

Mend and Make Do

Organisational Sustainability

and
Miss Porter's House

Edited by Zelmarie Cantillon & Sarah Baker



Miss Porter's House
House Museum

OPEN 2ND SUNDAY EACH MONTH (FEB-DEC)

REGULAR DAY 1-4PM

PRIVATE TOURS BY ARRANGEMENT

020 8773 5022 | nationaltrust.org.uk/MissPortersHouse

Number on the door: National Trust Number 202280

Sustaining Community Heritage zine series

Series editors
Professor Sarah Baker
Dr Zelmarie Cantillon

The Sustaining Community Heritage zine series emerges from an Australian Research Council-funded project, 'Co-creating a sustainable future for the community heritage sector'. This project explores the organisational sustainability of Australia's volunteer-managed galleries, libraries, archives, museums and historical societies which serve important functions in shaping public history through the collection, preservation and display of local, everyday and marginalised heritages. However, the sector faces a sustainability crisis. Mounting pressures pose a threat to the long-term futures of volunteer-run heritage institutions, putting at risk the diversity and accessibility of the nation's historical record. In this project, we collaborate with representatives from community heritage institutions across Australia to co-develop strategies for recognising value, measuring organisational sustainability and creating benchmarks for sustainable practice.

The zines in this series capture the work of the project as it unfolds, enabling volunteers in community heritage organisations to communicate their experiences and knowledge creatively and accessibly. We approach the zines as a way to facilitate a networked, co-designed understanding of organisational sustainability from a range of institutional contexts. The zines in the series identify challenges, but they also seek to build on existing resources, capabilities and ambitions already in place for the pursuit of viable futures.

For project updates and other issues of this zine series, see:
<https://communityheritagetoolkit.com/>

Mend and Make Do: Organisational Sustainability and Miss Porter's House

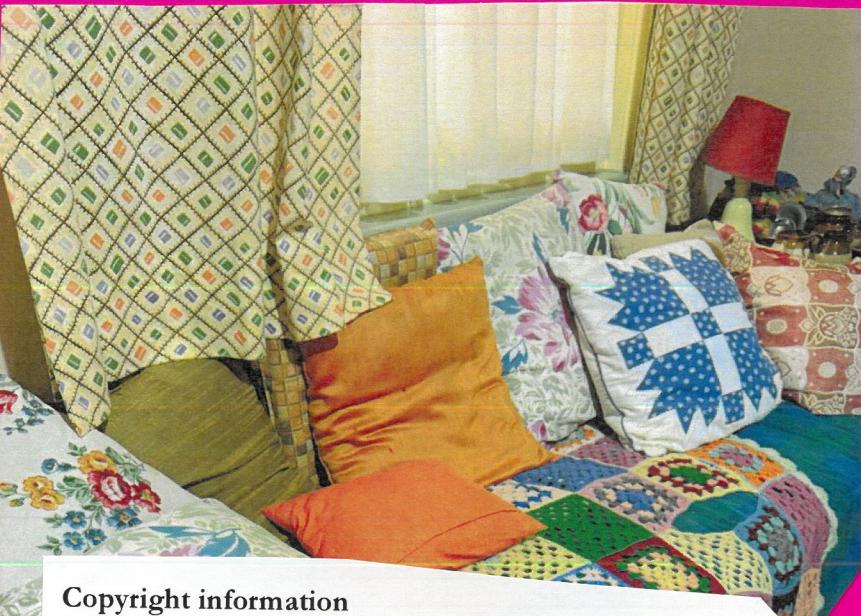
Editors

Zelmarie Cantillon
Sarah Baker

Contributors

Nola Barry
Jean Bridges
Kathryn Pitkin
Annabel Senior
Caroline Watts

Published by Community Heritage Press



Year of publication: 2025
ISBN: 978-0-6459525-8-2

Copyright information

Creative Commons Attribution + Noncommercial + ShareAlike
(CC BY-NC-SA)

Contributors hold the copyright to their submitted piece(s) and can republish their contribution(s) without seeking permission from the zine editors. Contributors can also distribute the work in the zine format as they see fit. This zine's Creative Commons copyright license lets other entities remix, adapt, and build upon Contributors' pieces non-commercially, as long as they credit the Contributor and license their new creations under identical terms.

Ethics

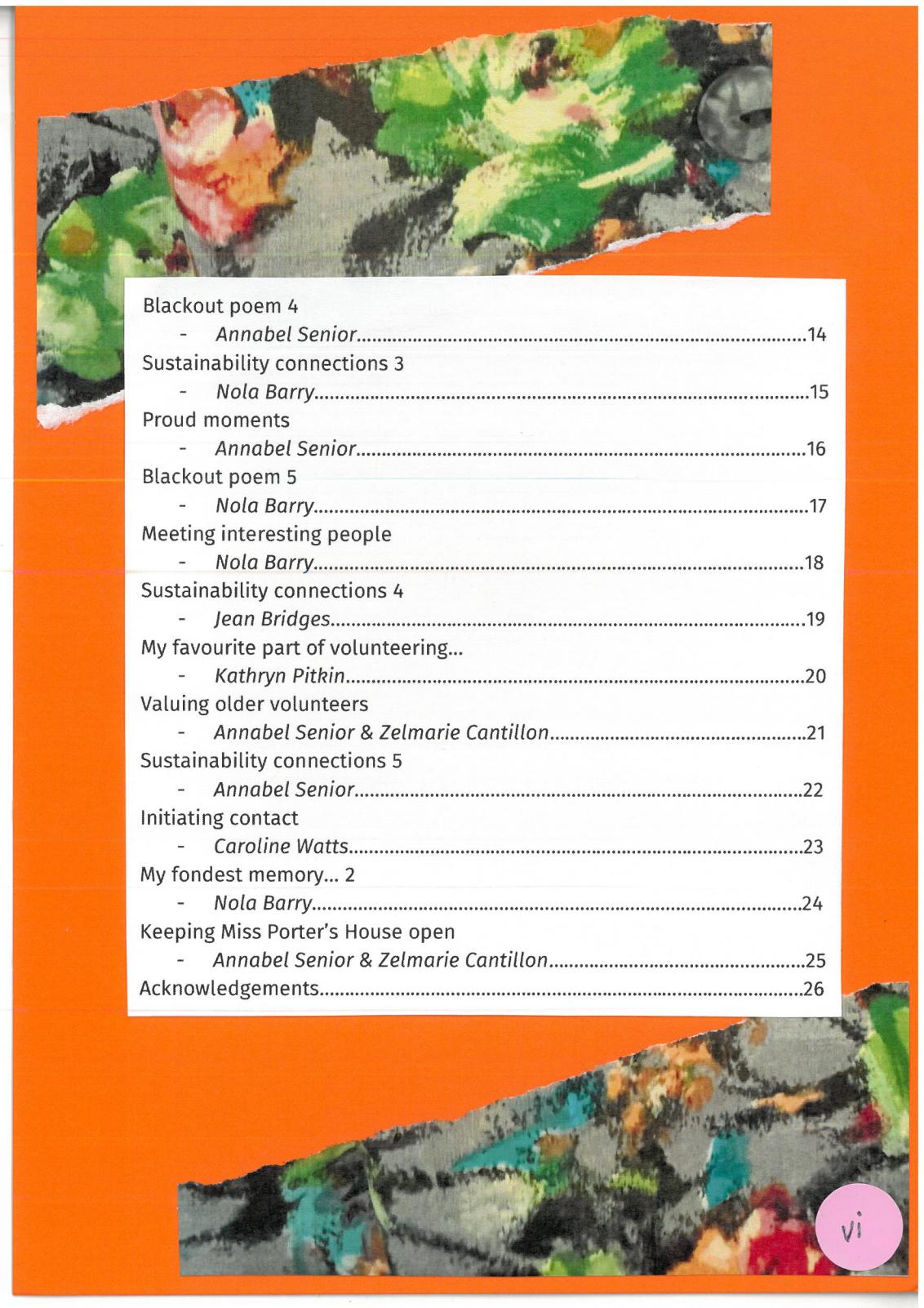
This project has received full ethical clearance from Griffith University's Human Ethics Committee (GU ref no: 2025/199).

Funding information

This publication is funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project 'Co-creating a sustainable future for the community heritage sector' (DP250101408).

Contents

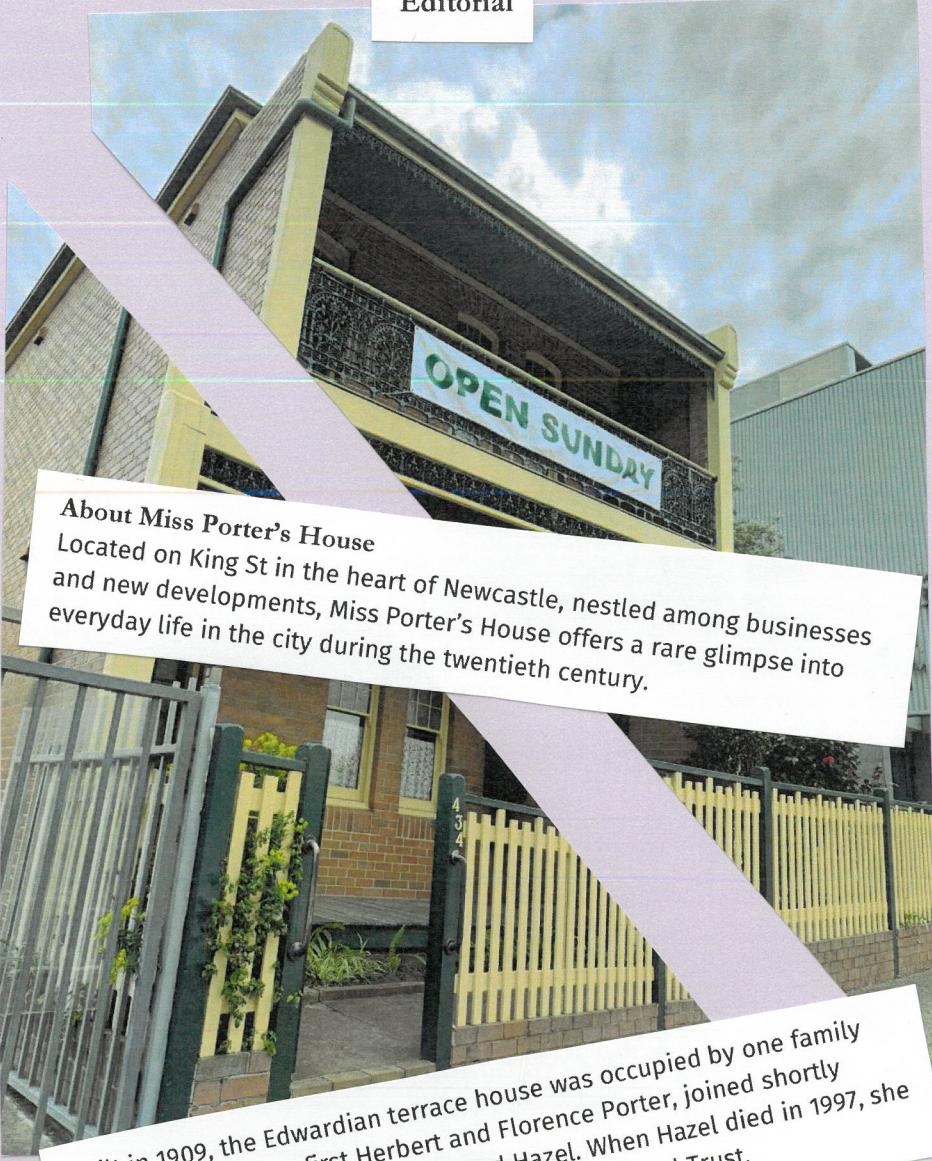
Editorial	
- <i>Zelmarie Cantillon & Sarah Baker</i>	vii
Blackout poem 1	
- <i>Caroline Watts</i>	1
Food	
- <i>Annabel Senior</i>	2
Sustainability connections 1	
- <i>Caroline Watts</i>	3
Organisational culture	
- <i>Annabel Senior & Zelmarie Cantillon</i>	4
My fondest memory... 1	
- <i>Jean Bridges</i>	5
Blackout poem 2	
- <i>Kathryn Pitkin</i>	6
Learning	
- <i>Caroline Watts</i>	7
Sustainability connections 2	
- <i>Kathryn Pitkin</i>	8
Cataloguing	
- <i>Annabel Senior</i>	9
Research	
- <i>Jean Bridges</i>	10
Blackout poem 3	
- <i>Jean Bridges</i>	11
Procedures	
- <i>Kathryn Pitkin</i>	12
Strengths	
- <i>Nola Barry & Annabel Senior</i>	13



Blackout poem 4	
- <i>Annabel Senior</i>	14
Sustainability connections 3	
- <i>Nola Barry</i>	15
Proud moments	
- <i>Annabel Senior</i>	16
Blackout poem 5	
- <i>Nola Barry</i>	17
Meeting interesting people	
- <i>Nola Barry</i>	18
Sustainability connections 4	
- <i>Jean Bridges</i>	19
My favourite part of volunteering...	
- <i>Kathryn Pitkin</i>	20
Valuing older volunteers	
- <i>Annabel Senior & Zelmarie Cantillon</i>	21
Sustainability connections 5	
- <i>Annabel Senior</i>	22
Initiating contact	
- <i>Caroline Watts</i>	23
My fondest memory... 2	
- <i>Nola Barry</i>	24
Keeping Miss Porter's House open	
- <i>Annabel Senior & Zelmarie Cantillon</i>	25
Acknowledgements	26

Mend and Make Do: Organisational Sustainability and Miss Porter's House

Editorial



About Miss Porter's House

Located on King St in the heart of Newcastle, nestled among businesses and new developments, Miss Porter's House offers a rare glimpse into everyday life in the city during the twentieth century.



Built in 1909, the Edwardian terrace house was occupied by one family for almost 90 years: first Herbert and Florence Porter, joined shortly thereafter by their daughters Ella and Hazel. When Hazel died in 1997, she left her family home and its contents to the National Trust.

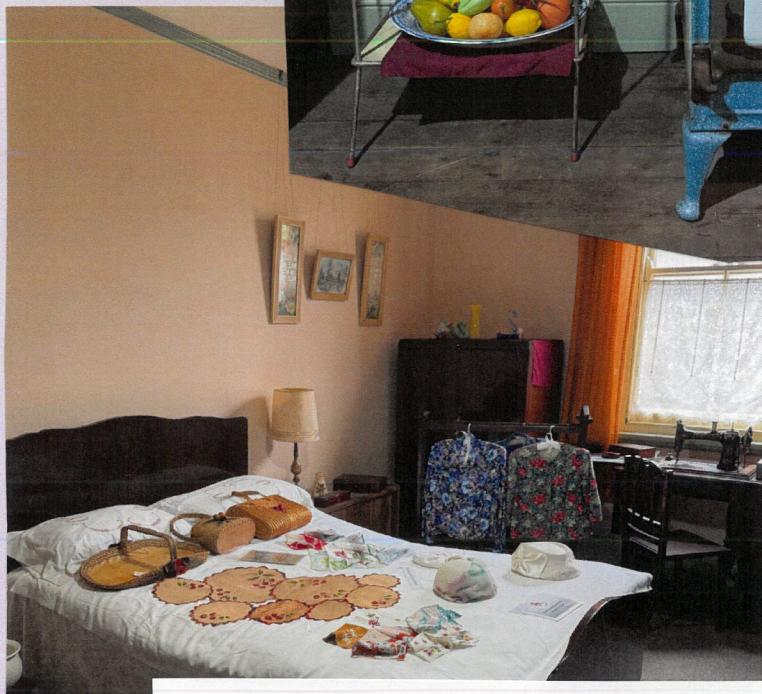


Today, Miss Porter's House is cared for by more than 40 dedicated volunteers, including a management committee of 13. The organisation's strengths lie in their leadership, which fosters collaboration and team work; an enthusiastic and skilled cohort of volunteers; and productive relationships with local community groups, universities and the Newcastle Museum.

The significance of the collection held by Miss Porter's House – including documents such as scrapbooks, photographs, medical records, utility bills, letters and postcards – was recognised by its addition to the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register in 2023.¹



The title *Mend and Make Do* draws inspiration from the Porter's frugal, resourceful approach to life – an ethos shaped by scarcity of the Depression and two world wars, and a belief that nothing should be wasted. That same spirit sustains Miss Porter's House today, as volunteers find creative ways to keep the doors open.



To mend and make do is both a historical sensibility and a contemporary strategy for organisational sustainability: repairing, reusing and reimagining to ensure the house and the organisation behind it endures. It's a reminder that organisational sustainability in the community heritage sector is not only about preservation, but about care, ingenuity and continuity – where small acts of repair can work to hold a whole organisation together.





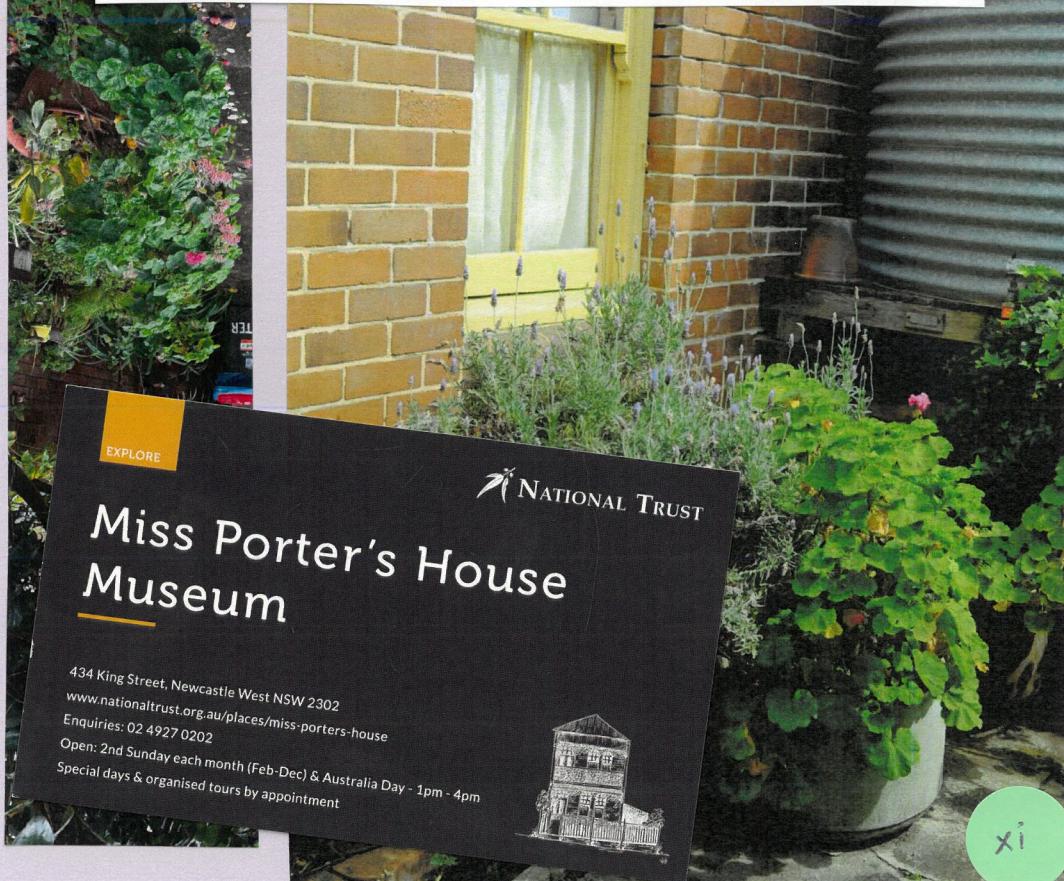
Outline of this zine: What's inside?

Content for this zine was created during a two-hour workshop conducted with five volunteers on Tuesday, 9 September 2025. Zel, one of the project's co-leads, guided the volunteers through three activities aimed at getting them to think creatively about organisational sustainability.

Our first activity invited participants to create 'blackout poems' using their volunteer newsletters and marketing material. The poems highlight Miss Porter's House's welcoming atmosphere, fundraising efforts, networks, and the conservation and legacy of its treasured collections.



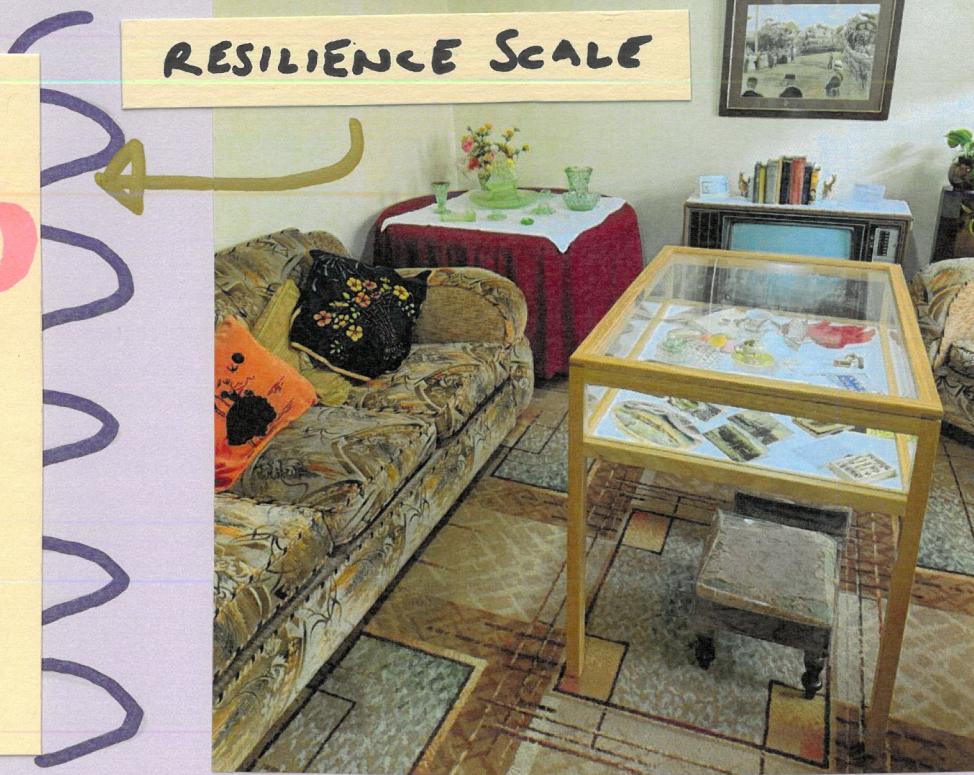
Next, we turned to an activity where participants considered a pre-prepared list of keywords relating to sustainability in community heritage organisations. Participants selected and wrote down a few words that stood out to them most, then stuck these on a page and indicated how various issues/themes are interconnected. Their pages acknowledge the mutually informing relationships between issues, as well as the flows between concepts. For instance, Annabel's page illustrates that mission and vision shape an organisation's leadership, which in turn shapes opportunities for collaboration and the availability of resources – which then contributes to the organisation's capacity for relevance (p. 22).



Our final activity required participants to respond to writing prompts to elicit reflections on sustainability challenges as well as the rewards and costs of volunteering. These pages capture, for example: the pleasure in forming friendships with fellow volunteers; the importance of food to sociality and fundraising efforts; the experience of being a new volunteer; the joy of caring for and accessing historically significant collections; and the challenges overcome in terms of implementing policies and procedures.

RESILIENCE SCALE

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1



Also dispersed throughout this zine are excerpts from an interview undertaken with Miss Porter's House Chair, Annabel, as well as snippets of discussions that took place during the zine workshop.

In true mend and make do fashion, this zine turns scraps of text, words and ideas into something new. The pages that follow patch together the volunteers' creativity and care to reveal how Miss Porter's House might keep adapting, renewing and sustaining itself into the future.



**Zelmarie Cantillon
Sarah Baker**

¹ National Committee of Australia Memory of the World, n.d., '#86 Miss Porter's House Documentary Heritage Collection 1910-1997', <https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/miss-porter%280%99s-house-documentary-heritage-collection-1910-1997>

FAMILY HISTORY at Miss Porter's House.

Bunnings BBQ Sunday 24th August, 11am
If you've not already volunteered and wish to help with the BBQ contact Geoff Farris - geoff.farris@bigpond.com

AGM - Tuesday 2nd September 5:30 pm
Hamilton Uniting Church hall. Everyone welcome to come and discover another wonderful year at MPH. Don't worry, you definitely won't be pressured to volunteer for anything.

what's happening for volunteers

will be submitted, projects being prioritised.

Textiles & Paper - MPH budgeted funds currently being spent on clothing and textile conservation, plus photo and paper item stabilisation. Thank you everyone for all the fundraising done by MPH volunteers.

Bunnings cake stall

A brave band of volunteers battled awful weather to raise over \$400 with the cake stall. Thankyou to all who made goods, and staffed the stall.

There were valuable networking opportunities and expert sessions on everything from researching collections to textile conservation—a parti-

Best of all, she came away reassured: Miss Porter's House is in excellent shape, with strong practices

• Most rewarding -
Food - shared amongst volunteers,
made by volunteers - used to
build connections, take time together
& have a welcoming atmosphere.
Food used to make money for the
operation of the house - including
sales of home made jams, cakes,
biscuits at monthly fells. Sunnies
B-B-Quines & Sunnies cake stall.
Tea & soups for visitors also as fund
raising



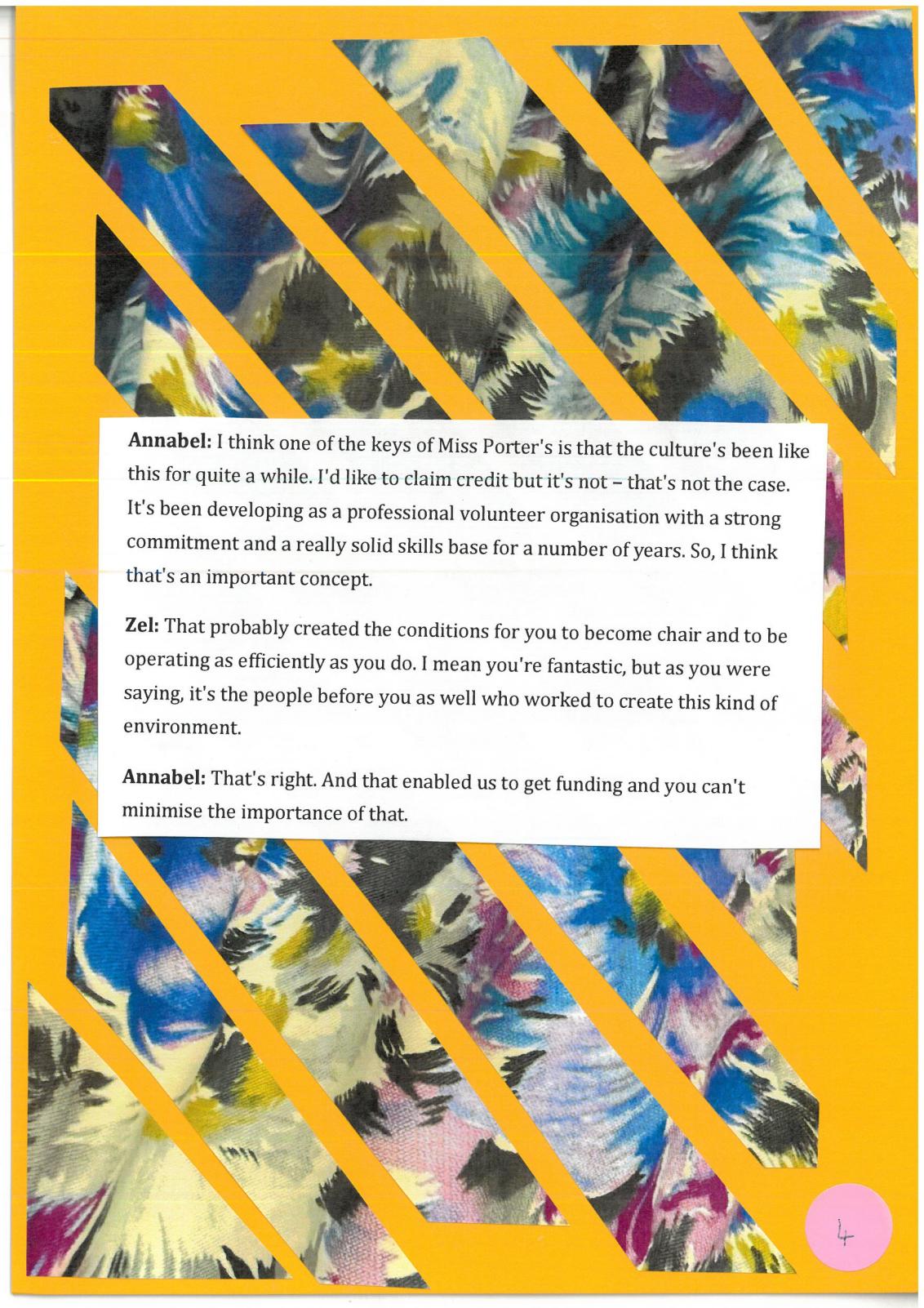
Leadership

Value

Succession
planning

Younger
generations





Annabel: I think one of the keys of Miss Porter's is that the culture's been like this for quite a while. I'd like to claim credit but it's not – that's not the case. It's been developing as a professional volunteer organisation with a strong commitment and a really solid skills base for a number of years. So, I think that's an important concept.

Zel: That probably created the conditions for you to become chair and to be operating as efficiently as you do. I mean you're fantastic, but as you were saying, it's the people before you as well who worked to create this kind of environment.

Annabel: That's right. And that enabled us to get funding and you can't minimise the importance of that.

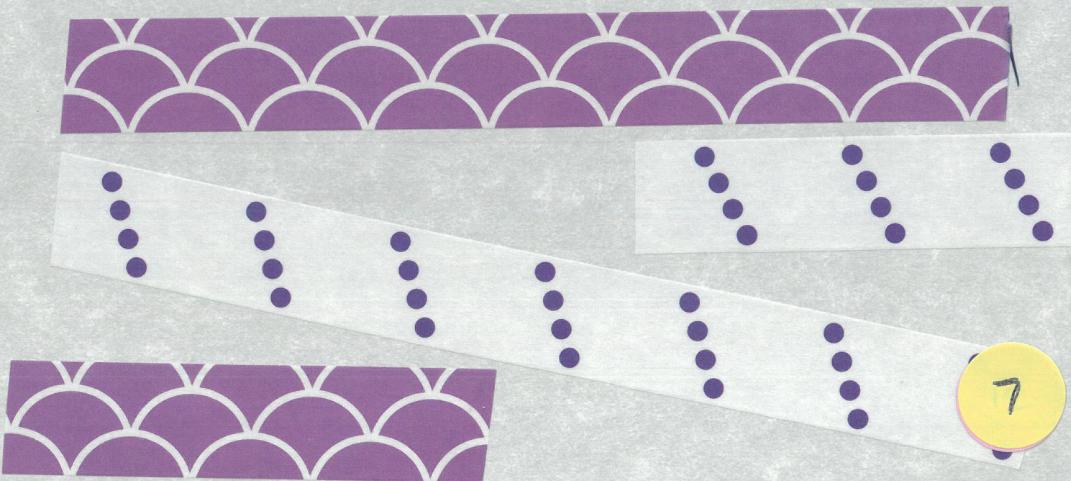
My fondest memory of volunteering here is being welcomed into a new community after moving to Newcastle. The welcome extended to being valued as part of a dynamic group of volunteers, being able to try and use many different skills and finding things I had not previously known I could do.

Discover hidden treasures at Newcastle's only UNESCO-recognised museum. Marvel at nationally recognised documents from the Miss Porter's House collection and other rarely seen beautiful and unique family objects. Visitors will be able to turn the pages of recently acquired replicas of notebooks and albums and see personal objects like a tiny, stylish mother-of-pearl evening purse. All will be on display during **HIDDEN TREASURES** at Miss Porter's House.

From colonial **beginnings** as farmers on Astley Island and in the Singletown area, to their key role in the **commercial life** of Newcastle's West End, the Porters made an important contribution to city life for well over one hundred years. This legacy continues following Hazel Porter's bequest of the family home to the **National Trust**.



The most rewarding thing about being part of Miss Posters House is learning. Learning about the history of the house and who lived in it; how people lived during the 100 years of occupation, the uses that individual items had over the decades and how we can share this learning with our wider community.



governance



Strategic
Planning



Diversity



Relevance

Stewardship



Preservation

Annabel: The advantage of Miss Porter's is that because it was really well set up, and this comes all the way back to when we first opened. The volunteers for years – years – catalogued every single thing in that house. Everything. Every peg, every single thing. The false teeth, everything. Catalogued. And it's all digitised, all that sort of stuff.



The most rewarding thing about being part of MPH is, apart from working with other volunteers, is being able to use the collection as a basis for historical research.

Research is my real joy and then writing about it to explain the Porter stories to visitors and other volunteers.



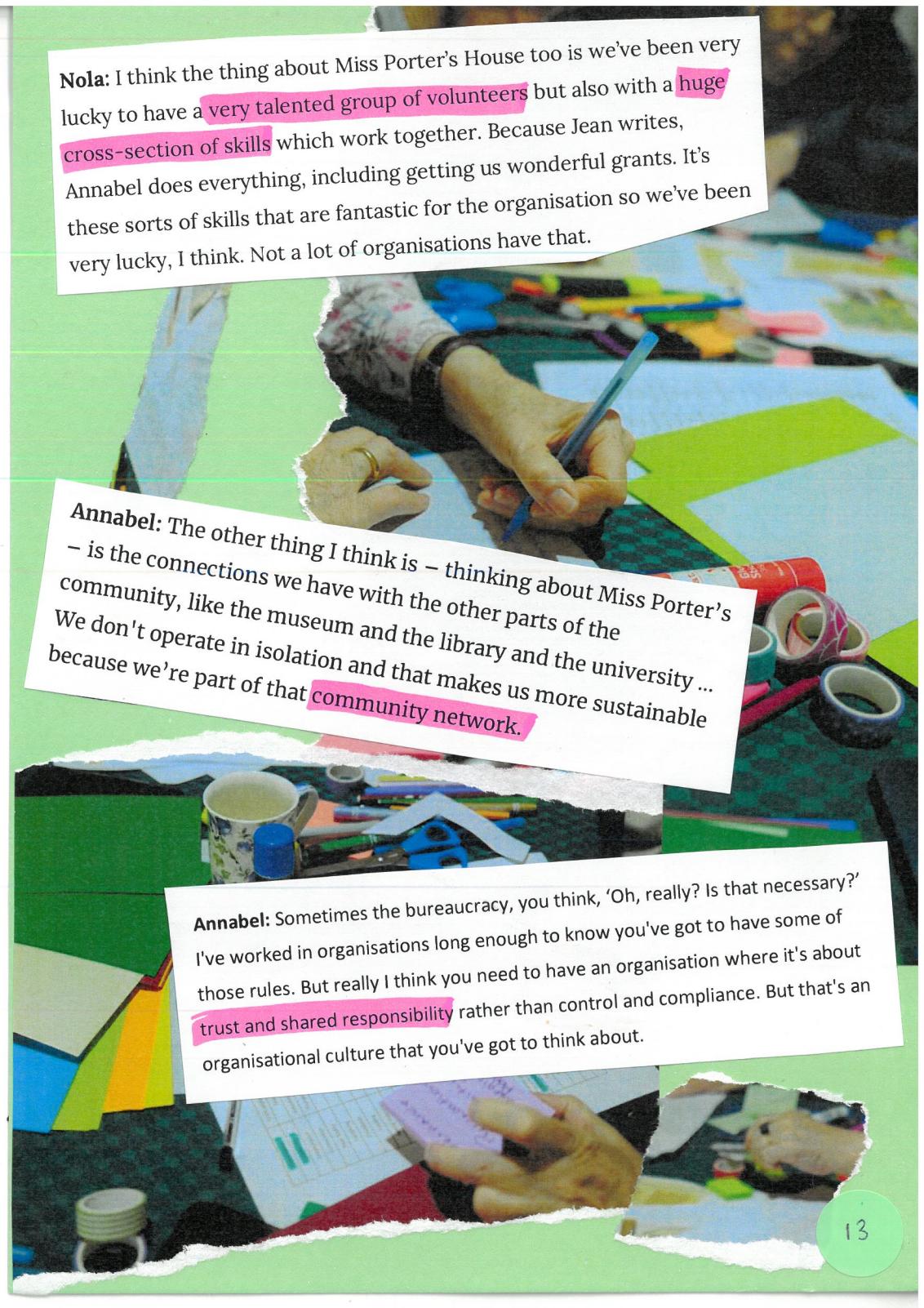
Miss Porter's House has a garden which is remarkable. A rare example of a modest Edwardian town garden of which few examples survive. The near century long residence by one family with limited means and cautious habits, means that the owners can continue to enjoy both the house and the small garden. Both are relatively untouched and retain many of their key elements.

Carefully tended by dedicated volunteers, the Miss Porter's House garden has been maintained in a way which reflects its use by the Porter family. Every 14th is garden Sunday when visitors are specially invited to celebrate spring and see the beauty and moral in house and garden.

The Porter's garden has been retained the original structure of the 1920s but that doesn't mean that they ignored changing plant fashions. The Miss Porter's House collection has a wonderful scrapbook of magazine and newspaper clippings from 1954-77. It contains articles about individual plants, new varieties, growing problems and gives an insight into the typical mid-century tastes. They loved azaleas, camellias and camellias as well as ferns and the new fast growing Australian natives. Tea tree and bottle brush caught their interest, and they are reported to have had great success at the side of the house. So, enjoy everything ... , celebrate Spring in MISS PORTER'S GARDEN and take home a memento from the plant stall.

A difficult challenge I faced when joining Miss Porter's House was the total lack of process & procedures. I had come from a very bureaucratic organisation so felt bereft.

However the volunteer committee rallied and over 5 years we worked to write procedures & implement them until Miss Porter's House became very efficient and effective.



Nola: I think the thing about Miss Porter's House too is we've been very lucky to have a very talented group of volunteers but also with a huge cross-section of skills which work together. Because Jean writes, Annabel does everything, including getting us wonderful grants. It's these sorts of skills that are fantastic for the organisation so we've been very lucky, I think. Not a lot of organisations have that.

Annabel: The other thing I think is – thinking about Miss Porter's – is the connections we have with the other parts of the community, like the museum and the library and the university ... We don't operate in isolation and that makes us more sustainable because we're part of that community network.

Annabel: Sometimes the bureaucracy, you think, 'Oh, really? Is that necessary?' I've worked in organisations long enough to know you've got to have some of those rules. But really I think you need to have an organisation where it's about trust and shared responsibility rather than control and compliance. But that's an organisational culture that you've got to think about.



Fascinating audio stories reveal their migration experiences and can be heard via QR signs in the house. All four of Ella and Hazel Porter's grandparents came from various parts of the United Kingdom. Visitors will be amazed at how these intrepid families undertook the long sea voyage, often with small children, knowing that letters 'home' would follow the same long route.

Unsurprisingly, Florence, Ella and Hazel Porter maintained contact with some of their UK relatives throughout their lives and many wonderful greetings cards exchanged during the early years of the twentieth century are on display.

Visitors can also see grandfather, James Porter, in full Oddfellows regalia and hear the Audio Story of the Porter Shop. An immigrant labourer he transitioned into a worthy Newcastle citizen, storekeeper and property owner who was an active member of many community organisations and honoured at his funeral in 1912 by numerous public dignitaries.

Some of the most stunning photographs and memorabilia belong to Herbert, Florence and their two daughters. This was the family that lived at what is now Miss Porter's House, kept their carrier's horses and cart behind the house, went to school at nearby Cooks Hill and, in Hazel's case, worked all her life for Newcastle businesses. Photographs, cards and other memorabilia are all preserved. See them during FAMILY HISTORY AT MISS PORTER'S HOUSE and hear their Audio Stories.

Leadership

Collaboration

Partnerships

Welcoming
Environment

Enthusiasm.

I recall how great -
when we grand we received to
do a Significance Assessment
unlocked the door to reveal
other grants focusing on conservation
& maintenance of the house.

This also lead to listing with
UNESCO on the Australian Memory
of the World Register for Documentary
Heritage.

Over past years we have worked
through a number of projects to
improve visitor experience and
conserve the collection.

Community partnerships have
also been a key to success &
sustainability.





There is a brilliant idea
the Post keeps us in
lockdown and saves
some of us from total
boredom. There is a
wealth of information
now available on
OneDrive Post Post
1500 BC There is also
an index which makes
for easy research.

INITIALS

Thanks to Wendy Marion, & all for the fascinating presentations on conservation of significant items from the collection, home dressmaking in the 20th century and the development of textiles and sewing technology as reflected in the collection. A fun day, & it was great to see the

Wingless Bees—watch this space for details of the next super fun working bees at MPH.

Adventures in Logos—a big THANK YOU to everyone who acted as mom guides, visitors, child wranglers and catering truck workers during the photo shoot on 10th and 25th March.

How to Date
Billie Moran from the
Museum gave us
some great ideas of
what to look for

exhibition. Tuesday 15th April, 10am for anyone interested in taking down the current display, and we'll be out the next one Contact: Jean

Shering ~~Sheringham~~ ~~bedroom~~ - shelving behind the pink curtain is being dismantled to make more exhibition space and better store the collection. High preservation needs items have gone to the Newcastle Museum store and things previously on the shelves have been relocated under the beds and in the front bedroom cupboard.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

The most rewarding thing about being part of Miss Porter's House is working with interesting, talented volunteers and the friendships I have formed.

I also love meeting visitors who come to the house and sharing stories of the house.

Governance

Strategic
Planning

Leadership

Cataloguing

My favourite part of volunteering at Miss Porter's House is meeting & working with other volunteers learning their life stories & their diverse backgrounds.

I have acquired different skills from these volunteers.

~~David~~

I have spent time with amazing cooks, clever thinkers, wonderful gardeners, creative planners and spent a lot of time laughing.

Annabel: Sometimes there's too much focus on getting young people. Young people have lots of other things that they need to do and older people are really valuable.



Annabel: I don't see our primary goal as trying to get young people involved as volunteers. I think the primary goal is to support the volunteers regardless of their age and to value people regardless of their age. Young people have lots of competing demands. They have young families. Our volunteers also have grandparent duties, a lot of them. And aging parents and all of those sorts of things.

Zel: And partners who might be unwell.

Annabel: Yeah. All of that sort of stuff. So, some people have a strategic goal of getting more young volunteers involved. I don't see that as particularly relevant for us. If we do have young people, fantastic. But people with time and skills often are older. No offence.

MISSION AND VISION

LEADERSHIP

COLLABORATION

RESOURCES

RELEVANCE

The most difficult challenge I've faced was initiating the contact to join Miss Porter's House volunteer group. Difficult because you never know what you are going to get. Are they like minded? ... friendly? inclusive and kind? Will they be my kind of people?

Volunteering is taking a step into the unknown, which is a challenge but also one with great rewards at the end.

my fondest memory of
volunteering here is acting
as a room guide and meeting
the 80+ year old doctor
who had Hazel Portor
as a patient. Some of
the medicine cabinet
is in the laundry.



Zel: Why do you think Miss Porter's House is important to keep around?

Annabel: I think there's two reasons. One is for young people and children to understand the importance of the past. And the other is for older people to be able to reminisce about the past. I also think that there's something in terms of permanence and reflection on difficult times. It was a very difficult century. And it's recent enough for people to feel familiar with it, but it's becoming more and more remote, so its historical importance will increase over time I think.

Acknowledgements

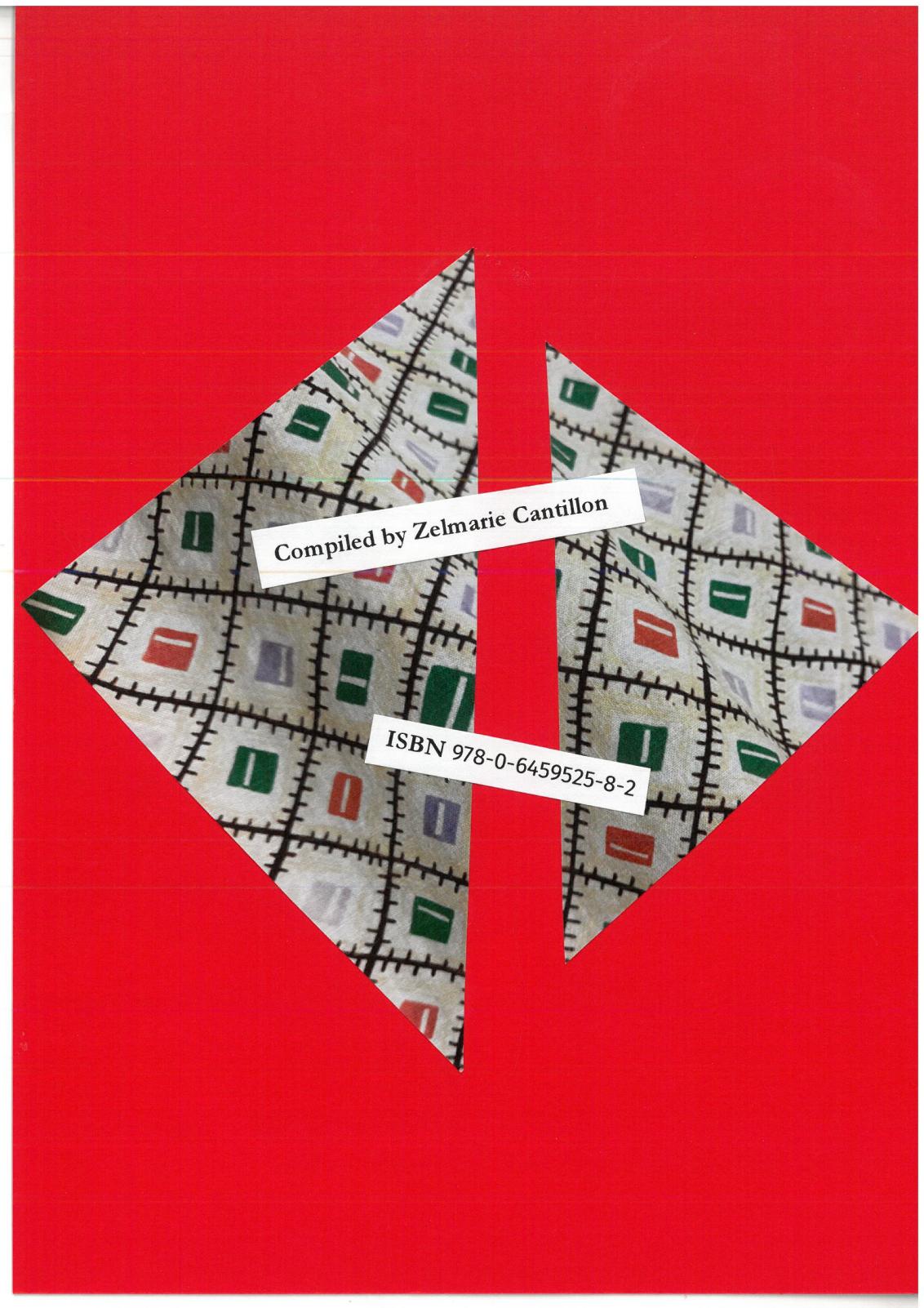
Thank you to the volunteers of Miss Porter's House who engaged with this research. Your willingness to share experiences and offer your views on the sector's organisational sustainability are central to creating a zine series that captures viable futures for community heritage organisations.

Special thanks to Annabel for being Zel's main point of contact for the research and for helping to arrange the zine workshop.

Shout out to Nola for bringing along her apple slice and Caroline for the date loaf with maple butter – both provided excellent zine-making sustenance!



Images used throughout the zine were taken by Zel during fieldwork. Many other images and artwork used are in the public domain (sourced from <https://pdimagearchive.org/>) and do not require attribution. Some images on p. 11 and p. 17 were provided courtesy of Miss Porter's House.



Compiled by Zelmarie Cantillon

ISBN 978-0-6459525-8-2