

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS: CONSERVATION IN A TIME OF CHANGE → THE ETHIC OF CARE

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DEMOS

Samuel Jones is an associate of the thinktank, Demos, and a widely recognised speaker and writer on cultural policy. Currently, he is editing a collection of essays on Octavia Hill, the founder of the National Trust. He has recently completed a year-long policy fellowship at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the results were published in October in a pamphlet, *Culture Shock*. Previously, he was Head of Culture at Demos, where he led major projects on conservation (*It's a Material World*) and heritage in the regions, as well as a major report on organisational change at the Royal Shakespeare Company, co-authored with John Holden and Robert Hewison. Sam also edited a collection of essays, *Expressive Lives*, which examines the changing importance of culture in the public realm, and features chapters by major national museum directors and Ministers of State. Previous work at Demos includes *Cultural Diplomacy*, *Talk Us Into It*, on conversation in the public realm and *Knowledge and Inspiration: Making the Case for Museums, Libraries and Archives*. He has a double first in History from the University of Cambridge, and an MA in the History of Art from the Courtauld Institute. He also sits on the UK Executive Board of the International Council of Museums and is on the advisory board of the Institute of Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin.

[The following is a transcription of the speaking notes for Sam Jones's Keynote Address – Ed.]

Good morning.

The first thing I'd like to do is to thank you for inviting me to speak here.

I'd also like to say how much I am enjoying speaking to colleagues in Australia, finding out more about the cultural sector and issues here and getting new perspectives on cultural policy.

Before starting, I'll explain a little more about who I am and what I do.

I'm an associate at the British thinktank, Demos.

Demos is an educational charity, and so it doesn't speak for the government or any particular party.

Instead, we write about ideas that we think are important, and that we think have relevance to politics and society, but aren't necessarily getting the attention that they need or require.

I was Head of Culture at Demos, and in that role and since have examined the relationship between culture and policy, in the context of wider changes.

I spent last year on a secondment at the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport – or DCMS for short – where I was tasked with taking a fresh look at cultural policy more widely.

So I've seen the challenges from both sides of the fence.

I share and have written about the concerns of the cultural and heritage sector

... but I have also seen up close the whirring of the policy machine into which they have to fit, and the pressures on a government.

The two don't necessarily sit comfortably together.

One problem is that, in the UK and many other places around the world, governments have – understandably and for reasons of accountability and the electoral cycle – to operate according to values that can be measured and will provide demonstrable evidence of success.

Funding decisions tend to focus on immediate deliverables such as targets met, income earned, audiences attracted and so on.

And success is often defined by default to readily accepted norms and convention.

Now, I'm sure that this situation is familiar to many of you here today...

And the cultural sector has become adept at measuring *some* forms of impact.

In the UK, for example, we know that tourism contributes about 90 billion pounds a year to the economy, and supports about 1.3 million jobs.

We also know that 85 per cent of tourists say they come to the UK for its culture and heritage, and that nine out of the top ten tourist attractions are museums and buildings that depend on conservation.

That amounts to considerable economic impact.

But such measures don't really get at some of the deeper values of cultural activity like conservation and why it really means.

This debate is well documented, not least by my colleague, John Holden, and in work we have done at Demos, so I won't rehearse it here ...

But for our purposes today, suffice to say that the causes run deep ... and don't just apply to governments.

And this wider context is a good place to look as we think about the deeper values of conservation.

Geoff Mulgan, a leading political thinker – and in fact the founding director of Demos – has written that in leaders and governments tend to 'respond urgently to dramatic events, but ignore slow, cumulative trends'

And 'The dominant forces in modern democratic societies encourage them [to do this], ... competitive electoral politics attends to welfare prosperity now and not in the distant future'

Meanwhile, 'Competitive consumer markets attend to current desires not future needs,

And competitive capital markets generally demand immediate returns in which the future is, literally, heavily discounted'.

Mulgan's words are echoed by a San Francisco group called the Long Now Foundation.

The Long Now comprises an eclectic range of thinkers from businessmen like Peter Schwartz to the musician, Brian Eno, they have set out to provide a counterpoint to today's "faster/cheaper" mindset and promote what they see as "slower, or better" ways of thinking.

Their description of what prompted them to act adds a social dimension to Mulgan's description of politics and commerce.

Civilization, they write, is revving itself into a pathologically short attention span.

So, alongside economics and politics ...

'The trend might be coming from the acceleration of technology',

'...or the distractions of personal multi-tasking'.

Between the Long Now and Geoff Mulgan, it becomes clear that the problem of short-termism relates to government, commerce and the public alike ...

The British political journalist, Jeremy Paxman said recently that ...

'As time goes on, one gets increasingly conscious of historical background and the diminishing horizon. Short-termism just won't do, and so many of those snake oils that we seem to be offered are merely short-term'.

This is a collective problem that requires collective solutions in which many different acts combine, and that requires a change in ethos.

The thinkers of the Long Now focus particularly on the idea of *responsibility*

In other words ... How people put long term, collective and social gain over the short-term, individual profit that can often come at its cost.

As they put it, that means 'mastering long lead times, long lag times, and the hidden effects of cumulative change'.

They use this diagram to describe the different and necessary forces at work in civilisation, and how they relate and present a different way in which we might think of society and our collective actions within it.

At the top are quick-moving things like fashion, commerce ... and I would put politics there too.

Society *needs* these to be responsive, adaptive and innovative.

But, frenetic and quick paced, these layers have the glitz, and they gain attention.

Ultimately, however, they are anchored in deeper, more profound and slower-moving levels of society: things like nature and culture.

The problem with short-termism is that the top layers have come to be valued in their own right and at the neglect of their connections with the lower.

What is needed is something that will provide a *framework* for responsibility within which people can lead their lives in a more responsible way.

This is where a discipline like conservation is important.

As well as preserving the artefacts of the past, it represents an ethic of care.

In fact, the reason for my first involvement with the world of heritage conservation is a practical example of the problems I've just outlined.

A couple of years ago I and my colleague, John Holden, published this.

It came about because of a conversation with the Textile Conservation Centre – or TCC – which was then based in Winchester.

The Textile Conservation Centre had been part of the University of Southampton since 1999, but, in 2007, it was facing closure.

The finance people at the university had looked at the books and decided that things didn't add up.

Look at it from their point of view.

Like many Higher Education Institutions, the university faced severe funding pressures.

The TCC occupied prime real estate in one of England's oldest cities.

Compared to other departments, the building had a huge footprint, and the staff/student ratio was low.

The equipment and materials were expensive.

In addition, it was proving very difficult to find financial support for the centre.

In the UK, academic funding follows the split of sciences and humanities.

And – despite the TCC's success in winning grants – it wasn't really clear into which category conservation falls.

Stepping back, the low profile of conservation and public image of conservation didn't help.

The stereotype of conservation is that it goes on behind closed doors, in a lab, and with things that people aren't allowed to touch.

It isn't top of mind, and so public outcry at the threat to the TCC was limited.

In the cultural sector, because of the political pressures just described, public funding in museums tends to concentrate on immediate impact that can provide evidence in the next spending review.

So, the focus is more on audience numbers and ticket sales, and less on budgets for care and collections management.

Furthermore, corporate sponsors are more attracted to causes, like climate change, that have more cachet because they seem more pressing, and have a higher profile.

So, as the university faced funding pressures, something had to give.

And a department that deals with long-term value, and whose greatest benefits might not be clear for generations – let alone measurable in any readily achievable way – was closed.

At this point, I should add that there has since been a happy resolution – the TCC has found a new lease of life at the University of Glasgow.

But the question of how to make clear the importance of conservation is in many ways more pressing now than it was when we began our work.

Certainly in the UK, but I think elsewhere too, we are seeing a paradigm shift.

Across the cultural sector, organisations are having to think differently.

As I'll explain in a moment, public and audience expectation is changing, which presents as many opportunities as it does threats.

Cultural organisations are also having to find funding sources other than the state, and there are more profound, social changes at work too.

How can conservation adapt to these changes?

At heart, the reasons for the TCC's closure were value judgements – it wasn't worth the investment; other things were more attractive to fund; the public were more interested in other issues and so on...

So the question isn't so much how to get more funding for conservation out of the *current* system,

but what conservation represents and how that can effectively be communicated to different audiences.

*It's a Material World* argued that conservation should be recognised as integral not just to the cultural and heritage sector, but also to social well-being.

It is part of caring for the public realm.

But for that potential to be recognised, conservators themselves must take the lead in communicating its values, and relating it to the challenges around us.

At first, it seems a big leap from conservation, like that of the *Mary Rose* ...

...to debates about the economy, security and social policy that preoccupy representative assemblies and government departments around the world.

But by stepping back, and looking at conservation in a wider social and political context, the links become clearer.

Making a case for conservation requires reconsidering how it fits into society.

And society is going through a period of profound change.

The global economy is struggling...

New powers, like India and China, have brought different attitudes and beliefs to centre stage...

And twenty year olds can change the way we communicate.

In particular, expectations, norms and patterns are being disrupted, particularly, for our purposes in relation to culture.

Where culture has in the past been sidelined in policy, it must now be taken much more seriously.

I'll give an example of how and why culture matters.

You'll all be aware of the reality television show, *Big Brother*.

...but you probably *didn't* expect it to come up in a speech about conservation.

Well, in 2007, the UK's celebrity version of *Big Brother*, became infamous ... and even disrupted global economic discussions.

Three of the contestants, a pop-star, a glamour model and Jade Goody, a woman from South London who had first been catapulted to fame in an earlier series of *Big Brother*, clashed with the Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty

Tensions had been mounting throughout the series, and ... eventually ... these developed into a full-blown argument.

During the argument, racist terms were used, and several of the contestants mimicked Shetty's accent.

As it unfolded, the story showed how social and technological change has catapulted cultural issues to the fore of politics ... and how policymakers must think anew of the capabilities that people need to be cultural citizens.

First, it shows how significant culture is in a global society.

The producers of the programme had realised that by putting Shetty in the house, they could access vast audiences in India.

But it's doubtful that they had anticipated or prepared for the consequences.

Second, it reveals that new concepts of the professional, the expert and the public and citizen have blurred.

As I said, Jade Goody had, herself, first come to prominence in an earlier version of the show.

Here was a girl from Bermondsey, a run down area of South East London, not only rubbing shoulders with a Bollywood superstar, but also occupying a global stage.

And her actions had international impact.

The capacity of individuals – any individual – to act very publicly is a radical change.

Pretty quickly, as people fired off emails and copied links, the story spread around the world far more quickly than any conventional news cycle and far beyond the control of any organisation.

Third, cultural conflict caused a clash.

Ultimately, the reasons behind the arguments were probably personal, but the flashpoints were cultural.

The row between Goody and Shetty was sparked by how Shetty had cooked chicken, itself a cultural form.

In the fight that followed, Goody played on the word 'papadum', another cultural form, in a way that caused racial offence.

Put simply, the arguments stemmed from the inability – or lack of readiness – of three young women to respond to and accommodate cultural difference.

Finally, they also lacked the responsibility and awareness to anticipate how their cultural conflict would play out in the world at large.

Relayed on television and broadcast around the world, the furore impacted directly on politics.

In the couple of hours it took for the story to break and spread, Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, was flying to India for economic talks.

When he landed, he didn't face questions about the economy, but instead a sea of protest about what was going on in the *Big Brother* house.

Talks on grand political and economic issues were stalled by a lack of readiness on the part of a few individuals, catapulted into the limelight, to respond to cultural difference.

Overall, events in the *Big Brother* House encapsulated the challenges of managing the complexities of a modern society.

States can no longer predict or provide solutions so easily.

They have instead to think about the *capabilities* that individuals will need.

And foremost among these are the capabilities by which people can live, coexist and thrive in the modern world a new, and radically different public realm.

The skills of cultural accommodation and understanding are vital ... and people need a framework within which to develop them.

And conservation can be part of providing that.

To understand why and how, it's necessary to break things down a bit and look at some of the challenges and changes of today.

There are three that I think have particular relevance in relation to conservation and provide a new way of thinking about its importance.

They are all connected and all three can be seen at work in the *Big Brother* example I just gave.

First, there is a growing importance of the idea of 'making'.

Second, there is the changing nature of how policy-makers must see culture.

And, third, there is what I'm going to call 'the age of uncertainty'...

In isolation, these changes don't provide a clear-cut answer as to why people should suddenly start funding an organisation like the TCC.

But they do provide a very different context in which to think about and communicate the importance of conservation.

Let's take the first...

...The rise of 'making' and the meaning and agency that people find in manufacture and production.

The chain of events in *Big Brother* that ended up with Gordon Brown fuming in an Indian airport began with the way that Shilpa Shetty *cooked* a chicken.

Similarly and like so much today, the controversy was both sparked and fuelled by individual action, on the part of the housemates initially, and then by countless others emailing the story around the world.

Making has always been a vital part of society, but ... as a concept ... it is regaining power.

The way that we make and do things says something about us.

Today, there is a growing focus on the material and the produced, which has given rise to a different way of looking at both the right to 'make', and the communicative power of the way that things are made.

'Making' is currently being celebrated in a fascinating exhibition at London's Victoria and Albert Museum

The exhibition celebrates craft, and the ingenuity of production

But it also discusses the relationship between 'making' and modern society ... and reveals the importance of thinking about 'where things come from and how they were made'.

It emphasizes the distance between the ethics of consumerism and craft.

Consumerism is a prime example of a focus on short-term satisfaction over long term values.

And it has political ramifications.

The disjunction between our sense of manufacture and the individual, and the consumerism around us all the time, creates gnawing unease.

The values of commerce have come into conflict with the values of happiness and humanity.

And the exhibition goes further than saying, simply that the artisanal is 'better' or more pleasing...

...It also promotes an ethic of making and awareness of the material as being part of a good society.

Making has to do with satisfaction and a sense of agency.

It is present in our everyday and popular trends indicate its power.

Jamie Oliver and his peers are so popular because people *value* craft, handiwork and individual efficacy, and are coming to value it more.

In another example, knitting has provided the focal point of a global network of social gatherings.

And this was someone's response to All Black Dan Carter's recent injury in the Rugby World Cup, knitted onto the rail of a ferry in a New Zealand harbour.

More and more, people are relating to the world through their industry and creative agency ... something reflected in the rise of the creative industries.

The exhibition at the V&A also examines the *future* of making and it stretches beyond the material and connects to behaviour.

It will be critical in the politics, society and economics that are emerging.

Making is what underlies the conflict around copyright ... the right to make running up against the right to profit from doing so.

And it is manifest in hacking culture, which is disrupting the way we have to think and also the way that companies have to behave.

This is a Lego Mindstorm robot.

Lego, probably more than anyone else, symbolize making.

And Mindstorm was a new step – the cars and diggers that I remember from my childhood have grown up to become fully programmable automata.

Lego had made the breakthrough step of creating a toy robot that children could build.

But when it was launched, the people at Lego were horrified.

People quickly hacked the code that they had spent years perfecting, and all that work seemed to be being torn up and the value *stolen* from them.

But then they noticed that people were discussing this code online, and working out ever-more inventive things to do with the robots.

Communities were forming, and they were made up by people way beyond conventional Lego age groups.

And Lego soon realised that, rather than being a threat, this was something that they had *enabled* and was actually core to their success.

Making had redefined a business model.

Its spirit doesn't have to be 'geeky' and it can have momentous implications.

It is manifest in the twitter revolutions and riots that we see taking place around the world.

The spirit of making is a spirit of activity, meaning and empowerment ... the individual as agent ...

Telling the story of how and why things were made the way they were, and engaging people with the fabric of things is important...

All this might seem a long way from the conservation bench and how to keep it funded but, in fact, it is part set of values.

The conservation of objects that have been 'made' keeps alive a reference point to the values behind their manufacture or use.

And, as I'll discuss in a moment, conservation is in itself a process of making meaning.

It is therefore an important part of an ethic that is becoming ever more important – the ethic of making and care.

The spirit of making has radical implications.

It means that politicians and society as a whole have look at the idea of 'culture' very differently.

We have seen how the incident Big Brother centred on a cultural clash that took place in a cultural medium and span rapidly out of control.

Cultural activities, like the theatre or conservation have a significant part to play in how we address the challenges of the modern world.

But, the way that our assumptions about culture have evolved, can prevent this.

'Culture' is a notoriously difficult word.

The Cambridge academic, Raymond Williams, once described it as one of the most difficult in the English language to define.

It can mean the arts.

It can mean the way that we lead our lives.

And, especially with modern technologies, 'culture' can also refer to popular entertainment forms, which are often commercial and determined by markets.

We tend to separate these three forms of culture out, and I have been accused of confusing different ideas.

But – in the publication I wrote during my secondment at DCMS – I argued that that separation means that we don't really see the wood for the trees.

Governments and funders often to focus on the first meaning, in other words, set ideas of 'the arts' ... and they both receive the lion's share of attention and are lionised at the same time.

By and large, they are 'safe' and can be categorised as being inspirational, educational or entertaining.

The thing is that – again because of technology, but also changes in behaviours, attitudes to consumption and the self and, indeed, the making that I just described – the different kinds of culture are coming together in new and more powerful ways.

People can now produce and create as easily as they can consume cultural forms, and conventional ways of thinking about culture and the arts are no longer so meaningful.

Last year, for instance, the Guggenheim launched *Youtube Play*, the first professionally curated search for content generated online not just by artists, but by members of the public too.

In the process, the boundaries between culture as the arts, popular culture and culture as the way we lead our lives, were blurred.

These shifts in approach to culture are critically important because 'Culture' – in the sense of being the way we lead our lives – is a formative part of society.

It's part of how we recognise things like similarity and difference and how we form groupings like community, society and so on.

It's why culture provides the bedrock of society in the Long Now diagram.

The problem is that we tend to treat cultural forms with the ephemerality of the top layers of the Long Now diagram.

But these are the forms through which culture as the way we lead our lives is made manifest, either through creating or consuming them.

People gather around their interests, and identify 'otherness' through cultural signs and symbols.

And they can vary from the traditional, like a Ucello painting, to the multiple expressions to be found on Youtube, and extend to things like food and clothes, and to activities like knitting too.

Together, these expressions represent a conversation between values.

And it's a whirling hubbub of noise and conflicting values that fascinates and disorients us at one and the same time.



It's part of what the sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman terms 'Liquid Modernity'

A world in behaviour moves too quickly for institutions and structures to adapt and so the frameworks around which we have built communities and societies fractures.

In other words, people are using their greater power for individual choice to break free from outdated assumptions and structures, but at the same time miss the security that those assumptions and structures provide.

We need new spaces in which to make sense of that multitude of choices and what they mean.

I looked at this in another publication called *Expressive Lives*.

Cultural behavior needs to be seen as democratic expression, a way of making one's beliefs and opinions public, and a means of encountering the beliefs and ideas of others.

It is critically important that a government is sensitive to this ... and just as important that it should provide the means by which people can access and take part in it ... this is a core part of what I mean by 'cultural capabilities'.

Among cultural capabilities is access to cultural institutions in which opinion can be encountered, expression given voice, and skills developed.

Exclusion – more correctly, feeling excluded – is not just missing out on the benefits of an opera or a museum as they are conventionally perceived ...

Nor is it realised by thinking about the finances of ticket sales and profits...

It's missing out on shaping the society in which you live.

It is problematic if, within this, different forms of culture appear to receive greater official recognition than others, and if some people have greater

opportunity to shape and produce culture than others, because that creates inequality.

This is a *different* way of looking at ideas like cultural rights and cultural capital ... and it should be a wake-up call to governments.

It relates to how we manage society – problems in the Big Brother House stemmed with a lack of cultural capabilities

It also provides a different starting point for thinking about how and why money might be spent on displaying, showcasing ... and conserving ... different forms of culture.

Caring for things that symbolise value is important ... it helps reconnect with those deeper layers of society, culture and nature.

The question of what we care for and how is important.

Especially amidst the uncertainty of Bauman's liquid modernity.

Amidst the cultural intensity I just described and the particular context of the Global Financial Crisis...

Worldviews and frameworks of value have been shaken and deeper meaning is being sought.

I know that in Australia, the experience has been different, certainly to that in the UK ... but around the world, the financial crash has caused people to question the values and pace of the preceding years.

Before the crash confidence and certainty become part of the political and social mindset.

New technologies convinced people that they had greater command over the world.

Famously, the journalist Thomas Friedman, proclaimed that 'the world is flat'.

New methods of commerce, like Amazon and iTunes, allowed people to take greater control of their options and choices.

And at the same time encounter a far greater intensity of cultural diversity than ever before.

The result is that we are exposed to different worldviews that both challenge our own and also make it harder to adapt to change.

Recently, I spoke in Finland to an audience of thinktanks and civil servants.

One of most common concerns in the room related to the impact of migration on the country – particularly, as it happens, new Somali communities.

Finland has historically been a very homogeneous society.

But on the streets of Helsinki today, different attitudes, beliefs and customs are now much more visible and palpable through forms like clothes, music, foods, and so on that symbolise a different source culture.

This has disrupted the older, compartmentalised view of culture that I described earlier and has created political uncertainty.

One effect has been a rise of the parties of the right, particularly a group called the ‘True Finns’, who secured 20 per cent of the vote in the General Election of May this year, making them the third largest party.

There is a connected concern on the left over a declining faith or belief in the welfare state, previously very strong in Finland.

At the heart of this, is cultural difference and the challenging of things that were considered certainties.

In Finland, as elsewhere, the welfare state was built on ideas of similarity and the Enlightenment concept of sympathy.

People were willing to contribute to the good of the wider whole because they identified with it.

But changing social and global dynamics mean that such basic lines of connection are no longer so clear,

and that the tacit foundation of welfare economies is weakened.

At the same time, the short-termism I described earlier has meant that people have concentrated too much on those top, glitzy layers of society.

On the one hand, immediate gain was to be made ... on the other, there was no need to take stock – things seemed to be available aplenty and the answers so sure.

As the financial crash takes its toll, the price of such attitudes is being exacted.

When money flowed, few questions were asked.

And this has grave implications now because, as things seem less certain, we don’t have the answers to the basic questions of ‘what really matters?’ ... ‘what can’t we afford to lose?’ ... ‘what does it mean to lead a happy life?’

In response, governments are turning their attention to the idea of well-being.

And Nobel laureates, like Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz, are working on ways of assessing governmental activity that focuses less on Gross Value Added and more on indicators of happiness.

We have realised that aspects of life that take time and provide less immediately measurable impact but are very important, have been undervalued.

But the snag is that the structures of society – states and markets – cannot adapt quickly enough to new priorities and find it difficult to think in terms other than economic measures.

And the same applies to people too.

The sad parable for this is climate change.

Immediate gain has been made from extracting oil, cutting timber and burning fuel, but the long-term cost will be astronomical.

Is the same true for our *social* resources?

Society needs spaces in which people can encounter, examine and question values.

We need constantly to remind ourselves of longer-term visions and develop a more collective ethos of thinking long term and a framework to support that

So, what does all this mean for conservation?

Conservators don't just fix things when they are broken, they stand for a wider social ethos of care, in which we individually and collectively take responsibility and action

Heritage and conservation are part of an ethic of *responsibility* and a means of connecting with deeper values.

They also play a vital role in building a greater awareness of the cultures around us.

They represent the valuing of things past and present, for the benefit of now and the future.

In fact, they are manifestations of it.

This is the famous White Tower at the Tower of London, under wraps for conservation.

The Historic Royal Palaces, the organisation that manages the site could have used a conventional sign, saying something like 'We apologise for the inconvenience to visitors'

But, instead, a virtue was made of the conservation work going on.

The *act* is as important as the preservation of the form.

So, what things, values and ideas do we really need to protect and care for?

How does *the act* of conserving things and the process of deciding what to conserve and how to conserve it affect society?

Drawing people into the process of how this is determined, using the conservators' expertise to do so makes conservation an expressive act.

Some things will always need experts – and some kinds of conservation are very good examples ...

When treatment is carried out in public, people stand in wonder at the skills and knowledge on display.

And this, as many in this room will now, is a very powerful means of communicating the values and work of conservation.

Organisations, from the British Museum, shown here, to the Prado in Milan have recognised the power of conservation in public to attract and engage audiences.

But there are others in which people can be more involved.

Some of you will know of the Cerne Abbas Giant ...

He's one of the most familiar sights in the English countryside...

In fact, he's so well-known that ... during the war ... he had to be dulled out because he provided so recognisable a landmark for air raids.

Put simply, he's about 180 foot's worth of fertility symbol, carved in chalk on the hillside above a little village in Dorset.

Each year, the National Trust ... who are responsible for the landmark ... conserved him by allowing the local sheep farmer to graze his flocks on the giant, trimming his outline as they ate.

However, the credit crunch hit us all and, in 2007, the farmer went bankrupt.

So, there were no longer any sheep available ... and the National Trust was confronted with quite a task.

Trimming the grass outline of a 180 foot giant requires a good deal of time and labour.

And, as the story of the Textile Conservation Centre shows, that is expensive – deploying twenty PhDs to cut some grass is extravagant.

The solution they found was to ask volunteers to come from around the UK ...

... And people *came* ... they came from far and wide.

One ... who had made the 500-mile round trip from Leeds ... explained why.

In his words ... 'It's hard work ... but it's not often you get to work on an icon'.

It is in this way that conservation has much to contribute in the challenging contexts I described at the beginning.

Caring for the material world is important.

It's meaningful ... and, as the volunteer just quoted demonstrates ... it provides the opportunity by which people can connect with objects, buildings, sites and artefacts that convey something of their identity and who they are.

In choosing what things to conserve and how to conserve them, we reflect and create social value.

Conservation animates connections with those deeper, underlying values in society.

In *It's a Material World*, we connected conservation to social capital.

Social capital ... in the words of its most prominent theorist, the American sociologist Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*... is the glue that holds us other.

It's the common concerns and interests around which we form groups and communities ... and, unbeknownst to Lego, it's what the hackers found and created around Mindstorm and it's what the people involved in stichnitch found in knitting.

It's also the resource from which those groups draw when they face challenges or issues.

The volunteers who worked at Cerne Abbas ... and those who give freely of their time to work on other heritage and cultural sites throughout the world ... aren't just working on an object.

They are also preserving a past that they value ... for the future.

They are connecting to a sense of community and making a statement about what they value for others.

These are the temples of Djenne, in Mali.

And each year, worshippers conserve them as a ritual and religious act.

Looked at this way, conservation is a form of social communication that cements and reinforces social capital.

But ... if it's a form of communication ... it requires a language

And this is why the conservation *profession* matters.

It provides a logic and touchstone – it can help people deal with the uncertainties I described earlier.

Society is structured around a multitude of different professions and sectors ... and these embody ideas, practices and beliefs.

For instance, doctors and the medical profession provide reference points for healthcare...

...the police and the judiciary for law and order and so on.

Professions provide standards and frameworks within which we exist ... and which we develop by challenging.

...And the same is true for the conservation sector.

In *It's a Material World*, we make the point that a spectrum exists between ... on the one hand ... complex professional conservation work ...

...and on the other, more the everyday decisions that we all make.

Ultimately, the decision ... say ... to preserve the Mary Rose...

... is based on the same values that you or I uphold when we choose not to leave a photograph of a subject we like in the sunlight.

They are about caring for material objects that convey something significant to us.

At a more social level, this encompasses decisions like not dropping litter on the street.

As a society, we will only **stop** littering if we begin to value the appearance of the material world around us.

The point is that such change is rooted in the *same* values on which the conservation profession is built

These are values that conservators can help to promote.

And, extended to society as a whole, it involves asking what symbolizes the values that we want to sustain, and how do we want to go about doing so?

More than that, however, conservation can be a space in which the continual negotiation between the values that comprise culture can be clear.

This is a critical part of social sustainability in the modern world.

This is Hinemihi – one of only two Maori meeting houses in the Northern Hemisphere.

Hinemihi should be referred to as a 'she' because she is a manifestation of a Maori God.

She is currently to be found in the grounds of Clandon Park, a National Trust property in Surrey, in South East England.

She was moved there in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the then owner, the British Governor of New Zealand.

Since then she has functioned variously as a boathouse, storage and a grotto.

However, now the National Trust is working with the Maori community in the UK to conserve her in such a way as to preserve her living values.

So, working with the Maori community, Hinemihi is once again being used as a meeting house.

Through Hinemihi, members of the Maori community in the UK not only have a means of connecting with their ancestry and heritage, but also communicating those values to others.

Doing so raises very interesting questions because one of the ways of caring for Hinemihi in this sense is to give her the very best ... and if that means central heating to keep her warm in the British winter, then so be it.

This flies in the face of the very traditional, preserve things in aspic sense of conservation that many National Trust *members* have.

By working with the Maori community in this way, the conservators at the National Trust are using conservation to create live value and at the same time challenge expectations of the discipline itself.

Situated in the UK, Hinemihi is a touchpoint with a different kind of culture.

She is an idea that is being preserved and she provides a point at which different values can be brought together.

In this, conservation's use to society is not just in the value of the things that are conserved, but in the meaning of the act.

Involving people and different cultures in that is incredibly important.

So too is finding different ways to conserve culture as it is created anew.

When it comes down to it, it's very hard to convince a hard-pushed finance officer that the Textile Conservation Centre is worth its cost.

But by thinking now about how conservation relates to the public realm, how the values of conservation can be communicated more widely and its practice opened up, it is less likely that that question could be asked so bluntly.