

# **PODCASTING THE ARCHIVE: AN EVALUATION OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH A NARRATIVE NON-FICTION PODCAST SERIES**

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of the empirical work discussed in this paper was to explore the theme of audience engagement with digitised archive data in different formats. A comparison is drawn between experiences of interacting with an archive presented as a narrative non-fiction audio performance and the same core material displayed as online text and images. The findings derive from an analysis of data collected in interviews with participants familiar with both versions of the archive: (1) as a podcast series entitled Diary of the war, and (2) photographs in the LornaL journal on the Blipfoto platform. The interviewees exhibited greater levels of engagement with the podcast series as a form of entertainment that prompts learning and generates emotional responses. They also found the podcast series a more flexible platform for engagement. They believed that the Blipfoto journal offers greater affordances in respect of access to contextual information, and authenticity. Key to these findings is the addition of contextual resources to the core archive in each presentation. This contribution provides*

*insights on the role of curation in promoting audience engagement with digital presentations of collections, and the extent to which archive material in digitised formats should be left to 'speak for itself'.*

Keywords: *archives, audiences, Blipfoto, cultural heritage, engagement, Lorna Lloyd, podcasting, Second World War*

## **1 Introduction**

The research reported here centres on audience engagement with the digital exhibition of archives by considering the cognitive, emotional, and affective experiences of users as they interact with historical records. A comparison is made of audience interest in, attention to, and interaction with a podcast series based on an archive first made publicly available as images and text in a daily journal on the photo-sharing site Blipfoto (<http://blipfoto.com>). The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded both the practical work to create the podcast series, and the work to implement the empirical study. The podcast series was highly commended by the British Records Association at a ceremony in London on 10 May 2023 as a runner-up for the Janette Harley Award 2022.<sup>2</sup>

In the extant literature on podcasting, the main area of enquiry in respect of cultural heritage is its use for public engagement and outreach, for example to introduce, showcase, or discuss materials held within a collection. The novelty of the research reported here lies in the

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<sup>2</sup> British Records Association (2023). Winner of the 2022 Janette Harley Prize announced. <https://www.britishrecordsassociation.org.uk/news/winner-of-the-2022-janette-harley-prize-announced>.

exploration of the theme of audience engagement with an archived data set presented as a narrative non-fiction audio performance, and comparisons of this experience with viewing the same core material as online text and images. We demonstrate the practical ways in which an existing digital archive can be augmented and exhibited in podcast format to deliver a product that holds audience interest with content that is entertaining, encourages learning, and is emotionally engaging. In addition, we reveal the role that different types of supplementary content play when presented alongside the core digitised archive. The visibility (or invisibility) of editorial and curatorial effort is also surfaced as a factor that determines the level of trust that audience members bestow on archive material made available in two different digital formats. As such, this work represents an innovative and creative contribution to existing perspectives on the use of digital technologies for audience engagement with archives, opening up new thinking on the practical affordances and limitations of selected platforms – a theme that has been somewhat neglected to date, despite the recent growth in popularity of podcasts. It also extends the scope of academic research on podcasting in general.

The core archive material under discussion is the hand-written diary of a woman resident in Malvern, Worcestershire during the early months of the Second World War. Aged 25, Lorna Beatrice Lloyd (1914-1942) embarked on detailing the progress of the war, and life under wartime conditions in England, from 1 September 1939. The diary entries offer personal commentary on key stages of the war by a young person whose ambitions were limited by gender, class, and ill health. The quality of writing is high, reflecting the author's privileged upbringing, and her education to degree level in English at Girton College, Cambridge. Until

the commencement of the work discussed in this paper in 2019, the archive was held within the Lloyd family, and not publicly accessible.

The activities described in the diary include the reception of child evacuees in provincial British towns, the issuing of ration books, and the billeting of armed personnel in civilians' houses. Lloyd's real-time reflections on incidents and events, now often viewed as wartime 'episodes', are intriguing at a distance of eight decades. These include the evacuation of Dunkirk (26 May to 4 June 1940), the Battle of Britain (July to October 1940), the sinking of the *City of Benares* carrying child evacuees to Canada (17 September 1940), and the bombing of Coventry (14 November 1940). Lloyd's reports also convey details of life in an upper middle-class English household during war time.

At the time of writing, Lloyd could not have anticipated that her frank, and often raw, opinions would be analysed for research purposes in the future (unlike other personal wartime records such as those written for the Mass Observation Project<sup>3</sup>). It is not known whether Lloyd had any intention of publishing her war diary or using it as source material for later creative work. However, she was aware that her writing had wider value. This is conveyed in May 1940 when she feared that a German invasion of the UK was imminent. Here she refers to a possible future audience for her words, implying that she would be comfortable with wider dissemination of her writing:

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.massobs.org.uk/about/mass-observation-project>

I shall bury this diary so deep that one day, in a saner world, someone may find it and know that the last legions of civilisation meant not domination but good, even though their hands were feeble and their foresight all too dim.

(May 15<sup>th</sup> 1940<sup>4</sup>)

The article is structured as follows. First, we summarise extant knowledge on the use of podcasting in cultural heritage, and podcasting and audience engagement. Then we outline the phases of the practical work undertaken to bring Lloyd's war diary entries to a listening audience in the *Platform to platform (P2P) project*. Next, we cover the research design and implementation of the empirical study. Following the presentation of our findings, we discuss their implications with reference to prior research. We conclude that although a small-scale study, as the first to compare the reception of two digitised presentations of the same core archive material, our work contributes new perspectives on the theme of audience engagement with digitised archives and opens up avenues for further research in this area.

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<sup>4</sup> May 15<sup>th</sup> 1940 <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2707866392899618085>

## 2 Literature review

Academic research into podcasting has been conducted since the early 2000s<sup>5</sup>, and is considered an area ripe for further investigation.<sup>6</sup> Investigations into the application and use of the technology have been considered across several domains including business,<sup>7</sup> higher

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<sup>5</sup> T. Sharon, ‘Peeling the pod: towards a research agenda for podcast studies’ in *Annals of the International Communication Association*, XLVII (3), 2023 pp. 324-337.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2023.2201593>

<sup>6</sup> M. Lindgren, ‘Personal narrative journalism and podcasting’ in *Radio Journal:*

*International Studies in Broadcast and Media*, XIV (1), 2016, pp. 23-41.

[https://doi.org/10.1386/rjao.14.1.23\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/rjao.14.1.23_1); L. Rupinski and J. Rander, ‘Telling stories: a case study in podcasting with archival resources’ in *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference*, XL (1), 2019, pp. 24–38.

<https://doi.org/10.31274/archivalissues.11085>.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Y. Chen and C. Keng, ‘The effect of subscription relational bond on customer engagement and stickiness in podcast: the moderating role of social connectedness’ in *Service Business*, XVII, 2023, pp. 723–745.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11628-023-00538-8>.

education,<sup>8</sup> health,<sup>9</sup> and music.<sup>10</sup> To situate the empirical study discussed below, here we consider the main characteristics of research in podcasting as related to cultural heritage, and to audience engagement.

A number of researchers and practitioners have contributed to a small subset of this research with outputs on podcasts and cultural heritage collections, some of which refer to podcast production and use in archives. As evidenced in individual works cited directly below, amongst these are professionals in cultural heritage institutions (such as archivists, librarians, and curators), academics who conduct historical research (such as archaeologists, historians, and digital humanists) and others whose research is of direct relevance to the exploitation of historic records found in domains such as media and cultural studies, and human geography. There is variety in the nature of the individual outputs produced. These range from short

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<sup>8</sup> For example, J. Gunderson and T. Cumming, ‘Podcasting in higher education as a component of Universal Design for Learning: a systematic review of the literature’ in *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, LX (4), 2023, pp. 591-601.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2022.2075430>.

<sup>9</sup> For example, L. Bertrand et al. ‘Use of podcasts in healthcare: a literature review’ in *Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, LXXVI (2), 2023, pp. 157-158.

<sup>10</sup> For example, B. Bolden and J. Nahachewsky, ‘Podcast creation as transformative music engagement’ in *Music Education Research*, XVII (1), 2019, pp. 17-33

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2014.969219>.



descriptive updates in the professional press<sup>11</sup> to full-length articles in international peer-reviewed journals.<sup>12</sup> Papers on practicalities of podcast production are most common, with less attention paid to intangible issues such as audience engagement and impact.

While the subject coverage of this material encompasses the themes of building, curating, and interpreting collections, much of the published research is limited to reports of single case studies, with accounts of personal experiences of producing one podcast series or one episode most common.<sup>13</sup> These reports fit into two main categories: (1) broadly auto-ethnographic reflective analyses of the influence of podcast production on the researchers' positionality and praxis;<sup>14</sup> (2) accounts of practical work. By relating decisions on digital platform, hardware,

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<sup>11</sup> For example, C. DeCristofaro and E. Druda, 'FieldReports' in *Library Journal*, CXVII (11), 2017, pp. 14–16.

<sup>12</sup> For example, S. Moradi et al. 'Designing a model for Web 2.0 technologies application in academic library websites' in *Information and Learning Science*, CXVIII (11–12), 2017, pp. 596–617. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-03-2017-0013>.

<sup>13</sup> Ryan, B., Wilson, M., Hall, H. & McGregor, I. (2023). 'The power of audio: presenting archives via podcasts'. Paper presented at *Shaking the archive*, Edinburgh, 25 June 2023.

<sup>14</sup> For example, C. Moten, 'Historical practices creating during crisis: The development of the black HERstory 101 podcast' in *Journal of Women's History*, XXXIII (3), 2021, pp. 157–161. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2021.0031>; D. Rogers et al., 'The city under

branding, content, as well as the technical skills required to produce a podcast, these can be used by others to support and promote their own efforts at podcast production.<sup>15</sup> Further to this advice, some authors warn of the challenges of hosting a podcast series, such as the workload involved.<sup>16</sup>

In other publications on podcasting and cultural heritage, podcasts per se (as opposed to the process of their creation), and their wider uses, are explored. For example, since there are

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COVID-19: podcasting as digital methodology' in *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, CXI (3, SI), 2020, pp. 434–450. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12426>.

<sup>15</sup> For example, C. Amundsen and C. Belmonte, 'How to podcast in archaeology' in *Advances in Archaeological Practice*, VI (3, SI), 2018, pp. 259–266.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2018.20>; DeCristofaro and Druda, 'FieldReports'; H.

Moorefield-Lang, 'Delivering the message: disseminating information and professional development in the field of librarianship through technology' in *Library Hi Tech*, XXXV, NO(1), 2017, pp. 81–91. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LHT-04-2016-0039>; R. Nelson,

'Podcasting services in academic libraries: A case study' in *College and Undergraduate Libraries*, XXVII (2–4), 2021, pp. 117–132.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2021.1897722>.

<sup>16</sup> For example, P. Lombardi and S. Simas, 'The Bryant faculty spotlight: how to love your institutional repository' in *College & Research Libraries News*, LXXXIII, (1), 2022, pp. 34–37. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.83.1.34>; Rupinski and Rander, 'Telling stories'.

similarities between podcast recording and the activities normally undertaken when preparing research for publication in textual formats,<sup>17</sup> it has been argued that podcasts should be treated as non-traditional research outputs.<sup>18</sup> The potential role of podcast content in future

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<sup>17</sup> R. Scriven, ‘Making a podcast: reflecting on creating a place-based podcast’ in *Area*, LIV, 2022, pp. 260-267. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12776>.

<sup>18</sup> For example, J. Bonnet and M. Méndez-Brady, ‘Making the mission visible: altmetrics and nontraditional publishing’ in *Digital Library Perspectives*, XXXIII (4), 2017, 294–304. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLP-01-2017-0002>; E. Edwards and R. Hershkowitz, ‘Books aren’t dead: resurrecting audio technology and feminist digital humanities approaches to publication and authorship’ in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, XV (1), 2021, pp. 1–10; J. Kell and S. Gagau, ‘New collaborative research on ethnographic collections: bridging archives and communities through podcasting’ in *University Museums and Collections Journal*, XII (1), 2020, pp. 37-45; Moten, ‘Historical practices creating during crisis’; D. Rogers et al., ‘The city under COVID-19’; Scriven, R, ‘Making a podcast’; D. Smith et al., ‘Making disciplinary research audible’ in *Information Technology and Libraries*, XXXIX (3) 2020. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v39i3.12191>.

research endeavours is also recognised. For example, podcast transcripts may be sources of content for traditional scholarly publishing<sup>19</sup> and as secondary data for qualitative analysis.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, there are indications in this literature that podcast production contributes to emerging digital research methodologies and thus deserves critical examination by scholarly communities.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, it has been claimed that podcasting is more than a medium, but also a method of cultural production.<sup>22</sup> Podcasts have their own ‘distinct textual practice’,<sup>23</sup> capable of simultaneously representing, preserving, and enacting culture.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> D. Hunter et al., ‘Roundtable: Lincoln and public history’ in *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, XL (1), 2019, pp. 46–56.

<sup>20</sup> I. Roddvik et al., ‘Norwegian entrepreneurs (1880s-1930s) and their ‘new America’: a historical perspective on transnational entrepreneurship and ecosystem development in the Russian Arctic’ in *Journal of Management History*, XXVIII (4), 2022, pp. 530-552.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards and Hershkowitz, ‘Books aren’t dead’.

<sup>22</sup> A. Salvati, ‘Podcasting the past: Hardcore history, fandom, and DIY histories’ in *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, XXII (2), 2015, pp. 231–239.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2015.1083375>.

<sup>23</sup> S. McHugh, ‘Memoir for your ears: the podcast life’ in B. Avieson et al. *Mediating memory: tracing the limits of memoir*, 2018, pp. 104-122.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Kell and Gagau, ‘New collaborative research on ethnographic collections’; Sharon, ‘Peeling the pod’.

Assigned such status, podcasts merit preservation.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, to guard against ‘podfade’ (i.e. the gradual decline or abrupt end of a podcast series), arguments have been made for the preservation of both output sound files for public dissemination and ephemera created in the process of podcast production, such as scripts and raw audio.<sup>26</sup> These align to the broader discourse on digital preservation (such as that led by the Digital Preservation Coalition<sup>27</sup>), and the role of cultural heritage organisations in such endeavours<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Kidd et al., ‘Subscribe, rate and preserve wherever you get your podcasts’ in *Journal of Archival Organization* XVII (1/2), 2020, pp. 161–177.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2020.1769997>; J. Morris et al., ‘The PodcastRE project: curating and preserving podcasts (and their data)’ in *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, XXVI (1), 2019, pp. 8–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2019.1559550>; P. Reséndiz, ‘Approaches to the study of podcast as a born digital sound document’ in *Investigacion Bibliotecnologica*, XXXVI (90), 2022, pp. 151-164.

<http://doi.org/10.22201/iibi.24488321xe.2022.90.58512>.

<sup>26</sup> Kidd et al., ‘Subscribe, rate and preserve wherever you get your podcasts’.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.dpconline.org/>

<sup>28</sup> For example, R. Ahmad, M. Rafiq & M. Arif, ‘Global trends in digital preservation: outsourcing versus in-house practices’ in *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 2023, available ahead of print

<https://doi.org.napier.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/096100062311734>

Throughout this body of work, the value of podcasting to cultural heritage is referenced. This is considered in terms of the content selected for broadcast, and the affordances of the podcast platform. While initial forays into podcasting were for basic instructional purposes,<sup>29</sup> in a large proportion of the recent literature, podcasting is highlighted primarily as a tool for public engagement – especially for intangible cultural heritage – and the associated outcomes of learning and community building.<sup>30</sup> Here, podcasts serve as outreach outputs to raise general awareness of collections and services, targeted at local<sup>31</sup> and wider audiences.<sup>32</sup> For example, in episodes of *In the stacks*, the podcast hosts discuss books held in the stock of a public library.<sup>33</sup> Other podcasts showcase particular features of a collection. For example, the materials held in a university’s institutional repository – the core focus of *Bryant faculty*

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<sup>29</sup> For example, A. Jowitt, ‘Perceptions and usage of library instructional podcasts by staff and students at New Zealand’s Universal College of Learning (UCOL)’ in *Reference Services Review*, XXXVI (3), 2008, pp. 312-336.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/00907320810895396>.

<sup>30</sup> Ryan et al., ‘The power of audio’.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Scriven, ‘Making a podcast’.

<sup>32</sup> For example, M. Francis, ‘Anything but silent: a British Library podcast’ in *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, LXVIII (4), 2020, pp. 551–551.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2020.1840720>.

<sup>33</sup> DeCristofaro and Druda, ‘FieldReports’.

*spotlight* – are discussed to encourage awareness of, and engagement with, research projects.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, a collection of family papers held by a university library underpins storytelling in the *To the letter* podcast series.<sup>35</sup>

There are two common formats for such podcasts: a mediated (i.e. hosted) commentary that provides information and reflections on artefacts held within a collection, as in *To the letter*; and less formal conversational interactions between parties with interests in the material under consideration, such as book review interviews in *Books aren't dead (BAD)*.<sup>36</sup> In each case, podcast hosts are usually cultural heritage professionals such as archivists and librarians. A notable exception is the podcast series hosted by teenage public library users in a project undertaken in Norway.<sup>37</sup>

Less commonly reported in the literature on podcasting and cultural heritage are narrative-focused approaches to delivering memoirs<sup>38</sup> and history.<sup>39</sup> When these convey a strong sense

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<sup>34</sup> Lombardi and Simas, 'The Bryant faculty spotlight'.

<sup>35</sup> Rupinski and Rander, 'Telling stories'.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards and Hershkowitz, 'Books aren't dead'.

<sup>37</sup> J. Tveit and A. Kaasa, 'Teenagers in the library: participatory mediation practices' in *Information Research*, XXVII, (October special issue), 2022. <https://informationr.net/ir/27-SpIssue/CoLIS2022/colis2217.html>

<sup>38</sup> McHugh, 'Memoir for your ears'.

<sup>39</sup> Salvati, 'Podcasting the past'.

of storytelling, deep connections are forged between the listeners and podcast subject matter, and empathy amongst the listenership is engendered,<sup>40</sup> taking advantage of the inherent ‘sensorial intimacy’ of audio.<sup>41</sup>

Cultural heritage podcasts (in general) are considered valuable for promoting accessibility.<sup>42</sup> This is achieved in terms of breadth through the opening up of collections and research to wider audiences than is normally achieved by traditional media,<sup>43</sup> and in depth by supporting immersive engagement with the materials. For example, podcasts may surmount practical issues of physical access and interpretability of paper-based, hand-written, archive

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<sup>40</sup> L. Covart, ‘Popular and public history’ in *Journal of Early Modern History*, XXV, (6), 2021, pp. 547–559. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-bja10049>; McHugh, ‘Memoir for your ears’; Moten, ‘Historical practices creating during crisis’; Rupinski, and Rander, ‘Telling stories’.

<sup>41</sup> Kell and Gagau, ‘New collaborative research on ethnographic collections’.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Covart, ‘Popular and public history’; Ryan et al., ‘The power of audio:’; Salvati, ‘Podcasting the past’.

<sup>43</sup> For example, S. Senier, ‘An indigenist Internet for Indigenous futures: DH beyond the academy and “preservation.”’ in D. Kim & A. Koh (eds.), *Alternative historiographies of the digital humanities* 2021, pp. 401–425. Punctum Books.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003021513-4>.



materials<sup>44</sup>; *BAD* consciously aims to reify the metaphorical dialogue that exists between author and reviewer in traditional academic book reviews by providing audiences with direct access to a literal dialogue between the two parties.<sup>45</sup>

As well as promoting inclusivity of access to cultural heritage, podcasting can address the issue of poor representation of marginalised groups evident in other media formats such as those that are text-based.<sup>46</sup> When members of under-represented communities engage in oral storytelling using the podcast platform, this can create a sense of immediacy in the presentation of the narrative. Examples of this are found in the literature with reference to groups such as indigenous populations,<sup>47</sup> Black women,<sup>48</sup> and ‘hidden’ histories.<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere,

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<sup>44</sup> Rupinski and Rander, ‘Telling stories’.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards and Hershkowitz, ‘Books aren’t dead’.

<sup>46</sup> Ryan et al., ‘The power of audio’

<sup>47</sup> Kell and Gagau, ‘New collaborative research on ethnographic collections’; Senier, ‘An indigenist Internet for Indigenous futures’.

<sup>48</sup> Moten, ‘Historical practices creating during crisis’.

<sup>49</sup> For example, C. Collins, ‘When do you stop arriving? The Project ‘We are not strangers here: African American histories in rural California’ in *California History*, LXXXIV (4), 2022, pp. 51–81. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ch.2022.99.4.51>.

it has been demonstrated that a podcast can be used to preserve tangible heritage at risk of destruction.<sup>50</sup>

Opportunity for collaboration is regarded as a further reason for cultural heritage professionals to engage in podcasting projects.<sup>51</sup> In many cases, collaboration is part of the process of podcast production, rather than an outcome: collaboration is driven by necessity due to the level of technical expertise required to produce a podcast of sufficient quality.<sup>52</sup> Outputs of collaboration reported in the literature include knowledge sharing, acquisition of new skills, professional development, and community building.<sup>53</sup> With reference to relationship building, some researchers have written of wearing a ‘party hat’ during podcast production as a celebration of the work of academics in their institution.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> D. Ocón, ‘Low-cost digital tools to preserve cultural heritage ‘blind spots’: the case of Kubor Kassim in Singapore’ in *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, XXIX (9), 2022, pp. 961-987. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2231903>.

<sup>51</sup> Ryan et al., ‘The power of audio’

<sup>52</sup> Nelson, ‘Podcasting services in academic libraries’; Smith et al., ‘Making disciplinary research audible’.

<sup>53</sup> Edwards and Hershkowitz, ‘Books aren’t dead’; Moorefield-Lang, ‘Delivering the message; Rupinski and Rander, ‘Telling stories’.

<sup>54</sup> Lombardi and Simas, ‘The Bryant faculty spotlight’, p. 36.

Some commentators have drawn attention to neglect of the theme of audience engagement in published studies on podcasting and cultural heritage.<sup>55</sup> Even reports on listener feedback in this body of work are brief. For example, a podcasting team<sup>56</sup> indicates systematic collection of audience feedback in the *Calling: earth* podcast, but does not elaborate on this other than to note that it is positive. Similarly, broad evaluations of podcast consumption present in the literature are at too high a level to provide indications of determinants of audience engagement.<sup>57</sup> Feedback on podcast *production* from professional *peers* appears to be of more interest than feedback on podcast *content* from *audience members*.<sup>58</sup> Given the strong orientation to public engagement noted above, it is surprising that audience engagement with cultural heritage podcast content has merited so little research attention. One possible reason for this is the practical difficulty of collecting data on podcast audiences. They have a wide choice of platforms for listening, and can do so asynchronously at any time of their choosing, from the day that a podcast episode is published to years afterwards.

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<sup>55</sup> For example, McHugh, ‘Memoir for your ears’; Salvati, ‘Podcasting the past’.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, et al., ‘Making disciplinary research audible’.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Moradi et al., ‘Designing a model for Web 2.0 technologies application in academic library websites’.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Lombardi and Simas, ‘The Bryant faculty spotlight’; Moorefield-Lang, ‘Delivering the message’.

For an exploration of the explanatory factors of audience engagement with podcast content, it is necessary to look beyond the cultural heritage literature. Examples are found in education,<sup>59</sup> linguistics,<sup>60</sup> media and cultural studies,<sup>61</sup> and psychology.<sup>62</sup> Such works cover

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<sup>59</sup> S. McNamara and S. Min, ‘Understanding why educational professionals engage with podcasts: Educational Podcasts Motivational Scale development and validation’ in *British Journal of Educational Technology* early access January 2024.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13428>.

<sup>60</sup> Reddy et al., ‘Modeling language usage and listener engagement in podcasts’ in *Proceedings of the 59th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics and the 11th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing*, 2021, pp. 632–643. <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2021.acl-long.52>.

<sup>61</sup> For example, S. Chan-Olmsted and R. Wang, ‘Understanding podcast users: consumption motives and behaviors’, in *New Media and Society*, XXIV (3), 2022, pp. 684-704. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820963776>; D. García-Marín, ‘Mapping the factors that determine engagement in podcasting: design from the users and podcasters’ experience’ in *Communication and Society*, XXXIII (2), 2020, pp. 49-63.

<https://doi.org/10.15581/003.33.2.49-63>; Sharon ‘Peeling the pod’.

<sup>62</sup> Harrison et al. ‘The relationship between environmental context and attentional engagement in podcast listening experiences’ in *Frontiers in Psychology*, XIII, 2023.

factors from the broad physical environment in which podcasts are consumed<sup>63</sup> to specific features of language adopted by podcast presenters.<sup>64</sup>

Four quantitative studies are of direct relevance to the research reported here. First, results of a large study in the US shows that podcast consumption is primarily motivated by a desire to be entertained and informed on a convenient platform<sup>65</sup>. A study of educators reports these same factors, with the addition of opportunities for social interaction and access to professional encouragement.<sup>66</sup> A third work – on personality traits – identifies that podcast listening is motivated by openness to experience, interest-based curiosity, and need for cognition.<sup>67</sup> Amongst these findings, the importance of parasocial relationships with the hosts of mediated podcasts is highlighted. Finally, a data-driven analysis of podcast creator

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<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1074320>; S. Tobin and R. Guadagno, ‘Why people listen: motivations and outcomes of podcast listening’ in *PLoS ONE*, xvii (4), 2022, pp. 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0265806>

<sup>63</sup> Harrison et al., ‘The relationship between environmental context and attentional engagement in podcast listening experiences’.

<sup>64</sup> Reddy et al., ‘Modeling language usage and listener engagement in podcasts’.

<sup>65</sup> Chan-Olmsted and Wang, ‘Understanding the podcast users’.

<sup>66</sup> McNamara and Min, ‘Understanding why educational professionals engage with podcasts’.

<sup>67</sup> Tobin and Guadagno, ‘Why people listen’.

descriptions and transcripts of audio of 250 podcasts considered the influence of linguistic style and textual attributes on audience engagement.<sup>68</sup> The researchers report characteristics of ‘high engagement’ podcasts: they are longer, have appropriate descriptions, use diverse and mainstream language, contain positive sentiments and suspense, and are presented by fast speakers who avoid interjections and swearing.

A further study, which is qualitative in nature, is also relevant to the discussion here. This work draws on the analysis of interview data to report thirteen factors that determine engagement.<sup>69</sup> However, the focus of this work is *podcasting* (the activity) as opposed to podcasts (the productions of podcasting activity). Furthermore, the engagement under scrutiny is that of ‘user’ podcasting experts as opposed to audience members: the expert study participants are five podcasting industry pioneers, five podcasters, and seven podcast listeners recruited from an online community of podcast enthusiasts. The findings on the appropriation and use of the media production technology presented in this article are thus at a level of most value to commercial media companies seeking to enter the podcasting market. Nevertheless, within the article references are made to characteristics of podcasts that keep audiences engaged. These include, for example, elements that fit with ‘high engagement’

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<sup>68</sup> Reddy et al., ‘Modeling language usage and listener engagement in podcasts’.

<sup>69</sup> García-Marín, ‘Mapping the factors that determine engagement in podcasting’.

podcast characteristics such as narrative simplicity, and a delivery tone that is accessible, friendly, and easily understandable.<sup>70</sup>

It is clear from this review of research literature on podcasting, and the limited body of literature on the subject in cultural heritage domains, that there is much scope for contributing to a greater understanding of audience engagement with the medium. Our empirical study, as discussed in detail below, considers a type of podcast that has been overlooked in the research literature: the unmediated (i.e. unhosted) narrative non-fiction performance of an archive. Furthermore, we explore the issue of engagement in a qualitative study that allows for comparison of audience opinion on the podcast output with the same core material as online text and images. This work enables us to address two key research questions:

- (1) How do people engage with an archive digitised as a performance in a non-fiction podcast series?
- (2) How does this engagement compare with that when the audience accesses the same core archive material as online text and images?

This was achieved with reference to the Lloyd archive, as outlined below.

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<sup>70</sup> Reddy et al., ‘Modeling language usage and listener engagement in podcasts’.

### **3 Practical work to bring the archive to a larger audience**

The practical work to bring the archive to a larger audience was undertaken from 2019 to 2023. Here we give an overview of the archive in all existing formats, then outline the processes undertaken to create the two publicly-available digitised versions of Lloyd's war diary.

#### **3.1 The archive**

The archive of Lloyd's diary entries is publicly available in three formats. First is the exercise book that holds 106 hand-written diary entries composed between 1 September 1939 and 4 January 1941: see Figure 1. This is currently on display at the Malvern Museum of Local History in Worcestershire.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> <https://malvernmuseum.co.uk>.



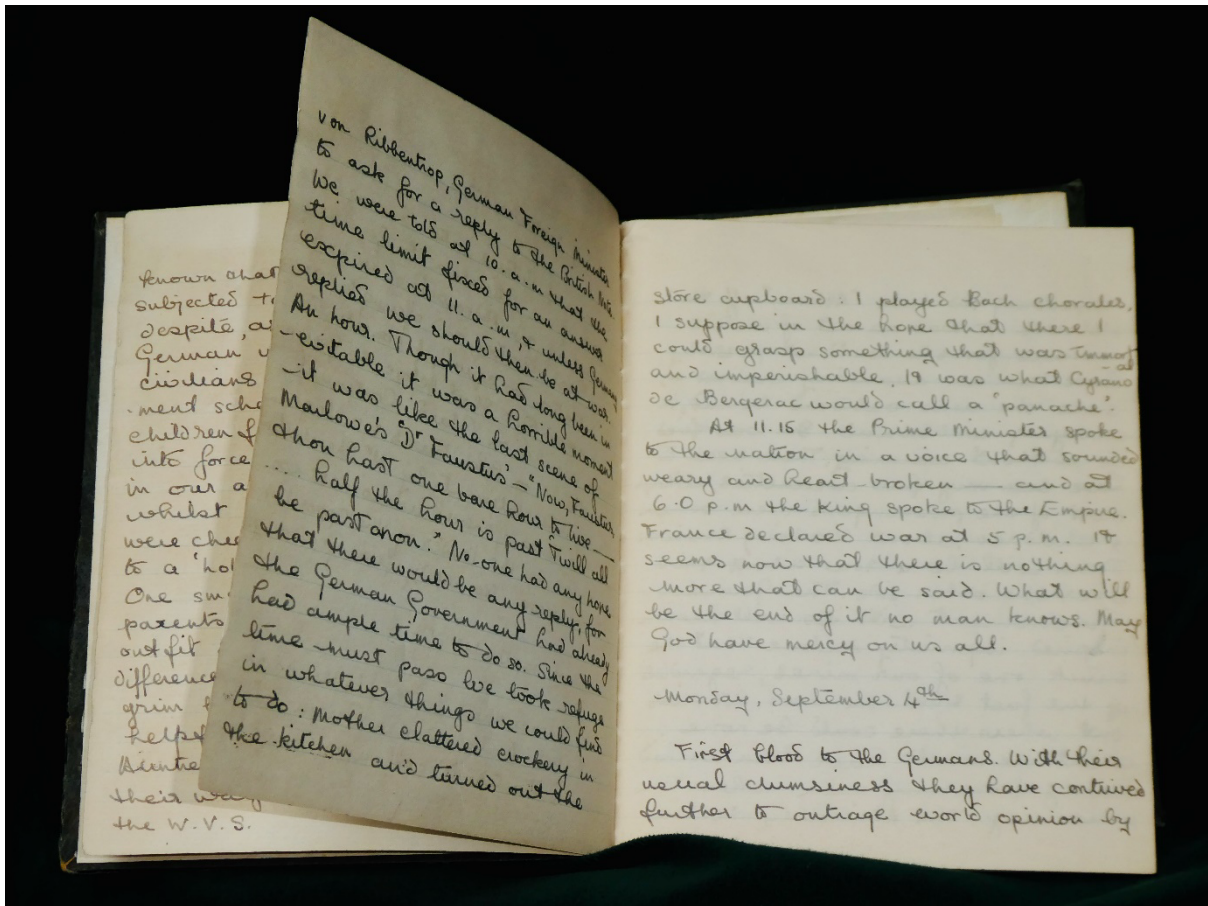


Figure 1: Lorna Lloyd's handwritten war diary<sup>72</sup>

The diary entries are also accessible in two digitised formats:

- a Blipfoto journal entitled *LornaL* set up by Hall in 2019 (481 posts in total, including the 106 diary entries)

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2615746887600312286>

- an eight-episode podcast series entitled *Diary of the war* produced in 2022 as part of *P2P* (total duration 3 hours)

Another three versions of the entries were created over the course of the work to bring Lloyd’s writing to a wider audience. The characteristics of all six versions of the archive are summarised in Table 1, with links to online content where applicable.

<b>Version</b>	<b>Creation date</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Created by</b>	<b>Publicly available location</b>
1	1 September 1939 to 4 January 1941	Hand-written war diary entries in an exercise book	Lorna Lloyd	On display at the Malvern Museum of Local History <a href="https://malvernmuseum.co.uk">https://malvernmuseum.co.uk</a>
2	Summer 2019	Single word-processed file: transcription of content of Version 1	Jonathan Lloyd, nephew of Lorna Lloyd	Not applicable

3	31 August 2019 to 11 January 2021	Individual entries in the <i>LornaL</i> Blipfoto journal: generated from Version 2 with corrections to errors in the transcription, and inclusion of writing in French plus its translation	Anonymously by Hall	<a href="http://blipfoto.com/lornal">http://blipfoto.com/lornal</a>
4	February 2022	Single word- processed file: generated from Version <i>3 for P2P</i>	Tim Read, great-nephew of Lorna Lloyd	Not applicable

5	February 2022 (as part of P2P project)	Single word-processed file in script format: generated from Version 4 for P2P	Ryan	Not applicable
6	May to July 2022	Podcast episodes: sound recordings of content of Version 5 for P2P	Student sound team led by McGregor with four presenters	Various platforms including Apple podcasts <a href="https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/diary-of-the-war/">https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/diary-of-the-war/</a> , and RSS <a href="https://rss.com/podcasts/lornaLloyd/">https://rss.com/podcasts/lornaLloyd/</a>

**Table 1: The six versions of the war diary entries**

The focus of this study are the two publicly available digital versions of the archive highlighted in Table 1: (a) version 3 created independently by Hall; (b) version 6 produced by the *P2P* project team with the support of AHRC funding. Our means of presenting Lloyd’s war diary entries in each of these two formats is outlined below.

### 3.2 Presentation of the archive material as text and images in the *LornaL* Blipfoto journal

Blipfoto is a photo-sharing service that allows individuals ('blippers') to upload photos and text on a daily basis to a personal journal (to 'blip'). For blippers, blipping is a means of curating a record of their lives. The standard use of the site is to post a single photograph taken on the day in question to represent that day as a whole. There is also the option to add text beneath the photograph. This may describe the photograph itself and/or the day that has just passed.

When Hall first saw the exercise book of Lloyd's war diary entries in July 2019, she recognised an opportunity to bring the work of a talented young writer to a larger audience by using the Blipfoto platform in an innovative way. The daily photograph would be a picture of a diary entry (or part of one, if the entry covered more than one page of the exercise book), and the text beneath it a transcription of the full diary entry for that date. Where necessary, pointers to further information could be included in footnotes to the text. The date of upload for each entry in a journal named *LornaL* would correspond to that of the diary entry written exactly 80 years earlier. As Lloyd's proxy blipper, Hall started posting anonymously in the *LornaL* journal on 1 September 2019. Since then, the journal has attracted 175,024 views on Blipfoto (28 March 2024).

As illustration, the diary entry in the *LornaL* journal for 11 September 1940 posted to Blipfoto exactly eighty years later, reads:

Last night the attack on London was not so heavy owing to a new technique with anti-aircraft guns and predictors. Many of the enemy raiders did not get through. Theo predicted something like this. O God may it be soon that we beat them off altogether.

I forget which day it was between this and the last entry in this diary that we were bombed. Fortunately no-one was hurt and the concussion was not particularly awe-inspiring, but then they were only small bombs.

I was practically asleep so I did not hear the worst. All I remember is a series of thuds which made the dog bark furiously. I clutched her while remarking fatuously 'Keep your seats please', which happens to be the title of one of George Formby's films.

We have been sleeping in the dining room for a long time now as the noise of aircraft – ours and theirs buzzing about overhead – is too irritating.

89 planes downed yesterday.

*(September 11<sup>th</sup> 1940)<sup>73</sup>*

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<sup>73</sup> *September 11th 1940* <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2750997855031265134>

Footnotes to this entry include an explanation that Theo is Lloyd's brother, a link to an eye-witness account of the bombing of Malvern on 4 September 1940, and a link to the Wikipedia entry about *Keep your seats please*.

Blipfoto also enables blippers to correspond with one another through the public posting of comments on journal entries. For example, reactions to the *LornaL* journal entry cited above include:

I do enjoy all Lorna's commentaries. The history books seldom give such insights.

(JohnD)

I like the way that she casually says that they are sleeping in the dining room, as if it was a fairly insignificant matter when dealing with nighttime noises.

(walkingMarj)

Thank you for this journal. I think that you are filling a lot of empty spaces in people's lives. We use Lorna's story to act as a stand-in for the stories we never got from our own loved ones.

(Joyful)

On several dates between 1 September 1939 and 4 January 1941, Lloyd did not write in her diary. At first, Hall sourced family photographs and artwork by Lloyd to bridge the gap from one Blipfoto post to the next. In the third month of the exercise however, a donation of

additional material from the Lloyd family made it possible to post a photograph to the Blipfoto journal *every* day whenever there was a gap in the reporting of the war. Examples are given in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

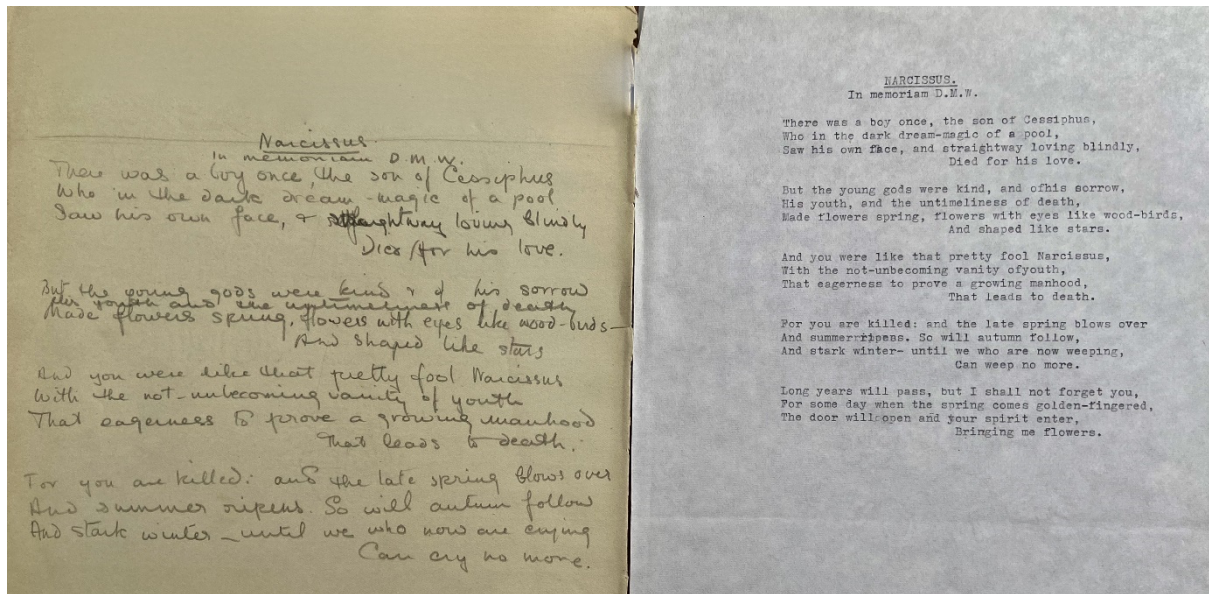


Figure 2: Sample of Lloyd's poetry<sup>74</sup>

These artefacts related to Lloyd's life comprise:

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2713317883613547817>



- other samples of her writing such as plays, an entire novel, and poetry (Figure 2 displays a poem for her young step-cousin RAF pilot Denis Moss Weston, killed aged 21 on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1941<sup>75</sup>);
- artwork by Lloyd (see Figure 3), including costume designs for theatrical performances at Girton in the 1930s;
- family photographs;
- ephemera about/by the wider family.

Much of the latter was assembled by Lloyd's father in scrapbook annuals. Inside these he pasted reports of family activities, press cuttings concerning family members, souvenirs of trips and events, school reports, and letters. To put these Blipfoto posts into context, Hall provided text beneath the photographs of this additional material. For example, Lloyd's writing is transcribed and dated (where possible), and details of the subjects of her artwork noted. Similarly, photographs are labelled with locations, names, and dates. These non-diary Blipfoto entries furnish two additional narratives within the *LornaL* journal that run alongside the 'main plot' on the progress of the Second World War.

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<sup>75</sup> Lloyd herself died just a few months after composing this poem. Her family chose to bury her very close to Weston's grave in Malvern Wells Cemetery. See <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2974377361794928636>.



Figure 3: Sample of Lloyd's artwork<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2669472495806975777>

The first comprises an emerging story of the Lloyd family history, pieced together by the proxy blipper as she makes sense of the activities of Lloyd and her relations from the clues in the ephemera in the larger archive. Effectively this gives Lloyd and her family members a backstory. For example: a letter pasted in one of the annuals from Lloyd's father to his mother (Lloyd's grandmother) about his daughter's Cambridge interview reports Lloyd's disappointment at the architecture of Girton; several labelled photographs taken in Cornwall chart the family tradition of taking holidays there from 1884 onwards. A sample photograph is presented in Figure 4. Taken in summer 1924, it pictures ten-year-old Lloyd with her parents and the family dog.



**Figure 4: Sample Lloyd family photograph (1924)<sup>77</sup>**

A second ‘live’ storyline for the readership of the *LornaL* journal focuses on Hall’s efforts to discover more about Lloyd and her family through the interrogation of the ephemera and other sources such as UK census records. Here readers follow the processes that Hall undertakes to create the Lloyd family history narrative described above. For example, *LornaL* journal readers can observe Hall’s struggles to name people in old photographs and share her joy when she is successful, as evidenced in comments on the posts. At the time, displaying

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2724274288659005516>

the work ‘behind the scenes’ in constructing the archive of online text and images added interest to the work of the proxy blipper, as well as entertained the daily readership of the journal.

### **3.3 Presentation of the archive as audio files in the *Diary of the war* podcast series:**

#### **Phase 1 of *P2P***

By the time Hall had posted the last entry to the *LornaL* journal, there was obvious appetite amongst the Blipfoto community to access the war diary in a different format, with especially strong support for its adaptation as a performance. The opportunity to respond to this came when the AHRC Creative Informatics Programme<sup>78</sup> made a call for small-scale projects to be undertaken in 2022. Proposals were invited for research with the potential to unlock value from digitised heritage content through online performance. Those that offered the opportunity for students and other external partners to contribute to the work of academic project teams were particularly welcomed.

The project team won funding for a project that comprised two phases: (1) creation of a multi-faceted sound archive centred on Lloyd’s war diary entries, supplemented with contemporaneous news content, to include material from the BBC Archive; (2) evaluation of engagement with the resulting narrative non-fiction podcast series. In addition, a second Blipfoto journal *LornaLPodcast*<sup>79</sup> was created to document the project, and secure the

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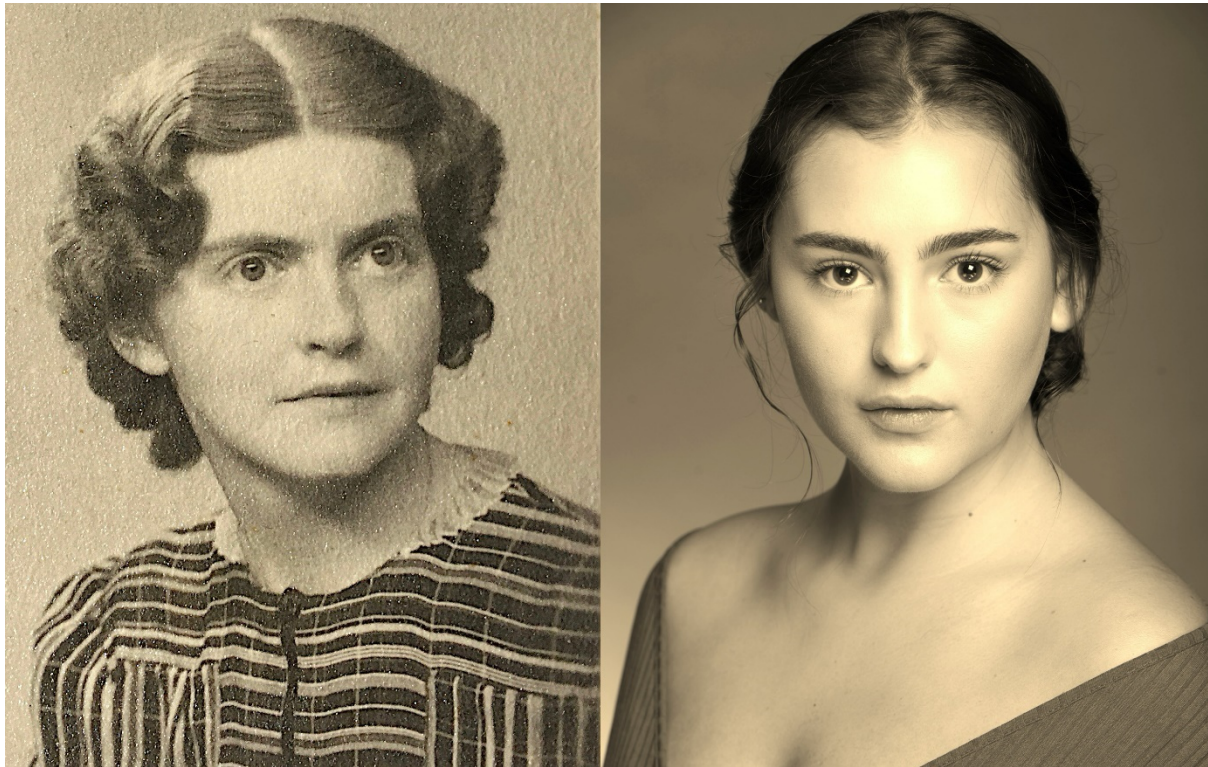
<sup>78</sup> AHRC code CI: AH/S002782/1

<sup>79</sup> <http://blipfoto.com/lornalpodcast>

engagement of Lloyd's original audience of blippers at *LornaL* in it until July 2023. In effect, the work to create the podcast series would take advantage of the format to reveal a 'hidden history' as described in the literature review above.

*P2P* was supported by project partners at the BBC, the British Library, and the Malvern Museum of Local History. A project board was also formed, comprising members of the project team plus four others not directly involved in the creation of the podcast series. The 'external' board members were a representative of the Blipfoto community, a member of the Lloyd family with interests in archives and genealogy, a sound production professional, and a digital scholarship librarian.

Phase 1 began on the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lloyd's death on 2 February 2022. Four people were recruited to play the main roles in the series using the script generated by the project team: Bethany Ray as Lloyd (see Figure 5); David Monteath as Lloyd's brother Theo; Richard Godden as the newsreader; and Katherine Stephen as the announcer. All four are experienced performers, with Ray and Monteath holding formal qualifications in acting. From a methods perspective, the inclusion of Ray in the project added a novel dimension to the delivery of *P2P*. Not only is Ray Lloyd's great-great niece, but she also turned 25 in 2022, the same age as Lloyd when she started writing her war diary. Thus, the project involved a living relative in the co-construction of historical research, whose gender and age were entirely appropriate to participation.



**Figure 5: Lorna Lloyd and her great-great niece Bethany Ray<sup>80</sup>**

The other main set of personnel involved in phase 1 of *P2P* were five third year undergraduate students from Edinburgh Napier University: sound designers Alex Gencs, David Graham, James McLachlan, and Andreas Peter, and software engineer Michael Suttie. Under the supervision of McGregor and Ryan, the sound engineers recorded the ‘new’ material voice-acted by Ray, Godden, and Monteath, plus Stephens’ announcements at the start and end of each episode. The student team members then interwove over 400 new sound files with the existing BBC broadcast material to create episodes of *Diary of the war*. Suttie

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<sup>80</sup> [https://hazelhall.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/lorna\\_bethany.jpeg](https://hazelhall.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/lorna_bethany.jpeg)

was also responsible with Ryan for technical aspects of making the episodes publicly available as sound files for the listening audience to download. Further to the eight episodes of *Diary of the war*, the student team recorded four bonus episodes for the podcast series. In these Ray performs some of Lloyd's poetry. The extent of collaborative activity in this project is in line with that described in earlier reports of podcasting projects as noted above. Without the internal and external partnerships outlined here, it would have been impossible to create the podcast series.

As the primary output of *P2P*, the *Diary of the war* podcast series combines naturalistic 'tranche de vie' or 'slice-of-life' performance of the type described by McHugh<sup>81</sup> and Salvati<sup>82</sup> with contemporaneous reporting. The wartime narrative stems from three perspectives. First, Lloyd's diary entries give first-hand personal reflections on particular events. Second, the narrated print media excerpts chart and record reactions to the same events, mainly at local and regional levels. Finally, the national perspective is provided through the inclusion of BBC content and some national press reports. The BBC material takes the form of original radio news broadcasts, and scripts of BBC news bulletins narrated by Godden in cases where the content no longer exists as original sound files. Colleagues at the BBC Archive also provided a segment of César Franck's *Symphony in D minor* for the

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<sup>81</sup> McHugh, S. (2018). 'Memoir for your ears'.

<sup>82</sup> Salvati, 'Podcasting the past'.



theme tune to the podcast series. This selection was prompted by Lloyd's diary entry of 14 June 1940, which records the fall of Paris:

I shall never forget the BBC's courageous and inspiring music of Sibelius' *First symphony* and the whole of Cesar Franck's *D minor*. These the enemy can never take away, but I feel as if something inside me is dying.

(June 14<sup>th</sup> 1940)<sup>83</sup>

To date the podcast episodes have been downloaded 2483 times (28 March 2024).

The other main outputs of *P2P* are the *LornaLPodcast* Blipfoto journal, the podcast series launch event<sup>84</sup> held at Great Malvern Priory on 24 May 2022, and the publication of a selection of Lloyd's poetry.<sup>85</sup>

*LornaLPodcast* charts the progress project phases, including production of the podcast series, arrangements for the podcast series launch, and calls for participation in the empirical study

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<sup>83</sup> June 14<sup>th</sup> 1940 <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2718781809293787387>

<sup>84</sup> See <https://hazelhall.org/2022/06/18/lorna-lloyds-diary-of-the-war-podcast-series-launch-event-review-and-resources/>

<sup>85</sup> B. Ryan and H. Hall (eds). Selected poems: Lorna Lloyd. Edinburgh. 2022, 978-1-3999-2417-7. <https://www.napier.ac.uk/-/media/worktribe/output-2877394/selected-poems-lorna-lloyd.ashx>.

completed in phase 2. Between July 2022 and July 2023, it also served as a platform for blippers to contribute to a photographic extension of *P2P*. Over the course of twelve months, they submitted photographs by email to the project team of, or representing, locations mentioned in the war diary. The pictures were then posted to *LornaLPodcast* journal, with links to the diary entry blips featured in the *LornaL* journal, and to relevant episodes of the podcast series.

#### **4 The empirical study: Phase 2 of *P2P***

In the second month of *P2P* we began preparations for the empirical study on audience engagement with digital archives. First, we secured ethical approval from Edinburgh Napier University for a series of interviews.

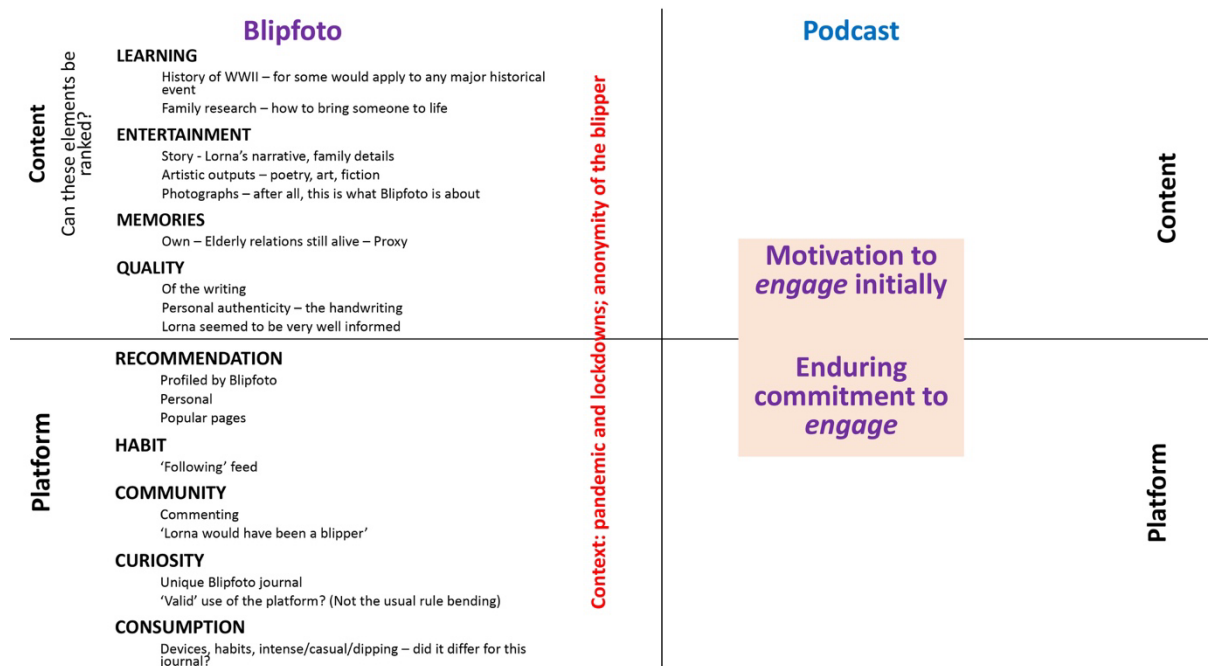
A grounded approach was adopted for the empirical work. This started with a review of comments left by blippers on the *LornaL* journal entries, and Hall's analysis of the comments left in response to her own Blipfoto journal entry on 10 January 2021, i.e. the date that she unmasked herself as Lloyd's proxy blipper.<sup>86</sup> Discussions between Hall and Wilson of the emergent themes from this exercise formed the basis for scoping interviews with three blippers known to have followed the development of the *LornaL* journal from 2019 to 2021. We were interested in these informants' initial motivations to engage with the content of the journal, and their enduring commitment to follow it. The data collected in this exercise,

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<sup>86</sup> *My secret recreational project revealed!*

<https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2794886070787903258>

thematically summarised according to content and platform in the left hand segments of Figure 6, informed the design of the semi-structured interviews for the main data collection exercise.



**Figure 6: Output of the scoping exercise**

Following our call for study participants on Blipfoto on 7 April 2022, we recruited nine people to take part in online interviews. The selection criteria were familiarity with the content of the *LornaL* journal, commitment to listen to all eight podcast episodes of *Diary of the war* as soon as they were made available, and willingness to be interviewed twice on engagement with the archive.

The first series of interviews took place prior to the release of the podcast series. In these Ryan and Hall questioned interviewees about their experiences of looking at the digitised

images, and reading the text, in the *LornaL* Blipfoto journal published between 2019 and 2021. The second set of interviews took place after the participants had listened to the war diary podcast episodes. Here we focused on the interviewees' consumption of the audio version of the war diary archive in 2022, and comparisons of this experience with their first encounter with the archive of Lloyd's work on Blipfoto.

The first of the eighteen interviews took place on 29 April 2022, and the last on 21 June 2022. We used Teams as the platform for most of them (14) and Zoom for the others (4). The average interview length was 40 minutes (range 23-57 minutes). To protect the anonymity of interviewees, we assigned them pseudonyms of Alex, Chris, Frankie, Kim, Nicky, Pat, Rowan, Sandy, and Sam.

We transcribed all interview content verbatim for data analysis. This task was split between a professional transcriber, who generated Word files of ten interviews directly from the recordings, and Ryan, who reviewed and corrected the output of the video conferencing software's auto-transcription functions for eight interviews.

The most valuable data for comparisons of engagement were generated in the 'after' interviews when we asked the interviewees two broad open questions:

- (1) What has been your experience of engaging with the archives of Lorna Lloyd's work as a set of audio files alongside the contemporaneous news content?
- (2) How does this compare with viewing her work on the Blipfoto website?

We used prompts with each question. These covered the topics of:

- podcasting as a possible medium for entertainment and/or learning.
- the ‘performance’ of archive content.
- content differences between the two digitised presentations of the archive of Lloyd’s work, taking into account that only her commentary on living through the war is identical in each (see Table 2: Content of *LornaL* Blipfoto journal and *Diary of the war*).
- affordances of the two digital content delivery platforms.
- the wider current-day context of the time at which the interviewees consumed each version of the archive.

The latter prompt recognised that most entries in the *LornaL* journal were posted during COVID19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, and the podcast series made available not long after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. We also invited the interviewees to share any additional thoughts with us, especially those believed relevant to our study of audience engagement with archives in different digitised formats.

Content	Blipfoto	Podcast series
Lloyd’s commentary on living through the war	x	x
Poetry by Lloyd	x	Limited: bonus episodes

Samples of other writing by Lloyd	x	
Samples of Lloyd's artwork	x	
Outputs by other family members	x	Limited: episode 8
Family photographs	x	
Emerging storyline of family history	x	
Narrative of assembling family history	x	
Audience comments	x	
Footnotes e.g. explanations of references, links to further information	x	
Print news of the war: local, regional, national		x
Broadcast news of the war: national		x
Music enjoyed by Lloyd		x

**Table 2: Content of *LornaL* Blipfoto journal and *Diary of the war***

Ryan and Hall manually performed thematic analysis of the interview data. The themes identified for the interview prompts served as initial codes. These were supplemented as additional codes emerged through detailed review of the interview data. Consideration of the fully-coded data set allowed for the identification of findings.

As is the case with all small-scale case studies, the most obvious limitation of this research is sample size and the extent to which the findings related below are representative of the whole

population that has read the *LornaL* Blipfoto journal and listened to the podcast series. Added to this, the three interviewees invited to take part in the first phase of the empirical work were contacted because it was known that they had strong interests in the *LornaL* journal.

Similarly, the nine interviewees in phase 2 were self-selecting and would probably not have come forward had they not already felt an affinity with Lloyd and her work. It is recognised that it would have been valuable to interview audience members who encountered Lloyd first through the podcast series, and then accessed the Blipfoto journal afterwards. However, this was not possible due to time constraints, and other practical difficulties as noted in the literature review above, such as knowing the identity of those who download *Diary of the war*. Inferences drawn from the findings as discussed below must be made with these limitations in mind.

## **5 Findings**

Below we present our detailed findings on the reception of the podcast series and the main cognitive, emotional, and affective responses to it, drawing comparisons with the *LornaL* Blipfoto journal. These are considered according to six themes: (1) entertainment; (2) learning; (3) emotion; (4) flexibility for consumption; (5) access to contextual information; and (6) authenticity. This reveals that the interviewees exhibited greater levels of engagement with the archive in audio format in respect of the first four themes. The Blipfoto journal was more successful in maintaining audience interest in, attention to, and participation with the archived material with respect to themes 5 and 6.

## 5.1 Engagement through entertainment

The interviewees were enthusiastic about the translation of the war diary entries into podcast format. They complimented the highly polished, professional end product, drawing attention to the techniques deployed by the production team. For example, Frankie, who considered the podcast series ‘a tremendous translation into audio’, admired the handling of diary text in French, noting that the technique of overlaying an English translation over the French words sounded just like it would in a BBC Radio 4<sup>87</sup> broadcast.

The interviewees found that listening to a curated story that offers humour, intrigue and drama is more entertaining than reading entries in a Blipfoto journal. Rowan said:

[It is] very entertaining because [of] the dimension of the audio... the different sources, coming together.

(Rowan)

Key to the entertainment value is the vitality of an audio presentation. The combination of a variety of voices, including those presenting the wartime news, contributes much to this. One interviewee argued that the news content makes the audio presentation ‘much more vivid’ (Nicky); another noted that ‘the BBC Archive material really [brings the story] to life... It just [makes] it so present’ (Frankie). Pat admired script-writing that allows for mention of a news

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<sup>87</sup> The BBC’s main speech radio station.



broadcast that Lloyd listened to herself to be followed immediately by the actual audio file from the BBC Archive.

The interviewees were also of the opinion that the podcast series charts the progress of the war much better as a sustained narrative than does the Blipfoto version. Chris, for example, noted:

[It's] curated, edited and made into a cohesive story... The Blipfoto [version doesn't] get such continuity.

(Chris)

The *LornaL* Blipfoto journal is lacking in this respect because the war diary entries are interspersed with other unrelated material wherever there is a gap in the diarist's reporting.

## **5.2 Engagement through learning**

As well as considering the podcast series a more entertaining way to consume Lloyd's war diary, the interviewees also judged the audio version more favourably as a learning experience. This is largely due to the inclusion of the news items that relate directly to Lloyd's testimony. These contextualise Lloyd's words, especially in cases when audience members today are able to consume exactly the same material as Lloyd did eight decades ago. Pat offered an example of this from Episode 1 of the podcast series:

She's saying, 'Oh today... they announced the war' and then... the Prime Minister announcing the war [comes next].

(Pat)

A number of other affordances of the news items were identified: they lend breadth to Lloyd's story (Rowan); they create a sense of immediacy in the narrative (Chris); and they present a story of the war as it unfolds in 'a real timeline' (Rowan). Frankie also proposed that inclusion of the news items may encourage listeners to undertake further independent research on particular events, thus prompting them to enhance their learning further.

The cohesion of the 'story' in the podcast series also renders it a 'convenient' medium for learning. For example, Sam admitted 'I probably learnt more from the podcast because it was all there'. The contrast here is with two facets of the *LornaL Blipfoto* journal. First is the interrupted reporting of the war in the Blipfoto journal entries due to the gaps between diary entries. Second is the need to leave Blipfoto to visit the websites referenced in the annotations to discover more about the events to which Lloyd refers.

### **5.3 The role of emotion in engagement**

The podcast series prompts a greater emotional response to the war diary content than does the Blipfoto version. Frankie, for example, described it as 'really moving' and a 'demanding experience emotionally'. According to the analysis, this is due to: (1) a sense of immediacy in the delivery of the content; (2) knowledge of the personal connection between the lead actor and Lloyd; and (3) parallels drawn between the course of the early months of the Second

World War and live conflicts in the twenty-first century. Each of these factors is considered below.

Further to rendering the archive more entertaining and a better learning experience, the progress of the war in a single focused narrative in the podcast series forges ‘a bigger emotional connection [to the entries than when] interspersed with other things’ (Chris). It is notable that even though the interviewees were already familiar with the tragic content of the war diary, and its devastating conclusion, it still hit them hard when they approached the end of the podcast series. This is illustrated in Rowan’s report of reaching the climax of episode 8:

It was quite a shock when the diary ended, and the next thing [is] the letter from Theo... There didn’t seem to be any warning of that. It came as a bit of a shock even though I’d actually [already] read it in all the blip stuff... It had the desired effect... ‘Oh no!’

(Rowan)

Knowledge of the family link between the main performer also deepens the emotional engagement with the podcast series content. As Pat explained:

[Bethany Ray as Lorna Lloyd] adds to [the podcast series]... in terms of emotional impact [because] she is reading the words of her relation.

(Pat)

The strongest emotional responses to the podcast series, however, relate to recognition of contemporary parallels between the reporting of the Second World War and current conflicts. The timing of the empirical study coincided with extensive news coverage of the conflict in Ukraine following Russia's aggression on 24 February 2022. Furthermore, consequences of this action, such as the displacement of Ukrainian people fleeing the war, were attracting much press attention. This made the podcast series a difficult listen for the interviewees. Frankie, for example, regretted that 'this is all happening again'.

Four interviewees remarked on the ease with which the names of countries and people could be switched to tell the same story of conflict. One was Nicky, who explained:

It's so much harder [to listen]... because we are in a similar situation... If you changed the words slightly, it could [be] contemporary... If we made Germany Russia, and made Finland Ukraine... We are dealing with [accommodating displaced people] *today*.

(Nicky)

In a similar way, Sam matched Hitler with Putin, and was prompted by Lloyd's words to consider the plight of the Ukrainians:

I was thinking about some the things that she [says] about Hitler... and drawing parallels with Putin's behaviour... how the Ukrainians must be feeling.

(Sam)

Pat's emotional response extended to prompting further independent reflection on the events of first half of 2022:

Ukraine makes me emotional. It made me think afresh about [the invasion] when I listened to the podcast.

(Pat)

#### **5.4 Flexibility for consumption of the podcast series**

In one further respect, the podcast series of *Diary of the war* was considered by the interviewees to be superior to the Blipfoto version: it offers greater options for engagement than does the *LornaL* journal. The interviewees enjoyed the flexibility of the podcast format, especially for 'passive' consumption of content when 'on the go'. Pat, for example, listed other activities that can be combined with listening to podcast episodes such as walking, cooking, and gardening. The interviewees also remarked that between September 2019 and January 2021 subscribers to the *LornaL* Blipfoto journal were forced to be patient while waiting for each 'new' war diary entry to be made available. In contrast, there is the option of binge-listening the whole podcast series. Sandy exclaimed enthusiastically:

Wow, you can have the whole thing in one hit?!...Being able to listen to it [all in one go] is like starting a really good book. You [can] keep going.

(Sandy)

It was also noted that audio content is more accessible to potential audiences that suffer from poor vision or low levels of literacy than that made available as text and images:

[The podcast can also be useful] if you've got visual or reading difficulties or you just like listening to things.

(Alex)

In just one respect did the interviewees identify that the Blipfoto version of the archive offers greater flexibility for consumption than the podcast series. This is ease of cross-referencing. Using the links and annotations in the Blipfoto journal entries provided by Hall, readers can navigate directly to specific points elsewhere in Lloyd's war diary. For example, the last five words in the sentence 'Germany has been massing troops on the frontiers of Holland and Belgium – a move which I predicted two months ago'<sup>88</sup> are hyper-linked to Lloyd's prediction in an earlier war diary entry: 'I foresee the invasion of Belgium and Luxemburg

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<sup>88</sup> *November 9th 1939* <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2639982956315149808>

even Holland in order to get at us and France, and turn the flank of the Maginot Line'.<sup>89</sup> Alex appreciated this affordance for engagement in the *LornaL* journal on Blipfoto:

I found it really interesting when [Lloyd writes reflectively about earlier diary entries] and [says] 'What I said then was rubbish' ... You can't go back and listen to the podcasts so easily, whereas you can go back and read that blip.

(Alex)

### 5.5 Contextual information and the podcast series

Here we turn to two ways in which the Blipfoto version might be considered superior to the podcast series in terms of engagement, as evidenced in our analysis of the interview data.

The first relates to content that is available in the first presentation of the digitised archive on Blipfoto but missing from the second in the podcast series. In the words of Frankie, without the storyline of family history present in *LornaL* 'You don't quite get a rounded picture'. All that listeners can glean about Lloyd and her family from the sound files comes directly from the diary entries. This is because in the audio version the archive of Lloyd's writing is left to speak for itself (through Ray's interpretation of her role). The interviewees inferred that greater contextual information in the podcast episodes would aid audience comprehension of

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<sup>89</sup> *September 21st 1939* <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2621987602651156073>

the material presented. For instance, on occasion Lloyd mentions her brother Theo. An early example of this reads:

We heard from Theo, which made this a gala day. He is somewhere in  
Lincolnshire, very short of sleep, but otherwise OK.

*(September 7<sup>th</sup> 1939)*<sup>90</sup>

A footnote beneath the transcription of this text on Blipfoto explains the relationship of brother and sister. In contrast, there is no indication of Theo's identity in episode 1 of the podcast series. Alex pointed out the difficulties that this can cause a listenership unfamiliar with the earlier online presentation of the war diary:

If I was listening to the podcasts without having read the blip [I would be]  
wondering 'Who's Theo? You keep talking about Theo!'

(Alex)

One interviewee missed a further aspect of the experience of engaging with the archive on Blipfoto journal that cannot be easily replicated when listening to a podcast series. This is a

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<sup>90</sup> *September 7th 1939* <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2616912473856410289>



sense of consuming the war diary entries alongside others as a member of a community of readers. Frankie explained:

I know [the comments] were short and largely just enthusing, but I missed the sense of the [other] readers.

(Frankie)

This remark hints at a further narrative within the *LornaL* journal developed as the blippers commented on the individual posts between 2019 and 2021. This ‘live’ commentary on the main plot of Lloyd’s chronicle of the war joins the sub-plots of (1) the emerging story of Lorna Lloyd and her relations, and (2) the account of Hall’s practical efforts to piece together the family history.

## **5.6 Authenticity of the podcast series**

The second way in which the Blipfoto version of the archive might be considered superior to the audio version relates to authenticity. We make this suggestion on the basis that most interviewees who expressed a firm opinion on the topic of authenticity (four out of seven), declared that the *LornaL* journal feels more authentic. Key here are the images of Lloyd’s own hand-writing visible on Blipfoto, which give more direct access to the diary. The detail on curating the archive and editorial commentary, including the provision of further references and news of the proxy blipper’s quest to amplify the war diary entries, adds to this. For example, Alex liked to be ‘able to see the photo of the diary [entries], and to know that it [is] an exact transcript, and to have the extra references... and to know people are doing extra research around it’.

It should be noted, however, that the interviewees did not question the authenticity of the podcast series. Indeed, authenticity was also regarded as an important part of the listening experience. The selection of news content for the podcast series that is directly tied to Lloyd's writing about the same events (as discussed above in respect of entertainment and learning) contributes much to this. For example, Kim said that 'The sound design made it sound like you were sitting next to a 1940s radio'. The use of several voices (also considered above for its value to entertainment) also lends authenticity to the podcast episodes. For example, Rowan said 'It's the voices that [make] it real for me'. Sam's distinction between 'voice' in the act of reading and that when listening to sound files adds a further dimension to this line of argument:

When you are reading on screen, you're reading it in your own voice. You're not really getting a feeling for how exactly things were said... I found it much more helpful to have the different voices so that I could relate to it a bit more.

(Sam)

The greatest contributing factor to the sense of authenticity of the podcast episodes, however, is the casting of Bethany Ray as Lloyd. The versatility of Ray's acting contributes much here, as noted by Frankie:

She's got several voices... young woman, the very indignant young woman... the creative person... and the very educated one.

(Frankie)

Kim admired the way that Ray used her voice to convey a range of emotions as Lloyd, and the advantages of hearing this over reading the written word:

Anger or distrust in Lorna's voice [is] actually much better than you could demonstrate... on a written page.

(Kim)

The accent that Ray adopted in the podcast series is an important element to a 'true' portrayal of Lloyd as a middle-class woman from the 1930/40s. For example, Nicky argued that the accent helps convince the listener that a real person is speaking about her life in real time (albeit at a distance of eight decades), rather than a contemporary commentator relating details about someone who lived in the past:

It [is] just right in making you think 'This is someone from that time talking about their life', rather than '[This is] someone from now talking about somebody who lived [during the Second World War]'.

(Nicky)

All the interviewees were aware of the family connection between Ray and Lloyd. Apart from deepening the emotional impact of the podcast series to a degree (as noted above), this was not considered essential to generate a sense of authenticity. So, while the interviewees considered the link 'quite special' (Sandy), 'an absolute bonus' (Chris) 'interesting' (Alex), and 'neat' and a 'nice thing' (Rowan), they argued that Ray's age is more important to an

authentic portrayal of Lloyd than her relationship to her great-great aunt. This is simply because a young woman is expected to speak with an age-appropriate voice:

It [is] really important that [Ray] [is] a similar age [to Lorna] giving the drama authenticity and immediacy.

(Chris)

Five of the nine interviewees noted that they were very convinced by Ray's performance:

You could almost, genuinely, hear Lorna.

(Sandy)

It could have so easily been Lorna speaking.

(Chris)

For Frankie and Sam, Ray becomes Lloyd in the podcast episodes:

It just came over as if [Lorna] was talking to you.

(Frankie)

I actually felt... as if I was listening to Lorna.

(Sam)

Kim held the strongest opinion of Ray as Lloyd:

It's all absolutely true as far as I am concerned.

(Kim)

## 6 Discussion

The intention of the empirical study discussed in this article was to establish the ways in which people engage with an archive digitised as a performance in a non-fiction podcast series, and compare this with their engagement with the same core material presented as online text and images.

In the analysis above it has been demonstrated that, in this case, audience members engage enthusiastically with an archive in podcast format. They regard it highly both as a form of entertainment and learning experience, while exhibiting strong emotional engagement with the content. Furthermore, the inherent flexibility for the consumption of audio files while 'on the go' allows the audience to engage with the archive at the same time as carrying out everyday activities. In these respects, the digitised archive in podcast format offers greater affordances for engagement than does its presentation as online text and images. These findings are largely in line with those of others who have sought to establish determinants of podcast engagement, as summarised above.<sup>91</sup> An exception relates to the finding of earlier research that listener engagement is encouraged by a sense of socialisation with other

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<sup>91</sup> For example, McNamara and Min, 'Understanding why educational professionals engage with podcasts'; Sharon, 'Unpeeling the pod'.

listeners<sup>92</sup> and podcast hosts<sup>93</sup>. That this is not the case here is due to the format of *Diary of the war* episodes. A narrative non-fiction podcast series without a host does not lend itself to such levels of interaction.

In two respects the audio version of the digital archive is less engaging than its equivalent as online text and images. First, a platform that presents online text and images offers greater flexibility for the inclusion of background material to accompany the main story related through the archive. This is more difficult to achieve when the archive is cast as a performance with a single, tight narrative. Second, it appears that online text and images convey a slightly stronger sense of authenticity to a reading audience<sup>94</sup> than does digitised audio to an audience that listens. Access to pictures of actual core source material – in this case to the diary entries in Lloyd’s own handwriting – is important here.

Table 3 summarises these conclusions on the facets of engagement on each of the digitised platforms.

<b>Facet of engagement</b>	<b>Online images and text</b>	<b>Audio in podcast format</b>
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<sup>92</sup> For example, McNamara and Min, ‘Understanding why educational professionals engage with podcasts’; Sharon, ‘Unpeeling the pod’.

<sup>93</sup> Tobin and Guadagno, ‘Why people listen: motivations and outcomes of podcast listening’.

<sup>94</sup> It should be borne in mind that the participants in this study were selected because they are part of the Blipfoto community – a reading audience.

Which is more entertaining?		X
Which is the better learning experience?		X
Which prompts a greater emotional response?		X
Which offers more flexibility for consumption?		X
Which gives the fuller picture of the life of the diarist?	X	
Which provides a greater sense of authenticity?	X – just	

**Table 3: Facets of engagement with digitised archives in two formats**

Our analysis suggests that the primary explanatory factor for the opinions on entertainment, learning, and the opportunity to know more about the diarist is the selection of content additional to Lloyd’s diary entries in each digitised version of the archive. In the podcast series, the inclusion of news content anchors Lloyd’s testimony to the present that she shared with the rest of the UK population as they experienced the war. The news content helps drive the strong single narrative in an entertaining and informative way. The preference for this over the jumpy presentation of war diary content in the Blipfoto journal confirms that

narrative simplicity is a determinant of engagement with podcasts.<sup>95</sup> The use of the news also adds a sense of suspense, another engagement factor identified in the literature review<sup>96</sup>.

The sub-plot of the emerging story of the Lloyd family history in the Blipfoto journal connects the diarist to her relations and domestic milieu. Meanwhile the images of examples of her other outputs such as artwork and poetry tell the reader more about her. Thus, a fuller picture of Lloyd's personal context and character emerges. This, however, is at the expense of diluting the narrative of the progress of the war. The additional content fractures the 1939 to 1941 timeline, and also highlights that Lloyd's wartime reporting is sporadic in its later stages.

We propose that the stronger emotional intensity of the podcast episodes is partly due to the intimate and immersive nature of active listening to audio, as has been noted previously.<sup>97</sup> The quality of the audio files that showcase the talents of the lead actor is also important here. Ray is very convincing as Lloyd vocalising her candid 'private' thoughts to the extent that the audience members foster a parasocial relationship with their intimate companion 'Lorna'. This connection is similar to that of twenty-first century podcasters telling their own stories

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<sup>95</sup> Reddy et al. 'Modeling language usage and listener engagement in podcasts'; García-Marín, 'Mapping the factors that determine engagement in podcasting'.

<sup>96</sup> Reddy et al., 'Modeling language usage and listener engagement in podcasts'.

<sup>97</sup> Kell and Gagau, 'New collaborative research on ethnographic collections'.



directly, as identified in the literature on podcasting and journalism.<sup>98</sup> It also fits with earlier research that has identified the importance of parasocial relationships between podcast hosts and their audience members in mediated podcast series,<sup>99</sup> albeit that in this case the ‘host’ is not the author of the writing, but a relative of hers.

It is clear from this analysis that direct access to source material is a key determinant of the authenticity of digitised archives. Further to this, evident curatorial and editorial input is also an important authenticity marker. The work undertaken to assemble the *Diary of the war* podcast series was both demanding and extensive<sup>100</sup>. This ranged from selection of news stories from hundreds of BBC archive wartime broadcasts and news programme scripts, plus a huge range of national, regional and local newspapers (plus poems for the bonus episodes), to decisions on the best place to start and end the narrative in each podcast episode, determination of podcast episode length, and the look and feel of the visual representation of the series online. However, such behind-the-scenes effort is invisible in the audio performance. In contrast, the additional work dedicated to the *LornaL Blipfoto* journal is obvious, particularly in the sub-plot that relates the proxy blipper’s attempts to create Lloyd’s backstory. This lends authority (as well as interest) to the journal, especially when the proxy

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<sup>98</sup> For example, McHugh, ‘Memoir for your ears’.

<sup>99</sup> For example, Sharon, ‘Unpeeling the pod’; Tobin and Guadagno, ‘Why people listen’.

<sup>100</sup> As has been noted by other podcast producers, for example Lombardi and Simas, ‘The Bryant faculty spotlight: how to love your institutional repository’.

blipper exposes her workings to the scrutiny of the *LornaL* journal's readership in real time as she constructs the archive. The apparently unmediated presentation of content (as understood by the audience, even when this is not the case) in a digitised archive presented as performance accounts in part for the weaker sense of authenticity assigned to the podcast series by the interviewees here. The need to present a performance maintains the entertainment value of the work, but this may be at the expense of conveying authenticity, especially for outputs that do not benefit from a recognised institutional provenance such as a well-known museum or archive service.

These observations have implications for future attempts to present archive material per se in podcast format. They raise questions over the means of balancing content and context, and strategies for creating engaging outputs without the risk of diminishing authenticity.

## **7 Conclusion**

In the P2P project we exploited, augmented, and exhibited an existing digital archive in a novel way by transforming it into a narrative non-fiction podcast series as a performance. The findings of our empirical study show that audience members are entertained, learn, and are moved emotionally through listening to high quality audio files that present a cohesive and vivid real-life personal story supported by contemporaneous news material. These findings add to extant knowledge on audience engagement with podcasts focused on cultural heritage collections. In addition, we have brought to the fore the question of how a strong sense of authenticity is conveyed in the presentation of digitised archives, and means of engendering audience trust in the material presented on the selected platforms. Key to this are decisions on

supplementary material to be provided alongside the core archive data set, and the visibility (or not) of curatorial and editorial effort. This contribution has implications for practice in the selection of contextual information to accompany exhibits, and the extent to which archive material should be allowed to ‘speak for itself’.

This valuable contribution to knowledge has been achieved through the unique nature of this study. It stands out as creative and innovative amongst the other contributions on podcasting and cultural heritage – *not* as a case study on the experience of the creation, and/or the use, of a mediated podcast, but instead as an account of audience engagement with an archive presented in a podcast series as a performance. The earlier presentation of the archive on the Blipfoto platform serves as a foil for a worthwhile comparative evaluation to further our understanding of facets of audience engagement with digitised archives and open up new thinking on means of encouraging the general public to interact in more meaningful ways with historical records.