marketing and Communications Officer, engages mostly online with visitors and responds with more compassion and patience to visitor comments and complaints made on social media. Caroline reflects on the way in which her thinking has shifted when dealing with online visitor experiences: from annoyance, irritation or an extra job to do, to starting a conversation and thinking more deeply about what the visitor might be experiencing.

‘In my job when working on social media you get the occasional complaint or niggle or a lot of people who are constantly hounding you. I think it’s made me think about them and what their situation is. Sometimes what’s inconvenience to me is actually somebody reaching out or somebody who I think well potentially they’re very lonely or they’ve got no one else to talk to, so when I respond to them online

maybe that’s a significant moment for them and I should embrace this rather than go, ‘ugh, it’s very annoying’

For Caroline, HumanKind has made her more willing to connect with others on a personal level. For those working in front of house or marketing functions, it can feel like a succinct, but polite ‘thank you’ is expected when engaging with visitors. However, the concept of kindness has encouraged staff to adopt a different idea of professionalism, one in which a real conversation is valued over more traditional customer-service engagement. Whether it is online or offline, for Caroline, this means she ‘will delve a little bit deeper into their understanding’ when visitors bring positive or negative feedback to the table. In her experience, most people welcome a conversation and are happy to talk about their experience.

Selina

Selina, who is involved in the day to day running of operations on the restaurant floor, was involved with the Chatty Cafe and History café. When recounting the impact of *HumanKind* on Calke and the ways in which visitors engage with the estate, Selina describes how many meaningful opportunities for human connections emerged spontaneously, away from the table designated for the Chatty Café. One occasion in particular, revealed how Selina feels better able to foster caring and compassionate connections when equipped with kindness, time and attention in her everyday encounters:

'I had an incident not so long ago: some of the younger staff came to me, in fact, one of them was one of my bosses and she said 'I've got a lady crying in the restaurant, is there any chance you can deal with that?' I said 'yeah, course I can' and I went over. I can empathise, but I'm not a sympathetic person and I think sometimes that's what people want. They want the empathy rather than sympathy, they don't want you to feel sorry for them.'

Selina started a chat and heard how it had been 12 months since the woman's husband had died. It was the first time she had been back to Calke since he died, which brought memories flooding back:

'I said 'that was silly coming up on your own'. She looked at me and I said, 'fancy coming up on your own'. She said 'Well, I thought I was over it'. I said, 'You'll never be over it' and we sat and we chatted and she told me about her husband. She left laughing. To me that is what it's about. You listen, but you lift spirits.'

This philosophy of listening and being attentive helps Selina create a safe and social place for regular visitors, many of whom 'are just fed up of looking at four walls at home':

'Even if I can't remember their name I can remember what they drink or the fact the wife's still sat in the car because she's disabled. I think a lot of it is just being recognised and not necessarily just another number.'

Food, Beverage and Retail Manager Steve Butterworth spoke of the shift in his team's approach. For Steve, the Chatty Café provided a model for the conversations that should take place at Calke. Not unlike the online interactions Caroline described, the retail and catering team found that most visitors are open to conversations when staff take a genuine interest in their day. Steve describes the enormous sense of achievement that kindness can foster when the team's efforts proved successful. Because the Chatty Café at Staunton Harold Café (a nearby café also run by Calke) seemed relatively quiet, Steve 'wasn't convinced it was going to work'. However,

'... within, I think, two days of having the table in, we'd had a success. Almost like a proud parent, Tash rang me after they'd left and said, 'it's worked, it's worked'. We just had a lady come in and she sat at the table and another gent came and said, do you mind if I sit with you and talk? She said they had a good 40-minute natter over a cup of tea. I think that's up there with what I'll take from the project.'

In recognition of the lessons learnt from *HumanKind* and motivated by the project's success, Steve worked with Project Co-Lead Alison Thornhill to adopt kindness across Calke to improve the overall visitor experience, moving from what he describes as a 'shallow' customer service approach to a more genuine approach:

'I would say I would like to think it's helped our visitor enjoyment scores because Alison very kindly spent an hour with my team at the start of this process last year to really drill home what it's all about. It was the genuine authenticity of the conversation and not just the 'have

you enjoyed your meal?' But more of as you're clearing up, 'oh, can we talk about have you enjoyed your day?'

HumanKind inspired managers like Alison and Steve to structurally embed care and empathy across the organisation. From an understanding that kindness had to be part of Calke's internal narrative to have ongoing impact, Visitor Experience Manager, Caroline Taylor revised staff and volunteer training to incorporate kindness as a key element. Although happiness was already part of the language adopted in the national service leadership training used in the past, Caroline has tailored the message to fit Calke's specific working culture, granting more explicit presence to the question what it means to be kind:

'Actually, by keeping it quite simple and quite informal and not using any jargon, words like kindness and happiness mean a lot to everybody. It's things that they can get into and tap into their own experiences. I think it has made things more meaningful: more people have got involved with it and are more supportive of it.'

For a significant number of Calke's workers, the human-centred approach adopted by people like Caroline served as an important reminder to be more attentive to the wellbeing of colleagues – both staff and volunteers – and visitors. For Food, Beverage and Retail Manager Steve, drawing on personal experiences to think about his role within the organisation helped him relate to his team and become more understanding of the complex social lives in which people's actions might be rooted:

'Having had my own experiences, I think what HumanKind did was awaken me. You go through those experiences and you either survive it or you don't. You've just got to find a way of managing but I think now I've seen it within myself and how I felt, I can spot it in other people. It's probably actually, as a manager, made me a bit more aware of my team. I know that a couple of my team have struggled with different circumstances, whether it be directly their family, which has obviously had an impact on their work life or within themselves. It's made me... I mean, I don't think I'd have been tough on it, but I think I am a little bit more lenient than I would have been previous to the project.'

But as Calke became more aware of people who experienced loneliness within the organisation, so has the need to counter stigma surrounding social isolation and loneliness – as something trivial or shameful that is best dealt with in silence – gained importance. For some, the stories of the people who lived at Calke confronted feelings of loss or disconnect from the outside world. There were signs that a few volunteers with personal experience of loneliness had distanced themselves from the project, finding it too raw or too personal to address, and that those around them only grew more sensitively aware of their circumstances as *HumanKind* took shape. Day Leader Pam Ebenbeck recalls how a number of volunteers had been recently bereaved and came to Calke to forget the realities of everyday life and loneliness. Self-admittedly, Pam and her fellow Day Leader Albert Slater had not previously considered how *HumanKind* might affect volunteers:

'I didn't think about the implications of putting people who were single, but not through choice, into Humankind. So far only one person has

said that they wouldn't want to do it again because of their own situation, but it's something I didn't think about before.'

Although they spend significant time with volunteers, Day Leaders are not always able or aware of the need to create time for in-depth conversation, explains Albert. Chats are often short, taking place just before opening or on the floor, when the presence of visitors might discourage volunteers from feeling able to speak freely. *HumanKind* helped him consider his colleagues and their experiences of isolation and loneliness in a more personal way.

Change is difficult

As expected, not everyone immediately embraced the new ways of thinking and doing that *HumanKind* introduced. Whilst the project was designed to invite and support volunteers and staff to be involved in different ways and was embraced enthusiastically by the majority of workers, the project proved challenging for a number of staff and volunteers and was dismissed entirely by a small minority of volunteers. Understanding the varying experiences the project prompted, is key to both dealing with the upset that some perspectives generated for colleagues and supporting the whole team to navigate a route through change.

Most volunteers who expressed support but also hesitation about the project indicated that they felt uncertain about their ability to embrace a new narrative. Despite her willingness and understanding of the important research that informed the evolved narrative about the family that lived at Calke, Stableyard Coordinator Fiona describes how having to change the story she tells about Calke – a story that has remained unchanged for many years – has had a significant impact on herself and other volunteers:

'Through research, we've decided we're not quite telling the right story. We need to tweak this a little bit. That's been a struggle for me because I've had to add in and forget bits of our six main characters. Also, it's supporting the volunteers who are having to change, some of them, 20 or 30 years of telling one story and going to another or telling the right story when we thought we were. That's been a difficult transition for some people. We don't like change as humans, so it's been a challenge to facilitate that and to have words of support and encouragement and try and say to people, don't give up. Give it a go. If you're not happy, walk away and do your bit in the house, but please don't disregard it because you're worried you're going to get it wrong. You've learnt it once. You'll learn it again. That's the challenging bit.'

As well as asking staff and volunteers at Calke to expand the stories told about Calke, *HumanKind* also reimagined the visitor experience, a change which demanded something different from the role usually allocated to volunteers in the House. Audrey, who is a volunteer on the visitor welcoming team and who participated under the condition of anonymity, explains that volunteers provide a short spoken introduction for *HumanKind*, in contrast to the traditional National Trust model, which places 'someone in each room armed with all the knowledge to talk to someone'. Indeed, the Trust encourages room guides to respond to visitor questions in their own way, allowing volunteers to engage in conversation and employ their own, often extensive, knowledge. *HumanKind*, on the other hand, asked volunteers to deliver a partly-scripted introduction within a set timeframe and then encourage visitors to explore the installations, make sense of what they were seeing, and ask questions if they needed to. As a result, the conversations that might arise from *HumanKind* are less didactic; many aspects of *HumanKind* ask the

volunteers to be open to dialogue with visitors, to not have all the answers and to leave some things – the conventional Calke narrative about an eccentric family – unsaid so that visitors can explore the installations and make them their own.

Volunteer Celia Sanger, who has contributed to research for *HumanKind*, understands why facing the public alone can be daunting for some of her volunteering colleagues. Being unable to rely on colleagues or a guidebook, as volunteers might do ordinarily, means interactions are 'very much face to face and personal'. Her comments relate in particular to the introduction, a small space where it can feel 'off-putting and intimidating for some' when visitors ask questions that volunteers might not be able to answer immediately. In the experience of volunteer Day Leader Phil Askam, the hesitation or self-doubt described by volunteers was a common feeling and one that was often disguised behind a response like 'I don't want to do that'. Most volunteers regained their confidence with support and encouragement from Day Leaders or Calke staff and, after hosting the introduction to the installation at least once, were better able to facilitate *HumanKind* than they expected.

Many of the volunteers who held back at first – because they dealt with issues of loneliness themselves, doubted the narrative, or lacked the confidence or capacity to immediately take up the new challenges – fully embraced the project as it began to unfold. Even volunteers who remained hesitant about loneliness and social isolation as a way into Calke's histories unreservedly contributed to the collaborative process, dedicating their skills and expertise to the project. Curator Becky Harvey recalls how the system of working and steering groups created space for constructive disagreement:

'that collaborative way of working right from the start means that the team were taken on that journey. So, it wasn't something that was being imposed top down, 'This is the new story', but that everybody was involved in listening and thinking about what didn't feel right and how that might change.'

Both volunteers and staff however, expressed a sense that a small minority seemed invested in negativity and that, no matter what, they would resist and disengage from *HumanKind*. They described their struggle to bring this small group on board as one of the most significant and, at times, tiresome challenges. Assistant House Manager Gemma Davis recalls that 'the biggest challenge has been dealing with volunteers who are opposed to the project as their negative attitude can be emotionally draining for others.'

Despite efforts to create space for dialogue and dissent and increase organisation-wide understanding of *HumanKind*, the project's most vocal critics did not take advantage of the many opportunities to engage with their objections in a more productive way. Celia Sanger, one of the volunteers who worked on the guidebook and leaflets for *HumanKind*, explains how efforts to communicate *HumanKind* internally often went ignored. Celia described the range of presentations on the new stories as well as an additional session organised to provide an opportunity for some of the criticisms of the project to be discussed called 'What the Devil is *HumanKind*?' and to which only seven people turned up. For Celia,

'Some people decided before there was a stone turned that they weren't going to like it... and that's always the way. I think you've just

got to accept the fact that you are not going to win them all, and enthuse the ones that you've got.'

Celia's view was echoed by Audrey, a volunteer who agreed to be interviewed under the condition of anonymity. She recalls that:

'There were a lot of opportunities, from the very beginning, for volunteers to find out more about HumanKind and get involved in lots of training and talks... All the way through before the season opened. Some people didn't take the opportunity to do that, and then complained that they weren't fully informed about what was going on.'

Audrey's frustration about some volunteers' reluctance to express criticism in a productive manner is compounded by a sense that negativity impacted the visitor experience and began to undermine the professionalism of the whole team:

'Not everyone is going to like everything, and that's OK, but if everybody has had an opportunity to be involved in the project, and have input, then you have got to let it go. You don't have to come. You can be negative about it yourself, out of the public domain, but some of that negativity, in my view, spills over into the public domain.'

This worrisome statement was corroborated by evidence from visitor comment cards:

'I fully support the attempt to tell new stories and this has been achieved with mixed success. On several occasions volunteers butted in/talked over experiences which were meant to be reflective and

would be best experienced uninterrupted. Would be far better for volunteers to be absent, or at least quiet. Congratulations for attempting something new though.' Comment Card

'Very innovative and thought provoking. Negative comments from volunteers, possibly better descriptions of rooms for people with less open minds! Also very creative and good use of rooms.' Comment Card

HumanKind provides a case study of the tensions that institutional change can bring about – a process that is especially tricky when challenging or evolving values. From the moment the premise of the project was made explicit, the Project Leads set out to embrace diverse perspectives and actively invite staff and volunteers to become part of the collaborative process. The invitation for as many staff and volunteers as possible from across Calke to get involved in working groups was shared widely and individual working groups actively invited feedback from volunteers, with one of the groups focusing exclusively on internal communication by organising question and answer sessions, talks and opportunities for discussion. As part of a briefing day and in addition to the volunteers who became actively involved in different aspects of the project, all 500+ volunteers were introduced to *HumanKind* and invited to provide feedback. Details were shared on the internal communication system and announcements were made in team briefing sessions by team leaders across the property. Whether they had been involved in the process or not, the opening of the partially completed installations to volunteers for feedback and to identify teething problems provided an opportunity for staff and volunteers to test and review the installation, comment on interpretation and provide feedback on accessibility using comment cards. As a result of this

significant effort, the numbers of staff and volunteers involved in and committed to the project was high and grew as the project progressed.

Although challenging, *HumanKind* and the new ways of working and thinking it introduced was embraced by a highly creative and inclusive team. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the small number of people most opposed to the project, are slowly beginning to engage in different ways.

Piloting the installation

Prior to the *HumanKind* installation opening and whilst installation was underway, staff and volunteers were asked to test out *HumanKind* and provide feedback to help the interpretation working groups finalise decisions and to pre-empt any issues ahead of opening. Of the 145 volunteer comments cards completed, 42% relayed negative comments, the majority of which related to practical elements of *HumanKind* (e.g. the opening script, circulation, signposting). The majority comprised positive comments and related to the concepts surrounding *HumanKind*, which volunteers called 'inspiring', 'brilliant' or successful in bringing 'the stories to life'. Echoing the wider evaluation, a small minority expressed concern that the subject matter sat uncomfortably with Calke's historical narrative and 'Spirit of Place'.

Breaking new ground: a lasting legacy

Many interviewees commented that by bringing something new and innovative, Calke is contributing to change within the National Trust. When asked to think about the larger significance of the project, volunteer Stephen Pember describes *HumanKind* as 'breaking new ground', something he sees as

hugely important for raising the profile of Calke both internally and within the sector.

Collectively, the small, individual developments that staff have experienced have the potential to drive change within the National Trust, thinks Food, Beverage and Retail Manager Steve Butterworth, to become a more compassionate, human organisation that values the fundamentals of human interaction – not just ‘serving a customer’:

‘I’m quite proud of where we have come from, actually, and wellbeing is what the National Trust is now moving towards for its own policies, for staff and volunteers. I think it’s the better for the nation, actually. If we can influence some people around us, even if they’re only staff and volunteering team members, then I think it’ll be a better place.’

This belief that the organisational changes achieved through the project could be exemplary within the Trust is not limited to staff or management: volunteers expressed a similar conviction. Room Guide volunteer Sue Styche sees Calke’s shift in thinking as a model for the new directions becoming visible within the National Trust. She comments that the Trust has ‘been a very masculine organisation up until recently’ and that new leadership is working to reduce distance between the properties, the Trust and the wider public. *‘It’s pushed Calke to the forefront of what’s happening in the National Trust’*, comments volunteer Day Leader Albert Slater. He adds that *HumanKind’s* high profile has raised the bar for both Calke and the Trust: *‘It gives us something that we have to live up to.’*

HumanKind has certainly put Calke on the map. *‘We’re just being seen and heard more’* explains Visitor Experience Manager Caroline Taylor. However, she continues, the project’s real significance is in its contribution to the Trust: to inspire new developments, move people, and provide a tangible example of out-of-the-ordinary practice. By becoming more active, inclusive and socially purposeful, Caroline sees an opportunity for the Trust to engage with and contribute to the cultural sector’s efforts to have greater impact on the lives of people:

‘It puts the National Trust perhaps more firmly within the heritage world and the cultural work of engaging with social issues through it’s use of its collection and place in a way that perhaps... we were more hiding in the shadows a little bit before.’

Perhaps more so than other projects, the social significance and research implications of the project have contributed to a sense of pride in staff, who describe the project as one of the first of its kind within the National Trust and beyond.

The broader institutional interest in *HumanKind* is evidenced by the number of enquiries about the project from colleagues and senior managers across the organisation. *HumanKind* sits comfortably within and is already impacting the Trust’s *Everyone Welcome* programme. Leaders within the Trust have championed Calke’s work and *HumanKind* attracted significant press coverage over the course of the project. Staff are eager to facilitate the interest this has sparked amongst colleagues, according to General Manager Stewart Alcock:

'Already we are having a steady stream of properties; we're hosting the Petworth team in a few weeks' time, we've had other groups come that are interested in understanding our learning to help inform other projects elsewhere.'

Visitor Experience Manager Caroline Taylor emphasises how sharing the lessons she has learned can enable other properties to take on braver and bolder approaches in their own programming and interpretation. Community and Engagement Manager Alison Thornhill goes one step further and is already considering in more practical terms what would be needed to have wider impact: 'how can we help other properties to go through this process?' she asks.

Working with RCMG has helped amplify some of these important questions, allowing staff to take a long view on organisational change and how it can be achieved within Calke and the Trust. *'There can be a real habit of working in quite an insular way of just within the walls of Calke and doing our own little thing'*, remarks Caroline. The prominence of *HumanKind* has encouraged staff to connect more closely and share strategies. Specific elements like the talks programme and the pledge wall have generated a lot of interest. Curator Becky Harvey notes:

'Beyond the Trust, I think it's such an important case study; and I know it's generated a lot of interest within the Trust, just showing the potential of our places to respond to contemporary issues and to

respond in a way which isn't just making a comment, but actively seeking to plant some change.

The Trust has known for some time now that relevance should be of key importance to everything it does. As Director of Curation and Experience John Orna-Ornstein describes it, the Trust needs to be a 'living cultural organisation', significant and meaningful in contemporary life, as well as flexible and open to change. He explains why linking the past and the present is a continuous project:

'If we genuinely wish to be for everyone, we can't just talk to a historical narrative. We need to bring that into a relevance in the modern world. So, the way we've been able to [do that] through HumanKind... with these six new stories of individual trials and tribulations and difficulties and think about how love and kindness then helped people work through those. And then hopefully facilitate a bit of reflection in people around where that sits in the modern world.'

By helping the wider organisation imagine how it can affect change within the wider context of its more than 500 properties, *HumanKind* has significance beyond its scale.

2.5 Project outcomes and summary findings

- Stage 1 research ensured that the Calke team were able to access deeply researched knowledge and understanding around the causes, lived experiences and effects of loneliness and social isolation and develop a sophisticated shared understanding of the potential for Calke to become an active mechanism for raising awareness of this pressing social issue, combating stigma and enabling meaningful human connections. The positive impact of undertaking the research prior to embarking on work with staff, volunteers and other stakeholders is difficult to overstate.
- At Stage 2, the project delivered outcomes across all 16 working groups. These outcomes came together in *HumanKind*, new interpretation and a new visitor experience for 2019/20. The project forged new relationships, generated new ways of working, built capacity and confidence around research and interpretation including an increased confidence to think more broadly about the nature of experience at Calke, encouraged staff members to work in ways that are socially engaged and linked to contemporary social issues, stimulated a commitment to deeper human engagements across staff teams and with visitors, demanded collaboration and equitable relationships and resulted in a whole raft of tangible outcomes from films and installations to landscape rooms, reading benches, chatty cafes and playschemes, pledge walls, activities, a talks programme, training, collaborations and schemes for volunteers. The result of the work of a very large number of project participants and the commitment and creativity of the Calke team, the scale and reach of the project was vast.
- An unanticipated outcome of the project was a realisation that the stories prioritised at Calke over the last 30 years were themselves stigmatising. These stories, which focused on perceived eccentricities and suggested a hereditary tendency towards isolation in the Harpur-Crewe family, were the outcome of the complex of processes and relationships through which Calke was acquired by the National Trust. As the project developed, more detailed and evidenced stories of the Harpur-Crewe family became central to the research and enabled the team to move from thinking solely about loneliness and social isolation to exploring the fundamental need for kindness, compassion and connection as the route out of loneliness.
- 81% of staff, visitors and volunteers responded positively to *HumanKind*, enjoying the contemporary theme, the breadth of approaches to interpretation, the resonance and humanity of the stories and issues explored and the invitations to take small actions. 12% (a higher proportion of whom were volunteers) responded negatively, though 75% of these responses related to practical elements in the display. The remaining small number of negative responses related to the theme of *HumanKind* and were often

informed by a particular view of the Trust as there to preserve the past and a particular understanding of what comprises 'a nice day out'.

- The project generated high levels of awareness of the issue of loneliness and social isolation amongst staff, volunteers and visitors and, more than an openness to discussion and reflection, produced an outpouring of emotion and sharing. It provided vital public space for important conversations, reflections and activities around loneliness and a case study of great significance to the wider question of how cultural organisations can play their part in tackling loneliness and social isolation alongside business and public services. *HumanKind* drew to the surface, in a visceral way, the humanity of the people who lived at, worked in and visited Calke in the past and today and the fact that we are all, at some point in our lives, directly affected by loneliness and social isolation. As MP Jo Cox stated, '*Young or old, loneliness doesn't discriminate*'.
- The project challenged stigma through the new stories it prioritised and in the ways that it began to challenge visitor perceptions. The evaluation both revealed some of the forms of stigma that surrounds loneliness and captured moments where visitors used the interviews to work through these thoughts.
- *HumanKind* generated significant opportunities for visitors, volunteers and staff at particular risk of loneliness and social isolation to avoid loneliness through specific elements of the project such as Chatty Café and Chatty Play. Participants talked in depth about the positive impact of the initiatives. One participant referred to the Local History Café as a '*lifeline*' and for another participant Chatty Play provided a much needed network and access to information through the new connections she made.
- The new ways of working central to the project had a significant impact on the work experiences of staff and volunteers and the relationships between them. The team at Calke were excited and motivated by the new ways of working. Some felt that the project enabled them to experiment with training and education they had undertaken in the past but had not previously had the opportunity to put into practice. Others felt re-engaged with their day to day work and enjoyed the momentum of the project. The project empowered volunteer researchers at Calke to take a more questioning and critical approach to their work. New skills were learned and new relationships were formed and cemented in a process that demanded collaboration and equitable teamwork.
- The 'All In' philosophy which invites everyone to become involved in a project in ways that work for them and which necessitates absolute transparency and not only an openness to ideas but an invitation to put ideas into action, proved fruitful at Calke and resulted in renewed motivation amongst many staff and a sense of greater involvement and agency amongst many volunteers. For example, one volunteer used *HumanKind* to action an idea she had talked about previously but hadn't taken forward to develop BSL training for staff and volunteers.
- The process was also challenging and despite the project being infused by the spirit of sharing and support, some staff and volunteers would

have benefited from greater communication, support and direction. The project drew attention to the process of change at Calke, making the whole team aware of the need to progress slowly and in ways which included and shared.

- The project generated fertile ground for creative thinking. Stewart Alcock, the General Manager at Calke, utilised the project as a mechanism for driving forward organisational change. Later described as a 'Culture of Kindness', Stewart harnessed *HumanKind* to adapt training and generate a reinvigorated discussion of and ambition for the organisational culture at Calke. Stewart's support for the project and work to build the ethos of the project into all aspects of the site resulted in deep reflection amongst, for example, the Food and Beverage team, on their interactions with visitors and colleagues and how they might rise to the challenge of being sociable in all that they do.
- Change is difficult and individuals respond to change differently. The project initially surfaced a divide between the majority of staff and volunteers who are excited to see Calke evolve and become more inclusive and a smaller group who stated that they would prefer that Calke and the National Trust remain the same. The *All In* philosophy of *HumanKind*, the continual reiteration that people could join the process and shape the project, the sharing of information and the emphasis on kindness, rather than judgement, did aid the process of change. For a small minority of volunteers and echoing the statistics above, however, this was not enough. Interestingly, recent anecdotal evidence suggests that new approaches and ways of working

(*HumanKind* demands very different kinds of input from volunteers) are slowly bedding in and become more acceptable amongst those who found the process challenging.

- For a very small number of individuals, *HumanKind* was too raw and related too closely to their recent experience. These individuals chose not to engage and staff at Calke responded with empathy and understanding.
- *HumanKind* sought to broaden the opportunities for visitor experience at Calke – to value sitting and chatting and to provide places for this in the landscape and to cater to a wider range of interpretive preferences. The evaluation showed that this worked to both successfully include more people *and* generate increased discussion about what people preferred. Expanding the potential embedded in Calke will generate such discussion and support Calke to continue to broaden its welcome, relevance and content for increasingly diverse audiences.
- *HumanKind* had impact beyond its scale. It successfully generated new ways of working and reinvigorated and provided a new and understandable approach to discussions about organisational culture. Questions such as 'how can we be sociable in everything we do' and ideas such as the 'culture of kindness' are easily graspable and actionable by staff and volunteers and, in turn, have a significant impact on the social relationships and felt experiences at property. The *All In* philosophy and cross property working around specific aspects of the project was highly effective and is replicable. As Alison Thornhill

states: 'The ways of working as a whole property team will continue into the future. Development of programmes and themes will use the principles of the culture of kindness, inclusion of staff and volunteers and creative ways of working. There will be a legacy of involving people from many of the groups we have worked with and continuing to build relationships with communities we may not have worked with in the past. We will aim to make Calke relevant and accessible to as many people as possible.'

- Places such as Calke Abbey can tell powerful human stories which resonate across time and can have multiple and positive effects today. More than this, and in a way which perhaps moves discussion on beyond the 'only where it is relevant' argument, visitors valued these vital and rare public spaces where difficult conversations, deep reflections on the human condition and new connections can be nurtured in an increasingly divided and confusing world. Cultural spaces can normalise this kind of sharing and reflection, enabling it to become part of our daily lives. Research shows that such an approach is not only positive for individuals, but is a significant contribution towards the larger social good.

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Please share any comments or suggestions about HumanKind with us here:

Thanks. That was a v
thought provoking experience.
I'm sure we'll be thinking
back to it over the next
few hours / days and relating
it to our own lives and
relationships.
(+ loved the at work)

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Appendix 1 - HumanKind at Calke Abbey – visitor questions and prompts

<p>Research Focus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did HumanKind stimulate debate, reflection and action around loneliness and social isolation? 2. What role can culture play in addressing the contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation? 3. How does the programme impact visitors' and participants' perceptions of the Trust's relevance to contemporary issues? 	
<p>Introduction</p>	<p><i>HumanKind</i> is a project at Calke Abbey, National Trust (NT) which explores loneliness and isolation, kindness and compassion, past and present. It has been inspired by the 200th anniversary of the death of Henry Harpur Crewe. It includes outdoor landscape rooms, exhibitions in the family apartments, interventions in the house and the pledge walls.</p> <p>We are carrying out visitor research for Calke Abbey who are keen to find out more about visitors' experiences of HumanKind.</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>(keep question 1 questions brief)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you choose to visit Calke Abbey today? (Probe – local/not local? In a group/on your own?) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Were you particularly interested in something? What? b. Have you visited before? c. Are you a member of the NT? d. How often do you visit NT properties? 2. When you set off today, can you tell me what kind of experience you were hoping for? <p>We're interested in finding out more about your experiences of visiting HumanKind.</p>



3. Are there any parts of HumanKind that especially stand out for you?
(Probe – Where did you go? What did you see?)
4. How do you feel about the National Trust exploring the topic of loneliness and isolation?

Isolation and loneliness are increasingly significant issues today (eg. Jo Cox Commission, Minister for Loneliness).
5. What ideas or insights does HumanKind give you about loneliness and isolation? (enhanced, developed, helped shape, challenged)
6. How has HumanKind made you think differently about loneliness and isolation?
7. How important is this issue to you personally?
(Prompt – do you know, or are you aware of, anyone who is lonely?)
8. Did anything surprise you about HumanKind?
9. What will you take away with you from your experience of HumanKind?
10. How has HumanKind inspired you? What action might you take? (pledge wall)

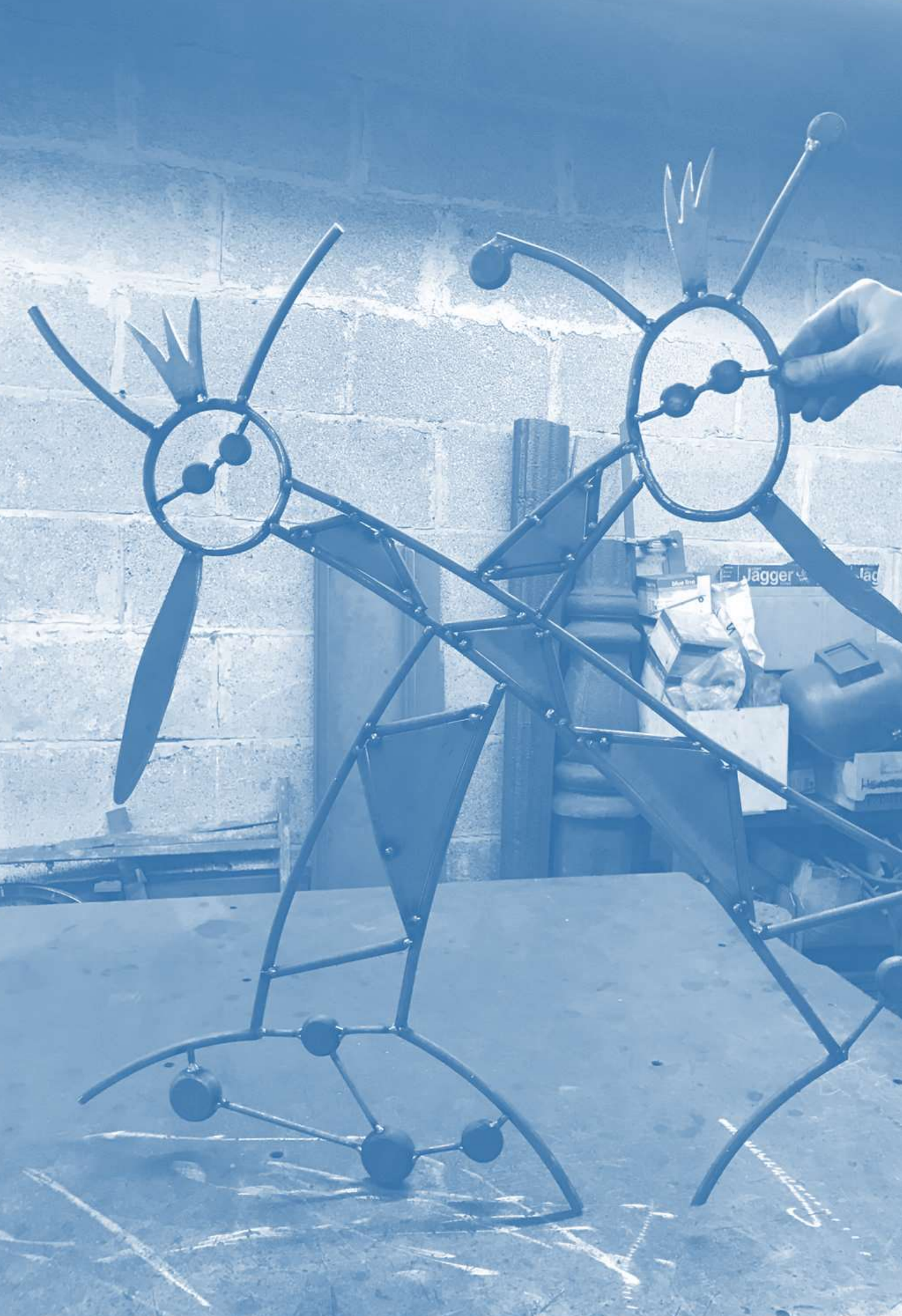
Filming on iPad

We'd like to capture some people on film.

We were really interested in your response to x question.

Would you mind if we film your response to this?





Appendix 2 - HumanKind Reflective Notes

Researchers to write a short reflective synopsis following the interview providing a short description of the key themes emerging from the conversation.

Date	
Researcher's name	
Participant/s	
Description and reflection on interview	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did the participant/s respond to HumanKind?• Key themes emerging from the interview• Any good quotes?	



Appendix 3 - HumanKind at Calke Abbey – volunteer and staff questions/prompts

<p>Research Focus</p> <p>How has HumanKind made a difference to Calke’s and the National Trust’s working processes, thinking and practice? (In particular, the distinctive characteristics of the HumanKind process: the more democratic and team-based approach to developing the project; the socially purposeful aims and ambitions; and the ethically-minded lens through which all work has been approached).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does the project fit in with or enrich Calke and the National Trust’s mission and values? - How will this approach be embedded into Calke’s working practices? - What are the opportunities and the challenges of this work? 	
<p>Introduction</p>	<p><i>HumanKind</i> is a research project between Calke Abbey and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, University of Leicester. It explores loneliness and isolation, kindness and compassion, past and present and was inspired by the 200th anniversary of the death of Henry Harpur Crewe. We are carrying out visitor and community group, and volunteer and staff research to find out more about a range of experiences of HumanKind.</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>Significance and impact of engaging with loneliness and isolation</p>	<p>11. Can you tell me about your role at Calke? What was your involvement in HumanKind?</p> <p>12. Before the HumanKind project what did you think about loneliness and isolation?</p> <p>13. How has HumanKind made you think differently about loneliness and isolation? (enhanced, developed, helped shape, challenged)</p>



Working practices and processes

14. How has HumanKind inspired you? What action might you take? (pledge wall)

15. How do you feel about Calke Abbey and the National Trust, as a heritage organisation, exploring the contemporary issue of loneliness and isolation?

HumanKind was a different kind of project because Alison Thornhill commissioned research beforehand which helped to shape the project. It was a collaborative process with RCMG and across the whole Calke team, with 16 working groups and monthly steering group meetings.

Steering Group only

16. What possibilities have been opened up by working with RCMG on a research-led approach?

17. HumanKind took a more democratic and participatory, team-based approach. What have been the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

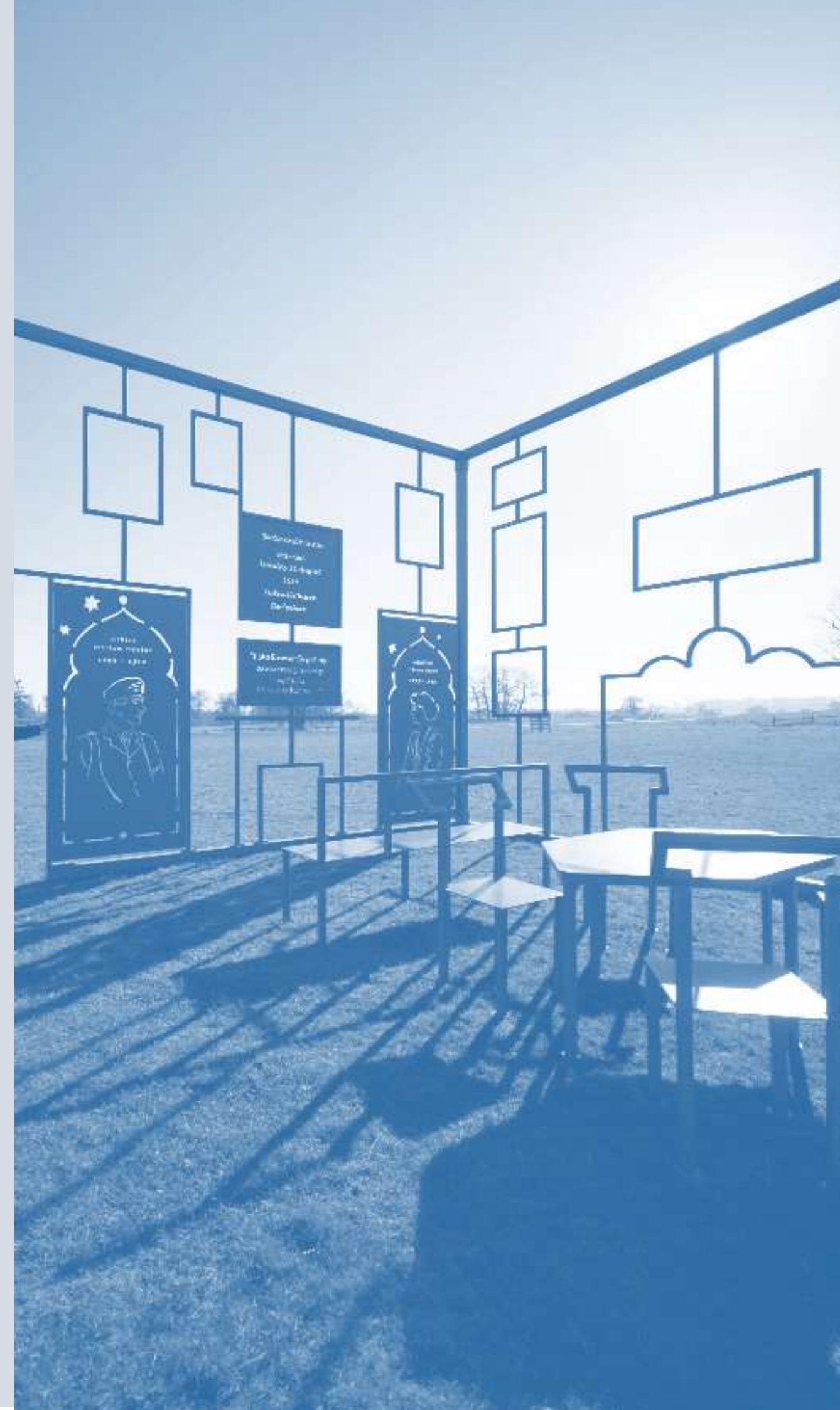
18. How might you embed this approach into your future work and projects?

19. What has challenged you and what has excited you about HumanKind?

20. How has HumanKind impacted on your confidence in engaging with contemporary issues?

21. What's the significance of HumanKind for Calke and the National Trust more widely?

7. What possibilities for your practice have been opened up by working with Calke Abbey and the National Trust?
8. HumanKind took a more democratic and participatory, team-based approach. What have been the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
9. How might you embed this approach into your future work and projects?
10. What has challenged you and what has excited you about HumanKind?
11. What will you take away with you from your experience of working on HumanKind?
Probe: What's the significance of HumanKind for your practice?
12. What are your future aspirations for HumanKind and the connections with Calke/NT?



Appendix 5 - HumanKind at Calke Abbey – Creating connections staff questions

<p>Research Focus:</p> <p>What role can culture play in addressing the contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation?</p>	
<p>Introduction</p>	<p><i>HumanKind</i> is a project at Calke Abbey, National Trust (NT) which explores loneliness and isolation, kindness and compassion, past and present. It has been inspired by the 200th anniversary of the death of Henry Harpur Crewe. It includes outdoor landscape rooms, exhibitions in the family apartments, interventions in the house and the pledge walls at Calke Abbey, alongside working in partnership with a number of local and regional organisations.</p> <p>We are carrying out participant research for Calke Abbey who are keen to find out more about participants' experiences of HumanKind and the activities they have participated in.</p>
<p>Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me a bit about your role at Umbrella? 2. Tell us a bit about what you do with Umbrella? (types of activities, participants, partners etc.) 3. Can you tell us a bit about how the relationship has been with Calke Abbey? 4. Why did you decide to work with Calke on Chatty Play? (how did it come about?) 5. What have the participants done in the sessions? (can you describe what happens in the sessions?) 6. What have the participants' responses and reactions been so far of Chatty Play? <p>Isolation and loneliness are increasingly significant issues today (eg. Jo Cox Commission, Minister for Loneliness). Calke has looked at the past to illuminate the issue today through HumanKind.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. What role do you think culture/history/places like Calke can play in addressing loneliness and social isolation? 8. What will you take away with you from your experience of Chatty Play? 9. What are your future aspirations for Umbrella and the connections with Calke?



Appendix 6 - HumanKind at Calke Abbey – visitor questions and prompts

<p>Research Focus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did HumanKind stimulate debate, reflection and action around loneliness and social isolation? 2. What role can culture play in addressing the contemporary issue of loneliness and social isolation? 3. How does the programme impact visitors' and participants' perceptions of the Trust's relevance to contemporary issues? 	
<p>Introduction</p>	<p><i>HumanKind</i> is a project at Calke Abbey, National Trust (NT) which explores loneliness and isolation, kindness and compassion, past and present. It has been inspired by the 200th anniversary of the death of Henry Harpur Crewe. It includes outdoor landscape rooms, exhibitions in the family apartments, interventions in the house and the pledge walls. We are carrying out visitor research for Calke Abbey who are keen to find out more about visitors' experiences of HumanKind.</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>(keep question 1 questions brief)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you choose to visit Calke Abbey today? (Probe – local/not local? In a group/on your own?) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Were you particularly interested in something? What? b. Have you visited before? c. Are you a member of the NT? d. How often do you visit NT properties? 2. When you set off today, can you tell me what kind of experience you were hoping for? 3. What will you take away with you from your experience of Squirts / HumanKind? 4. How has Squirts / HumanKind inspired you? What action might you take? (pledge wall) <p>Additional Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. How do you feel about the National Trust exploring the topic of loneliness and isolation? 6. How has Squirts/ HumanKind made you think differently about loneliness and isolation?

