

We explore how National Lottery funding helped the United Kingdom Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA) adapt to lockdown and launch an award-winning virtual book club.

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There is a wealth of Punjabi heritage in museum, archive and library collections across the UK and internationally. For nearly 20 years volunteer-led UKPHA has been working hard to ensure that heritage is shared with as many people as possible.

Bringing people together through exhibitions and events has been at the heart of that work. So when the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic began, the organisation and its mission were under threat.



A pre-lockdown exhibition visit

Using a?National Lottery grant from our Heritage Emergency Fund, UKPHA was quick to adapt.

Virtual book club

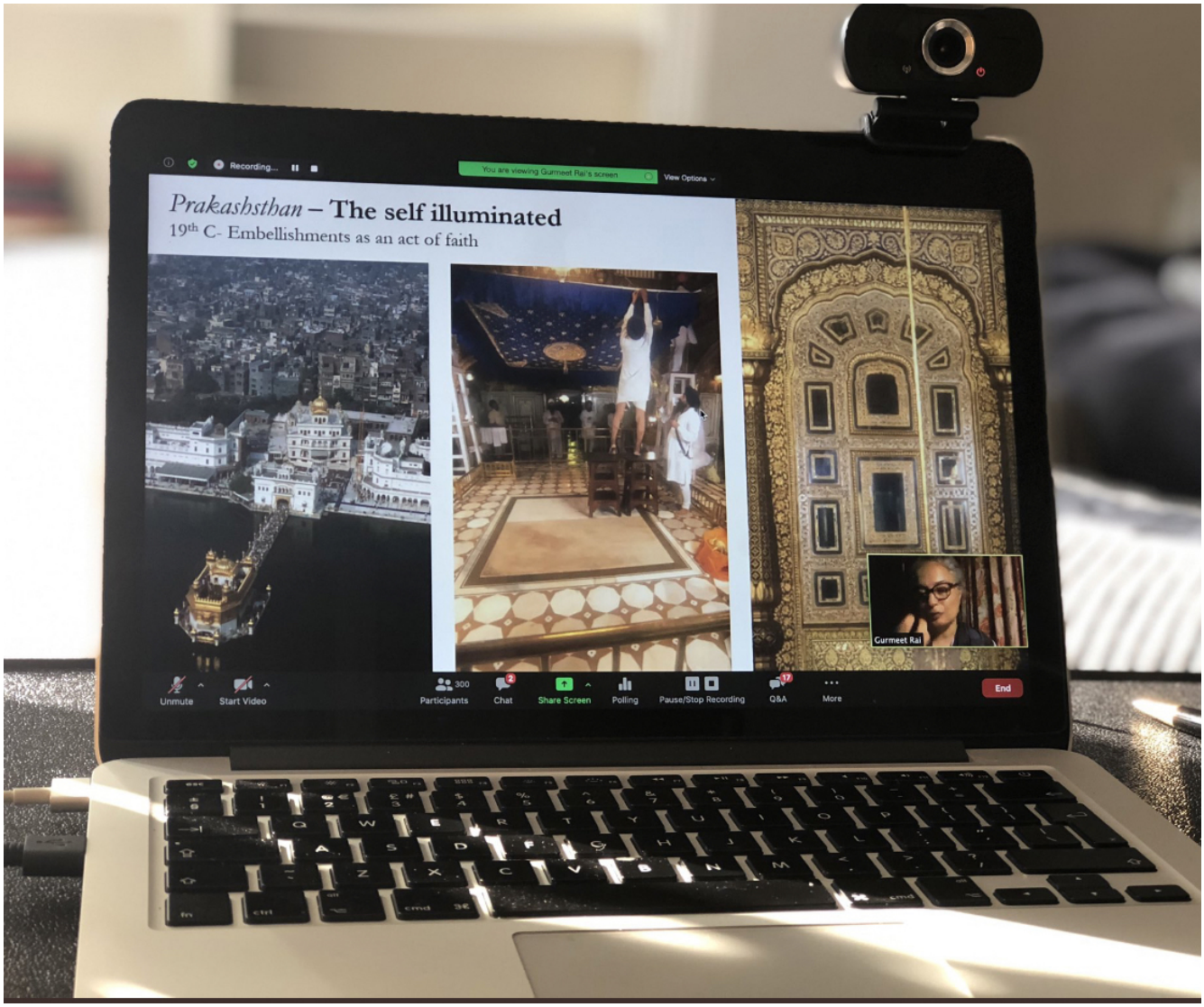
They established a weekly virtual book club in early April, with world-leading speakers and authors covering a huge variety of heritage-related topics. These have included Meera Syal in conversation about her career, BBC journalist Kavita Puri on the 1947 Partition of India and Dr Nadhra Khan with a virtual tour of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's samadhi (funerary monument) in Pakistan.

This impressive schedule of weekly talks, each one free and available via Zoom, will continue until November. All previous sessions are available to watch on UKPHA's website.?

Reaching new audiences

The book club has captured the imagination of a diverse audience and in addition to gaining coverage on BBC radio, two UKPHA volunteers were even awarded a 'Point of Light' award by Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Shamneet Shergill, a UKPHA volunteer, said: "National Lottery emergency funding has been absolutely critical. Through the book club we've been able to continue sharing Punjabi heritage during lockdown, accessing speakers we might never have seen before!"



Sharing Punjabi heritage during lockdown

Moving completely online because of the pandemic has been a huge change but has had its benefits too. Without travel costs, location restrictions and time restraints, UKPHA has secured leading speakers and enabled viewers to access stories and places they would not have been able to before.

It has also seen its audience expand in terms of age. She explains: “As well as the book club, our virtual activity means we’ve been able to reach out to younger people who would not have got involved before. One of our comic films, made by actor and film maker Jassa Ahluwalia, reached around 30,000 people on social media.”

The future

Of course, bringing people together will remain a key part of UKPHA’s work following the pandemic, but having the chance to try things virtually will only strengthen its impact.

Shamneet said: “We now have a new website which reflects our values, we’ve reached more people than ever before and I and other volunteers are able to meet (virtually) more regularly to think creatively about our next steps. We are

already planning for next year and, whether online or in person, it’s going to be really exciting.”



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difficult times

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