



Episode 1 - Stay Home Stories

Introduction

This is the first podcast in a series of eight exploring how the pandemic has changed our relationship to home, a research project involving museums and universities in London and Liverpool. This first podcast will explore highlights from the Museum of the Home, ‘Stay Home’ Rapid Response collecting initiative, drawing on people’s audio recordings and interviews with museum staff. These themes will be further explored by the wider project team in future podcasts.

I’m Eithne Nightingale, a researcher at Queen Mary University of London, talking to Danielle Pattern and Veronique Belinga from the museum.

Eithne

Danielle, could you tell me what your role is at the Museum of the Home, and your role also in the Stay Home project?

Danielle

I am a curator at the Museum of the Home. I also work collecting objects on our Documenting Homes collection which is collecting people’s stories of home.

Eithne

Great. Veronique, could you tell me what your role is at the museum?

Veronique

I am documentation assistant at the Museum of the Home. My job essentially is to help facilitate the collection, the organisation and preservation of people’s stories of home.

Eithne

Great. So, Danielle, can you tell me why the museum has started collecting material about staying home during the pandemic?

Danielle

The project is a Rapid Response collecting project. We started it in April 2020, just after the lockdown last year, and we really wanted to document how the coronavirus had changed the way we live and to think more about the uncertain future of home.

Eithne

Sounds a really great initiative. So, can you tell me how many people have responded and where they live and what kinds of housing they live in?

Danielle

We’ve had just under 400 people take part in the project so far across the UK. We’ve also had people from across the world, so people from Australia and India, taking part too.

Eithne

What different kinds of homes have people lived in?



Danielle

A whole range – people living in tower blocks, people living in sheltered housing, people living in quite temporary homes, some people living in the house they were born in, but other people have only just moved in, or moving in with a partner. Several different housing situations.

Eithne

What are the different challenges do you think?

Danielle

I think it's completely different and I think quite a lot of the rhetoric around the pandemic was that we're all in it together and I don't think that is really the case. I think someone that's got a lot of space, has a garden, lives in a secure family unit, their experiences can be really different to someone living in sheltered housing, temporary accommodation, potentially with people that they don't know very well.

Eithne

Veronique, maybe you could say what are the things you've found most interesting or even surprising?

Veronique

I think what I found interesting was the new rituals created around the home. So, a lot of people learning new skills, a lot of people getting out of their comfort zone, although they are in their comfort zone. And, yeah, a lot of people thinking about the community around them, whether that be their neighbours, their close family, their extended family. What I appreciate is people being honest about what they're having to do differently from what they know.

Eithne

So how have people used space in their homes differently?

Danielle

Our living rooms are turning into gyms and restaurants and schools and workplaces. So, someone in particular who has mentioned how they've been using their space effectively is Lahuru. So, he lives with his partner and their young child and he's commented that their living room is now the centre of their lives. And they've been working, and they've turned their living room into a hairdresser's at one point. They've been raising their child and then also speaking to family.

Lahuru

This has been turned on its head by the pandemic and by lockdown and our home has now turned into the multi-functional centre of our lives. And we still do most of what we used to do before lockdown, just in a different way. In our open plan living room we work, cook, exercise, play, hang out with friends and relatives, virtually of course, and all in the same space.

Eithne



I found that moving about Gareth who's retired and lives with his stepdaughter and she's the nurse. They've been very careful about safety.

Gareth

She uses the front door; we use the back. She bags her shoes at the door having changed at the hospital. Next, she showers then stays in her room. We put food on the landing. There are wipes and soap everywhere. She usually gets home at 8pm on Thursdays for her own personal street applause.

Eithne

I was also interested in the difference between Rania, who's a student in Tower Hamlets, and she shares a bedroom with her sister, and she is super, super organised.

Rania

I have established a timetable that I did not have before. This was to ensure that I had time to complete all of my assignments for my dissertation and didn't fall into a trap of leaving things too late. But I've kept it up after all of my assignments were finished, just so my days can have some sense of order. I clean a lot more often than I used to; the house is spotless now. I'm learning a new language and ironically like a lot of people, speaking to family and friends more often than I used to.

Eithne

Whereas Julie, who also lives in Tower Hamlets, lives in a maisonette, and she really misses the structure.

Julie

In the beginning I was much more disciplined. I would get up every day at seven and get up, get dressed and do things that were much more like my life before lockdown. So, my habits were pretty much the same as before. More recently I have not been keeping to that – getting up at a certain time, getting up or dressed or even keeping to set-meal times.

Eithne

I think people seem to have responded differently, either they're going to really get this organised or – Julie lives on her own so, you know, I have that feeling too. I live on my own, you know, so it doesn't really matter if the living room's messy, because no one's going to come in.

Danielle

Rania was so interesting when she was saying how she had changed her routine, because of living with her sister, and not having a room to herself.

Rania

In some ways this isn't as difficult as I might have thought. My sister and I run on completely different schedules with her sleeping in much later while I wake up early to work. So, for a good chunk of the day, we still don't actually have to deal with each other. However, small tiffs have led to her purchasing a sleeping mask and me waiting a little later in the morning to open the curtains.



Danielle

I don't think I'd be disciplined enough to get up early for the quiet time.

Eithne

Also, about home deliveries, that's been another real feature. I don't know if you remember Claire who lives on her own in the Yorkshire countryside. She seems to get everything delivered including fish and chips and laundry.

Claire

Anything else that I want I now arrange to get delivered. For instance, on the Friday, I've got my beer delivery arriving. Delivery services didn't exist before now exist. Baker's orders with me apple turnovers. Fish and chip deliveries, would you believe! Today all my beddings going off to a laundry, again being collected. So, it's not that much of a hardship to be honest in that respect.

Eithne

So, what about changing roles, about who takes responsibility for household tasks and care within the home?

Danielle

So, Robin, he talks about the different standards of cleanliness and how it's really coming out and how his wife is always wanting to clean and wanting him to clean.

Robin

I am perfectly happy to clean the toilet, do the washing up, do the cooking, whatever it is, but I don't want to do them as frequently as she does. So, the end result is I say I'm not going to do it because it's not necessary. She says it is, so she ends up doing it. So, it's an unequal division of labour which is something I find awkward. But I am stubborn and arrogant enough not to change my approach because I fundamentally do not see that it is necessary to clean to the extent that she does. So, coronavirus has enhanced and exacerbated that gulf between us.

Eithne

When you're in close quarters 24/7 all sorts of tensions can come out presumably. What about relationships within the home? Veronique, do you want to say about people, whether they are getting on better with each other or whether there are conflicts that naturally or understandably have emerged?

Veronique

People, I guess, who are not used to being at home as much are having to again revisit their relationships whether that be with their parents, their siblings, trying to navigate really hard relationships at home or anywhere else.

Eithne

Are there any examples that you'd like to pick out particularly?



Fran

One participant, called Fran, talks about how just before the pandemic she had moved back in with her parents to study. The pandemic hadn't changed her living situation, but she would have been out much more if it wasn't for the lockdown. And actually, she was really enjoying being able to spend more time with them.

Fran

I recently moved to Gloucester from London to do an MA and so this pandemic has changed everything. I'm like at home a lot with my parents. Then me and my mum every few days, well every other day, are doing weights exercise in our living room. So that's been nice to do that with her. So, my parents are retired, and they do have a routine and that's changed a bit for them because they used to be out of the house a lot, they love walking around. So, during this time I've joined them in a lot of their routine things. So, one thing is that I go round half ten, eleven o'clock it's coffee time. And while the weather's been nice, we go and sit in the garden. And because of the nature of the building, it's a big, shared garden and actually quite a lot of the other residents do that at similar times. So, we're at a safe distance, but we're able to say hello.

Eithne

There was Chantelle, also, who lives in a modern two-bedroom flat in Surrey and she wishes she had an extra bedroom, I think, so her daughters could have one each.

Chantelle

But it has been very frustrating that the girls share a room as there is a three-year age gap and limited space - they clash a lot these days. My ten-year-old daughter, Zoe, is on the spectrum of autism.

Eithne

And then of course Robin, for example, is suffering from terminal cancer so that's stress upon stress it seems to me.

Danielle

Yeah, and he talks really beautifully about being so aware of limited time.

Robin

The most obvious one is the relationship between me and my wife, we are per force almost together for the majority of the day so add in the fact that I've got a terminal illness and I do have periods of frustration and depression, we have many more arguments, usually about petty and stupid things. We shout and scream at each other more than we would otherwise do, although we were doing that anyway but we're doing it more. And I think that's actually very useful, because it's quite cathartic because there's a lot of strain but, you know, I think it's better to do that, much, much better than bottling it all up and not letting off steam. So that's the first thing. Then the relationship with one's family. We are extremely lucky in that of our three children, two of them live within half a mile of where we live and our daughter who has two children, I can hear them downstairs at the moment actually, so I'll get told off talking to you and not being down there.



Danielle

Sorry, send them my apologies.

Robin

They live three streets away, so they have been – the grandchildren are two and four, four to five as Esme likes to say, she's not four, she's four to five. They have been coming regularly, initially standing on the pavement or sitting on the path, on the small front garden while we sit inside on a couple of chairs and maintain social distance. And then latterly, and again before the government – I want to stress it's before the government said we should – I lifted a fence panel at the side of the house and they've been coming into the garden and playing in the garden, which is really nice.

Eithne

So, what about how it's not just relationships within the home that are affected, but it's relationships outside the home?

Lahuru

In a strange way I think even the relationships with our wider circle of friends and extended families, have strengthened because, for the first time ever, everyone was at home at the same time which meant that we could use Zoom, Skype, etc., to virtually spend time with loved loves. In fact, we had a Zoom call with my entire extended family which turned out to be the first time ever that we have all chatted together at the same time.

Veronique

And that just speaks to the sort of pivotal role of technology and the digital world and helping us connect with what's happening outside and around us.

Eithne

And what about Fran, I found that very interesting. The whole issue of dating too, because she just started dating somebody. That's quite complicated.

Fran

Also, before the pandemic I was going up to London and, you know, having dates and meeting people and that's changed quite a lot during this time. I don't really want to do virtual dating so I've kind of avoided it. Although I know a lot of people are.

Danielle

A couple of people have mentioned that they've made a decision early on. Once the lockdown last year was announced, they moved in together and some people had only been dating for a couple of weeks or a month, really forcing people together.

Eithne

And also, I think people really miss grandchildren. You spoke about Robin really missing his grandchildren, but also Gareth. I mean I found his story was terribly moving because they moved out. The stepdaughter is a nurse and her children have moved out to be with their father. And the grandparents really miss their grandchildren, and even moving into the bedroom space to feel near to them. I thought was incredibly moving.



Gareth

We live in Hailsham, it's an extended end of terrace with four bedrooms. It's just the two of us right now. Normally my stepdaughter also lives here with Millie eight, and Oscar five. The absence of the grandchildren echoes everywhere. Their bedrooms are silent, except for the hum of their fish tanks. We sometimes sit in their rooms sending love and hugs.

Eithne

Really moving onto something a bit different. How have religious practises been affected by the pandemic, because certainly a lot of the time synagogues, churches, mosques, temples, have been closed?

Danielle

Yeah, and I think nearly a year on from the pandemic, most festivals, religious festivals, and events have been affected somehow by the pandemic.

Julie

We've been through lots of different experiences during lockdown, like my family, for example, are practising Muslims so people have had to fast and celebrate Eid in social isolation with each other and that was a very strange experience. I managed to spend it with my mum that weekend so that was really nice that she wasn't by herself. But, I think, for a lot of people it's been a very odd experience having to connect with people differently during a really important time.

Danielle

And also, I think because other traditional places of worship have been closed, people have looked elsewhere, so more into the community. Robin speaks about the street coming together and he lives on a street where there are many people practising different faiths and how certain kind of leaders of certain faiths have come together.

Robin

There was also on Sunday, and this doesn't involve me because I'm an atheist, every Sunday, the last one was this Sunday and I think they're breaking up now because places of worship are opening up, they used to have a multi-faith get together at eleven o'clock on a Sunday in the street. There's one family who are Sikh, there's one family who are Muslim and there are a lot of Christians, Christians of various brands and somebody said, 'Why don't we get together because we can't go to church or the mosque or the gurdwaras?' so they did.

Eithne

I actually love the story of Lucy who lives with her husband and five-year-old son in Putney and who's Catholic and actually has found a way of involving her five-year-old son.

Lucy

And then we've also been doing a sort of mock mass with my five-year-old, my mum joins us virtually. On occasion my little boy has got dressed up as a priest, he makes an altar, she makes an altar and we structure it and sing, and it's the most incredible bonding experience. And I'm able, and she's able to talk to my son about what we're hearing and what we're



saying in a way that isn't possible during mass. So, I'd say my faith and churchgoing was a little bit stagnant even and certainly lockdown has produced the most surprising rekindling of that for me and my son and mum actually.

Eithne

So, what about the issue of outside space? How important has that been?

Danielle

People have shared communal spaces. So, Fran again speaks about the development that she lives in, designed for the over 55s.

Fran

So, it's not like aesthetically how I would choose. It's got really weird wallpaper – like that textured '70s wallpaper which is really hard to get off, so they haven't. But I have put my pictures up and things like that, but yeah the way I feel is strange 'cos it's nice to be with my parents and it's really nice to have outside space as we never had as much of that when I grew up. So, I'm quite fortunate to be here at this point and obviously in London I didn't have any outside space.

Danielle

And a lot of people, if they have a private garden or outside space, using it as a place of interaction. Tony speaks about making a hole in his fence and so he can have his grandchildren nip through the fence and they can see each other at a social distance and just the joy that he got out of that, it's really lovely to read about.

Chantelle

And Chantelle, I think living in a two-bedroom flat with two young children who are onto Tik Tok and whatever, I think she really needed to get outside.

Chantelle

So, it's also been very challenging. I'm a single mum trying to also occupy my daughters. We've been very lucky with the weather, so we've enjoyed the outdoors by taking walks to the woods or sitting outdoors in the communal garden. On the days we don't venture out it can be very stressful and almost like there is no room to just breathe. I'm thankful for the outside space and the woods that surround us.

Danielle

Yeah, going on walks to where the kids are, so that they don't have as much energy bouncing off the walls inside, has been very important for lots of people too.

Eithne

The issue of neighbours I found that fascinating. It's a really important trend in this, how important neighbours have been in this pandemic, would you agree?

Veronique

Yes, absolutely, I think people have attuned to who they live next to. Yeah, quite strongly.



Eithne

Are there any examples you want to pull out?

Danielle

So, Julie speaks really nicely about how she had the virus quite early on. She lives alone and so really depended on her neighbours.

Julie

So, I know some of the neighbours here from a very long time, because they've been living here longer than I have and so, at the beginning, just before lockdown, I had the coronavirus symptoms, and I was very ill. And so, one of my neighbours, he would cook meals for me and leave them at my door or bring things that I needed to eat or drink or bring newspapers and magazines. He's always been a caring person, but I think he left food for me every day which was great, 'cos I was too weak or unable to do anything for myself. And in the beginning, it was really important because I couldn't even make anything for myself. So that was really great. And they were delicious home-cooked south Asian meals which I really appreciated because I'd lost my sense of taste and smell and I couldn't tell the difference but once it started coming back, I really appreciated what he'd done. And also, I had some other friends who would pop by with things that I needed. So that was really great, and it made me realise how important it is to have friends and neighbours nearby who look after each other. Because I don't think I would have got through it by myself, the fourteen days in isolation if I was sick, because, being by yourself, it's so difficult to look after yourself if you're very ill.

Danielle

So, Chantelle spoke about – as I said she's got two young children and they sound very creative and fun so they're dancing around singing a lot, and the neighbours complaining about that.

Chantelle

It has also been very tough. The first few weeks the neighbours complained mainly from my daughters trying to practise their cheerleading routine. Also, from exercise and the famous Tik Tok dancers. The neighbours were not used to us being home in the day.

Eithne

I mean I was very impressed by Lucy's five-year-old son who took matters into his own hands when the neighbours' noise stopped him from sleeping. It's a great story.

Danielle

Yeah, it's a very fun story.

Eithne

Very confident little five-year-old.

Lucy

During lockdown my son's been baking for the neighbours and he's been putting little cakes into sealed bags with notes just saying, 'stay well', which is really sweet. But then we have had, during these lovely summer days, quite a lot of music noise coming, and this is generally



around bedtime. And it's been apparent. And so, my little boy decided that he wanted to go round and just ask them whether they might possibly keep it down a little bit during bedtime. What I didn't expect is that he would come downstairs, ready to go round, dressed fully as a policeman with a walkie talkie and a notebook and uniform and hat. So, there was this five-year-old, as a policeman, knocking at the door of a neighbour. And he was pretty bossy, and pretty scary and I had to apologise to them but luckily they're really lovely and they've got a good sense of humour although quite surprised to find a miniature policeman at their door. They were terribly understanding, and the music has now gone down or off during bedtime, but I was pretty staggered by his confidence to be honest.

Eithne

I thought it was moving about Claire, how her neighbours have finally accepted her transitioning to some extent and how she's play acted, or she played a role, because she's a re-enactment person, isn't she? So, she's obviously used to dressing up.

Lucy

The relationships with the neighbours have improved over the lockdown. The hostility towards me seems to have gone. Apart from one person two doors down, I think, and that guy is – well something is definitely wrong with him. Otherwise, it's alright now. We'll go back to when I first transitioned though, you know, then it was seriously a bad situation with people putting dog faeces through my letterbox and being banned from walking down entire streets, and for the shop. The law and attitudes have changed to where we are now where – well it's not mentioned. I've even found, even with the house across the road, a niche as a children's entertainer, dressing up as Darth Vader for a four-year-old child who's into Star Wars so I dress up as Darth Vader and she thought it was incredibly good fun to chase the evil Darth away from her house with her lightsaber. Well, I've got this big cardboard roll that you use – that Christmas wrapping's put round. So, I've got the roll, that became the lightsaber, put on my gas mask which I wear when I'm going shopping. Seriously, it's a real gas mask, gloves and a pickelhaube and goggles and apart from looking ridiculous – wearing a black coat as well, this child thought well great, you know, it's definitely Darth Vader.

Eithne

What do you think will people take away from this experience as to how they live their lives? What will be the long-term impact of feelings towards home?

Veronique

What people can take from this is, I guess, the resilience throughout the time, understanding what community means, and their experience of it.

Danielle

As someone who works at the Museum of the Home, we're quite used to thinking about home in this kind of multi-faceted way and what does it mean. I think it's quite new for a lot of people to think about what does home mean to you. How does your home – your feelings towards home change, and I think people are much more aware of the emotional side of home and that it isn't just a place that we go to sleep. It's a place where we can express our identity, where we can spend time with our loved ones, or not. Yeah, it can be a safe space, it



can be prison, it can be a sanctuary. Those conversations becoming so at the top of everyone's agenda, is just really interesting and I think it's good for us to explore.

Eithne

I think that's quite interesting because I was quite interested that there are some very specifics like Fran says she'll continue to do yoga at home and Gareth will continue to communicate through Zoom. But Julie, I think, makes a really important point that this pandemic really has highlighted the inequalities in our society.

Julie

This has been a real challenge for a lot of people. And particularly with the recent events that have been happening in Britain but also around the world. People feel they've been let down by their government and other authorities, by not being treated fair or being looked after or protected in the way that they could have been expected to be looked after as citizens. And so, I think it's really made people think how we respond to that and some people have been out demonstrating and protesting, other people have been supporting each other in different ways. And I think it's given us a time to reflect on our lives, our health, our wellbeing and how we continue to live with each other.

Danielle

As a museum we really want to use the material to enable those conversations. To make those links and to use it as a starting off point to reflect on all of those things, and hopefully make change.

Eithne

So, are there gaps – are there things that are not coming through that you would like to explore?

Veronique

When I think about my experience, I don't necessarily see it reflected within the collection yet, because I was working, right? That idea of home not being the only place I'm at or can be, and I do think a lot of people my age or younger have loads to say. People are sharing and talking on different platforms. But now it's about how we hold them within the collection.

Danielle

We'd love more video and audio, so that's all possible by the same form, where you do the written submissions. We have recently started a strand that particularly looks at the students' experience. Everyone's lives have been uprooted but students in particular and those in higher education, their expectations of education and their lives after moving to new cities.

Eithne

Is there anything you'd like to share about your own experience of the pandemic?

Danielle

My routine, weirdly, really hasn't changed that much but I really miss hugging people. I live with my partner, so I get to hug them a lot, but I'm bored of just hugging one person. I miss seeing my mum and family. And with my friends, just those physical



interactions with people. It's lovely chatting to people on Zoom and doing all of that but I just miss running up to people and just giving them a big hug.

Veronique

Yeah, I agree, I do miss my family, my friends a lot, but I guess home has been also an exciting space. I'm learning an instrument, that's been really exciting.

Eithne

How about you, Eithne?

Eithne

Well, I live on my own and that's been quite a challenge, but I mean I must say, having the fence down with my neighbours is like they've adopted me really, and I've adopted them, so that's fantastic.

Okay, I'd like to thank you both, both Danielle and Veronique – that was great. A really interesting interview and thank you very much. I just do encourage everybody else to participate in this really exciting project. Thank you.

Danielle

Thank you, it was lovely speaking to you.

Veronique

Thank you.

Eithne

If you would like to contribute to the Museum of the Home's Stay Home collection, go to stayhomestories.co.uk or to museumofthehome.org.uk. Stay Home, rethinking the domestic during the Covid-19 pandemic, is funded by The Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of the UK Research and Innovation Rapid Response to Covid-19.

With thanks to all contributors and to Jonty Lovell for the soundtrack *Blip*, a recurring sound he created to reflect the monotony of lockdown life, but also to instil a sense of optimism that things will get better. Follow him on Instagram [j.lovemusic](https://www.instagram.com/j.lovemusic).