



# Victorian Samplings

## Episode 2: Intimate Histories

Hosted by Vanessa Warne and Jessie Krahn

With Guests: Heather Hind, Jacqui Hyman, and Kyle McPhail

[Light Piano Music Intro- fades to background]

**Vanessa Warne** [00:14]: Welcome to *Victorian Samplings*, the podcast that speaks with artists, curators, scholars and crafters about Victorian objects and the stories they tell. I'm Vanessa Warne and, in this episode, we're exploring intimate histories. Clothing, jewelry, everyday household objects: they preserve information about their owners, about the work they did or the pleasures they pursued, about their values, relationships and lived experience. With the help of this episode's guests, scholar Heather Hind, textile conservator Jacqui Hyman, and curator Kyle MacPhail, we discover what a broken bracelet, a vibrant wallpaper, and a surprisingly dirty frock coat reveal about their owners. We begin with Jesse Krahn's conversation with Heather Hind, and we hope that you'll enjoy listening to this episode as much as we enjoyed making it.

[Light piano music fades]

**Jessie Krahn** [01:24]: I'm joined today by Dr. Heather Hind, a digital learning developer at the University of Exeter and postgraduate representative for the British Association of Victorian Studies. Today we'll be discussing Heather's research on hairwork and Victorian culture. Thanks for joining me today, Heather.

**Heather Hind** [01:39]: Thank you so much for having me.

**Jessie Krahn** [01:40]: You have an article in the spring 2020 issue of *Victorian Review* about hair jewelry, and in it you analyze one specific piece with a broken plait in the Brontë Parsonage Museum's collection. Could you describe it for us? And could you explain what interests you about the piece?

**Heather Hind** [01:54]: Yes, so this is a multi-strand hair bracelet of six strands, two different kinds of plaits alternating across it, that was said to have belonged to Charlotte Brontë, but the source of the hair

is, well, unknown, at least as far as I could find out in terms of its provenance, but I would say that it's shade looks most like that in Anne Brontë's named pieces. It's kind of a very dark golden color, maybe tarnished a little bit with age, a kind of bronzy gold color in the clasp, and one of the strands is broken and kind of pulling away from the rest and has frayed a bit at the end. A few years ago, when I went to the Brontë Parsonage Museum, it was the first time that I'd been to a museum specifically to look at hairwork for my PhD research, and I didn't quite know what to expect but I had an idea that there might just be all of these beautiful, pristine, shiny pieces of hairwork waiting for me, and what I actually found were all of these, were, at least some, slightly tarnished, broken, crumpled, partially fixed pieces of hairwork. And so that is kind of what got me thinking about this relationship between hairwork, connection, breakage, and what that would kind of mean for an object that's supposed to be enduring, and about the eternity of a relationship. This kind of came from, I guess, my expectations as a student very new to this kind of research and the reality of what I found, again I didn't know what to expect in terms of the hairwork I was going to look at, but also in terms of how I would be looking at it and what I would be allowed to do with it. As you might expect, you know, you get given the museum gloves, the stuff comes out to you in an archive box, and all of these pieces of hairwork were also in kind of plastic packets or folded, you know, inside the acid free tissue paper. There was so much denying my touch of those objects, and again for something that I think is partly about touch, and about feeling close to that person who donated the hair, about wearing it, displaying it and kind of turning it over, I came across all of these barriers to doing that, that then it almost highlighted the importance of touching the hair and of getting close to it by the fact that I couldn't always do that with these objects.

**Jessie Krahn** [04:12]: In your essay, you propose that hairwork materializes ideas about connections between people living or deceased, and that wear, and breakage, and hair jewelry create anxieties about disconnection. Can you tell me more about that?

**Heather Hind** [04:25]: I guess I was thinking about what might motivate somebody to make or commission a piece of hair work. It might be that somebody wanted to feel close to someone who they were expecting to be separated from in some way, whether that was distance, age, death, you know, these things aren't necessarily pieces of mourning jewelry, but there's always some sort of, I think, distance encoded into them because they are trying to keep that person close. So, I think there's a contradiction at the heart of hairwork that all of these objects speak to. I think also in terms of trying to memorialize an individual by taking a person's hair, or even a family's hair and working it in to one piece, bringing several people together, because these objects are still then separated from the person. There's then an anxiety about identity, and how far can these objects represent a person, and especially all of the very frustratingly anonymous pieces of hairwork I found in museums with, you know, little provenance, or no inscription, or no corresponding letter or label to go with them. So, all these things that I think hairwork is trying to achieve—closeness and proximity, identity, a sense of connection to people—are all also things that are kind of anxieties of hairwork because there's only an extent to which it can kind of smooth over some of those issues.

**Jessie Krahn** [05:45]: So, you raise some questions already about preservation and provenance, what lasts what endures, what we keep in museum collections, and how we allow people to engage with or interact with a piece once it's in a collection. What do we know already about how these pieces are made? And what do we do with pieces like these when we don't know who the hair belonged to?

**Heather Hind** [06:04]: That's a really good question. It's really difficult. In my case, I found myself in my PhD thesis speculating quite a lot. You know, some of the things, like, for example, the pieces of hairwork in the Brontë Parsonage Museum, a lot of them at least do have letters and things, and kind of a record of who they were at some point, kind of traded between, sold to, that means that it is highly likely these were at least owned by the Brontë family at some point. And it's the same for collections like the Armstrong Browning Library, where these objects have been collected, because there is a clear link to the Brownings. The more challenging ones are things like regional and county museums and historic houses where they have bits of hairwork that are perhaps of that area, but in terms of the person that made them, the person that owned them, it's really difficult to find out. Some pieces do have at least a name written on them often, you know, if it's mourning jewelry; a day that they died, but I just found myself speculating a lot. I mean, to give an example, one of the ones I found really interesting was in the Mercer Gallery in Harrogate, in the UK, and it's a bracelet that has—kind of had most of its hair worn away from it, it was around a kind of mold that was still in the bracelet. So, the hair is kind of mostly frayed and totally come away from the bracelet, but on either end joining it are two metal ends that have the names Alfred and Clara inscribed on them. So, I've got two names. I know that this maybe is Alfred or Clara's hair, but in terms of what their relationship is, I mean, how do you know? Maybe they were married, maybe they were engaged, they could be brother and sister, they could be friends who just wanted some, you know, commemorative thing. So, I guess you have to speculate in terms of a probable relationship, *that* can still tell you things, I think it can still tell you things about the kind of cultural import of hairwork, but you do, you kind of get more questions raised by looking at some of these objects than you get answered, but I think that's been part of its appeal for me, when I've been looking at it.

**Jessie Krahn** [08:04]: Most of us might think of human hair as being best preserved when it hasn't been shaped, like hair we might find in a grave. I'm wondering if denying touch, in the way that you've described here, might interfere with this process of speculation or the ways that we honour the people who made the pieces and their wishes, and I wonder how our project changes when we can't touch the hair, especially when that's considered best practice in museum contexts.

**Heather Hind** [08:30]: Yeah, I think on the point, on locks of hair that haven't been worked into anything, I definitely do find those even more difficult to deal with because at least with a piece of hairwork, I can say this is attesting to a relationship of some kind, or even a commercial endeavor of some kind if it's, you know, a piece of hairwork that was maybe made by a jeweler just to be sold for fashion. But with a lock of hair, they seem to be so full of meaning and to have such an authenticity to them, that maybe at least, you know, to our eyes, a very elaborately worked piece of hair doesn't because it's not that honest, simple, genuine piece of hair that's just been kept, as you say, in its kind of natural, pure form. But I can think of lots of examples of Victorian poetry, in particular, that would kind of challenge that and talk about locks of hair being traded as deceitful tokens, Tennyson calls them "golden lies," that can be so easily therefore played upon for that apparent worth or that apparent purity. In a way, something that's been worked into a piece of hairwork has a kind of framed purpose to it, it's kind of trying to tell you something about what that hair meant, in a way that a lock of hair might do much more slyly.

**Jessie Krahn** [09:43]: It sounds like an unworked lock of hair is typically a more secretive artifact, whereas a piece that's been worked is meant to be shown in public?

**Heather Hind** [09:50]: Yeah, that's a very good point. Lots of the locks of hair I found have been inside letters or kept in family collections. There was a really good example of some hair that I found in the Harry Ransom Center in Texas. I think it was cut by Sarah Coleridge, and it was her husband's hair, cut from around his left nipple [laughter]. I think it said on his deathbed, if I'm remembering rightly, but keeping hair of her dead husband from an intimate area, I don't know what that was about, to be honest, but that seemed like a really intimate, personal reason behind keeping that kind of lock of hair as well as the idea of keeping hair like locks in a kind of private place, maybe, you know, pressed within a book, kept within a letter, kind of tucked away in a way that hairwork, as you say, was—that was displayed was worn.

**Jessie Krahn** [10:40]: Is there anything more that you can say about where, on the bracelet that we talked about earlier, what's intact, what's broken, and what you've speculated about the history of the person who may have worn the bracelet?

**Heather Hind** [10:51]: Yes, so, the bracelet that [pause] belonged to Charlotte Brontë, that I've mentioned earlier, there's just the one strand that's broken and coming away from the bracelet and has kind of started to unravel at the end and kind of splay out like the end of a plait would. Obviously, I've no idea how it came to be broken. I think when you find broken hairwork, it becomes more likely that it was worn, and worn regularly. There are some pieces I found that—in museums, that are still in the box that look just maybe never worn that you can kind of tell because, anyone with long hair knows, you get split ends, it breaks, it rubs, it gets dry. So, you can kind of tell when hairwork has been worn, even if it's been worn lightly, there will be kind of strands that come away, that kind of get itchy and prickly along the length of the bracelet, or the necklace, or whatever it is. So, I think this bracelet was worn regularly, so that says something about the, I guess, the importance of it. Potentially also, though, I will say the ordinariness of hairwork, some of the pieces, I think there's a correlation between how elaborately worked some of the things I've seen are and how pristine they are. So, in a way, maybe making something that's then you know, studded with rubies and has all this gold in it means that it's not something that you wear every day and think about that particular loved one. Whereas something like this, which is six relatively simple plaits or braids of hair, just joined with a simple clasp with a safety chain, there's something much more ordinary and kind of accessible about it, like a, you know, a well-loved t-shirt versus that dress that you just wear to, you know, weddings every three years, [laughter] something much more, I don't know how to explain it, something I find much more endearing about it because it's had that sign of use, and maybe even, you know, been pulled at some point. Some of the other pieces in the Brontë collection, they've broken and then they've been knotted, as though—I don't know whether that again was a Brontë, or a subsequent owner, or maybe even, whoever it was at some point, but it's kind of been patched up. There's some sense that they wanted to really preserve that piece of hairwork and keep wearing it, keep using it.

**Jessie Krahn** [11:03]: To wrap up, do you have any final thoughts on what hair jewelry can teach us about Victorian culture or society?

**Heather Hind** [13:03]: Um, I think there's some common misconceptions that maybe hairwork has fed into, but that it can also dispel, particularly to do with Victorians and mourning. So, the idea that the Victorians, you know, were permanently in mourning and wore black all the time, and were really ostentatious with it—I mean they were, [laughing] in some decades, but not all hairwork is mourning jewelry. It kind of has all become mourning jewelry, because the donors of the hair all inevitably died. And so, I think that a lot of hair jewelry was made during a person's lifetime, but then was worn as mourning jewelry later, or at least you know, came to be that token of mourning somehow. So I think that's a kind of common misconception that it's fed in a roundabout way. I don't know whether I'd say it teaches us something about the, I guess, Victorian contradictions, that it could be something so deeply personal, and intimate, and yet a fashion accessory that was worn, and that it could so encode somebody's identity, and their relationships, and their deep affective life, and yet also be this thing that, in our hands, is anonymous and we don't understand, and we're trying to kind of grasp all of those meanings that are somehow in it, but that we can't access. So, for me, it's really just—it's been a big contradiction to study. It kind of does one thing to do with love and permanence at the same time as it expresses ideas of distance and anxiety. So, I think it helps us to understand how complicated it is to look at the Victorians, and how difficult it is to say the Victorians were like this, or thought this, or went about things this way—that there's anxiety and desire kind of coded into everything. It's always kind of pulling both ways.

**Jessie Krahn** [14:51]: Thanks so much for joining me today, Heather.

**Heather Hind** [14:53]: Oh, thank you very much.

[Light piano music segue]

**Vanessa Warne** [15:05]: Thank you to Heather Hind and to Jessie Krahn for that conversation. We continue our exploration of objects that bare traces of where, by visiting with textile conservator Jacqui Hyman. I spoke to Jacqui from her studio, with the tools of her trade surrounding her. I began by asking her to introduce herself.

**Jacqui Hyman** [15:26]: Hi, I'm Jacqui, Jacqui Hyman, and I work as a freelance textile conservator. I would class myself as a slightly weird person in that I'm actually doing the profession—undertaking a profession—that I decided at the age of fifteen. I was let loose in a textile store in my local museum, and the very first job they asked me to do was to take some old samplers out of their frames, and I thought, “Oh, yeah, I'm enjoying this.” And I'd always sewn all my life and I'm one of four sisters, so my mother taught us to sew, my grandmother taught me to sew as well, and she actually was a very, very accomplished needlewoman. She'd won a scholarship to the Royal School of Needlework in London, so she taught me as a child to embroider, and every school holiday was, “well, what are we going to embroider this holiday? What are we going to knit?”—that sort of thing. Then at school, I got called up in front of the careers teacher saying, “Now Jacqui, what do you want to do?” And I said, “I'm going to be a textile conservator,” and I had to get a relevant degree, which I took in textile design, at Leeds University, and when I left university, I had the opportunity to get postgraduate training in textile conservation, with the North of England Museum Service. So, I had all my conservation training, and just like we are—the times we're in now with COVID, things financially were really difficult in the UK, and I'd already met my husband to be when I was a student at university. And Mike said to me “oh look, come on, you're doing

all this work for museums, you could do exactly the same for private people. Let's set up a business." So, we set up The Textile Restoration Studio in 1982, offering conservation—museum standard conservation— work to private people, but to churches, cathedrals, stately homes, all sorts. And that is really where the business started, and we've never looked back.

**Vanessa Warne** [17:29]: Can you tell us a little bit about some of your goals and methods?

**Jacqui Hyman** [17:33]: The whole aim of conservation is to preserve something in the state it's in, and make it safe for the future, and apart from any cleaning, any practical work we do has to be reversible. So, most of our work is very fine delicate stitching, occasionally, we might use some adhesives with very fine textiles if we've got to put supports behind and things, but if in the future, a better process is developed or the item becomes damaged and they've got to remove what I've done, it can easily be done without harming the textile itself. So, any of the items that come into the studio, we spend a lot of time discussing with our clients exactly what their requirements are, but every item is different, and so that's when we work out what we're going to do and how we're going to approach it for the client.

**Vanessa Warne** [18:26]: Jacqui, we'd love to hear about some of the Victorian-era pieces you've encountered in your work.

**Jacqui Hyman** [18:32]: Right, we—well we've worked on Victorian pieces for years, and these can be anything from beautiful garments. They can be from baby's clothes, right the way through to women's and men's wear, furnishings, hangings, the list almost becomes endless with all the costume accessories and things like that. We've worked a tremendous amount on women's fashion though, because quite a lot of the museums around where I am here in the north of England have got very, very good costume collections. We have a town called Southport which is on the seaside and a lot of people would travel there, for the beautiful air, would go to Southport and Lord Street there was the one place which was — you would walk along being very fashionable to be seen. So, there were a lot of women who would go there in their finery, so the local museum there has collected a lot of costumes and garments that were made by the milliners, the hat people and all the embroiderers and the garment makers so they have them relevant to that town. So, I've been privileged to work on some gorgeous outfits with beautiful silk fabrics, very, very intricately made. I always marvel at the skills and the pattern matching and then it's all the wealth of trimmings that the Victorians used to put on their clothes, everything seemed to have little bits of silk fringing on it, fancy buttons, but then beautifully lined inside. Unfortunately, quite a lot of the linings do cause us a lot of problems because they used to use a cream silk fabric, which is called tin weighted silk as the lining inside the garments and for—this might be an unusual term for people saying tin weighted silk, because it was a bit of a naughty business that they used to do; they used to buy cheap cream silk fabric and then they would soak it in metallic salts to actually increase its weight so you'd think the fabric was a heavier weight and a more expensive fabric that's been used for linings, but the metallic salts within them just rot the silk. So as conservatives that causes a lot of problems, we might have the most beautiful outer silk fabric of a garment, and then you look inside and just find it in shreds, inside. So, we have to use special adhesive techniques and things like that to hold the linings together. But with a lot of the fabrics, it's difficult for cleaning some of the garments because of the complexity in their actual construction, with all their hooks and eyes and all these trimmings, so we actually do our own hand solvent cleaning as well. Here in the back of my studio, I had a very large sink made, it's a bit like a long

coffin, but it means that I can actually immerse a whole complete garment into solvent and soak it, and then bring it out and let the solvent evaporate. So, I can freshen up items if I can't even wet clean them.

**Vanessa Warne** [21:42]: Jacqui, you're spending a lot of time with these pieces and I'm wondering if you feel a sense of connection with the original makers, or perhaps the people who wore these garments that you work on?

**Jacqui Hyman** [21:53]: Oh, gosh, every item has got a story to tell. I've worked on quite a lot of famous people's clothes and that really gives you a great sense of who they possibly were. I've been privileged to work on some Charlotte Brontë's items; on her going away dress when she got married, it's the outfit that she wore when she went off on her honeymoon to Ireland. Um, I'm a great one for listening to the radio while I'm working so I actually put *Jane Eyre* on the radio as well, so I was listening to something in the background whilst I'm still working away, and you look at the clothes and you, I say you feel very, very privileged to handle something that's been worn by somebody so famous. And you just think "oh, I wonder who helped you put that on and did up those little buttons and bits and pieces like that." That's my little personal bit. I had, I also worked on William Wordsworth's frock coat from Grasmere in the Lake District, and that needed washing so I had my hands down the pockets, and there was a hole in the pocket, so I thought right, I'm going right the way around the lining of the coat, you never know there might be a little bit of paper down there with something on but there wasn't. But it's those sorts of things, you know cleaning his coat and it was very dirty on the back and I was thinking, "Oh, William, you know, you've been sitting up in the hills in the Lake District and it's not surprising your coat is so filthy dirty, it's got a hole in the back of it". But anyway, it was cleaned, and then I repaired all of that. And also had his silk neckerchief to clean and his table napkin, I'm thinking well, yes, it's covered in food stains, but, you know, that was what he was eating, that's what he stained, but that protected his clothes. So it's those little personal things. But I think, apart from working on famous people's clothes, the other items I've worked on that I feel give you a real tingle up the back is when you're working on Egyptian textiles, because they are so old and I've worked on a lot of mummies, and you're dealing with human remains in that respect. And to me that is another whole complete step away. I know when you're working in the museums, they say you mustn't sort of personalize the mummies or anything but I can't work like that. I had one lovely mummy I worked on and she'd actually—I found a little gold amulet inside her hand. She was a Roman mummy so she wasn't completely wrapped, all her fingers and her body were wrapped separately. And I called her Mimi, out of *La Bohème*, because I talked to the mummies, and I'd say to them, I hope you don't mind, I'm gonna have to move your arm, I'm going to do—I have to move this bit or what have you, because I'm dealing with a human being, you know, okay, they may have been dead for thousands and thousands of years but it's still very, very important to me that you get that right; respect to the item that you're working on. So, yes, I do feel quite a sense of connection with items that I'm working on in that respect, but at the same time feeling very, very privileged that I've got that opportunity to work on them.

**Vanessa Warne** [25:16]: Jacqui, given the time and effort you put into this work, what do you feel that people who view the artifacts that you've worked on can learn from looking at them and thinking about them?

**Jacqui Hyman** [25:29]: That's, that's really a fascinating question, because I find especially if I go to a museum, I'm walking around, and I'm looking at things, I'm the worst person to go around an exhibition

with, because I sort of hone in straightaway, especially on the damaged parts, but it upsets me quite often that you see people walking along, and they just walk straight past things, and they don't stop, and they don't look. So, I always find that if I'm out with people, especially if I'm going to an exhibition, I'm going with a friend, I will explain to them what I'm looking at, and suddenly you realize you've got half a dozen other people standing behind you, listening. And I think it's something to actually—people need a lot more explanation to understand what things are, to then start really appreciating it. I don't think there's enough information out there for people often to fully appreciate what they're looking at. I think we need to step back a bit and give people more information, it's—things are getting lost on the actual methods of construction, and things like that. I actually think back to some curtains I worked on many years ago for Lord Derby at Knowsley Hall, which is just on the outskirts of Liverpool, and these were cut silk, velvet curtains of the early 1800s, and they had the most ornate tie backs on them, but one pair had been lost. So, they asked me to make a replica pair, and so I had to spend hours trying to work out how they were put together and then sourcing all the additional bits, the little buttons, the fringing, and all the things that were needed to create these tie backs. I wouldn't be able to do them today because those firms that made the pieces for me then have gone, they don't exist anymore. So, we are losing so much so this is why I think we need more information out there if possible for people. That's my personal bit.

**Vanessa Warne** [27:29]: Jacqui, you've given us a great deal to think about. Thank you so much for joining me.

**Jacqui Hyman** [27:34]: You're welcome.

[Light piano music segue]

**Vanessa Warne** [27:45]: House museums can be complicated spaces. Preserving and displaying collections of everyday objects, often in the restored home of a celebrated individual, these museums offer visitors immersive encounters with a history of domestic life. But, as visitors to these kinds of spaces know, we sometimes have to look very closely to uncover the stories that these museums have not prioritized, stories of, for example, exploited or marginalized people. We had the chance to speak with Dr. Kyle McPhail, the intern curator of a house museum in central Canada, about their work expanding the storytelling potential of a Victorian house museum. I began by asking Kyle to tell us about Dalnavert Museum and Visitor Center, the museum where they work.

**Kyle McPhail** [28:36]:

Dalnavert is a small mansion in the heart of Winnipeg; it is just off of Broadway. This was the home of Huge John Macdonald, the son of John A. Macdonald and Hugh John's family which was his wife, Lady Agnes, his daughter, Daisy and son, Jack, they moved in in 1895. The land once belonged to a man named Onésime Falcon who was a Métis man; he sold the land to Huge John. So yeah, and it's just a little—a stone's throw away from the legislature.

**Vanessa Warne** [29:10]: What has curating at Dalnavert taught you about domestic life in settler colonial Canada in 1895?



**Kyle McPhail** [29:18]: It's really taught me that there's certainly, like, several perspectives on history: everyone's going to have a different perspective, everyone's going to have a different opinion, people are going to highlight certain things. That's why I usually like saying histories, plural, because it kind of really recognizes that there's a multiplicity of perspectives and voices that are contributing to the stories that we hear. At Dalnavert, every volunteer is going to give you a different version of the story of the house. Some people will highlight kind of more of the colonial aspect; some people might not. Interpretation is all verbal, and there aren't labels or panels, everything, you know, is going to be told to you, usually via story or highlighting certain objects. So, it's kind of really taught me that, you know, these different perspectives and these different voices are going to build a bunch of different stories about a singular space.

**Vanessa Warne** [30:13]: Thinking about the kinds of stories a museum like this can tell, you recently gave a talk on gender and sexuality at Dalnavert Museum. Can you tell us a little bit about it?

**Kyle McPhail** [30:23]: Sure, I have a PhD in Museum Studies, and my focus is in queer art histories. So, for me, my interest is kind of queer histories, queer art, queer people in history spaces, heritage spaces. I find that a lot of museums don't like to talk about this, they will erase it, they'll talk around it, they kind of will say that these aspects of history are unimportant. One of my favorite books is *Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and she has this quote, where she talks about, while people often respond to questions of why isn't there queer histories in this space to, what's the interpretive consequences of having this, you know, histories in the space, but what is the interpretive consequences of *not* having these histories in these space? And I think that when you don't talk about queer histories, you often are telling a version of history where there aren't queer people or their contributions don't matter, or that part of their personality doesn't matter. But when it's a straight person, or cisnet person it does, and there's, like a lot of importance to representation, it's important to see yourself represented in these spaces, so to completely ignore a whole community of people, communities, plural, of people, you know, it's doesn't seem like you're really doing history justice. So, I think it's really important to tell histories of gender and sexuality in historic spaces.

**Vanessa Warne** [31:50]: Kyle, you gave this lecture virtually, not to a crowd at the museum, but you gave a tour to the attendees of your lecture, and you took up some of the artifacts at the museum that could easily be understood as having no relationship to histories of identity or sexuality. Could you give us an example of one of the ways you read or re-read those artifacts to find those histories?

**Kyle McPhail** [32:18]: Yeah, that's the thing that's interesting about queer histories is it's, you know, blink and you miss it, because it is just like everyday objects, it's like in plain sight, and if you, kind of, are part of the community, you have that eye, and you have that, I guess, background where you can read these objects as potentially being queer, they might not be, but then they also might. It's kind of like when you see someone in the street, and you kind of give them that look, and you're like, oh, are they? And sometimes you'll give each other that nod, and you just know it—it's kind of the same with objects in the museum, you kind of look at it and you might just know. There's a lot of, you know, a big part of queer histories is this kind of secrecy and kind of trying to communicate with each other via like symbols or colors and things like that, so it is kind of interesting to go through the house and have this, almost like museological gaydar and picking out these objects. One that really—when I first walked in the house and

saw it and went, "oh, okay, there we go," is at the bottom of the stairs, there's like an eagle, and it reminds me of Ganymede, the story of Ganymede, where there was the—Jove or Zeus disguised himself as an eagle, because he fell in love with the shepherd named Ganymede and he wanted him to be his lover, so he turned himself into an eagle and kidnapped Ganymede and took him and, you know, he was his lover and his cup bearer, and so it was this symbol for queer relationships for a long time. In the Renaissance, if someone said, you know, Ganymede, they knew it was code for they were gay, and a lot of queer artists from histories would, you know, depict Ganymede, so when I saw that I went, oh, here's like, kind of a little bit of what potentially could be queer histories, could just be an eagle, but there's also people who would see that go is that—like, is that related to the story of Ganymede? In the Victorian era, they kind of backed off from that, they were sort of retelling the story so he kidnapped him, rather than kidnapped him to be his lover. So, the Victorians kind of erased some of that queer histories which was, you know, very typical of the time.

**Vanessa Warne** [34:20]: Kyle, you've been drawing our attention to a wall decoration, but it's sometimes hard to notice individual objects in a house museum. The re-creation of domestic life, it can be very immersive, but it also means that individual artifacts can kind of get lost in the shuffle because they're *in situ* display can be a little bit overwhelming. Are there artifacts in the collection at Dalnavert that you've fallen in love with, in your time there, that really stand out for you?

**Kyle McPhail** [34:50]: Yeah, it's the one thing with a house is that—you put everything out, you have everything out, so yeah, these little things just get lost and—or you kind of forget that they're there. I certainly have a few favorite things, again, some of them are kind of related to the lecture I gave, like there's that beautiful Art Nouveau style lamp that's on the staircase as you go up. And it's kind of this, like nymph-fairy figure, and she's holding a flower, but the flower actually has a light bulb in it. And to me, it's very Camp, because Camp is something that's exaggerated, or, you know, it's supposed to be one thing, but it's actually another, so it looks like a flower but it's actually a lamp. So, I always look at that and I really love that. I also really like the wallpaper in the dining room, and it's this really bright poisonous, kind of arsenic green, and it looks really, like I just—I think it's a really nice color. You don't see green a lot in houses nowadays, so it kind of just calls back to, like the Victorian fascination with chemicals and colors. So yeah, the green wallpapers were my favorites.

**Vanessa Warne** [35:55]: Speaking of color, and Victorians and color, there's an exhibit currently on at the museum *Dalnavert in Colour*, which you curated Kyle, can you tell us about it?

**Kyle McPhail** [36:04]: Sure. Yeah, I mean, I love colours, so it was kind of obvious for me, if I was going to curate an exhibition that I would focus on colour. I thought it was kind of funny, because I was teaching a class, like an art history class, and I was setting up this lecture, and we were talking about the Byzantine Empire, and the art and Byzantine Empire, and Tyrian purple comes up. And Tyrian purple was extremely rare, is extremely expensive; it took like, it kind of came from these like mollusks, and it would take like thousands of them to make just a little bit of this dye, so only like the richest of the rich had it. And so, we were looking at some artworks that had the Empress Theodora wearing Tyrian purple, and I thought, my class is going to love this, they're going to love me talking about colour, and so I go to my lecture and I start talking about purple and just blank faces, like they do not care. So, then I went to work, I think the next day, and I was just like, "they didn't care about my purple lecture," and everyone

there is like, “oh, colour is so interesting,” and I thought that could be, like a really interesting exhibition, looking at colour through a Victorian perspective, since purple, for example, was one of the first synthetic colours that was discovered during the Industrial Revolution. So, the Victorians were quite enamored with a lot of these synthetic colours, including purple. Purple didn't make it into the exhibition, we just didn't have enough objects in the house that would fit purple, but that was kind of how that idea came about, with, you know, my class not being interested at all in purple. Yeah, nineteenth-century scientists were really discovering, quite quickly, a lot of these colours, which I thought was very interesting, which fits very well into purple. It was actually, well it was mauve specifically, that was discovered. It was 1853, and it was William Perkin, and he was only 18 years old, and he was doing experiments, and he was trying to find the cure for malaria, and he ended up coming up with this kind of mauve colour. So it's interesting that a lot of these colours actually were discovered accidentally, and then they were incorporated into art and fashion, and everything that the Victorians really loved.

**Vanessa Warne** [38:14]: Given that Dalnavert was built in 1895, in the late Victorian period, we'd be remiss if we didn't chat about yellow, Kyle, can you talk about the yellow objects?

**Kyle McPhail** [38:25]: Sure. Yellow's one of those colours that is rebellious. We don't think of it today as a necessarily rebellious colour, but back then it was, and even like in previous decades, it has kind of been rebellious colour. Protestants didn't like really bright colours, so for them yellow was an absolute no, no. So having yellow on anything was very, like "you know these people are being so showy with their yellow." And then, the people did relate it to also, like yellow back books, which were cheap books that you'd find in railway stations, I would kind of equate them now to the German krimis, you know, you basically read it once and then you toss it out, or give it away, and so they were kind of very sensational tales, which was very, like anti-Victorian, so they weren't these morality tales, it was sensational. And this kind of also relates into Aestheticism, and yellow was very popular in Asceticism, which was an art movement that rejected any story or rejected any sort of, you know, morality tale, it was just art for the sake of art, it was just beautiful. So, I feel like that really fits into Dalnavert as well, because it's aesthetic objects, you don't really necessarily hear the morality tale behind the objects, you just look at them, which is exactly what the Aesthetic movement would have wanted. So, a lot of these Aestheticism artists incorporated yellow into their designs, which also kind of relates to Oscar Wilde as well because he was a big follower of the Aestheticism movement.

**Vanessa Warne** [39:50]: Kyle, one of the things I'd like to note about your exhibit is the way that you've selected objects from the house, which has a very significant collection of over six thousand objects, and then you've grouped them together and displayed them in the visitor center, which really allows for a kind of different way of looking or understanding.

**Kyle McPhail** [40:09]: Yeah, I think it's really interesting with these objects, because in the context of the house, the colour probably doesn't stand out as much as it does out of the house. But these objects, you never would have looked at, you know, under a light in an exhibition space in a cabinet, you would have looked at it in a house with a million other objects around it, in that Victorian lighting, so it's quite dark against usually dark wallpaper. So I think it's interesting to take them out of the context sometimes, I mean, it's important to study them within the context, but when you're thinking about colour, to remove them out of the context where there's going to be a lot of reds, and blues, and beiges, and browns, and

suddenly highlight that this is a pink object, or this is yellow object, it kind of changes your perspective on it. I think that—I thought with, especially the yellow, I look at more of the yellow colours than I would when it was in the house, in the house the yellow doesn't stand out as much, but in the case, the yellow stands out quite a bit, and same as the pink, there's actually a lot more pink in the house than I initially thought until we put it in the case. So, but these colours aren't necessarily highlighted in the same way when they're in the house, and the way they're exhibited definitely changes the way you look at the colour for sure.

**Vanessa Warne** [41:21]: Kyle, you've given us a lot to think about about the histories that a House Museum can share. You've given us a lot to think about in terms of colour and the Victorians, and I think you've also helped us to think about how we can look differently at Victorian domestic spaces. So, thanks so much for joining me.

**Kyle McPhail** [41:37]: Thanks for having me.

[Light piano music segue]

**Vanessa Warne** [41:49]: Thank you to Heather, Jacqui, and Kyle for their contributions to this episode. To learn more about the topics explored by our guests, please visit the Crafting Communities website, [craftingcommunities.net](http://craftingcommunities.net). You'll find links to suggested readings and resources as well as a link to a fabulous virtual tour of Dalnavert museum that you can take from the comfort of your home. Thank you to Jesse Krahn and to Anne Hung for their work on this episode. Thank you also to Natalie LoVetri for the transcript, and to Madison George-Berlet for her digital media work. Anne and Madison contributed to this podcast from Victoria, British Columbia, unceded territory of the lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples, traditional land of the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples; Jessie, Natalie and I worked on this episode in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which is Treaty One Territory, traditional Land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples and homeland of the Métis Nation. *Victorian Samplings* is the podcast of the Crafting Communities project. Crafting Communities is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada and the Universities of Alberta, Manitoba, and Victoria. The project is a collaboration between Andrea Korda, Mary Elizabeth Leighton, and me, Vanessa Warne. We welcome your feedback; email us at [crafting@uvic.ca](mailto:crafting@uvic.ca) and follow us on Twitter @craftyvictorian. We look forward to sharing a new episode of *Victorian Samplings* with you soon.

[Light piano music exit]