This conference explores the contemporary and historical creation, collection and circulation of sound and sound-producing objects, and is guided by the following enlightened advice of Henry Balfour, first curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum: “Any object whether natural or artificial, and however simple, which is employed for the purpose of producing sound (whether ‘musical’ in an aesthetic sense or not) should be included as a musical instrument.” He gave this advice in 1929 to anthropologists engaged in the collection of musical instruments, advice which seems prescient indeed, as distinctions between sound and music are dissolved and re-articulated in contemporary thinking about the sound and sound objects. Such objects have been amassed over 130 years of recording, collected, documented and stored in archives, lofts, memory sticks, phones and clouds, while new technology creates exciting new sonic possibilities: for example, electronic artist Aphex Twin can conduct an orchestra by remote control, engineers use microphones to capture the inaudible, and sound designers use ambisonics to encode sound fields with incredible fidelity.

At this exciting time in the history of sound recording and objects – when the influence of the commercial recording industry is declining, and the age of personal sound production and inter-personal distribution is proliferating—several key questions arise: What methods and resources might scholars use to collect, analyse, create and use sound? How best might we conceptualise the relationships amongst sound archives, museums, contemporary communities and soundscapes? What type of knowledge is it possible to achieve and share through sound and sound-producing objects? How does the creation and sharing of sounds influence and change societies? This one-day conference is hosted by the Pitt Rivers Museum, and seeks interdisciplinary engagement with these questions. Contributions have been welcomed from anthropologists, musicologists, acousticians, historians, geographers, organologists, sound engineers, song collectors, audio archaeologists, and fine and sound artists – in fact anyone engaged with the production and analysis of sound.

Sound at the Pitt Rivers Museum

The profile of sound, music and performance at Pitt Rivers Museum is expanding greatly. ‘Real to Reel’ is a project that has been running for this year, designed to establish the framework that can pioneer a new model for sound archiving that brings our sound collections out of the suitcases and back into the spaces of people’s lives. One thousand hours of recordings from the Central African Republic are beginning to circulate back in Yandoumbé and inspire young and elder BayAka. Thousands of school children have engaged with our BayAka recordings locally, and I have been putting together an expanding network of researchers, film-makers, sound artists, audio engineers, NGOs and health-care providers in order to develop ongoing and sustainable relationships between sound recordings and contemporary communities. My long-term aim is to develop sound recording collections into mutually interactive resources for collectors, institutions and indigenous communities.

Inspired by Henry Balfour’s enlightened approach to sound over 80 years ago, I very much hope that this conference will enable us all to think through possibilities for how ethnomusicologists, sonic artists, and sound ethnographers can productively combine. I would like to invite us all to consider how we might develop the published and performative legacy from today’s collaborative engagements.

Dr Noel Lobley, Conference Convenor
noel.lobley@prm.ox.ac.uk

http://pittrivers-sound.blogspot.co.uk
http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/sound.html
Programme of Events

Registration: 9:00-9:30 (Blackwood Seminar Room). Coffee. Welcome: Noel Lobley, Pitt Rivers Museum

Session 1: Active Cultures of Recording
09:30-11:00 (PRM Lecture Theatre)
Discussant: Dr Tom Hodgson (University of Oxford)

9:30: David Gunn, Founding Director of Incidental
Unhaunting: Music and Memory in Contemporary Cambodia

Drawing directly upon the author’s own experiences of running a range of sound projects in Cambodia, this paper focuses upon the role of music artefacts, processes and archives as transitional objects (Winnicott, 1953) that enable individuals and groups to negotiate cultural memory and to frame experiences of intercultural contact. To begin, the paper will briefly outline the historical conditions in Cambodia, which provide an almost unique context to analyse the relationship of cultural tradition to archival processes – with an estimated 90% of all artists and musicians killed and the nation’s musical heritage and archive almost entirely destroyed during four years of Khmer Rouge rule. In subsequent decades the recovery, conservation and archiving of cultural traditions became a key priority. However, as key cultural actors recognize that this phase of activity is now drawing to completion, cultural conditions within Cambodia are entering a period of complex transition. Drawing examples from the author’s own practice and key actors within Cambodia, the paper argues that this period should be understood quite explicitly as a tense renegotiation with the recently restored cultural archive, where processes of re-use and recontextualisation are fraught with emotion and danger. Where the discipline of archival curation and custodianship may traditionally place emphasis upon notions of clear transmissability of data, this paper will explore what happens to forms of sound and music when archival order or integrity collapses or simply is not present. In such circumstances, it will be argued that paradoxically it is precisely through staging its own collapse and obsolescence that the archive performs its most vital function.

10:00: David Henig, School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent
Divinity in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction: Sounded Pedagogy Among Dervishes in the Western Balkans

The significance of sensory media in the study of the creation, transmission and mediation of divine knowledge has been widely recognised. Yet very little has been written about the relationship between sensory media, divinity and creativity in the moments of rapture and discontinuity. In this paper I ethnographically document how production, circulation and exchange of sensory media -sounded objects of musical ritual performances - are used in the network of a Balkan dervish cult that strives to reassembling once lost religious knowledge. Dervish groups across the former Yugoslavia feel today a loss of continuity due to official bans and restrictions imposed by the state socialist state for several decades. The liberation of religious conduct since the early 1990s has opened new possibilities for reviving dervish teaching, and ecstatic rituals (zikr) in particular. Based on ethnographic fieldwork of a dervish cult that stretches between Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania, this paper documents dervishes’ engagements with sound and DVD media, to produce, gain and exchange divine knowledge. It illustrates how such an engagement with, and circulation of, sensory media are creatively used by the dervishes as a sounded pedagogy to rehearse the musical ecstatic rituals in particular. This paper concludes that ethnographic engagement with soundscapes and its materiality sheds light on creative forms of ‘religious-knowledge-in-the-making’.
10:30: Matthew Campbell, Cognitive Ethnomusicologist, Ohio State University

Affective Traces: Sounds of Intimacy and the Phenomenology of the Voice in Amateur Tape Exchange during the Vietnam Conflict.

“It was just more … real … as if they were there. Personal … in a way a letter couldn’t be. The tapes were really what got me through it.” These words from my grandfather, Lt. Col. James T. Gunby, allude to the palliative and intersubjective salience of the voice, communicated between Spokane and Khorat via technology newly available to military families during the Vietnam Conflict: the portable reel-to-reel tape recorder. Based on dialogic interpretations of five reels recorded in 1967, this paper details the verbal framings, multimedia juxtapositions, and paralinguistic performances through which my grandparents and their children shared the minutiae of their daily lives while negotiating their overlapping roles as husband/father/pilot, wife/mother/provider, and together, partner, confidant, and citizen. In their experimentation with recording, my grandparents gave aural form to their letter-writing practices, opening generative gaps between intention and execution, the symbolic and the real. These gaps reveal and reify intimate “excesses” from silences to frame breaks, the “grain” of the voice to bodily expression, and comments on the medium itself. I argue that it is precisely these unintended “spillages” which engendered a sense of immediacy and “closeness” both my grandparents described as essential to their relationship. Far from ephemeral, these tapes provided a sense of grounded materiality and malleability beyond that of a written letter. They captured the affective soundscapes of the officer’s club, rambunctious living room, and twilight bedroom while also remaining open to endless rewinding/replaying, creating active listening spaces more immersive than the inner-languaging of reading and imbued with the spontaneity of the unrehearsed and unexpected. While enduring the fear and separation of wartime military life, reel-to-reel supplied my family with a novel means of constituting temporary “presences” to bridge the geographic, temporal, and affective distances that divided them.

11:00-11:30

Coffee

(Blackwood Seminar Room and PRM staff room)
Session 2: Making Sonic Time Capsules – Histories and Futures of Listening and Circulating
11:30-13:00 (PRM Lecture Theatre)
Discussant: Dr Jo Hicks (University of Oxford)

11:30: Paul Whitty, Research Director for Film, Fine Art and Music, Director of the Sonic Arts Research Unit (SARU), Oxford Brookes University

Auditory Archaeology: Object, Text and Place as Sonic Time Capsule

This paper examines relationships between objects, texts and places and their potential activation as Sonic Time Capsules. Using auditory archaeology as the principal methodology it proposes the prioritization of sound as the principle method of reading our surroundings.

Sound is latent in the objects that surround us. The sounds of manufacture – memorably synchronised with our experience of the finished object by Robert Morris in his *Box with the sound of its own making* (1961); the sounds of use; of installation – even that most mute of objects, the shelf, has a rich auditory heritage when it comes to installation; of location – the soundscape inhabited by the object. This paper will explore the auditory world of the object; the insight that texts can give us into past soundscapes inhabited by those objects; and the former life of objects and places. Examining how the objects we encounter in our everyday lives – if we listen to their auditory past – can become Sonic Time Capsules hidden in plain sight.

Sound is a key element in the evocation of place in novels and poetry from the ‘bellow and uproar’ of Mrs. Dalloway’s London (Virginia Woolf; 1925); to the sound of radio static described by Tom McCarthy in his novel *C* (2010): ‘The static’s like the sound of thinking.’ The written word is rich with allusion to sound and this is particularly observed in the Text Scores of experimental composers. Alvin Lucier’s *Gentle Fire* (1971) features lists of sounds that tell us much about the world the author inhabited in 1971 ‘Buzzing saws, Landing jets, Drilling rigs...’ and forms an index for further exploration of the soundscape of the early seventies.

In examining this territory I seek to activate the cacophony of auditory information latent in our daily experience.

12:00: Felicity Ford, Sonic Arts Research Unit (SARU), Oxford Brookes University

Virtual Sound Museums: Digital Phonographic Archives as Sonic Time Capsules

This paper examines how digitally creating and archiving field-recordings might inform the physical production of a sonic time capsule. A Sound Diaries project by Felicity Ford entitled "The UK Soundmap / Sonic Time Capsule" forms a case-study for this examination.

In "The UK Soundmap / Sonic Time Capsule" Sound Diaries project, field-recordings deemed characteristic of everyday life in 2011 were collected and presented online on the Sound Diaries website. Integral to the project’s concept was that each recorded sound would also be publicly submitted to the online UK Soundmap, created by The British Library.

In a sense, making field-recordings publicly destined for the UK Soundmap was a deliberate act of “making history”, and this intentionality shaped several aspects of the endeavor. This project also intersected with the archival practices of the British Library, extending the new relationships between artists and museums that are emerging in the hyperlinked, hyperconnective digital age. The project exemplifies a contemporary trend in which the roles of museums, sound archives, artists and sound-objects are becoming more transparently interdependent and entwined.

However the meaningfulness of "The UK Soundmap / Sonic Time Capsule" Sound Diaries project to a future listener is entirely contingent on the online contexts of The UK Soundmap and the Sound Diaries website retaining their comprehensibility and functions as frameworks. This paper asks how this project might be preserved in a non-digital fashion, or whether the project is impossible to replicate in a non-digital form or context.
Listening to the Present: A Sonic Time Capsule

This paper examines how the process of creating a sonic time capsule can be a valuable methodology for tuning our listening and encouraging us to reflect critically upon our soundscape. It argues that a culture of listening must be created around the sound objects we collect and preserve in order to guarantee a permanence of their meaning. To explore these ideas, I will present “A Sonic Time Capsule”, an instruction manual I have compiled.

“A Sonic Time Capsule” is an instruction manual for building a sonic time capsule that also attempts to investigate the philosophical implications embedded in this process. It outlines a hypothetical workshop in which people interested in “listening to the present” decide on and perform the contents of a sonic time capsule. Listening exercises, by Pauline Oliveros and Raymond Murray Schafer, and questions written specifically for the task, serve as cues for the participants. An explanation of how listening critically can allow us to interpret the soundscape we live in and become active agents in it is also discussed.

This paper concludes with some reflections on how the process of creating a sonic time capsule can generate a culture of listening. What is kept for posterity is not a material object, such as the NASA’s Golden Record, but rather a listening strategy that allows future listeners to engage with their soundscape meaningfully (similarly to Alvin Lucier’s score for “North American Time Capsule”).

The process of collating “A Sonic Time Capsule” emphasizes the impossibility of reifying time on a physical medium, and how creating a live listening experience that preserves the ephemeral nature of sound can be a solution for this.
Session 3: The Art of Practical Sound Objects  
14:00-15:30: (PRM Lecture Theatre)  
Discussant: Menaka PP Bora (University of Oxford-Goldsmiths)

14:00: Diana Salazar, Composer & Senior Lecturer in Music Technology, Kingston University  
The Sound-Object as Spatial Signifier in Electronic Music: A Case Study of Spatial Relations in La Voz del Fuelle

It has been widely acknowledged that space on an intrinsic level is a vital musical parameter in electroacoustic music (Harrison 1999, Barrett 2002, Henriksen 2002). The manipulation of space-form (Smalley 2007) may result in enhanced sonic expression through features such as implied physicality, presence and agency, in turn creating exciting possibilities for the composer.

This paper will examine the manipulation of space-form in the author’s own fixed media electronic work La Voz del Fuelle (2010). The work is a sonic re-imagining of the stylistic, cultural and performative qualities that characterise the music of Tango. At its core is the exploration of physical properties of the bandoneon.

With reference to the reality-abstraction continuum (Young 1996) inherent in electronic music, I will consider how the recorded sound-objects in this work are arranged and manipulated in order to explore a number of spatial parameters. In particular, I will examine how the bandoneon, in its recorded and electronically modified forms, is presented in various sonic guises, notable as instrument, as cultural signifier, as gestural device, as implied agency and as abstract sound.

It is proposed that by embracing the original spatial attributes of a sound-object, including its cultural implications, the sound-object can become a powerful tool for expressing sonic meaning and articulating structure in electronic music. The paper will consider the gains, risks and opportunities presented when using such tangible spatial signifiers, arguing that they may be valuable in enhancing listener engagement and exploring new performance environments.

14:30: Chris Dorsett, Professor of Fine Art, Northumbria University  
Synaesthetic Presences: New Sights from Old Sounds

‘The storehouses of memory … are ecologies where the materials of the world are living, dying, and being devoured.’

Throughout my childhood there was a box of home-made gramophone records in my parents' loft. The box had been in storage since the 1940s when my father, following demobilization from the Army, earned extra cash during his first three post-war summer vacations recording messages for families with relatives still committed to military duties abroad. He had built the recording equipment himself and undertook many phonographic experiments using primitive shellac discs before launching his short-lived entrepreneurial venture. By the end of the decade magnetic tape had become commercially available and my father's project lost viability. The test recordings were stored away and forgotten.

This paper explores my reasons for retrieving these records and rethinking their status in the context of my practice as a visual artist. With my father's disintegrating shellac 'storehouse of memories' rehoused in my studio I have been able to examine the forms of personal remembrance forced upon me by a sound world now almost certainly beyond recovery. Curiously, the records hold my attention precisely because my ability to listen has been eclipsed by the scope I now have to look. This discovery, an unexpected encounter with the synaesthetic, substantially extends my exploration of the creative interface between contemporary art practice and museum display - the area of practice I have specialised in throughout my career as an artistcurator. From both personal and cultural perspectives, the significance of my father's recording project changed as I incorporated his discs into improvisatory 'overdrawings' based on the work of the German artist Arnulf Rainer. The type of transsensory experiences generated by these drawings suggested the theme of this paper: if it is possible to speak of ‘synaesthetic presences’ (a concept that invites comparison with George Steiner's notion of 'real presences') then perhaps there are museological, as well as artistic, conclusions to draw from the creation of, as my title has it, new sights from old sounds.
15:00: Deirdre Morgan, Department of Music, School of Oriental and African Studies

Hearing the Balinese genggong: the Jew’s harp and the Anthropology of Musical Instruments

A musical instrument is the material realization of an intended purpose, a vessel for content, an emblem of human ingenuity and imagination, and a testament to the universal presence of music in human activity. The ways in which an instrument is used in various cultures offers a glimpse of each culture’s musical perspective, a concentrated capsule of how the world sounds there. The Jew’s harp is unique among instruments, and in its apparent simplicity it is deceptive. It has been adapted to a wide array of cultural contexts worldwide and a diverse range of playing techniques, which, upon closer examination, reveal much about the cultures that generate them. Using the case study of the Balinese Jew’s harp genggong, this paper examines the phenomenon of the instrument’s adaptation to the cultural-musical aesthetic of Bali, looking at its physical, social, and musical construction and illustrating how it is used to reflect Balinese concepts of tuning, scale, and interlocking rhythmic figurations. Drawing on perspectives from organology, ethnomusicology, material culture, and the anthropology of the body, this paper explores how the study of musical instruments can enhance our understanding of the human relationship with sound.

15:30-16:00

Coffee

(Blackwood Seminar Room and PRM Staff Room)
Session 4: 
David Toop and Max Eastley in Conversation
16:00-17:30: (PRM Lecture Theatre)
Chair: Dr Noel Lobley (Pitt Rivers Museum)

“We took inspiration from looking at global instruments (usually within ethnographic contexts), from listening to global music and considering the implications of such actions and artifacts on the notion of what music, soundwork and sounding ‘instruments’ might be, particularly in relation to the wider environment of an acoustic ecology. Oxford’s Pitt Rivers played a highly significant part in the discoveries of that time … simply because of the museum’s taxonomy, the somewhat disconcerting organisation of objects that more closely fitted our emergent conception of fluid boundaries and new or blurred categories.”

Max Eastley and David Toop first met at the end of the 1960s. Both of them were guitar players. Max had performed as a folk singer and David had played in blues bands, but as art students, both were searching for ways to redefine the role of sound in society, environment and imagination. Extremely original and productive in areas as diverse as radio, improvisation, opera and inventive organology, they are both known as two of the finest sound artists and thinkers in the world today.

David Toop is a composer, musician, author and curator who has worked in many fields of sound art and music, including improvisation, sound installations, field recordings, pop music production, music for television, theatre and dance. He studied fine art and graphic design in the late 1960s, then in 1971-2 participated as guitarist and flautist in the first improvisation workshops led by jazz drummer John Stevens. He has published five books, currently translated into nine languages: Rap Attack, Ocean of Sound, Exotica (a winner of the 21st annual American Books Awards for 2000), and Haunted Weather. His fifth book – Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener – was published by Continuum in July 2010. Exhibitions he has curated include Sonic Boom at the Hayward Gallery in London (2000), Playing John Cage at the Arnolfini in Bristol (2003), and Blow Up at Flat-Time House, London (2010). His opera, Star-shaped Biscuit, was performed as a Faster Than Sound project for Aldeburgh Music in September 2012, and he is currently developing music-theatre works for live voice, HD video and digital sound. He is also researching and writing a new book – Into the Maelstrom: Improvised Music In Pursuit of Freedom.

David Toop is Visiting Professor at Leeds College of Music and Senior Research Fellow at London College of Communication.

Max Eastley is an internationally recognized sound and visual artist, sculptor, composer and inventor of instruments. He is currently a Research Fellow at Oxford Brookes University where he is leading the project ‘Aeolian Sound: An investigation of Aeolian Phenomena and their incorporation into Sonic Culture.’ Max is well known for his installation and recorded works which combine kinetic sound sculptures and music into a unique art form. He has performed, toured and created sound installations across the globe. In 2000 he exhibited six installations at Sonic Boom at the Hayward Gallery, London and travelled to Japan to exhibit and perform at ICC Tokyo. Max is also a long-standing friend of Cape Farewell art and climate change project, having been on many of the Art and Science Expeditions and contributed to several exhibitions since the project’s inception in 2001. In 2002 he exhibited at the Festival De Arte Sonoro, Mexico City, and was commissioned by Siobhan Davies Dance to write music for the dance piece Plants and Ghosts which toured the UK. His album ARCTIC premiered to a sell-out audience at the Planetarium in Hamburg 2007, and included sound recordings of the Bearded Seal, the Nooderlicht sailing schooner, the Barentsberg coal mine and recordings of the Arc, an electro acoustic monochord played by Max at Cape Farewell exhibitions in Oxford and London.

Max Eastley is a Research Fellow in the Sonic Arts Research Unit at Oxford Brookes University.
17:30-19:00
Break for dinner (not provided)

Room reserved in suggested pub:

*The King’s Arms, 40 Holywell Street, Oxford, OX1 3SP*
01865 242369

Plus

Option of walking tour to ‘Chorus’ - Ray Lee’s kinetic sound sculptures at Oxford Castle Gardens, OX1 1AY
(organized in association with Oxford Contemporary Music)

**Session 5:**
‘Making Live Sound Objects’ in the Pitt Rivers Museum
19:00 – 21:00 (PRM galleries)

Contributions from Robin Alderton, David Toop and Max Eastley

*Robin Alderton*

An intervention into the Pitt Rivers Museum’s sound archive by sound artist and performer Robin Alderton will bring the material, historical and physical aspects of the sound recordings and song collecting to the audible foreground.

Nestled amongst the cabinets of the Clore balcony on the lower gallery, to be discovered as if just another artifact in the collection, Robin will surround himself with antiquated audio technology: spinning dansettes, flailing reel to reel recorders, clicking dictaphones, overdubbed cassettes and flashing samplers. Alderton will plunder the sound archive to craft a palette of sound from which he will create a shifting textural composition. His source sounds, however, will not be restricted to the music captured in the archives, but will draw from the incidentally recorded mechanical sounds and recording errors, microphone tests, and the voices of the song collectors themselves. His performance will resonate with ideas of sound recording technology, nostalgia, memory and place - the processes of deterioration, of forgetting, and the social and political intentions and actions behind song collecting.

Robin Alderton is a sound artist, musician, and fine artist who draws inspiration from the biographies of explorers and from the transformative and reflective works of Simon Starling, Tacita Dean, Stefan Gec and Philip Jeck.

Robin has presented work throughout Europe, and has recently collaborated with the Britten Sinfonia. He is best known as one third of the UK’s finest avant folk ensemble Dead Rat Orchestra, whose work includes soundtracks for BBC Scotland and Tate Modern, and extensive international touring with Godspeople You Black Emperor, Eric Chenaux and Baby Dee, amongst others.

*wine reception
free entry, all welcome*
Conference Convenor:

Dr Noel Lobley
noel.lobley@prm.ox.ac.uk

Organising Committee:

Dr Jo Hicks (Faculty of Music, University of Oxford)
Dr Tom Hodgson (Faculty of Music, University of Oxford)
Peter Hudston (Reel to Real Project, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford)
Dr Carolyn Landau (Department of Music, King’s College, London)
Dr Noel Lobley (Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford)
Nathaniel Robin Mann (Sound and Music/ OCM Embedded composer-in-residence at the Pitt Rivers Museum)

WITH THANKS

Many thanks to all our speakers and performers

David Gunn, David Henig, Matthew Campbell, Paul Whitty, Felicity Ford, Andrea Zarza Canova, Diana Salazar, Chris Dorsett, Deirdre Morgan, Robin Alderton, David Toop and Max Eastley

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Chris Morton, Cathy Wright, John Simmons, Jon Eccles, Haas Ezzet at the PRM, George Kwaider, Ed Tolley and all of the front of house staff at the PRM, Dan Burt, Lauren Spiceley and John Wadsworth, Gina Emerson, Stephanie MacGillivray, Edward Smith, Nomi Dave, Victor Vu, Zakir George

With special thanks to

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Dr Angela Impey at SOAS, Laudan Nooshin at City University, Whitney Conti,

Owed many pints

Jo, Tom, Peter, Carolyn, Nathaniel and Menaka

Dedication

Dr Hélène la Rue
a scholar, a mentor, and a friend

Design and Website: Whitney Conti
www.whitneyconti.com

http://pittrivers-sound.blogspot.co.uk
http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/reel2real/
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2013 Joint Annual Meeting of the
British Forum for Ethnomusicology and ICTM-Ireland

‘Ethnomusicology in the Digital Age’

4-7 April 2013

Queen’s University Belfast
Keynote Speaker: Prof Leslie Gay

For further information see the conference website at http://www.bfe.org.uk and/or http://www.ictm.ie

Contact the conference organizers via s.reily@qub.ac.uk
Making Sound Objects Map

Making Sound Objects Map – Key

📍 Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PP

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 The King's Arms, 40 Holywell Streem, Oxford, OX1 3SP

 St John's College, St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3JP

Ray Lee Kinetic Sculpture, Oxford Castle, Oxford, OX1 1AY
Notes