**Talk title:**

Activating the Heritage Database: Digital Pasts in the Postdigital Present

**Speaker titles and affiliation:**

Prof Dr Gil Pasternak

Photographic History Research Centre, De Montfort University, United Kingdom

**Abstract/synopsis:**

This talk will consider ways to recharge heritage databases with social significance in the context of the postdigital world, where their prevalence and enormity have often damaged their useability and value. For the past three decades, heritage practitioners have used digital technology to convert cultural artefacts into digital files, be it as a way of reducing their wear and tear or as a means of increasing their public accessibility. Digitisation has, similarly, aided them in expanding heritage collections to represent vernacular culture and in facilitating the involvement of non-professional heritage enthusiasts in the identification of valuable artefacts. Most commonly safeguarding digital surrogates of written documents and multiple types of image-objects, these endeavours’ resulting databases are now normally publicly accessible. Yet, the magnitude of the data they contain tends to render them both too rich and too diverse to express the cultural heritage that they were meant to safeguard in the first place. Arguing that most often heritage organisations have developed databases by employing *digital memory* with disregard of the functions and uses of *human memory*, the talk will first consider the differences between these memory systems. A few case studies relating to family history, migrant experiences, and national and local heritage will then be presented to explore how heritage databases may be integrated into the fabric of everyday life to embed their digital contents in forms of cultural or collective human memory. In doing so, the talk embraces a postdigital approach, intended to shift the centre of attention of debates about digital heritage from explorations of the benefits and disadvantages of digital technology towards people’s cultural, emotional, and educational needs in the early twenty-first century. The talk will therefore equip the audience with ideas about the scope for the development of people-centred digital heritage.

**Biographical note:**

Gil Pasternak is Professor of Photographic Cultures and Heritage in the Photographic History Research Centre (PHRC) at De Montfort University in the United Kingdom. Investigating intersections of photography with politics and cultural heritage practices, his research focuses on uses of national and community photographic digital heritage. His most recent publications include *The Handbook of Photography Studies* (Routledge, 2020) and the special issue “Photographic Digital Heritage in Cultural Conflicts” (*Photography & Culture*, 2021). In 2018-21, Pasternak served as Project Leader of the European Commission funded research project*Digital Heritage in Cultural Conflicts* (DigiCONFLICT), and he is currently Project Leader of *Picturing Untold Migration Experiences*, a participatory research project funded by United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) that explores the potential employment of community-based photographic digital heritage in school education on local history.