

Landscape and Arts Network Newsletter

July 2017

Below you will find the impassioned write up of our January meeting in London by Sarah McCarthy. Thank you to all of you who were able to attend – it was a great gathering with lots of real energy in the room.

The Northern Heartlands bid for the Great Place Scheme which I spoke about at the meeting has proved successful. Over the next 3 years, Northern Heartlands has a total of £1.8 million to spend on putting the arts at the heart of local life in a large swathe of western Co. Durham. LAN's September 2016 symposium Artists, Farmers and Philosophers was instrumental in shaping the bid. This puts the network and its members in a good position to contribute to this scheme, not only in Co Durham but potentially to the other successful schemes across England.

1 IS THERE A GREAT PLACE SCHEME NEAR YOU?

Here's the list of successful bids (see <https://www.greatplacescheme.org.uk/more-information-about-great-place-scheme> for more details):

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council –£1,264,000

Coventry City of Culture Trust -£1,489,200

Craven District Council – £1,340,300

Derbyshire County Council (East Midlands) – 'Vital Valley: A creative future for Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site' - £1,285,800

Gloucester City Council - £1,489,200

Greater Manchester Combined - £1,489,255

Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft - £737,900

Great Yarmouth Borough Council – 'Making Waves Together - Reimagining the Seaside Towns of Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth'

Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (London) – £1,489,200

Reading Borough Council (South East) - £558,400

Rural Media Charity (West Midlands) – 'Herefordshire's a Great Place' - £748,200

Sunderland Culture (North East) – 'Sunderland Comes of Age' - £1,249,900

Tees Valley Combined Authority (North East) – 'Greater Tees' - £1,332,500

The Creative Foundation (South East) – 'Pioneering Places: East Kent' - £1,489,200

Torbay Economic Development Company Ltd (South West) - £1,191,400

Visit County Durham (North East) – ‘Northern Heartlands’ - £1,489,200

Walthamstow , London Borough of Waltham Forest- £1,355,600

With respect to the Northern Heartlands bid, artists and landscape activists of all stripes are going to be instrumental in many ways. One of these will be as independent brokers between hard-pressed communities and the policy & planning spheres. Opportunities for residencies will likely commence in 2018 but there is a Community Initiative Fund that will be launched earlier so go to the website <http://northernheartlands.org/> and follow on twitter @NHeartlands for updates . As for the other schemes, I would urge everyone to make themselves known to your nearest scheme and get involved. It’s artists that need to be in the lead of initiatives like this.

For those in Scotland, the scheme is also being rolled out as we speak so do keep an eye on what’s happening.

2 NOTICE

At the January meeting, a provisional date for an EGM in Hull was chalked in for Sunday 2nd July. You will, I hope, have surmised by the absence of any further notification, that this will not be happening. There is an impasse which needs to be overcome before any EGM can be meaningful. We will notify everyone as soon as we’re in a position to move forwards with a meeting.

3 WRITE UP OF LAN’S JANUARY MEETING BY DR. SARAH MCCARTHY

Ewan Allinson set the context for the LAN meeting in London 28 January voicing his belief that that there has never been a better time for the network to be active. The arts can lead the way, he said, in helping to effect participatory processes in policy and practice regarding all aspects of life – from health and well-being to the environment – because they bring people together who don’t ordinarily communicate; people who think they’re in different camps but, through creating and using a common language, realise they’re not. Art can erode the isolation between sectors, and involve people on the ground in policy creation and decision.

He talked about a recent, inspirational project – the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership. Taking its cue from the European Landscape Convention, the Heritage Lottery Fund landscape partnership scheme understands and promotes landscape as dynamic and holistic, deriving its multi-layered and diverse character through the interaction of multiple sectors, interests, experiences and approaches through participation, adaptation and simply living. LP projects funded by the HLF, such as the HoT, seek to strengthen and enable - through activities rooted in landscapes and the communities who live in and create them. The USP of the Heart of Teesdale project was to draw on the skills of artists and the interpretive and performative aspects of artistic practices to foster greater engagement between communities and their landscapes. The success of this approach and the project overall

was epitomised in the project's final and hugely successful symposium entitled 'Artists, Farmers and Philosophers' – one of the outcomes of which was a series of recommendations to

Ewan then moved on to talk about the role of LAN in this context. The Network has been dormant for a while and needs to be invigorated. To do this, a number of people, including current and potentially interested future trustees, have got together a few times since last summer (2016) to try and identify what steps need to be taken to get the Network properly active again. The first step is to enlist and arrange for the official appointment of at least five new trustees who are willing to take on task of reviewing the organisation's remit and governance so that it is fit for purpose going forward.

The importance of providing attractive membership services for the growth and sustainability of the organisation was raised from the floor. This was acknowledged and, in the discussion that briefly followed, it was suggested that the main priority must really be to ensure that the governance matters are in order and procedures must be put in place to deliver the aims and objectives of LAN.

It was decided to devote time to this aspect in the final session, after hearing the range of presentations to be given by a LAN members promised in the programme.

3.1 EWAN ALLINSON

3.1.1 The Great Places scheme and the role of LAN

From Ewan's perspective, one of the main aims of this LAN meeting was to create an audit of members' strengths and experiences to feed into the developing process of the Great Places Scheme.

Led by the HLF, Historic England and Arts Council England, this is a pilot scheme that "will fund projects in areas where there is a commitment to embed arts, culture and heritage in local plans and decision-making. By strengthening the networks between culture, civic and community organisations, and by involving citizens and local businesses, projects will enhance the role that culture plays in the future of each place participating in the Scheme. In time this will lead to the wide range of social and economic benefits that arts, culture and heritage can achieve", for example in "long term plans and strategies for the area such as the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan, or destination management plans".

The emphasis will be on activities not things – on activities and partnerships "that can be built on in the future, and whose learning can be shared with other places". The idea is to engage communities with the cultural setting/landscapes in which they live through activities rather than through buildings or capital projects.

Ewan posited that the Landscape and Arts Network was in a very good position to be able to create opportunities for members to be involved in, train others and influence the future of the Great Places Scheme. "Increasingly artists will be required to work with local communities to help them to reveal the hidden heritage in their communities and to train artists in their roles. The Landscape and Arts Network has members with extensive experience in working with communities in this way."

Twelve areas will pilot new approaches that enable cultural, community and civic organisations to work more closely together. Four of these will be in rural areas – we are hopeful that one of these will be the recently submitted Northern Heartlands project.

Very much following on from the Heart of Teesdale project – and as much in an attempt not to lose the momentum created by it, the Northern Heartlands project includes many of the members of the independent HoT board, representing a wide range of experience and sectors, including Newcastle University, English Nature, Landscape and Arts Network, Institute for Creative Arts Practice, Philosophy Department of Durham University. The **lead** partner is Visit County Durham.

This summary description of the project is taken from the bid, submitted mid January 2017.

“The Northern Heartlands project has been inspired by inspired by the landscape, people and culture of SW County Durham. This rural area encompasses historic villages, small market towns and the remote upland moorland of the North Pennines.

The striking landscape is defined by the underlying geology, the flow of the rivers Tees and Wear and by the cultural identity formed by a shared farming, quarrying, mining and railway heritage.

Using the arts and creativity together with strong and vibrant partnerships, we will create new perceptions, values and responses. We will build on history and heritage and harness contemporary grassroots knowledge and expertise to articulate common purpose and help shape policy and plans.

Above all we will reveal the cultural heart and latent potential of a rich and forgotten area of the North East.”

Very much at the core of the Northern Heartlands project is the focus on landscape – and the understanding of it as perceived by people, and being the result of the action and interaction between natural and cultural elements. The ELC, and the UK Government’s obligation as a signatory to implement it will not be rendered null and void after Brexit because the ELC is a product not of the EU but of the Council of Europe.

Ewan talked of the peculiar history of the so-called Category D villages, which have suffered decades of depression. With the decline of the local coalfields, the 1951 Durham County Development Plan classified villages as an A, B, C or D settlement. In Category D settlements “no future development would be permitted and property would be acquired and demolished. The population would be relocated to new housing” (<https://sites.google.com/site/waggonways/category-d>).

However, the communities proved resistant to such plans – these places were their homes – and, although the outlook in terms of employment and services was dismal, stayed on. The Durham County Council ‘Category D policy’ officially ended in 1977 but decades of unemployment and lack of investment had taken their toll. Should we be surprised that the people in such areas voted overwhelmingly for Brexit? What is it like to grow up in an area that planners want to rub out?

The Northern Heartlands project will attempt to bolster resilience in these once ‘to be demolished’ villages, through increased engagement with landscapes around them. A degree of match-making will be needed, listening to the communities and placing the right artist(s) within them to work together to confront issues.

A very exciting opportunity will be working with Opera North to create a ‘Brexit’ opera! People want to be able to tell their stories. Stories are at the heart of landscape and, the Northern Heartlands projects will be all about using the arts to enable people to tell their stories and, going further, to develop local policy/engagement. The artists will not be there to deliver *government* policy but there to engage people in shaping the policy. **Other partners will be the Sage and the music people there.** Also the Shildon Railway Museum will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.

At the same time, we must be mindful that for some, heritage is an unwanted weight on their shoulders. Not everyone wants to look back. But this is where landscape is key – it makes you conceive of ‘the other’.

Ewan mentioned the fact that the term ‘landscape’ was used in Donald Trump’s inaugural speech!! (mental note to self to look that up). The Great Places Scheme is indicative of a move towards independent sector solutions to things that used to be government responsibility.

The role of artists – particularly those who work with landscapes and communities is key to Great Places Scheme. Therefore, there will likely be many opportunities for LAN members to be involved, and particularly in the Northern Heartlands projects, if it is successful.

3.2 ALI CLARKE – SURREY HILLS

Ali Clarke, Programme Manager for Surrey Hills Arts presented on 'Inspiring Views' – a project that saw five artists, a poet and a sound artist respond to viewpoints along the Greensand Way. The resulting artworks each respond to a specific location – some incorporating seating – and all providing a reason to visit, pause and appreciate the view. Some of the views are historically documented but 'lost' through being overgrown or lack of accessibility. In addition to the artistic commissions, another core element of the project was to involve volunteers and apprentices working with the partners such as the National Trust and local landowners to re-create, restore the vistas, enhance access to them and to ensure their long-term maintenance.

Ali explained that Surrey, like many (all) other counties in the UK, has its own share of challenges in terms of landscape access, health and well-being. In the course of the project, the diversity of users of the Surrey landscape became very clear – some 80% of the 'hits' were from London – and therefore, the importance of the landscape in contributing to health and well-being of residents of the capital. But, because it is perceived as being a wealthy area, the county struggles for funding. Therefore, the grant from the the Mittal Foundation was all the more welcome.

Some 50 artists submitted proposals from which five finalists were chosen. Managing the project meant not just working with artists but with a variety of land owners, each of whom had their needs and objectives, for example, one landowner was very open about what would be done while the others were more conservative. One of the commissions was made of recycled plastic so there was some concern as to which owner would accept it? But in the end, the particular landowner wanted the artwork to be vandal proof above all else!

One of the main emphases in the project was on 'the local' – in terms of the project overall and the individual commissions – reflected in the process and focus of their conception.

Made from recycled materials, Russell Jakubowski's work 'Contour' was inspired by the local geology – the layers of sedimentation and contours of the land. In the course of the commission workshops were held with hundreds of people.

For 'Perspectives', the artist Giles Miller invited responses from local people and visitors to place. These words and messages are laser-inscribed on the shelter, from which visitors can sit and look out over the South Downs. Apparently, people come from far and wide to see the shelter, which is not just a space with a view but a place for contemplation as well as social engagement with other visitors. The work inspired student Carla Knight to create a short film, which can be viewed on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqLI6l3PKBc&feature=youtu.be>

One of three artists whose work shows fascination with elements of the landscape, sculptor Tom Nicholson based his work 'Grains' on the shapes and tones of microscopic particles. The carved oak forms, arranged at different levels to represent giant grains of sand, not only facilitate but encourage conversation.

In his bench 'Xylem', sculptor Walter Bailey explores charcoal and its historical links with the area. Similar to Tom Nicholson, he drew on micro forms to inform the bench design, which is carved of locally-sourced oak.

Adding more layers to the project – and indeed the landscape and artworks within it – are the sequence of poems by John Wedgewood Clarke (who the Project Manager, Ali had met at a LAN event last year!), and the 'sound pictures' created by musician and sound artist Graham Dowdall.

3.3 CATHERINE DEE – UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Catherine Dee is an artist and experimental landscape architect, theorist and teacher, who researches, practices and writes on landscape architecture as a forgotten art. This work is informed by, and informs her sculpture. She practices 'black and white' ways of thinking, and showed examples of her 'stick' installations, fashioning twigs and tree stems as rudimentary black and white ciphers, shelters and 'borderlands'.

She was inspired by the Artists, Farmers and Philosopher's symposium to become a member of LAN and is keen to offer something to the group. Holding an academic position at University of Sheffield, Department of Landscape Architecture, Catherine is currently writing a book on landscape architecture as an improvised art, as a combination of art, society and ecology. She advocates that landscape architecture is an artistic discipline in its own right.

Catherine also mentioned the *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, which has a section comprising of visual essays rather than just words. Her current paper explores why landscape needs art. Landscape is about ordinary, basic series of operations. To create better landscapes, very basic interventions are needed. Landscape architecture is at once raw, elemental, improvised, ordinary and utilitarian. Utilitarian can be cast as the source of the landscape.

She also talked about use and aesthetic, and how 'neglected' is also a strong aesthetic. She focuses on trees because they represent so many different aspects, processes and feelings – e.g. trees growing in a place can at once represent colonisation but also neglect. Towards the end of her presentation she showed a photograph of trees outside the Tate Modern, which were planted on their side. For me this brought it home once again how a simple image can evoke existential contemplation – hmmm, yes, why ARE trees nearly always upright?

3.4 HANNAH SOFAER

Hannah talked the Portland Sculpture and Quarry Trust (PSQT) interdisciplinary model that she developed with others. There is a plan to develop further collaborations that could contribute to a Great Places Scheme. In the course of its existence (since 1983), the PSQT has been working on the Isle of Portland to save the world-famous quarry "from further mineral extraction, invigorating new life and future for the quarry as a creative, leisure and educational resource, with a yearly programme of artists residencies, environmental mapping / monitoring, stone carving courses, school visits, community projects and performance events" (http://learningstone.org/?page_id=254). Hannah's work with the PSQT ties in closely with her personal arts practice within the landscape itself working with the cultural, environmental, industrial and heritage contexts. In such collaborations between disciplines, the aim is to create 'a new model for regeneration' that can be re-applied in other locations.

"A significant part of this process has been to establish sustainable structures and partnerships that engage communities in working with artists and researchers in shaping a new cultural landscape for the 21st Century."(Sofaer 2017, LAN website event pages).

The work on Portland is part of a wider scheme focusing on the regeneration of quarry environments and their after-use, influencing government policies via select committees, Dept of Trade and Industry Minerals Working Group, Local Plan Policies, Educational frameworks and new Arts organisations resulting in:

- education and training of the next generation of artists/designers/architects.
- education, training and provision for cultural infrastructure linked to diversification of visitor interest and economic development.
- art/ecology partnership in relation to access to nature, stewardship, conservation and interpretation.
- education for young people to broaden horizons through the arts, developing their aspirations and career paths, and build capacity within the community.
- to engage people with landscape informed through PSQT interdisciplinary exchange with artists - bringing former disused and neglected areas of industrial landscape into new use for community / cultural amenity — lifting the landscape into another category and set of values where a change in perception occurs.
- engaging universities and professional practice in developing live projects through new partnerships

The Isle of Portland comprises an area of 1.5 x 4 miles. This seems small but that is to deny the wavy, infinite nature of the underlying geology, and the intricate social and cultural weave of twenty-eight generations of quarrying families.

Key themes running through the project are history and hand tools, artists and scientists, negative and positive, local and global. Three examples given by Hannah exemplify these - for example, the Portland landscape was formed not where Britain finds itself now but much nearer the equator. One of the people depicted in a photography doing field study alongside the artists, is now Director of the Antarctic Survey; another, Ken Coombs, was born into the stone industry but instead of working it, decided to study it.

The project was very much informed by properties of the surrounding geology but also the traditional working practices of the quarrymen. Even today, quarrymen check the 'ring tone' of stone to ascertain if it's clean to carve. This led to the 'Memory Stones' project. Sustainability and regeneration are fundamental themes as well as core aims. The outputs and outcomes of the project are not just for visitors but also for communities. As Hannah said, "depending on what you are – you see things in different ways".

3.5 MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE HISTORY AND ONGOING WORK OF THE PSQT IS ON THE 'LEARNINGSTONE' WEBSITE [HTTP://LEARNINGSTONE.ORG/?PAGE_ID=254](http://learningstone.org/?page_id=254)

3.6 RICHARD KEATING

Provided a romp through his projects which, basically, involve walking and looking. Central to his participatory practice is engaging the local community in place making and co-creating place, involving them in landscape change.

Looking at his practice he admitted that he probably spends as much time organising people as practicing! The nature of his work serves to collapse ethics and aesthetics – the practice is embedded. Because the art is performative there is not much to show. Indeed, some might question whether socially-engaged practice = an artwork? He believes that his work can be seen as a metaphor for how landscape was created, being about people participating, taking apart and putting something back. The nature of his artistic practice also aligns with the core principle of Arne Naess' philosophy of 'deep ecology', that "the living environment as a whole should be respected and regarded as having certain inalienable legal rights to live and flourish, independent of its utilitarian instrumental benefits for human use" (Wikipedia)

Fundamental to his practice is being in a space but also putting something back. Among the projects he talked about was "The Weave", a project initiated by the Chamber of Trade and Stroud Common Wealth to involve people in the restoration of the Cotswold-Stroud canals.

The projects are concerned with the aesthetic appreciation of place. This can be achieved as easily as holding singing events in the forest, which happened during 'Caring for Folly Wood', the focus of which was a recently acquired community woodland. The aim was to prepare a long term organisational structure and management plan, involving (as Richard put it) "64 stakeholders and badgers and other species".

Richard also talked briefly about two other current projects that he felt might have potential for the Great Place Scheme in the future. These are,

- 'Interdependency and Interconnectivity' – a 2017 Walking the Land project in which 25 artists have expressed an interest. Working with ecologists and heritage managers, the idea is to publish local walks that these artists have walked.
- 'All Rivers Flow to the Sea', which is a collaboration with artist Valerie Coffin Price, where the idea is to explore the Severn Estuary, its Welsh and English landscapes and rivers, and to connect with the many artists who are working with others to care for it.

When he talked of the River Map project, I was reminded of the work of author and cartographer Tim Robinson, whose maps and accounts of creating them changed my perception of maps forever. Perhaps more overtly than in Tim Robinson's maps, the Map of the River Frome, produced during the River Map project, "also examines the responses of individuals to the landscape offering

subjective evaluations and responses to 'place' ", rather than just indicating 'places and topography' (<http://radicalstroud.co.uk/rivermap-the-river-frome-and-walking-the-land/>).

But don't all maps – even in their choice of place names – which ones, how they are spelled, the relative size of the font or the symbol – involve some element of subjectivity – of personal response?

3.7 VALERIE COFFIN PRICE

Valerie lives 1.5 miles from the River Severn at Taaffe, an area of lovely scenery contrasting against a background of heavy industry – rather similar to the north of England. There as in South Wales, many communities are in decline, but this is exacerbated in South Wales by the isolation of 'the Valleys' – there being one way in and one way out. The topography of the area means that, as in North Wales, gives rise to an intensity of land use in some areas e.g. the narrow strip of land between the coast and the mountains is packed with infrastructure – road, rail, settlement - , contrasting with vast open spaces of the sea on one side and the uplands on the other.

Describing herself as an 'artist-letterer', Valerie is a member of 'Walking the Land' – the artists' walking collective; the 'Space Place Practice' research group and 'Sculpture Cymru'. Her work deals with issues to do with the environment, language and cultural identity; the poetic resonance of language and its connection to a sense of place. The process involves archeo-visual research using drawing and textual traces to construct works inspired by elements of natural and human geography, revealing the multi-layered structure of culture, language and nature.

Over the years she has been involved in a number of collaborations – recently with Richard Keating who she 'facilitated' on the South Wales section of his walk from Stroud to Swansea. She talked of the difference between the Taaffe and the Frome. The Frome had in the past been intensely used – with some 170 mills on its length, and probably was not much different in character to that of the Taaffe – peri-urban, feisty and grubby with all sorts of social issues. But today it was 'bucolic' and full of 'nice houses'.

An initiative that she is involved in too, with Walking the Land, are the 'First Friday walks'. There are some 300 people on the list. No one is paid or pays – it's just a informal gathering of people, meeting for lunch and a walk. Currently mostly visual artists and writers, the group is keen to attract singers and musicians, in order to be able to integrate elements of music, dance and drama into the process of 'walking' and 'interpreting' the land.

Like Richard Keating, Valerie's work is preoccupied somewhat with community engagement – the contexts, methods and outcomes and mentioned TouchCast – which is a 'smart' video app that certainly I had not heard of before. She compared cooking & wildlife in terms of actual engagement and type of associated activity, for example, at the contrast in numbers between people who watch cookery programmes and those who actually cook. Is it the same with respect to wildlife – that more people watch wildlife programmes than actually engage with it in reality. Do they just look or are they willing to actually get out and experience it for themselves?

Another interesting point made was the changing demographic in western society – in 2050 one third of all Europeans will be over 65. This was raised in the context of activities that people begin to do as they get older or when they retire. Research carried out by the Baring Foundation (<http://baringfoundation.org.uk/project/arts-and-older-people/>) sets out the case for the advantages in personal health and well-being from engaging in participatory arts. Valerie also mentioned the organisation [longlivearts.eu](http://www.longlivearts.eu), which features a fascinating paper on its website looking at research into the effects of cognitive stimulation, e.g. “Think of dance and theatre where in one fluent activity motor skills, coordination, (body) language, and visual, auditory, and emotional networks are activated” ([http://www.longlivearts.eu/upload/files/Article%20Mark%20Mieras\(1\).pdf](http://www.longlivearts.eu/upload/files/Article%20Mark%20Mieras(1).pdf), page 3).

3.8 LORNA GREEN

Technical problems meant that Lorna couldn't show us her pre-prepared presentation on 'Sound Scape'. Instead we got to see a film of the performance itself, which was terrific!

The work, which was premiered on 18 September 2016, is a collaboration with Julia Harding, who conducts the KEMS Concert Band. Julia composed music to Lorna's nine 'art in nature' sculptures, so that there are effectively nine sections. In the course of the performance, the musicians move around the sculptures to which they play the relevant music. Each performance is different according to the choices of the musicians in selecting the sculptures and the music, and lasts around 35-45 minutes. The performers are also free to respond musically to each other during the performance and, may end up grouped together, leaving empty spaces or, at other times, they might be spread more evenly around the space and the nine sculptures. The work can be performed in any space and with any portable instrument.

At the end of her talk, Lorna asked for advice about how to make videos, and whether there were any arts' organisations that offered short courses.

3.9 JEFF HIGLEY – WITH ROB MCKAY IN HULL

As part of Jeff's presentation, we were also treated to a 10 minute Soundscape, which is part of a larger project called Heartlands, which explores vocal and instrumental sound and its relationship to body and culture. The material was recorded at Hull University under the auspices of Rob MacKay and with his participation.

Migration and water are core themes of the project. When refugees leave their homelands, there is a limit to what they can carry. But one of the most significant things they take with them is the water of their homeland. As this is replaced over time, they lose that link to their home and their identity. But where do individual molecules of water end up? Cyclical processes of water use, evaporation,

precipitation mean that it is quite possible to pick up individual molecules of that 'homeland' water in quite another place at another time – far removed from the original source.

The 'soundscape' is created entirely by bonafide acoustic instruments – not electronic devices. There are four musicians, playing a waterphone, tongue drum, ezraj and singing bowls. The mp3 linked to here is a recording of the recording, made on the day, just to give you a sense. The album is to be released in a few months' time.