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The Polari Mission: independent evaluation

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All photography is attributed to Jez Dolan unless otherwise credited.

"Fantabulosa! Brilliant work that is of incredible value to the LGBT community and also to the history of the UK. It is a key part of LGBT history and thanks to the work of people like Jez and Joe it will be alive for new generations to experience."

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1 Executive summary

The Polari Mission was an HLF-funded project led by artists Jez Dolan and Joseph Richardson. It aimed to document and conserve Polari – one of the world’s most endangered languages which was a bold and secretive part of gay history. It comprised:

- Polari Mission Live!; a performance at Contact (Sat 9 Feb, 4pm and 5:30pm)
- An exhibition at John Rylands Library (Friday, 16 August 2013 - Sunday, 2 February 2014)
- A symposium (Friday 18th October 2013)
- A website, social media network and downloadable Polari iPhone app
- Training opportunities in personal archiving and oral history interviewing through a partnership with the North West Sound Archive and accessing archive sessions
- Guided tours, talks and events (a full list can be found in Appendix 2).

This report provides an independent evaluation of The Polari Mission. It ascertains that there is evidence available to suggest that the following outcomes have been met as a result of the project;

- ✓ Gain an understanding of how LGBT individuals view, appreciate, utilise or see reflected in their own communities of language the influence of Polari and its impact on how we communicate today
- ✓ Visitors and participants to understand the significance of Polari within LGBT heritage
- ✓ Begin a dialogue about Polari within the LGBT community and beyond (create intergenerational dialogue)
- ✓ Increase inclusion of LGBT/ Polari presence at NWSA – ensuring the LGBT community is represented
- ✓ Create sense of ownership, relevance and access of LGBT community to archives
- ✓ Participants to increase their skills and knowledge in oral history techniques
- ✓ Participants to learn and develop skills in accessing archival material, specifically relating to LGBT communities in the North West, and develop their own personal archives.

A summary of the key findings is included below. It must be noted that caution should be drawn with the robustness of evidence as there are a number of methodological limitations given in the main report.

1.1 The Polari Mission Live!

- A total of 92 audience members attended two performances of The Polari Mission Live! This exceeded the intended target of 60.
- Audiences expressed high levels of satisfaction with, with the majority rating it either 4 or 5 stars.
- There was a high propensity to find out more about The Polari Mission following Contact Live!– with 100% stating they would be interested in attending further events.
- Audiences felt that the performances could have been longer – although the majority acknowledged that they were seeing a work in progress. This is recognised by the project team who suggested additional aspects such as 90s conversation (e.g. the dialogue between those writing into a gay magazine) could have extended the content.

- There was a strong, experienced team behind the performance which was viewed by the project team as a key reason for its success.
- Whilst the performance received high levels of satisfaction, audiences made suggestions for how their experience could be made even better. These included making the performance even more interactive, for example by engaging the audience in speaking Polari.

1.2 The Polari Mission: exhibition and events programme

- A total of 69,501 visitors were recorded in the John Rylands Library across the period of the exhibition. This exceeds the target figure. 220 people attended the private view and 5 tours were delivered to a total of 63 attendees.
- The team did not achieve their target for those participating on tours. This is indicatively attributed to reasons including prior attendance on similar tours, a lack of promotion (an issue the project team seek to challenge with the John Rylands Library), and the addition of other events which displaced potential tour visitors.
- Whilst this target was not achieved, there were unexpected outputs in terms of how the project engaged 'live' with audiences outside the exhibition space. For example, a Polari Bibleathon was commissioned by the Manchester Weekender team. This increased participation as well as media profile.
- The majority of visitors to the exhibition were motivated to attend because of their interest in LGBT heritage or because they had previously heard of Polari and wanted to know more.
- The findings clearly demonstrate that the exhibition was perceived as extremely important for contemporary audiences, particularly because of its relevance and resonance with the challenges that LGBT individuals face in society today.
- Visitors felt that the exhibition was extremely important for raising awareness of British heritage; not just for the LGBT community but the wider community. They viewed it as a positive catalyst for revealing a 'hidden history' to those who were previously unaware.
- Whilst caution must be drawn with the sample size, the exhibition survey results found that 91.3% of respondents rated the exhibition as either 'excellent' or 'good'. The remainder rated it 'OK'.
- Visitors described the exhibition positively, using words such as 'amusing, 'bona' and 'informative'.
- The personal archiving element of the exhibition was a key highlight for visitors and was often described as 'emotional'.
- The majority of survey respondents had no suggestions for improvement; however some commonly referred to the exhibition being difficult to navigate (due to the interventions across the whole library) and one respondent believed that there could have been a wider age range represented in the personal archives.
- The majority found out about the exhibition through word of mouth (72.2%), however a small number had also seen it advertised in the JRL brochure or through twitter/Facebook. The exhibition also received media coverage such as that from Creative Tourist.

- The exhibition attracted a range of age groups, the majority falling into the 35 – 44 year bracket and results suggest that those outside of the LGBT community had visited the exhibition (40% of visitors describing themselves as straight, 45% as gay, and the remainder LBT).
- 100% rated their experience of tours and talks as either 4 or 5 star. The ‘live’ aspect of the tours was commonly mentioned that had enhanced the overall visitor experience of the exhibition.
- The quality of the tours and talks was often praised, and there is evidence to indicate that those participating learned something new as a result of their engagement.
- Where suggestions were made in terms of how the tour or talk could be improved, these largely related to making the sessions longer, more structured or more comfortable.
- One unexpected outcome has been on the artists’ professional development. The project has also provided the artists with new archiving and tour-guiding skills to take forward in future projects.
- There is evidence to suggest that the artists have gained new contacts through the exhibition and events programme. For example, with those from the GLYSS group in Warrington. The team are already planning future projects together as a result of this new partnership.
- The project team believe that the personal archiving element of the exhibition worked well as a tool to engage participants and audiences. However, it may have strengthened this exhibition section to juxtapose personal artefacts against historical objects, rather than keep them in a separately defined area. Further interpretation of the personal archive section by participants may also have added to the overall visitor experience.
- Using the John Rylands Library presented a real challenge to the artists in terms of how to display and curate the work. Despite original discussion of a central ‘core’ for the exhibition, this did not come to fruition due to clashes over the programming – which otherwise may have helped with visitor navigation and flow.
- In hindsight, the artists would have focussed further creative thought on how to develop stronger ideas in terms of navigational signage/maps or considered how the exhibition could have been more effectively enabled by front of house staff.

1.3 Symposium

- A total of 15 delegates attended the symposium (plus 13 speakers/actors). This did not meet the intended target and various reasons have been attributed to this including low levels of event promotion and the weekday timing of the event.
- Respondents completing the post-symposium survey rated the symposium as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ (with nine out of ten stating it was ‘excellent’).
- Nine out of ten delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they had gained a deeper understanding of Polari as a result of the symposium.
- Nine out of ten delegates stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that the symposium had successfully explored the link between Polari and the wider issues surrounding LGBT heritage.
- Delegates commonly described the day using words such as ‘energising’, ‘wonderful’, ‘informative’, and ‘inspiring’.

- The majority of those responding to the survey decided to attend the symposium because they had an academic interest in Polari, however there was also a general curiosity around learning more about Polari or LGBT heritage.
- Seven out of 10 delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they had made new contacts as a result of the symposium.
- Half of the delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt more confident accessing an archive as a direct result of attending the symposium.
- Six out of 10 delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt inspired to contribute to an archive as a result of attending the symposium.
- Whilst the majority of delegates had no suggestions for improvements one delegate did suggest that further help or support in terms of signposting LGBT history resources would have been useful, and one suggested reviewing the content of the speakers to avoid duplication.
- The mixture of presentation and performative aspects alongside a diverse range of speakers made for a successful and accessible format for both academic and non-academic audiences.
- The project team believe that the Reading Room space was both a positive and a negative location choice. It gave a great sense of occasion, however it was difficult in terms of acoustics and it was not a private space which caused complications for those trying to use the space quietly for study.
- One unexpected outcome from the symposium has been its influence – particularly the format - on other planned academic conferences.

1.4 Digital offer

- There have been 585 downloads of the Polari iPhone app, including by users in countries from outside the UK; this exceeds the intended project target.
- The third highest downloads in terms of territory occurred in Asia Pacific. This is interesting to note as this region has their own active secret gay slang.
- Just over half of respondents completing surveys within the exhibition space were not aware of the Polari iPhone app, suggesting that further promotion of the app within the exhibition areas may have been needed.
- For those who were aware of the app, 14.3% had downloaded it. Similarly, whilst 45.5% of respondents were aware of The Polari Mission website, 40.9% were not – which again suggests there was an opportunity in the exhibition to more effectively promote it.
- Positively there is evidence to suggest that the digital app was a 'work of art' in itself, provided a contemporary way to engage users and was seen as a learning tool.
- Within the overall project online survey there were some suggestions related to developing the content of the app which generally related to producing it in android format or enhancing the content.
- The app was successful in achieving European media coverage such as in New Europe Online, which suggests it has wide-reaching interest and therefore potential to sell beyond the UK.

- 70.3% of respondents to the overall project survey either strongly agreed or agreed that the Polari Mission team have successfully created a new social network to share stories and experiences about LGBT heritage. Indeed, there are currently 600 followers of The Polari Mission twitter account and 192 on Facebook, with many examples of positive interactions between users.
- The project team recognise that further budget would be required to enable an android as well as iPhone app to be produced. This would need to be factored into the early stages of budgeting, time and resource management in any future projects.
- Introducing push notifications into the app would have allowed the project team to highlight new features and communicate with users.
- It is acknowledged by the project team that it was difficult to exhibit the iPhone app effectively and securely within an exhibition setting – and other accessible and reasonably priced solutions would need to be found in the future.

1.5 Oral history training and personal archiving

- The team delivered 2 oral history training sessions (recruiting 2 volunteers and recording 9 oral histories), as well as 3 personal archiving workshops (with 14 participants resulting in 14 personal archives).
- The project team did not meet their intended output of oral history trainee volunteers. The project team attribute this to the perception of ‘oral history’ as being something overly complex or scientific that acted as a possible barrier for people taking part and the lack of open and expected routes into potential participants due to changes in commitment by original gatekeeper partners.
- However, participants were passionate about participating in both the oral history and archiving projects and are keen for the archive to continue developing in the northwest.
- Participants were genuinely moved by their experience, learned new skills and increased their confidence. They were inspired by their participation and expressed high levels of satisfaction with their involvement.
- Those participating stated that they had discovered new perspectives on Polari or LGBT heritage and enjoyed meeting others with similar interests.
- There were very few suggested improvements to this section of the project, however one oral history respondent suggested that incorporating more role-play into the oral history training would have been beneficial, and one personal archiving participant would have liked more of a role in the interpretation of his collection which appeared in the exhibition.
- The project team believe that partnering with an academic individual or institution who had readily available volunteers for the oral history trainee element may have been a more successful and targeted way to recruit. They suggest that there is still a ‘mystique’ around oral history which still needs to break down.
- Both the oral history and personal archiving elements of the project required a large investment in time. This took longer than anticipated at the start of the project and therefore further time would need to be allocated in future similar projects.

1.6 Final project survey

- The final project online survey asked respondents to explain their motivations for being involved. People wanted to help conserve and document its history and felt that it is important to share that history with others; they wanted to learn, were genuinely interested in the project from a linguistic as well as historical point of view - and finally they were interested in seeing the work by the artists.
- Evidence indicates that the most important part of The Polari Mission's work was perceived to be the following; a) having the exhibition at a traditional library, b) beginning the project in the Northwest, c) the quest to conserve the language and raise awareness of LGBT heritage, d) that the project reached out to 'younger' or contemporary audiences and e) the approach to archiving and personal memory sharing.
- The majority of respondents believe that it is 'very important' to a) increase the presence of LGBT heritage in regional and national archives (and to increase LGBT access to those archives), b) use Polari to explore the wider issues and context of LGBT heritage, and c) to document and conserve Polari. This indicates that there is a moral belief in the project objectives of The Polari Mission and suggests that there may be a propensity to maintain engagement should the project continue.
- Just over half (55.6%) strongly agreed or agreed that they would be likely to contribute towards an LGBT archive as a result of the project.
- 44.4% strongly agreed or agreed that the project had inspired them to keep their own personal archive, with 31.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and nearly a quarter either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
- There is evidence to suggest that those engaging with The Polari Mission value its work and would like to see the project continue; suggestions included developing more content from an over 80's age group and from Round the Horne, producing a Polari Shakespeare, Polari socials and a lengthier performance which could tour along with the exhibition.
- The project team already have plans for the immediate future of The Polari Mission. An exhibition at Bury Art Gallery will enable new work to be created and a number of events will take place as part of the public programme of activities. The exhibition will form part of the Text Festival (May – August) which will raise awareness of the project with curators, artists and audiences from all over the world.
- Work from The Polari Mission will be going into Bury Art Gallery's Text Art Archive, to preserve it for future generations. The Bury team are in the process of achieving special collection status for the archive.
- The John Rylands Library have accepted the donation of The Polari Bible and this will feature within their permanent world-class collection of Bibles.
- 89% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the work of The Polari Mission shows how Polari is still relevant today.
- 87% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that The Polari Mission has helped make archives more relevant for the LGBT community.

- 98% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that The Polari Mission has raised the profile of Polari with LGBT communities and beyond.
- 87% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the work of The Polari Mission has created intergenerational dialogue.

2 Introduction

The Polari Mission was a HLF-funded project led by artists Jez Dolan and Joseph Richardson. It aimed to document and conserve Polari – one of the world’s most endangered languages which was a bold and secretive part of gay history. The project used Polari as a starting point to examine how contemporary LGBT groups use and appreciate the influence of Polari on their contemporary communication, as well as raise awareness of the importance of Polari in LGBT heritage. The project considered the current understanding of Polari’s social, cultural and political importance.

This report provides an independent evaluation of The Polari Mission and ascertains the extent to which the team have achieved their intended outcomes.

The project was a multi-disciplinary collaboration between the artists, linguistic and computer specialists including Professor Paul Baker at Lancaster University and Tim Greening-Jackson.

It comprised:

- Polari Mission Live!; a performance at Contact (Sat 9 Feb, 4pm and 5:30pm)
- An exhibition at John Rylands Library (JRL) (Friday, 16 August 2013 - Sunday, 2 February 2014)
- A symposium (Friday 18th October 2013)
- A website, social media network and downloadable Polari iPhone app
- Training opportunities in personal archiving and oral history interviewing through a partnership with the North West Sound Archive and accessing archive sessions
- Guided tours, talks and events (a full list can be found in Appendix 2).

2.1 Aims, objectives and outputs

The overall project aim was ‘to document and conserve the significance of Polari for future generations’. However, there were a number of individual project objectives, outputs and outcomes; these are outlined below.

2.1.1 Individual project objectives

Overall:

- Disseminate learning widely to the LGBT community and beyond.
- Use Polari to explore wider issues and context of LGBT heritage.
- Understand relevance of Polari with young people.

Exhibition:

- Open up access to archival material.
- Create new artwork.

Performance:

- Enable LGBT communities to create a performance.

Symposium

- Develop new contacts through the symposium.

Oral history and archiving:

- Enable LGBT communities to access and create archives relating to their own cultural life for future generations to access.
- Offer oral history training.
- Enable LGBT communities to participate in workshops which explore their own cultural life through personal archiving workshops.
- Recorded material edited, copied and archived at North West Sound Archive.
- Editing of all oral history materials gathered undertaken by project volunteers, trained by staff from North West Sound Archive.

2.1.2 Intended project outputs

- Attract 150 attendees to the symposium.
- Attract 200 to the exhibition launch at JRL.
- Create an updated and improved version of the existing app (released August 2012), achieving a total of 250 downloads.
- Achieve a total of 36,000 visitors to the JRL exhibition (this figure was based on overall visitors to the John Rylands Library).
- Run 8 tours of the JRL exhibition with 15 people at each, resulting in 120 total attendees.
- Create a dedicated website and online portal for all activity and for networking.
- Attract 30 audience members at each of the 1 hour long performances at Contact (60 total).
- 1 oral history training day to be delivered, 4 volunteers recruited and a minimum of 6 oral histories relating to the use of Polari to be recorded and archived.
- 2 personal archiving workshops to be delivered with a total of 6 participants, resulting in 6 personal archives created.

2.1.3 Intended project outcomes

- Gain an understanding of how LGBT individuals view, appreciate, utilise or see reflected in their own communities of language the influence of Polari and its impact on how we communicate today.
- Visitors and participants to understand the significance of Polari within LGBT heritage.
- Begin a dialogue about Polari within the LGBT community and beyond (create intergenerational dialogue).
- Increase inclusion of LGBT/ Polari presence at NWSA – ensuring the LGBT community is represented.
- Create sense of ownership, relevance and access of LGBT community to archives.
- Participants to increase their skills and knowledge in oral history techniques (including editing skills, 'soundsurvey' set up skills, ethics and copyright).
- Participants to learn and develop skills in accessing archival material, specifically relating to LGBT communities in the North West, and develop their own personal archives.

The below commentary considers the different elements of The Polari Mission project and asks to what extent the above objectives, outputs and outcomes have been met.

2.2 Methodology and limitations

The project employed a number of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and associated research tools. These are outlined below along with a number of methodological limitations that must be noted.

2.2.1 The Polari Mission Live! self-completion paper-based survey

The Polari Mission team devised and created a paper-based survey prior to the appointment of the independent evaluator for use within the performances at Contact. Caution must be drawn with the sample size of 48 completed surveys.

2.2.2 Exhibition, events (activities, tours and talks) self-completion paper-based survey

The exhibition visitor figure had to be based on the total number of visitors to the John Rylands Library and it is recognised that not all of these visitors may pro-actively have engaged with The Polari Mission exhibition. It must therefore be used as an indicator of the potential rather than a definitive quantity. A bespoke exhibition survey was designed by the independent evaluator and this was positioned at key exhibition areas in the John Rylands Library as well as being adapted and handed out by The Polari Mission team for use within talks and tours. However, caution must be drawn with the resulting sample of 23 for the exhibition survey and 28 from talks and tours. The disappointing sample size is perhaps indicative of the spread of the exhibition throughout the library spaces which presented no one focal point for a feedback area. The project team also feel that more pro-active work by front of house staff in asking visitors to complete the surveys would also have been beneficial to the completion rate. There was also a lack of time in terms of independent evaluation hours to undertake face-to-face interviews. Although this low sample size was not pre-empted, retrospectively training up volunteers to deliver face-to-face surveys may have worked well and increased the overall sample size. As such the results should only be viewed indicatively.

2.2.3 Private view 'vox pops'

A selection of twenty 'vox pops' were recorded by the independent evaluator with visitors attending the exhibition launch private view. These were randomly selected.

2.2.4 Symposium post-visit online survey

A post-visit online survey was sent to all those attending the symposium. Ten delegates responded to the survey which represents a response rate of two thirds.

2.2.5 In-depth telephone interviews

A small number of in-depth interviews took place due to the restrictions on the independent evaluator's time. Five in-depth interviews were held with a sample of participants who had been involved in The Polari Mission through events, workshop activities and oral history training.

2.2.6 The Polari Mission community online survey

An end of project incentivised online survey was circulated to those who had expressed interest or been involved with The Polari Mission. It was circulated through the Mission's e-mail list (sent to 97 contacts), through social media and featured on The Polari Mission website. Sixty-five people responded. Again, caution must be drawn with the resulting findings which remain indicative due to the sample size.

2.2.7 Project team interview

Finally, an interview was held with Jez Dolan and Joseph Richardson to assess each part of the project, looking at challenges, successes and key learning points. A summary of these project team key learning points is included throughout section 3 of the report.

3 Key findings: individual project elements

The below commentary sets out the findings from each project element of The Polari Mission, linked with the intended outputs and outcomes. A discussion of the overall thematic findings from the final project online survey is presented in section 4.

3.1 The Polari Mission: The Polari Mission Live!

Target	Actual
Attract 30 audience members at each of the 1 hour long performances at Contact (60 total)	92 audience members

The two performances at Contact, Manchester in February 2013 received high satisfaction ratings, with all respondents completing the post-performance survey choosing to rate it with either 4 or 5 stars.

“...the performers were fantastic! Everything underpinned with a real sense of danger but also irreverence. It was fun, serious, tragic joyful and so rich in language, history, culture.”

“Bona! Bona! Tres Bona!”

“...lovely - clear, funny, emotional.”

This level of satisfaction was also demonstrated in the willingness to find out more about The Polari Mission – with 100% stating they would be interested in attending further events. The performance indicatively sparked an interest in The Polari Mission’s work; there was a demand for 'more of the same' – and a call for access to be widened;

“This needs to reach a wider audience, I loved it.”

“Touring surely? - would certainly recommend.”

“There is a lot of contemporary history writing that talks about life being a performative thing so that was really interesting, seeing that echoed on stage and I think Neil was really fantastic because I think he related quite subtly his life as a gay man to being a historian and writer...”



Photo credit: Joel Chester Fildes

As a starting point for the project and a test bed for content, the survey sought areas of improvement from the audience. Positively, the majority of respondents stated ‘nothing’ or simply that they wanted the performance to be longer;

“She looked bona on the money she had dear.”

“She could handle another 20 mins.”

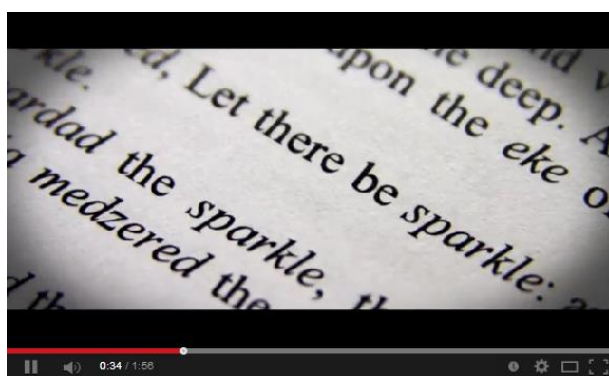
“She could be longer dear!”

“LONGER! Give us more!”

However, some suggestions were made to the content, for example;

“More understanding on how to speak & make the language today.”

“Transitions - between Polari ‘lectures’ and the scenes, songs etc. But this will all come naturally when the piece has had a bit more breathing time.”



The project team described the performance as a real ‘learning curve’ because it was a departure from their usual creative output.

“The response was really positive. I’d never done anything like it before. It was a fantastic process – it was a great team and a great experience.” (Jez Dolan)

[Watch a trailer](#) for The Polari Mission Live!

3.1.1 Project team key learning points

- Although it was a work in progress piece, the project team recognise that it could have been made longer. For example, aspects from 90s conversation (such as the dialogue between those writing into a gay magazine) could have been included.
- There was a strong team behind the performance which was seen as key to its success.
- The performance could have been made more interactive and engaged the audience in speaking Polari.

Particular outcomes achieved:

- ✓ Gain an understanding of how LGBT individuals view, appreciate, utilise or see reflected in their own communities of language the influence of Polari and its impact on how we communicate today.
- ✓ Visitors and participants to understand the significance of Polari within LGBT heritage.



Photo credit: Joel Chester Fildes

- ✓ Begin a dialogue about Polari within the LGBT community and beyond (creating intergenerational dialogue).

3.2 The Polari Mission: exhibition, events and associated activities

Target	Actual
Attract 200 to the exhibition launch at JRL	220
Achieve a total of 36,000 visitors to the JRL exhibition	69,501
Run 8 tours of the JRL exhibition with 15 people at each, resulting in 120 total attendees	5 tours with a total of 63 attendees

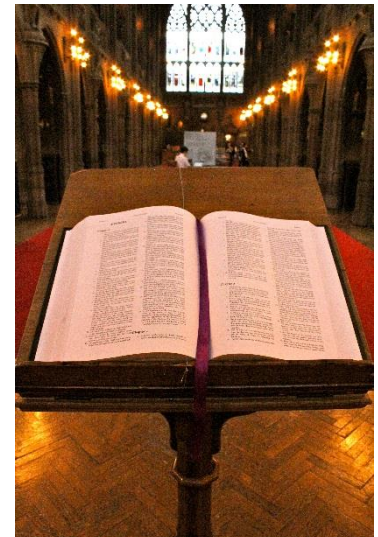
The above outputs chart shows that the team did not achieve their target for those participating on tours. Based on discussions with the project team, this is indicatively attributed to the following reasons;

- As the subject is so niche there is a possibility that audiences had already attended a tour prior to the exhibition when The Polari Mission was in its research and development phase.
- Improvements could have been made to the promotion of the tours.
- Those who were likely to attend tours were displaced – they potentially attended other unexpected events instead (more on this below) or received a tour during the exhibition launch evening.

However, whilst the target was not achieved for the original tours, there were unexpected outputs in terms of how the project engaged ‘live’ with audiences outside the exhibition space. For example, a Polari Bibleathon was commissioned by the Manchester Weekender team and the Polari Etymology piece was also exhibited at [Manchester Contemporary](#).

As well as increasing participation, this led to further promotion for the project overall, including in Creative Tourist online and through the live art strand promotion for the Manchester Weekender as well as the Manchester Contemporary. Other unexpected events included:

- practical creative workshops including ‘Camp as Christmas’
- Salford IDAHO Day – a Salford youth based drop in session (this involved 100 attendees).
- LGF Manchester evening session and lecture (this involved 12 participants).
- Warrington LGBT Youth Service lecture (this involved 2 youth workers, 1 volunteer and 6 participants).



3.2.1 Motivation and perception

Understanding motivations can help with future product positioning and messaging as well as evaluate the drivers for a particular project. As indicated in the exhibition survey, the majority of those visiting the

exhibition were motivated to attend because of their interest in LGBT heritage or that they had heard of Polari and wanted to know more.

“I’m interested in the evolution of LGBT community over time.”

“Heard about Polari but wanted to know more.”

“Interested in the culture and language of my community as a gay man.”

“Important part of our heritage.”

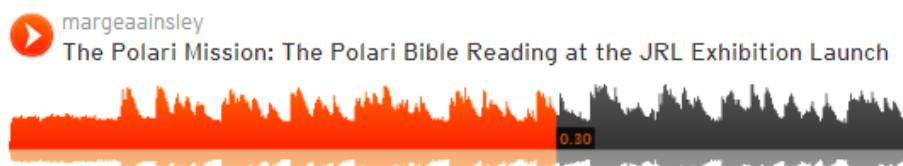
In order to reveal their own opinions about the exhibition, those guests attending the exhibition launch private view were asked why they thought others should visit. The findings clearly demonstrate that the exhibition was perceived as extremely important for contemporary audiences, particularly because of its relevance and resonance with the challenges that LGBT individuals face in society today;

“...it’s really fantastic to see this important part of LGBT heritage valued. I think also in such a very splendid location really and it sends out a signal also that all parts of the community actually value, and all parts of the heritage of our community are valued, so it’s a really important thing.”

“I think it’s very easy to think that LGBT stuff is normalised and mainstream and I don’t think it is, when I think what’s happening in Russia...those human rights that you take for granted can just slip through your fingers really easily.”

“I just feel it’s easy to be complacent now and say everything’s fine and it isn’t. An understanding of this history illustrates that really well I think. It’s just something that it would be better if people understood.”

“I think especially the younger generations, they think oh it’s all over now there’s equality, and there isn’t. You need to look into this past.”



[Listen](#) to a sample of The Polari Bible, read by Jez Dolan at the JRL Exhibition Launch Private View.

There is also evidence to indicate that visitors felt that the exhibition was extremely important for raising awareness more widely of British heritage; not just for the LGBT community but the wider community.

“An essential and wonderful exhibition capturing for posterity a history increasingly lost to commercialism and assimilation.”

Visitors spoke passionately about the need for such an exhibition; that it has been a positive catalyst to revealing a ‘hidden history’ to those who were previously unaware;

“It’s incredibly important isn’t it? People should come because their lives would be incomplete...it’s just such an important part of British culture that’s not fashionable or considered relevant by 99.9% of the population, but we live in times where other countries which aren’t as westerly settled as ours consider it to be appropriate to attack people in the same ways as we were being attacked hundreds of years ago. I can’t remember who said, ‘there’s no such thing as new things there’s just history that people forgot to tell us about’ and that’s why this project is so important, because we have to keep talking about the horrors that were perpetrated against us and the joy and the creativity that helped us overcome it. It’s incredibly important we keep it alive.”

“I think any part of culture that’s fringe or just generally not known about, it’s something that people should explore. It doesn’t matter who you are if you’re gay straight or whatever, this exhibition shows something about society and the way it was – and how things have been difficult and that’s still a relevant thing. It’s relevant for everyone to come and see this exhibition.”

3.2.2 Satisfaction

Whilst caution must be drawn with the sample size, the exhibition survey results found that 91.3% of respondents rated the exhibition as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. The remainder rated it ‘OK’.

“Very informative, educational, emotional but fun as well.”

“Fantastic exhibition, something the younger generation are not aware of, good to bring to our attention.”

Similarly, visitors to the private view also described the exhibition as a high-quality, positive experience;

“... it’s multi bona!”

“She’d describe it as something one must vada, that she should troll along immediately and immerse themselves in the fantabulosa world that it the Polari dear.”

“It’s fantastic, very high quality work.”

Visitors to the private view were asked to describe the exhibition in three words, these are displayed in the below wordle, with the most frequently occurring words appearing the largest. Again, these words echo the high satisfaction levels of those visiting.



Those completing the exhibition survey were asked what they liked best about the exhibition. Common responses particularly related to the personal material on display;

“Personal memorabilia on 3rd floor.”

“The focus and attention given to these small 'insignificant' objects which carry so much meaning - very nostalgic.”

“The range of activities made available. Especially the memory box near historical reading room exit.”

This was also evidenced by those at the private view, who described the personal archives as ‘emotional’ and a highlight of the exhibition;

“I was really affected by people’s personal memories -that really touched me.”

The majority of survey respondents had no suggestions for improvement; however some commonly referred to the exhibition being difficult to navigate (due to the interventions across the whole library);

“Maybe better to put everything in one place - but I'm nit-picking.”

“Make it easier to find the exhibition in the library - it was hard to find.”

“More compact.”

“Maybe a map?”

And one respondent felt that the personal archives would have benefited from a broader age range;

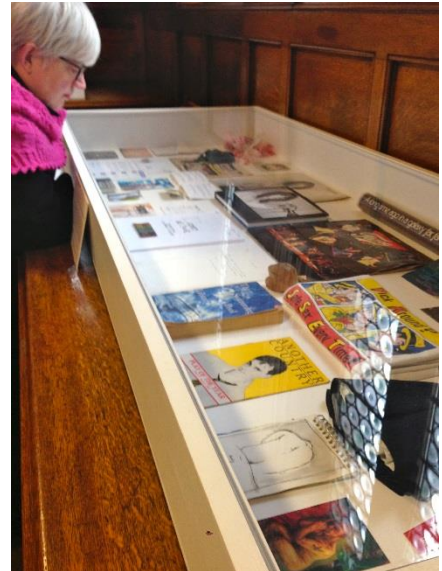
“It would have been good to have had a broader age-range represented in the personal archives. Particularly from gay men of the generation that would have used Polari.”

3.2.3 Communication channels

The majority found out about the exhibition through word of mouth (72.2%), however a small number had also seen it advertised in the JRL brochure or through twitter/Facebook. The exhibition also featured in media such as [Creative Tourist](#) and [Manchester University’s student magazine](#).

In terms of the demographic profile of visitors to the exhibition, an indicative set of results can be found from the exhibition survey responses. Although caution must be drawn regarding the sample size, the majority of visitors never used Polari, however 18.2% described that they 'often' or 'frequently' used it.

The exhibition also attracted a range of age groups, the majority falling into the 35 – 44 year bracket and results suggest that those outside of the LGBT community had visited the exhibition, (40% of visitors describing themselves as straight, 45% as gay, and the remainder LBT).



3.2.4 Tours and talks

Guided tours and talks ranged from public programme events to bespoke private events for groups such as LGBT societies (for a full list see Appendix 2). As shown in the overall exhibition findings, feedback collated from a sample of participants during tours and talks was also positive, with 100% rating their experience as either 4 or 5 star. The 'live' aspect of the tours was something commonly mentioned that really enhanced the overall visitor experience.



“Really interesting to get an insight into the artist’s inspiration.”

“Was lucky to have a guided tour, it made it live.”

Indeed, as mirrored in the above findings, those taking part in talks and tours found the personal archiving part of the exhibition the most striking;

“The last part about personal items and personal lives is really emotional.”

There is also evidence to indicate that those participating on the talks and tours learned something new as a result of their visit;

“It was fun!, good, and I learnt something new and I’m going to call people ‘Duckie’ from now on, and have a laugh to myself. When they ask why I’m calling them that - I might tell them.”

“Educational, I learnt something new and enjoyed it.”

“I would like to learn more about the language in the future.”

The quality and approach of presentation, along with the location was also praised; this indicatively impacted on the overall experience;

“Really good - interesting and informative. Good material and Jez and Joe were very engaging.”

“Jez and Joe - fantastic and very informative and engaging characters in their own right. Fully enthused and motivated the group to engage with the session and activities. They loved it.”

Where suggestions were made in terms of how the tour or talk could be improved, these largely related to making the sessions longer, more structured or more comfortable;

“Somewhere to sit.”

“More structured tours - they always seem a little ad hoc and under rehearsed.”

“Would have liked it to last a bit longer.”

3.2.5 Unexpected outcomes

One unexpected outcome as a result of the exhibition has been on the artists' professional development. For example, Jez Dolan believes that his practice has firmly moved in the direction of archives with historical material as a background – this is a shift from where his practice was prior to the project.

"I've very firmly moved it into the direction of archives and historical material being the backbone of where my work is going. It wasn't about that beforehand. It's had a massive impact." (Jez Dolan)

The project has also provided the artists with new archiving and presentation skills to take forward in the future.

"I learnt a lot through doing them – having to prepare what you have to say. Representing that to other people...thinking about how you're going to explain something that you've found interesting to somebody else – it helps you to take on board what's happened...it reinforces your own learning in a different way." (Joseph Richardson)

Secondly, there is also evidence to suggest that the artists have gained new contacts through the exhibition and events programme, for example those from the GLYSS group in Warrington. The project team are already planning future work together with GLYSS as a result of the new partnership.

3.2.6 Project team key learning points

- The project team believe that the personal archive element of the exhibition worked well as a tool to engage participants and audiences. However, it may have strengthened the section to 'explode' the archives and juxtapose them against historical objects, rather than keep them in a separately defined area. Further interpretation of the personal archive section may also have added to the overall visitor experience.

"Fantabulosa dear! A dowry bona exhibition which vadas at an important aspect of Molly culture throughout the ages up to the present journo dear!"

"I think it was a good tool for engaging people with the project...they do look good and powerful but I think it would be nice to explode that a bit and have the personal archives juxtaposed against things like clippings of the news archives...rather than keep it separate, putting those 'personal' bits of history alongside the 'official' pieces." (Joseph Richardson)

- Using the John Rylands Library presented a real challenge to the artists in terms of how to display and curate the work. Despite original discussion of a central 'core' for the exhibition, this did not come to fruition due to clashes over the programming of the space – which may have helped with visitor navigation and flow. It was posed that the John Rylands Library may wish to further develop their own thinking around how contemporary art work can be effectively displayed and enabled in the library spaces given the challenges regarding navigation and the wide space.
- In hindsight, the artists would have focussed creative thought on how to develop stronger ideas in terms of navigational signage/maps or considered how the exhibition could be enabled by front of house staff.

- The team believe that the events have helped them to develop new skills in leading tours and talks.

Particular outcomes achieved:

- ✓ Visitors and participants to understand the significance of Polari within LGBT heritage.
- ✓ Begin a dialogue about Polari within the LGBT community and beyond (create intergenerational dialogue).
- ✓ Create sense of ownership, relevance and access of LGBT community to archives.

3.3 The Polari Mission: Symposium

Target	Actual
Attract 150 attendees to the symposium	15 delegates, plus 13 speakers/actors/participants

As outlined, The Polari Mission Symposium took place on 18 October 2013 at the John Rylands Library. The above table shows that the team did not meet their intended output target of engaging with 150 attendees. On reflection, the project team feel this was an ambitious target and attribute the lower figure to the following;

- The symposium took place on a Friday to encourage students and academics to attend. It is recognised that this worked for some but may have been a barrier to others.
- The Reading Room where the symposium took place had difficult acoustics and therefore a lower number of people were encouraged (i.e. as a cap) so that all the audience were able to sufficiently hear.
- More could have been done in terms of promotion.

Positively however, respondents completing the post-symposium survey rated their experience as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ (with 9/10 stating it was ‘excellent’).

“Refreshingly un-academic but really smart.”

“Informative and enjoyable day.”

“This was the best symposium I have ever been to. Honestly, I loved it.”

When asked to explain why they had given it that rating, respondents commonly referenced the quality and variety of speakers;

“Rare opportunity to hear different speakers on this subject.”

“Excellent choice of knowledgeable speakers and wonderful use of drama to highlight aspects of culture.”

“Loved the variety. Every speaker had something different to offer...”

In addition;

- Nine out of ten delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they had gained a deeper understanding of Polari as a result of the symposium.
- Nine out of ten delegates stated they either strongly agreed or agreed that the symposium had successfully explored the link between Polari and wider issues surrounding LGBT heritage.

Delegates commonly described the day using words such as ‘energising’, ‘wonderful’, ‘informative’, and ‘inspiring’. As the below comments highlight, the evidence also suggests there was:

- a desire for more similar events to be programmed in the future
- a propensity to recommend the exhibition as a result of the symposium
- an interest in seeing the play developed;

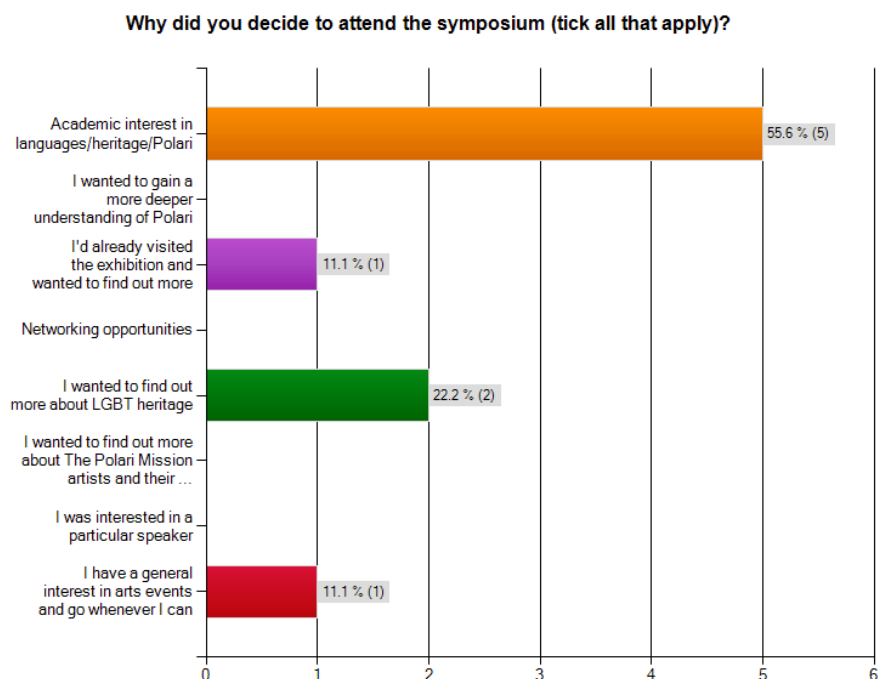
“Really great and inspiring. Three people came with me and loved it.”

“Would like to have more of these events.”

“I really hope that the play gets developed further. The venue was amazing. It was really well organised and ran very smoothly. Every speaker was really interesting. And just to reiterate, it was an excellent symposium.”

“Could we please have more Polari events?”

The majority of those responding to the survey decided to attend the symposium as they had an academic interest in Polari, however there was also a general curiosity around learning more about Polari or LGBT heritage.



“I am a PhD student and my research interests are vaguely aligned. I thought it would be interesting.”

“I'm interested in history/gender/culture.”

This suggests that those attending the symposium were varied in terms of their expectations and need – and indicatively their expectations were met given the satisfaction ratings. In fact, nine out of ten delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that the symposium had actually exceeded their expectations.

The survey asked respondents to describe whether they gained anything personally or professionally from attending. Positively the results indicate that delegates enjoyed meeting like-minded people, learnt something new about Polari, increased their understanding of LGBT heritage or were inspired to access an archive.

“I'd never heard of Polari before, so I learned lots.”

“I thought the whole day was really enjoyable and the talks were entertaining and informative. Some of the presentations made me think in new ways about my own research.”

“The Symposium has encouraged me to access LGBT archives and to investigate further.”

“Greater knowledge of the use and history of Polari; increased understanding of our LGBT heritage and a chance to meet like-minded others.”

“Enjoyment; entertainment; intellectual stimulation.”

Indeed, seven out of 10 delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they had made new contacts as a result of the symposium.

There is also some evidence to suggest that the symposia affected delegates' attitudes towards archives, for example;

- half of the delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt more confident accessing an archive as a direct result of attending the symposium
- six out of 10 delegates either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt inspired to contribute to an archive as a result of attending the symposium.

Whilst the majority of delegates had no suggestions for improvements;

“I can't really think of anything that could have been done better.”

“No, I thought it was excellently organised.”

one delegate did suggest that further help or support in terms of signposting LGBT history resources would have been useful, and one suggested reviewing the content of the speakers to avoid duplication;

“Pointers as to how one could continue to explore LGBT history both locally and nationally.”

“Better planning to avoid overlap / repetition between speakers; opportunity for active participation.”

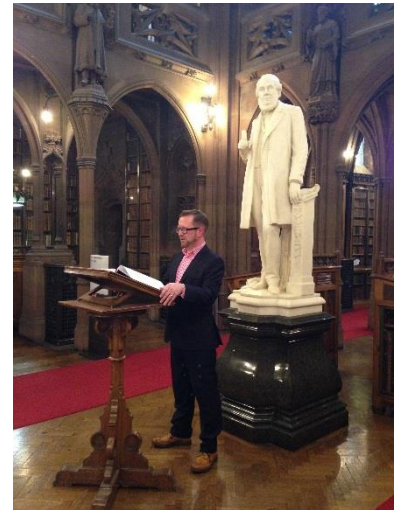
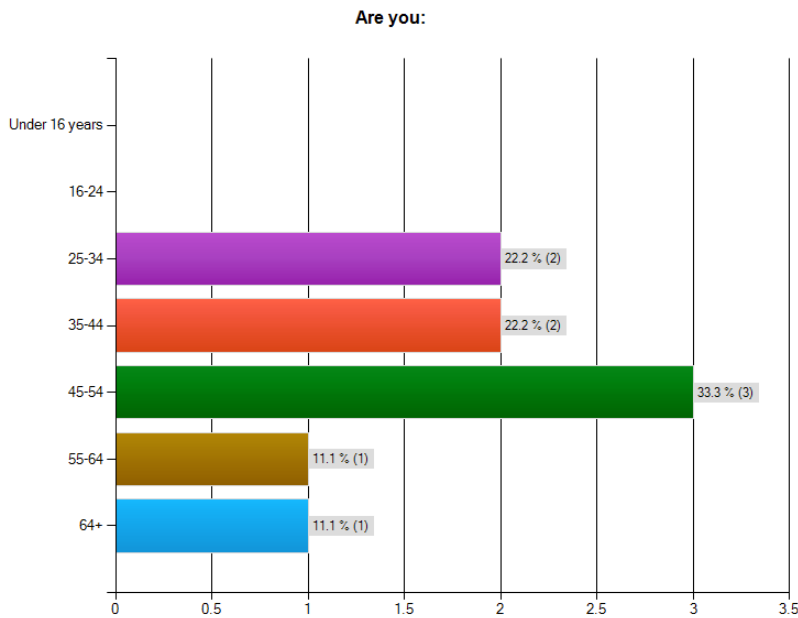


Photo credit: Marge Ainsley

“Such a bona experience and I feel I've made some fantabulosa coves.”



In terms of demographic profile, those responding to the survey indicated the symposium had attracted a broad age range of delegates.

Four out of ten delegates described themselves as straight, four out of ten as gay and one as bisexual. One person declined to answer.

The project team believe that the combination of academics and artists meant the symposia was an interesting approach as it revealed different perspectives. It was also viewed as extremely accessible by those attending – not just for an academic elite.

“Excellent event, which balanced detailed content with accessibility in a way that doesn't always happen. Have recommend the exhibition to several people as a result of the day.”

One unexpected outcome has been that the symposia has acted as a catalyst for others to ‘re-write’ the way academic conferences are delivered. One respondent described how the symposia has inspired a future academic conference to be programmed in a similar way, such as using the performance aspect;

“I think one of the unexpected outcomes is that it's inspired another conference which is really good - and that's an 'academic' conference at Huddersfield university of 6/7 June.”

3.3.1 Project team key learning points

- The mixture of presentation and performative aspects alongside a diverse range of speakers made for a successful and accessible format for both academic and non-academic audiences.

“There were a lot of audience members who weren't academics and they felt able to join in with the open questions.” (Joseph Richardson)

“Thanks to this amazing work I now use Polari on a daily basis and have introduced many other people to Polari and its history!”

- The project team believe that the Reading Room space was both a positive and a negative location choice. It gave a great sense of occasion, however it was difficult in terms of acoustics as it was not a private space. This caused complications for those trying to use the space quietly for study.
- The artists may wish to check cross-over between speaker content in future symposia as well as providing further signposting to resources.

- A symposia was a successful method to get similar people networking and to inspire practical use of archival material.

Particular outcomes achieved:

- ✓ Gain an understanding of how LGBT individuals view, appreciate, utilise or see reflected in their own communities of language the influence of Polari and its impact on how we communicate today.
- ✓ Visitors and participants to understand the significance of Polari within LGBT heritage.
- ✓ Begin a dialogue about Polari within the LGBT community and beyond (create intergenerational dialogue).
- ✓ Create sense of ownership, relevance and access of LGBT community to archives.

3.4 The Polari Mission: digital offering

Target	Actual
Create an updated and improved version of the existing app (released August 2012), achieving a total of 250 downloads	585 (August 2013 - February 2014)

The number of downloads has more than doubled the project target – with downloads in countries outside of the UK. The project team note it is interesting that the third highest number of downloads in terms of territory occur in Asia Pacific – particularly because these regions have active secret gay slangs of their own.



Just over half of respondents completing surveys within the exhibition space itself were not aware of the Polari app, suggesting that further promotion of the app within the exhibition areas may have been needed. For those who were aware of the app, 14.3% had downloaded it. Similarly, whilst 45.5% of respondents were aware of The Polari Mission website, 40.9% were not – which again suggests there was an opportunity in the exhibition to more effectively promote it.



However, positively there is evidence to suggest that the digital app was a 'work of art' in itself, and provided a contemporary way to engage users;

“I also think the app is really important because it’s a digital age now, people are keeping more things on their computer like photos – not everything is going to be in a shoebox like there was in the exhibition, so I think the digital app is bringing it to a younger generation and to say to them look this is something that we need to celebrate, you don’t need to learn it but maybe just know something about it, your heritage is important. I think that was a really important part of it.”

“The app has digitalised the language and is a work of art. Truly stunning.”

“It is the most contemporary aspect of the arts practice of the project.”

“I just thought it was a work of art it was absolutely amazing.”

“The App, (though wish it was available for android devices) is something instantly accessible and is bang on trend.”

And that it has been an indicative learning tool;

“I learned a lot from the app as well...Everything was so complex, thought out, your verbs, nouns, construction of sentences, a lot of work had gone into that so that introduced me to a lot of new words in Polari.”

Within the overall project online survey there were some suggestions related to developing the content of the app which generally related to producing it in android format or enhancing the content;

“The translation app was 'one way' - Polari to English, could do with English to Polari - make it easy to use in conversation ;-)”

This content was provided for version two, however the project team recognise that it would require a larger amount of time and resources to produce a true ‘translation’ app as this would also need grammatical structure and content too. An android version was not available due to a lack of budget to produce both formats.

Take a Polari safari

The project website was featured in a range of media, from the Guardian to the BBC, and was also covered in the LGBT press. The project website was also featured in the LGBT press, including the Guardian, the Independent, and the BBC. The project website was also featured in the LGBT press, including the Guardian, the Independent, and the BBC. The project website was also featured in the LGBT press, including the Guardian, the Independent, and the BBC.

The app was also successful in achieving European media coverage such as this piece from New Europe Online, which suggests it has wide-reaching interest and therefore potential to sell beyond the UK.

Read the full article [here](#).

70.3% of respondents to the overall project survey either strongly agreed or agreed that the Polari Mission team have successfully created a new social network to share stories and experiences about LGBT heritage. Indeed, there are currently 600 followers of The Polari Mission twitter account and 192 on Facebook, with many examples of positive interactions between users.



Jai Redman @JaiRedman · Aug 15

Bona Eek! #polarimission private view at John Rylands library Manchester. Go see! pic.twitter.com/qADPtKeWmg

View photo Reply Retweet Favorite Pocket More



Tim @rigmorole · Dec 23

Checking out the #polarimission exhibition (@ The John Rylands Library) [pic]: 4sq.com/1bmq8HD

View details Reply Retweet Favorite Pocket More

Retweeted by John Rylands Library and 1 other



Anne Louise Kershaw @Anne_L_Kershaw · Feb 1

FINALLY managed to see @PolariMission exhibition with @kevburkeguitar @TheJohnRylands today and LOVED it! Want more of this! #polarimission

Expand Reply Retweet Favorited More

Retweeted by Polari Mission



Simon Smith @Vauncey · Aug 26

Visited the fantabulosa Polari exhibition at @TheJohnRylands today! @PolariMission #bona

Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More

At the time of writing, the project team are working on a new website which will be live by the end of March. This will be the only comprehensive resource about Polari that is available worldwide; including project information, the Polari dictionary and personal archival material. It is anticipated that this will be a major legacy output of the project.

“There isn’t anything else like it. It’s very much put together by us as artists, not academics. I think it’s going to be a really good reflection of all the different areas that we’ve touched on.” (Jez Dolan)



Image of old website prior to redevelopment

3.4.1 Project team key learning points

- The project team recognise that further budget would have been needed to enable an android as well as iPhone app to be produced. This should be factored into the early stages of budgeting, time and resource management in any future projects.
- Introducing push notifications into the app would have allowed the project team to highlight new features and communicate with users.
- It is also acknowledged by the project team that it was difficult to exhibit the app within an exhibition setting – alternative accessible and more reasonable solutions should be considered for any future inclusion in a public space.

Particular outcomes achieved:

- ✓ Begin a dialogue about Polari within the LGBT community and beyond (create intergenerational dialogue).
- ✓ Gain an understanding of how LGBT individuals view, appreciate, utilise or see reflected in their own communities of language the influence of Polari and its impact on how we communicate today.

3.5 The Polari Mission: personal archiving and oral history

Target	Actual
1 oral history training day to be delivered, 4 volunteers recruited and a minimum of 6 oral histories relating to the use of Polari to be recorded and archived	2 oral history training sessions 2 volunteers recruited 9 oral histories recorded
2 personal archiving workshops to be delivered with a total of 6 participants, resulting in 6 personal archives created.	3 personal archiving workshops with 14 participants resulting in 14 personal archives.

The above table shows that the project team did not meet their intended output of oral history trainee volunteers. The project team attribute this to;

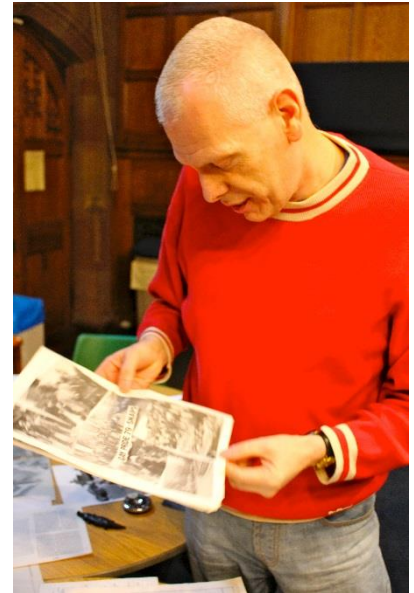
- The perception of ‘oral history’ as being something overly complex or scientific that was seen as a barrier for people taking part.
- The lack of open and expected routes into potential participants due to changes in commitment by original gatekeeper partners.

However, there are a number of key themes evidenced throughout the feedback from those who had taken part in oral history training or personal archiving workshops. These have been interpreted as follows;

- Participants were passionate about participating in both the oral history and archiving projects.

“What I felt was important was this notion of essentially recording and trying to capture and share an archive aspects of gay culture that very quickly in this internet age have ceased to have any validity.”

“Last night I had the privilege of taking part in a LGBT archivist project as a small group met to display and discuss artefacts significant in their LGBT journey; from Poptastic shag tags to Act Up; a script from Queer as Folk to 80s’ postcards of Morrissey; a homoelectric flyer from 99 scribbled with a first meet phone number to Hollinghurst’s The Swimming Pool Library and a first night programme from 1895 of Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest; a vivid pre internet world. Our history is precious, was buoyant despite prejudice and discrimination, and essential to record lest it disappears in an assimilationist forever. Last night felt special and am so looking forward to the coming Polari Exhibition at The John Rylands Library, Manchester.”



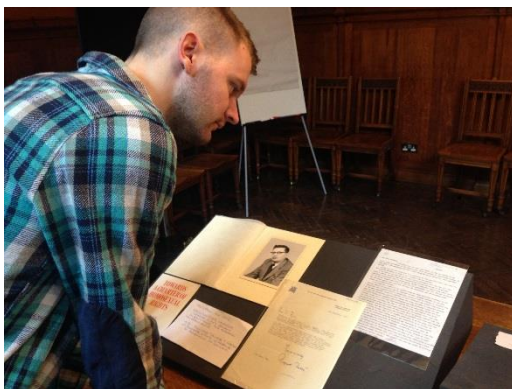
- Participants were genuinely moved by their experience.

“...to see and hear him talking so passionately with such insight, I found it profoundly moving...”

“... just hearing the personal stories I found really, really interesting and I’m really grateful those people gave up their time.”

“I did find that [personal archiving] profoundly moving...in many ways that’s the real dynamic of arts, something convivial and shared... so I really liked that. I just thought it was a lovely experience that I really valued. It has stayed with me and lived with me...I thought that was really quite significant event for me.”

- Participants learned new skills and increased their confidence.



“I think just emailing people I don’t know and asking to help with their work, it’s inspired me to do that a bit more. It’s improved my confidence and enabled me to network a lot more. For me personally it’s improved my confidence and got me speaking to people within a world that I hadn’t spoken to before - I’m not as intimidated now.”

“The oral history training I learnt when giving interviews (which I know I’ll have to do later on in jobs and at conferences) is listening really, and not talking over somebody and trying to steer them towards something. I’ve learnt a lot about listening to people.”

- Participants have been inspired to do something as a direct result of taking part.

“It’s given me a catalyst for going back to university... I wouldn’t say it was causal but it definitely felt quite empowering.”

"It's inspired me to kind of stray on the track that I think is right. Which is about making history and people's past more accessible to people..."

- Participants had high levels of satisfaction with the oral history training and personal archiving workshops.

"I found the training really useful and I think the conversations around ethics that we had and sensitivities and confidentiality issues was handled really well as that is a big concern. When people see a transcript back of something they've said - it's really challenging...there's something about that moment of transformation when what you say is written down and you read it...that's interesting and we talked quite a bit about that in the training."

- Participants discovered new perspectives on Polari or LGBT heritage.

"It introduced me to a new perspective on Polari. Previously I'd regarded it as a 'dead' language forever locked in the past, the project made it clear to me how much it is a live subject in the lives of many LGBT persons and I was amazed at the interest people (LGBT and non-LGBT) have shown in the subject."

- Participants met others with similar interests – it provided a social opportunity.

"It helped to put me in touch with others who were interested in LGBT history and by engaging with them I was able to improve my own appreciation and understanding of our shared LGBT heritage."

"I liked the informality of it. We sat round a dining table - I learn better in an informal setting. It was really good. I like things that are quite reflective and I think what was good about the training was that it was quite reflective, and personally for me my learning style suits that."

- Participants are keen for the archive to continue developing in the northwest.

"The whole 'Polari Mission' project has proved to be like a drop of water in the desert, refreshing, enthusing and inspiring. I would love to see it continue and (hopefully) develop further from its own local archive, so that archive material need not be 'on loan' from institutions in the South of England, but part of a North West LGBT archive and study centre."



"I was painfully aware that the project had a limited timescale and had hoped that it could become an ongoing project (there is nothing in the North West to replace it). I hope the project could become a springboard for further similar events."

There were very few suggested improvements, however one oral history trainee suggested that incorporating more role-play into the oral history training would have been beneficial, and one personal archiving participant would have liked more of a role in the interpretation of his collection which appeared in the exhibition;

"Probably to have a little role play, it's the dreaded word that people say. Perhaps maybe a little role play."

“I think it would have been lovely if we could have included our own narratives about what we contributed and why...there was nothing there, no catalogue to sort of give an opportunity. So what you had was a lovely amalgamation of artefacts, I think some of them are transparent but I think some of them sat in a void.”

3.5.1 Project team key learning points

- The project team believe that partnering with an academic individual or institution may have been a more successful and targeted way to recruit for the oral history training.

“I think what we could have done in hindsight is to try and partner up with an academic in the university who has a team of young volunteers...if we were to go to a university where academics are already doing oral history we could have presented it as an opportunity to them.” (Joseph Richardson)

- There is still a ‘mystique’ around oral history which still needs to break down – people think there is a ‘science’ to it. Reviewing the key messages of this element of the project and re-positioning these may be useful in similar projects going forward.
- A ‘personal visit’ rather than a ‘drop in’ approach would work best in terms of personal archiving going forward. This will allow a better explanation about the benefits of taking part and what archiving means.
- Both the oral history and personal archiving elements of the project required a large investment in time. This took longer than anticipated at the start of the project and therefore further time should be allocated in any future similar projects.
- As mentioned earlier, juxtaposing the personal archiving items in the exhibition against historical artefacts may have given them a sense of ‘importance’.

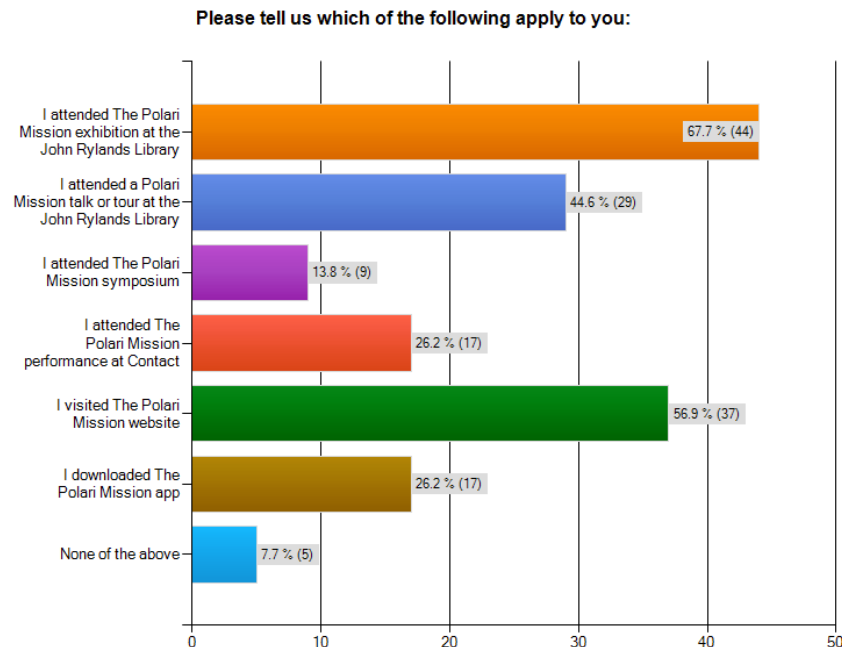
Particular outcomes achieved:

- ✓ Gain an understanding of how LGBT individuals view, appreciate, utilise or see reflected in their own communities of language the influence of Polari and its impact on how we communicate today.
- ✓ Visitors and participants to understand the significance of Polari within LGBT heritage.
- ✓ Increase inclusion of LGBT/ Polari presence at NWSA – ensuring the LGBT community is represented.
- ✓ Create sense of ownership, relevance and access of LGBT community to archives.
- ✓ Participants to increase their skills and knowledge in oral history techniques (including editing skills, 'soundsurvey' set up skills, ethics and copyright).
- ✓ Participants to learn and develop skills in accessing archival material, specifically relating to LGBT communities in the North West, and develop their own personal archives.

4 The Polari Mission: final project survey findings

The following discussion examines some of findings and associated outcomes from the final project online survey which was circulated online once the exhibition had closed.

The below graph shows the participation in each element of The Polari Mission's project by those completing the final project online survey. This shows that those respondents engaged with a broad spectrum of Polari Mission programming.



4.1 Motivation

This report earlier considered the motivations of those specifically visiting the exhibition. But why were people so curious or interested in The Polari Mission overall? The online survey asked respondents to explain their motivations for being involved. These were varied however common themes included;

- That people wanted to help conserve and document its history, and felt that it is important to share that history with others.

“I have been interested in LGB history for a while and have delved into Polari from time to time. Glad to have seen that someone is doing something on a bigger scale and bringing this almost forgotten language to a wider audience.”

“I think it’s hugely important for LGBTQI people to be aware of their cultural heritage. The Polari Mission represents a key part of this past, and hopefully future too!”

“Polari is an important and neglected part of our history. LGBT history is neglected enough as it is.”

“It was born out of work undertaken by one of our art co-op's founders. The subject of artists' endeavours to conserve, save, or highlight things/people/culture/language that is at threat from 'extinction' interests me.”

- That people wanted to learn.

“As a lesbian, and as someone who never knew Polari first hand, I wanted to know a bit of our history.”

“To understand more fully the Polari vocabulary and how it came about.”

“I knew a little about Polari and wanted to know how to speak it. Also have a professional interest in theatre (LGBT especially) so was part of my professional development.”

“The exhibition and the Symposium helped me to improve my understanding of British LGBT history and heritage.”

- That people were genuinely interested in it from a linguistic as well as historical point of view.

“I’m very interested in regional and LGBT history as well as language and dialect.”

“Interest in languages.”

“I love languages as a means of strengthening identity. I am gay and Welsh. So two for the price of one there.”

“General interest in language and linguistics.”

“I’m interested in social history, linguistics and art and this combines the three.”

- That people were interested in seeing the work from the artists.

“To see the work of Jez Dolan.”

“Interested in the work of the artist Joseph Richardson...”

87% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the work of The Polari Mission has created intergenerational dialogue.

4.2 Perceived importance of The Polari Mission

When asked what has been the most important part of The Polari Mission’s work so far, there were some common highlights. For example;

- Having the exhibition at a traditional library (something raised throughout the evaluation as a real achievement and enhancement of the overall experience),

“I think having this work at a traditional library and tourist site is a real achievement.”

“It’s a recognition of the importance of gay culture and the fact that it’s in this building is really significant.”

“The work at the library helped raise the profile of LGBT history in the city within a space that would usually be considered ‘straight’.”

“I liked the juxtaposition of the Polari exhibition within the seriousness of the John Rylands Library.”

Indeed, having the project begin in the Northwest region was often mentioned with pride;

“...it was heart-warming to see this undertaken in the North West (and not in London). The project has also proved instrumental in bringing in many non-academic people into an appreciation of the subject.”

“I’m really pleased that this was put on in Manchester. I wish it would be developed even further... I do wish there were more ongoing, and that it will develop further with even more events, and a further exhibition programme in the future.”

- The quest to conserve the language and raise awareness of LGBT heritage.

“Keeping the language alive.”

“It’s such an important part of gay culture that was very nearly lost forever, but due to the astounding work of Jez, Joseph and everyone else involved it will hopefully live on for future generations to honour and respect. Thanks to this amazing work I now use Polari on a daily basis and have introduced many other people to Polari and its history!”

“Its contribution to keeping Polari alive and extending knowledge of it.”

“Public recognition and visibility/revival of a forgotten history and sub-culture. Everyone’s heritage is shaped by the diversity of culture, not just the hetero-normative which is so prevalent. It was important to make it visible and to take its impact on us seriously.”

- That the project reached out to ‘younger’ or contemporary audiences.

“For us, it was the engagement of young people in the sessions and at events - I think it’s vitally important that Polari is ‘kept alive’.”

“The exhibition has brought Polari to a much wider audience.”

“Exhibition at the library and working with young LGB people. Enthusing a new generation who, though they might not use it as it was once used, will feel a link to the history of LGB people in general and make it a part of their history as a result.”

“Being visible - especially considering the history of Polari, making younger people aware of this rich resource is of huge benefit - illuminating generations of oppression and resistance to it. I think the Polari Bible is a hugely powerful symbol.”

“Increasing awareness, particularly amongst the young, hopefully.”

98% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that The Polari Mission has raised the profile of Polari with LGBT communities and beyond

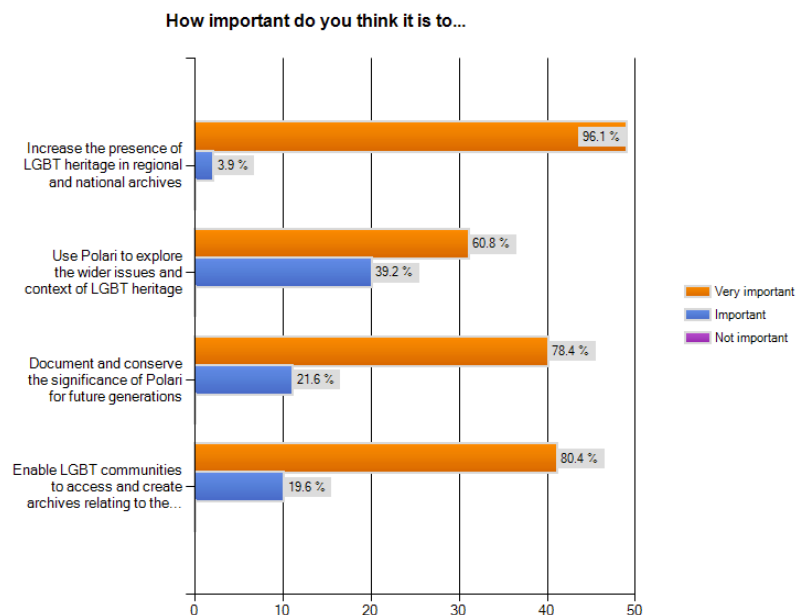
- The approach to archiving and personal memory sharing.

“Preserving & cataloguing certain artefacts, recordings etc. as a legitimate part of social history, for posterity. Presenting them in an intriguing, accessible way to the general public.”

“I liked the personal archiving as an insight into others’ lives.”

“Recording & preserving people’s memories.”

Indeed, as seen in the below graph, the majority of respondents believe that it is ‘very important’ to increase the presence of LGBT heritage in regional and national archives (and to increase LGBT access to those archives), use Polari to explore the wider issues and context of LGBT heritage, and to document and conserve Polari. This indicates that there is moral support of the project objectives and suggests that there may be a propensity to continue engagement should it continue.



4.3 Making archives more relevant for LGBT communities

Although respondents recognise the work the project has done in making archives more relevant, the

87% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that The Polari Mission has helped make archives more relevant for the LGBT community.

notion of contributing to, or starting a personal archive received more mixed responses. Just over half (55.6%) strongly agreed or agreed that they would be likely to contribute towards an LGBT archive as a result of the project.

44.4% strongly agreed or agreed that the project had inspired them to keep their own personal archive, with 31.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and nearly a quarter either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

“It inspired me to continue to maintain and extend my own LGBT archive. It introduced me to others who appreciated the importance of preserving and interpreting our shared LGBT heritages.”

4.4 Project perception

Survey respondents were asked how they would describe The Polari Mission to someone who did not know what it was. This question was intended to reveal the level of understanding about the project within its community and to indicate what it personally meant to them.

“The Polari Mission - saving the gay secret language from extinction. Keeping it alive by the means of education, theatre (Bible reading), modern technology and any other means possible.”

“Fun and engaging trip through LGB history and the language used by (particularly) gay men. The importance of everybody having an interesting and valuable story to tell, whatever their background and experiences.”



“An exploration of an almost forgotten language that in its time allowed for cultures of people to communicate without being discriminated against. To gossip, hook up, and generally subvert!”

“An artist lead mission to explore, promote and archive the language of Polari.”

“A very well curated exhibition of archive materials with original contemporary art starting from Polari, a coded language prevalent in the gay community in the twentieth century.”

A longer list of these is included in Appendix 1.

4.5 Suggestions for developing the work of The Polari Mission

There is evidence to suggest that those engaging with The Polari Mission valued its work and would like to see the project developed and continued;

“I think there's a lot of validity about the work and what it does for people in terms of igniting people's curiosity and people wanting to look at their own history - whether that's as a straight person or a gay person. I think that's really important and I think that's what those good kind of public engagement history projects do.”

“I was painfully aware that the project had a limited timescale and had hoped that it could become an ongoing project (there is nothing in the North West to replace it). I hope the Project could become a springboard for further similar events.”

“Fantastic. This work must continue.”

“I want to see this grow and grow and continue to reach out to audiences.”

“I think it should continue. If there's a possibility of another exhibition or going to arts festivals, or doing something at Pride maybe even at schools perhaps there's endless possibilities with this. Hopefully more people like Paul Baker will want to study it in an academic way.”

Furthermore, there were a number of suggestions for what else respondents would like to see on The Polari Mission programme, ranging from ‘more of the same please!’ to the ambitious, tongue-in-cheek comment ‘you guys should make a movie!’.

However, the most commonly occurring requests (which could indicate potential demand and a desire for the Mission to continue) included;

- Develop more content from an over 80's age group.

“Giving older gays tongue. Enabling those of us who lived through less liberated times to be heard.”

“More active input by those who are left with us that are in my age group (over 80's).”

- More content developed from Round the Horne.

“A guide to Round the Horne!”

“A listening event of round the horn and transcriptions too, if feasible.”

89% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the work of The Polari Mission shows how Polari is still relevant today.

- Produce a Polari Shakespeare.

“Polari Shakespeare?”

“I read somewhere online that people would like to see the entire works of Shakespeare translated into Polari. Would be a nice addition to the Bible.”

- Polari socials.

“Perhaps gay reading groups for those who wish to read and discuss LGBT literature of the past and present.”

“Polari socials and classes.”

- More content related to LBT members of the community.

“Polari is basically a language used by gay men but it would have been interesting to explore how much it has been used by women and transgender people. Although there are references to the 'LGBT community' throughout the project, nearly every example is about gay men.”

- A lengthier performance which could tour along with the exhibition.

“A lengthier theatre show would, I think, be something that could tour the UK and beyond.”

“The performance was of high quality, entertaining and informative and I wish it was able to develop further to a larger scale with a longer life.”

“Touring the work to other cities throughout the UK and internationally.”

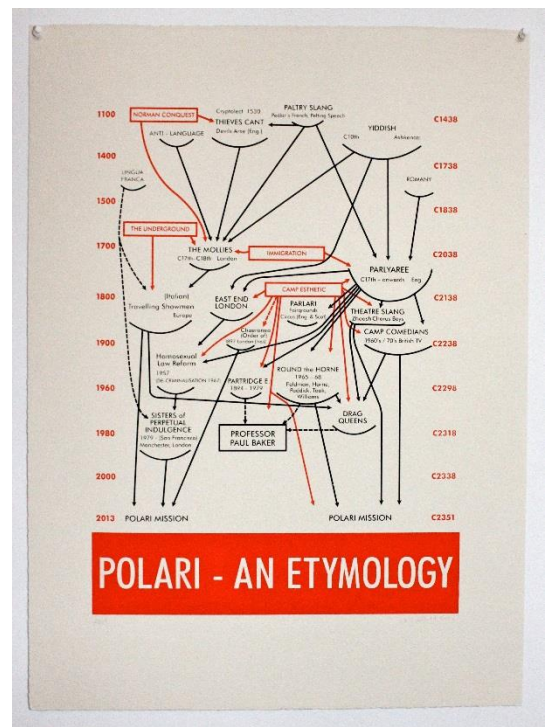
“I'd like to see Polari Mission Live again - perhaps a bit longer this time!”

In addition, the majority of respondents had no suggestions for how their experience could have been improved. However, where comments were made these typically related to more events;

“I suppose ultimately more funding to have made more events happen. I know I couldn't make the events that occurred, but it strikes me that this really highlights an important part of current LGBT culture and it would have been great for there to have been even more of it. The connection between LGBT history and present is really very important.”

The project team already have plans for the immediate future of The Polari Mission. At the time of writing the following is taking place:

- An exhibition at Bury Art Gallery which will enable new work to be created and a number of events will take place as part of a public programme of activities. The exhibition will form part of the Text



Festival (May – August) and will raise awareness of the project with curators, artists and audiences from all over the world.

- The work from The Polari Mission will be going into Bury Art Gallery's Text Art Archive, to preserve it for future generations. The Bury team are in the process of achieving special collection status for the archive.
- The John Rylands Library have accepted the donation of The Polari Bible and this will feature within their permanent world-class collection of bibles.

Project outcomes achieved:

- ✓ Gain an understanding of how LGBT individuals view, appreciate, utilise or see reflected in their own communities of language the influence of Polari and its impact on how we communicate today.
- ✓ Visitors and participants to understand the significance of Polari within LGBT heritage.
- ✓ Begin a dialogue about Polari within the LGBT community and beyond (create intergenerational dialogue).
- ✓ Create sense of ownership, relevance and access of LGBT community to archives.
- ✓ Participants to learn and develop skills in accessing archival material, specifically relating to LGBT communities in the North West, and develop their own personal archives.

“Without a doubt we’ve helped to document and conserve the significance of Polari for future generations - but I think the surface area of the project has been huge so the people who have been touched by it, and been made aware by it, is one of the greatest successes of it. Not only have we documented and conserved it but we’ve made everyone known that that’s happening.” (Joseph Richardson)

5 Appendices

5.1 Appendix 1

The below list includes responses to the final online survey question asking 'how would you describe The Polari Mission to someone who did not know what it was?'

Incredible and inspiring, bringing our LGBT heritage alive for us today.

The Polari Mission - saving the gay secret language from extinction. Keeping it alive by the means of education, theatre (Bible reading), modern technology and any other means possible.

Fun and engaging trip through LGB history and the language used by (particularly) gay men. The importance of everybody having an interesting and valuable story to tell, whatever their background and experiences.

An exploration of an almost forgotten language that in its time allowed for cultures of people to communicate without being discriminated against. To gossip, hook up, and generally subvert!

An artist lead mission to explore, promote and archive the language of Polari

Fantabulosa!

A study into personal histories and how a marginalised group communicated using a secretive language. Very entertaining, educational and celebratory. A triumph!

It's an examination of the use of language by the LGBT community to circumvent oppressive societal norms.

Good works

Fantabulosa

An exploration of the social and linguistic history of an underground LGBT language, bringing it into the present by means of shared experience and archival material.

Fantabulosa dear! A dowry bona exhibition which vadas at an important aspect of Molly culture throughout the ages up to the present journo dear!

It's a going back to basics of a language that could otherwise be lost

A project that charts and catalogues the continuous development of Polari - (language a bit like slang used by homosexuals when homosexuality was illegal and dangerous.) Polari Mission highlights the relevance of Polari's cultural heritage to contemporary LGBT as well as minority communities.

Tell them how the vocabulary came about and invite them to an exhibition/tour and check out the website.

Gay men's' history

An exhibition that helps us understand LGBT heritage through exploration of language

Reviving a lost language, using theatre. This is on the strength of me seeing it at Contact

I'll let you in on a little secret...

A project which researches and reclaims Polari, a language used in the gay community before it was legal.

Homosexuality used to be illegal and thus Polari was the secret language homosexuals could use to identify each other without outing themselves too unwittingly. With homosexuality becoming legal, Polari is dying off but it's very important we keep it as part of our history. The Polari Mission is doing just that.

A whole new world.

A programme to try to get gay men to relate to the history of gay men in the UK and see their own part in it.

Fantabulosa.

Rediscovery of hidden gay history and celebration of the joy it represents

A very well curated exhibition of archive materials with original contemporary art starting from Polari, a coded language prevalent in the gay community in the twentieth century

A journey into the unchronicled.

Keeping a language alive

A drive to keep a language alive

An artistic exploration and promotion of a lost language and subculture, making it relevant and accessible to today.

An exhibition capturing the lives, loves and trials of gay men in their own fabulous words

Inclusive, informative & historical with a personal perspective

Education.

A project to celebrate and archive a sub-cultural language that has been very important in the past, but is in danger of being forgotten now that life is a bit easier for LGBT people - and to have fun with it.

A really interesting picture of the subculture of homosexual men in the 50's to 70's with a surprising relevance today.

The revival of an endangered language

A project about the Polari language which takes the form of exhibitions, performances and workshops. By exploring Polari it also explores LGBT history and the contribution gay culture has made to life and language in the UK.

I would say that it was a mixed media/ historical art event that aims to save the language of Polari - a fundamentally important part of contemporary gay culture

A celebration and reinvigoration of gay heritage

The history of a dead language that was used because of oppression toward gays

A project keeping the rich history of the LGBT community alive.

5.2 Appendix 2

The below list outlines the events and activities that took place during The Polari Mission during August – September 2013.

- 5 tours of the exhibition at John Rylands Library with 63 people.
- 4 practical creative workshops including 'Camp as Christmas' (4 participants) and GLYSS Warrington (8 participants). At the time of writing, two workshops are yet to be held.
- The Polari Bibleathon – part of the Manchester Weekender. This involved 5 volunteer participants.
- Salford IDAHO Day – a Salford youth based drop in session. This involved 100 attendees.
- LGF Manchester evening session and lecture. This involved 12 participants.
- Warrington LGBT Youth Service lecture. This involved 2 youth workers, 1 volunteer and 6 participants.
- The Polari Etymology print – part of the [Manchester Contemporary](#), exhibited with Hotbed Press.