

Creative Arts East and Rural Touring

The arts thrive in rural communities. Performances, exhibitions, classes and groups abound. Alongside what is created locally, many villages also promote professional theatre and music with help from England's rural touring schemes,

A Wider Horizon tells the story of one of those – Creative Arts East, which serves rural Norfolk and Suffolk. It describes a three-year initiative to reach communities, which Arts Council England had identified as deserving more investment.

The work shows how good arts development depends on relationship, empowerment and trust – and a dash of creativity. At a time of change and austerity, it also has wider lessons for the arts and leisure services.



A Wider Horizon

François Matarasso
with Rosie Redzia



A WIDER HORIZON

REGULAR MARVELS

Where We Dream, West Bromwich Operatic Society
and the Fine Art of Musical Theatre (2012)

Winter Fires, Art and Agency in Old Age (2012)

Bread and Salt, Stories of Artists and Migration (2013)

The Light Ships, Church, Art and Community
in the Lincolnshire Fens (2014)

A Wider Horizon, Creative Arts East and Rural Touring (2015)

A Wider Horizon

Creative Arts East and Rural Touring

François Matarasso

drawings by

Rosie Redzia



Creative Arts East
2015

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No.

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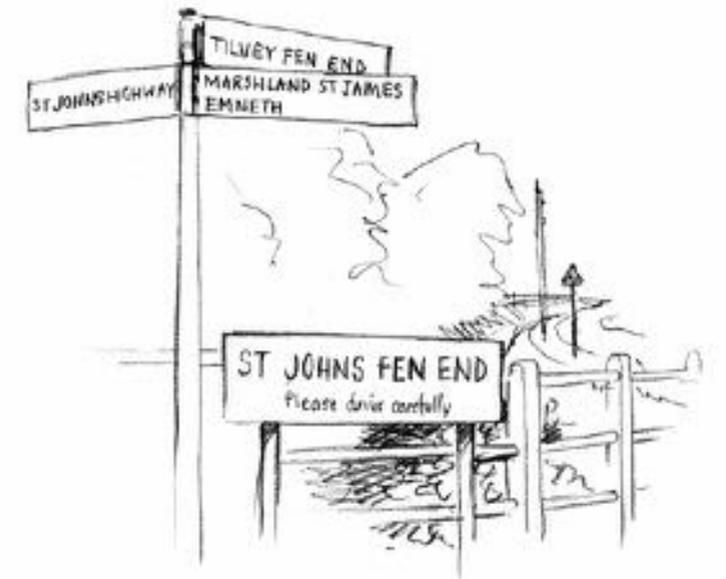
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'Development cannot be given. It has to be done. It is a process, not a collection of capital goods.'

JANE JACOBS

'With adults I unfortunately see no justification for setting other people's views of what is good for them above their own ideas of what is good for themselves.'

BERNHARD SCHLINK

'The arts can give people glimpses into other worlds, worlds they might like for themselves. Sometimes, just watching something you dream about is a really uplifting experience, whether it taps into emotion, or makes you think about things you never thought of before, happy or sad. Watching someone else's creativity is mind-blowing, sometimes.'

1 Breaking ground

The regular marvels of rural touring

Rural touring schemes are a quiet triumph of the British arts world. For 35 years, these small, independent organisations have brought theatre, music and other performing arts to villages across the country and found enthusiastic local audiences. They have offered life enhancing experiences to people who, because they live far from cities, have limited access to the arts. They have provided rewarding and often challenging work for thousands of artists, from seasoned performers to young people at the start of a career. And, in doing all this, rural touring schemes have allowed more of us to enjoy the arts we pay for as tax payers and national lottery players.





Night after night, gifted artists perform at the invitation of the local community in halls, schools and churches from Cornwall to Cumbria. There might be 40, 70 or a hundred people; few venues can accommodate more anyway. But numbers aren't the point. This is an art of closeness—chamber music, not the Last Night of the Proms.

'People like the intimacy of the performance, the fact that you are feet away. You're not watching at a distance on a screen—you're involved, you're part of the action.'

The performers are close: you can see the whites of their eyes. The atmosphere is electric because there's nowhere to hide if the show isn't working—and that can be as uncomfortable for the audience as for the artists. But such occasions are rare, partly because touring schemes are skilled at finding good shows, and partly because local promoters decide which ones to put on in their community. It is a joint enterprise with shared risks. And when it works, which is very often, audience and artists share a joyous experience, life enhancing and even, sometimes, life changing: regular marvels, indeed.

A model of co-production

This success is achieved through a unique model of coproduction in which rural audiences select the plays, concerts or other shows they want to see, with the support of professional arts managers and a small amount of subsidy. Costs and risks are distributed between voluntary groups, artists, public bodies and the schemes that bring them all together. It is cost-effective—without the volunteers, most village hall shows would be unaffordable.

It is also empowering, and that may be its most important quality. The rural touring approach enables people to shape the artistic life of their community and shows how creative decisions can be made by people working together. At a time of rapid change in public services, this unassuming part of the arts ecology has wider lessons for the arts world.

That became clear to me some years ago, when I looked at rural touring at the suggestion of the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF). Between 2002 and 2004, I crisscrossed the country to see shows and meet audiences, promoters, artists, managers and others. I was initially doubtful about whether two or three shows a year could make much difference in the life of a small community. But in village after village people with very different perspectives told me just how important these moments of artistic togetherness could be. I learned how much new, sometimes unusual experiences were appreciated. I learned about the value of shared memories in rural communities with new members and weaker social ties. And I learned how planning, advertising and hosting a visit means months of mutual effort, knitting relationships and enacting a sense of community that people repeatedly said was vital to them. The show was the tip of an iceberg. Its enjoyment rested on what lay beneath the surface.



Traveling
& Treasury
& magical
story telling
experience

That research was published in 2004 and it is still available. *Only Connect, Arts Touring and Rural Communities*, took 60,000 words to describe rural touring through case studies and a survey of almost 1,000 people that gives a rich insight into rural audiences and their views. It is the only national study of rural touring in England and Wales and, despite the passage of time, its findings remain current. After all, neither people's responses to artistic experiences, nor their reasons for getting involved in community activities change very quickly, so *Only Connect* naturally informs this book. But the focus here is tighter than before: on one rural touring scheme (Creative Arts East) and its three year programme of work in the western districts of Norfolk and Suffolk.

Pressures and uncertainties

If neither rural touring nor the people involved have changed very much since 2004, the conditions in which it takes place certainly have, most obviously because of the financial crisis. This has at least two consequences for the arts in rural communities. First, rural touring depends on public funds, albeit to a much smaller extent than the theatres, orchestras and galleries that enrich urban areas. It is part of a cultural ecosystem that supports small music ensembles, theatre companies and other artists and funding cuts affect it all. Secondly, the relationship between those who deliver public services and those who use them is changing, partly as a result of declining trust in decision-makers and leaders.

The first issue is clear enough: arts budgets are being squeezed on all sides. In England, government supports the arts mainly



through Arts Council England (ACE). The Arts Council makes grants to hundreds of arts organisations, from the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House to small and less well known groups. Since 2011, its funding from government has fallen by more than a third, with obvious effects on what it can support.

The other main source of public support for the arts is local government—district, county and metropolitan councils. They also derive most of their funding from government and have already seen sharp reductions. The Local Government Association estimates that the funding available for services other than social care and waste management will fall by 46% between 2011 and 2020. According to the National Campaign for the Arts, councils have cut their spending on culture by a quarter since 2008.

The silver lining on these dark clouds is the money raised by the National Lottery for charitable causes, including heritage, sport



and the arts. A fifth of this goes to support the arts, and is also distributed by Arts Council England. It amounted to about £360 million in the financial year ending in March 2015, a sum that cushioned the effect of the budget cuts just mentioned. However, the law prevents Arts Council England from using lottery funds to make up for shortfalls in existing services.

Both Arts Council England and local government face difficult decisions in coming years. The creative tension implicit in ACE's mission of ensuring 'Great Art for Everyone' will be sorely tested. The demands of artistic excellence in a London-based chamber orchestra and those of access to the arts for people living in rural East Anglia are both legitimate; but they are not easily balanced. Good decisions depend on understanding the interdependence of the arts ecology, and the need to sustain both the supply of, and the demand for, the widest possible diversity of artistic expression. But smaller budgets inevitably support a smaller, thinner cultural ecosystem.

It will be difficult enough to find a good balance with reducing funds but there is also the challenge of finding better ways of working. This is not, or not only, a matter of doing more with less. It is also about rebuilding trust between the people who use services, including the arts, and the institutions that provide them. The economic crisis has not only had financial effects: it has also undermined the trust that citizens formerly placed in those who decide, govern and manage on their behalf. Although the breakdown has been most evident in areas like banking, politics, policing, journalism and health, the arts have also come under new scrutiny. Arts Council England has been challenged about how it allocates funds and the fairness of a system which assigns half its resources to London. In 2014, the House of Commons Culture Select Committee produced a report on the work of the Arts Council that questioned the criteria for its decisions and its reach across the country, concluding that:

Art and culture can and should be available to all, and engagement will be increased if individuals feel they have had some influence in a decision to fund a particular activity or organization.

There can be few parts of the arts ecology that better demonstrate the force of this idea than rural touring schemes. Not only do they extend the availability of publicly-funded art to rural areas, which it otherwise struggles to reach; they do it in a way that gives local people real influence in the decisions involved. Enabling communities to choose what they want to see might not have been what the MPs had in mind, but it is a practical and effective way of building trust between artists and audiences, professionals and volunteers, supply and demand.

The right to participate

There will always be struggles over the allocation of public funds for the arts, if only because we do not all agree on what is culturally worthwhile. Indeed, some would prefer to see no public money spent on things they see as essentially personal. Those debates are sharper when there is less money, but not different, so there is no need to rehearse them here. What is important about rural touring, and the reason for thinking about it again now, is *how* it does what it does—the unique balance it has found between the interests of artists, public bodies and, crucially, the people who are supposed to benefit from their work. It is this model of coproduction, which has shown itself so effective at building knowledge, skills and trust in rural arts promotion, that has lessons for arts development in unstable times.

Creative Arts East is a Norfolk arts organisation, dedicated to ‘*improving community life through creative use of the arts*’. Rural touring has always been cornerstone of its work and it was a case study in *Only Connect*. In 2012, the organisation won funds from Arts Council England to strengthen its work in the Fens and Breckland, where the village hall scheme had less take up than in other parts of Norfolk and Suffolk. They also wanted to explore how rural touring could work in venues like libraries and pubs, in shopping streets and at festivals—the ‘New Places and Extraordinary Spaces’ that gave the project its name.

Between 2012 and 2015, Creative Arts East’s small team involved 75 new communities in Norfolk and Suffolk. With their support, some 790 volunteers put on 187 performances by professional theatre companies, poets, musicians and cabaret artists. As well as village halls, the venues included 18 libraries, 21 pubs and several schools and residential homes. Forays were made to



carnivals. In all, more than 5,000 people saw ticketed shows and thousands more watched performances at open air events.

It took time and a few false starts but the experience shows that it is not *where* the arts are presented that matters but *how*. By earning trust and building relationships, the project has given many people some wonderful experiences of the arts and laid the foundations for future rural arts activities.

A Wider Horizon is about one rural touring initiative. It does not argue for the value of live art in rural communities, or anywhere else—good work is its own best advocate, in the arts especially. But it does argue for people’s right to be involved in decisions about the cultural life of their communities. It is an argument based on values, not a thesis capable of proof. It reflects the belief expressed in Bernhard Schlink’s novel, *The Reader*, when the narrator’s father—who happens to be a professor of philosophy—

says he can *'see no justification for setting other people's views of what is good for them above their own ideas of what is good for themselves'*.

Principles matter, especially in uncertain times. The way that rural touring schemes empower communities and build relationships between artists and audiences has urgent lessons for arts policy. With limited resources there is a need to work differently. The experience of Creative Arts East and its peers shows that seeing local arts provision as a shared enterprise is good for artists, for audiences and for communities.



2 Fair exchange

The origins of touring

Art has always been a commodity to be bartered and exchanged, bought, sold and stolen. The strange things made, sung and told elsewhere fascinate and disconcert. And even when the art itself stays put, stories about it circulate and grow with every telling. The seven wonders of the world were never better than as travellers' tales. But it is not only stories that flit from place to place. Melodies are heard and reproduced, designs imitated, dance steps copied: creativity circulates in mutating forms.





Musicians, actors and poets, acrobats and showmen take to the road in search of new audiences. The deepest pool of tales, tricks and tunes will run dry if you play the same place night after night. Better move on and impress people who've not seen those moves before. Come back in a year or two when memories have faded or with some new tales. Art's pleasures hover between familiarity's reassurance and novelty's surprise.

The travelling show is a staple of European culture; perhaps of all cultures. It rolls into town trailing news of elsewhere and the glamour that makes children want to run away with the circus. In the reign of Elizabeth I, there were as many as 20 companies of actors touring the country when they were not wanted by their noble patrons. They performed in great houses, inns and churches, and they appear in stories too, as wandering players like those Hamlet brings to court.

In Walsham-le-Willows, a Suffolk village on Creative Arts East's touring circuit, there was in 1577 a 'game place', specially built for the performance of plays and interludes. A survey made that year describes a circular stage faced with stone, surrounded by '*a fayer banke cast up on a good height and havinge many great trees called populers growynge about*'. The performing arts have long roots here in East Anglia.

There is more to this old history than its own interest. The plays of Shakespeare's time—and therefore English theatre culture—were never *only* a metropolitan art. They were in dialogue with London audiences, certainly, but also with audiences throughout the country and were designed to be moveable and to fit different stages. As one expert on the period writes:

The plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, whether or not first performed in a London playhouse, had to render equal service in a guildhall in Leicester or a great house in Rutland. It was not just the bare platform of the Globe which required that the effects be straightforward, the costumes and props basic, and the language and stagecraft of great imaginative sophistication.

The plays were made in London but sought to please people everywhere. Their stories, language and references had to speak to Norfolk farmers as well as Southwark merchants, and the means used—the stagecraft—had to work as well in a church nave as in the Globe. The performers of Shakespeare's day catered for rural audiences and their successors do the same today. Touring is a two way street, an exchange rooted in mutual benefit, like the interdependence of town and country. It is never merely a transaction. It is also a conversation, a dialogue, a dance. Each partner is influenced by the other; each makes a contribution.

Rural touring schemes

If art has always moved between town and country, the model developed by rural touring schemes is more recent. The first English schemes were established in the early 1980s in Lincolnshire and Hampshire. Their success encouraged other counties to become involved and by 2004 there were 39 touring schemes in England, including seven that were less than a year old. Their different origins, histories and locations gave each its own character, but what they had in common—as they still do—was a way of working that shares decision-making and responsibilities fairly between all those involved.

They include the volunteer promoters who put on shows in their communities; the theatre companies, musicians, comedians, poets and other performers who perform in small and improvised venues; and the public bodies, principally Arts Council England and local councils, who give funds to support the arts in rural areas. The rural touring schemes that link them all are mostly independent arts organisations, and charities, set up for the purpose. They apply for and manage the funding; they identify and contract the best available performers; and they support the promoters to put on their events.

The promoters themselves are a very diverse group. Many put on shows as members of a village hall committee, but others are librarians, teachers, or local business owners. They love the arts, but they have different tastes: some like theatre whilst others prefer jazz or opera. But their personal tastes are only part of the equation, since their choices must attract an audience. So they put on puppet theatre during the holidays and plan a concert after a run of plays. They select work from a menu prepared by the touring scheme, which negotiates dates and prices with a



range of performers. The scheme provides a subsidy or, as in the case of Creative Arts East, a guarantee against loss for part of the cost. Even so, promoters will need to find several hundred pounds through ticket sales and other fundraising. If they're lucky, they make a surplus that provides a safety net for the shows that don't do so well. Most promoters work as groups, in committee or just as like-minded friends. There is too much work involved to go it alone—plans to be made, tickets to be sold, furniture to be moved...

At first sight, the idea of having a theatre company perform in the village hall may seem simple enough. In practice it's like trying to solve a Rubik's Cube, as everyone's different, if overlapping, wishes are aligned. There are all sorts of practical problems. Is the hall big enough to take the set? How many people can it take? At what price must tickets be set to cover the cost? Will they be too expensive? If people turn out, will they be able to see beyond the eighth row? What dates are available? Do the performers need a bed for the night? Who will give them supper before the show?



Since the show may cost several hundred pounds, smaller villages and halls may opt for one person shows or films to keep costs down. Children's theatre involves a fine balance, since ticket prices have to be lower. But promoters' risks are not only financial—it isn't easy to choose work to suit all tastes. Happily, people appreciate the effort involved and the shows are protected by a lot of goodwill: audiences, artists and funders all want them to succeed.

And succeed they do, as *Only Connect* showed ten years ago. Then there were 1,664 voluntary promoting groups in England, putting on more than 3,100 live shows a year. They reached a combined audience of 194,500 people, a third of whom did not otherwise see live theatre or music. Between them, their turnover was about £2 million a year, contributed in equal proportions by Arts Council England, local authorities and the communities themselves.

Most of the money went to some 250 different companies and artists, helping sustain the old roots and new shoots of Britain's artistic ecosystem. They included theatre companies like Eastern Angles, Kneehigh and New Perspectives who have been making plays for rural communities for 30 or 40 years and who have, as a result, built very loyal audiences. Younger companies like Cartoon de Salvo or The Gramophones have made of rural touring a training ground for bigger stages and more ambitious productions. Many musicians, storytellers, puppeteers and poets have found rural touring audiences ideal for their intimate performances. Both artists and audiences work hard to make each performance memorable. The facilities may be basic, but creativity, talent and inventiveness compensate. Quality of performance is not compromised and it is possible to see artists in a village hall for whom one might pay much more in a city theatre or concert hall.

Finally, *Only Connect* shows how the work supports rural communities undergoing profound change. They bring people together, not necessarily as art enthusiasts but because of their commitment to an idea of community. These moving, funny, entertaining shows create shared memories at a time when people living in rural areas have less in common than they once did. The task of organising them supports local voluntary action and helps build skills, confidence and friendship. Rural touring has never been about providing a service. It is about enabling communities to identify and meet their own needs—that is why it is an effective route for community development.



Rural touring today

This portrait of rural touring remains true in all its essentials, including the quality of the artistic experiences, its importance to village communities and the effectiveness of its delivery model. But the conditions in which it happens have altered because of financial pressures and continuing change in rural life. If the ten years to 2004 saw rapid growth, the ten years since have been marked mostly by consolidation. After some mergers and cutbacks, there are now 29 schemes in England. Although expenditure has risen in the past decade, thanks to more secure Arts Council funding and bigger audiences, some local authorities have cut their funding. Councils now meet a quarter of the costs compared to a third ten years ago, with 40% coming from ACE. If this trend continues, it risks undermining the partnership so central to rural touring's success.

But if the supply side of the touring economy has been constrained, the demand has not. The number of promoting groups in England has increased by 44% to 2,407. Audiences have risen by 43% and now number 278,000. Even the take up of tickets (i.e. the proportion sold) has risen, from 67% to 76%. All this goes some way to explain the 15% real-terms increase in box office income over the period.

English rural touring schemes are more productive than ever. Their combined expenditure has grown by 12.5% in real terms since 2004, but the number of shows and the audience have both increased by 43%. This is a remarkable achievement in a time of recession and public spending cuts. Since people are the principal cost of rural touring—artists' fees and staff time account for 81% of all spending—this increased productivity requires some explanation. The answer lies in film screenings.

Ten years ago, English touring schemes promoted 3,168 live shows and 300 films. Last year, there were 3,188 shows and 1,753 films. Screenings have increased five-fold in a decade and now make up a third of the programme. The reasons are not hard to find. Digital film technology has become much more accessible, while the lower costs of screenings make them attractive to promoters and schemes with limited resources. It has also become possible to stream performances from venues such as the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House. Video can be a live experience too.

'I don't always want to sit and watch a film on television or a little screen or whatever – I want to be with people.'

Happily, this new access to film has not come at the expense of live performance, which remains the heart of the rural touring

experience. That might seem unimportant, given what has been said about the value of village hall events in bringing a community together, but everything changes when the artist and the audience are in the same room. A film is a one-way communication. A live broadcast might produce a sense of occasion but spectators in remote locations are silent witnesses. Their gasps and laughter are not felt by the performers.

Live art's energy depends on the shifting relationship between artist and audience, articulated, sensed and felt on *both* sides. Art is an unstable element. If the artist is the initiator, what happens then depends on the audience's reaction to that first word, image or gesture. Good artists are creative listeners. Those who take their work to other places or cultures learn to speak unfamiliar languages—and to listen well too.



The identity of our region is strongly fixed in the popular imagination. Most minds will instantly respond to the mention of the name 'East Anglia' by conjuring visions of windmills, venerable houses of thatch and timber-framing, vast skies and low horizons.

JACK RAVENSDALE & RICHARD MUIR

3

Rich soil

A lesson in looking

The earth in Maputo, the coastal capital of Mozambique, is dull brown but as you drive inland it begins to glow with richer hues. Before long, the road is deep orange, almost red, as if it were made of powdered bricks. To judge by the bright greens of the vegetation, it is good soil too. The cattle have their heads down in the grass. The Land Cruiser turns onto a track, and I look out for my first glimpse of the farm. I still haven't seen it when we pull up at the farmhouse. It's only when the crops and fruit trees are pointed out to me later that I begin to recognise a farm in what I'd seen as uncultivated bush. This agriculture does not impose itself in fences and straight lines. It works with what's there,



cultivating each plant where it does best. The farm is all around me. I just hadn't seen it, because it didn't fit my idea of what a farm should be.

One might look for art in rural Norfolk and make the same mistake. The urban signs of culture—theatres and cinemas, galleries, museums and street performers—are rare. The few billboards advertise farm services, not exhibitions; the statues are mostly scarecrows. In Norwich, Arts Council England regularly funds organisations in Norfolk and Great Yarmouth; in the rural districts it supports only Creative Arts East in Wymondham. The funding map on its website might suggest there is no artistic life between Norwich and the Midlands but that would be misleading. Like the African farm, this land abounds in culture: it just might not be what you expect.



Discovering art

There is a schizophrenic quality to East Anglian culture. One side of this cultural coin is innovative, extrovert and represented by the historical role of the region as a reception area for settlers, refugees and all manner of new ideas from the Continent, and this capacity to absorb and revitalise change often placed East Anglia in the vanguard British innovation. The other side is introspective and characterised by a deep conservatism.

JACK RAVENSDALE & RICHARD MUIR

Churches pierce the wide East Anglian horizon. Many are splendid, extraordinary buildings. Even the simplest can be moving, despite our distance from the those who built them. Their materials, architecture and design suggest a distinctive East Anglian style. They are a celebrated sign of the region's cultural riches but there are other arts—music, literature, painting and dance—which, though less visible, have been equally important to life in this part of England.

It is a culture created through the interaction of locals and incomers. Like the fabric of its churches, it is a synthesis of foreign and local ideas. The Norwich School of painters—Crome, Ladbroke, Cotman and the rest—took inspiration from Dutch masters, lived in Norwich and London, and created an influential image of rural Norfolk and a new idea of provincial art. It is typical of this culture that one of its most celebrated authors, W. G. Sebald, should have written in German. All his books, including *The Rings of Saturn*, which traces a walk along the Suffolk coast, return to their author's home in translation:

I may be standing at a window on the upper floor of our house, but what I see is not the familiar marshes and the willows thrashing as they always do, but rather, from several hundred yards up, acres and acres of allotment gardens bisected by a road, straight as an arrow, down which black taxi cabs speed out of the city in the direction of Wannsee.

The Norfolk & Norwich Festival, which began in 1772 with a concert in aid of the county hospital, illustrates a similar interaction of rural and urban cultures. The success of that first concert led eventually to the creation of a triennial music festival that continued into the 1930s. A notable fixture in the music world, it premiered works by Elgar and Vaughn Williams and was led by artists of the stature of Sir Henry Wood and Sir Thomas Beecham. It became an annual event in 1988 and continues to flourish, expanding its activities and reach in Norfolk and beyond.

This artistic interplay between town and country is everywhere. The rural touring scheme is one example, but it appears also in many aspects of people's artistic life, today and in the past. For example, Jan Godfrey, a former chair of Creative Arts East, recalls her village school experience before the war:

'We had a wonderful head teacher, who was way ahead of her time in giving us the freedom to explore things that interested us. I thought of her yesterday because we would have been sitting under the oak tree and she would have been reading something like 'Wind in the Willows' to us. It becomes a part of your psyche almost—an expectation that that's how life is. And there was our vicar. He spent a lot of time in the school, as they did in those days. He also had a group of friends who were a part of the Art Deco movement of the late 1930s. They used to come down and teach us. We had lots of opportunities; we were very fortunate.'

A child could make life-changing discoveries through school and library, contact with amateur and professional artists, concerts in nearby towns and the radio. At her Thetford secondary school, Jan was taught art and literature by inspirational teachers. Hearing the *Messiah* in Norwich Cathedral and Bing Crosby on the BBC nurtured a deep love of music. Such experiences have shaped a life of teaching, art and community activity in which she has shared her discoveries with the next generations.





Participating in art

Slim Wilkinson, engineer, panto dame, magician and chairman of Magdalen Village Hall, recalls the touring Big Bands who could draw such crowds that there was barely room to move. Still, he went to Norwich for dance lessons on his days off:

'That's how I met my wife. She used to do a feather step with a quickstep. There weren't many people who could do that. We'd go whizzing round like that. Then, of course, with rock 'n' roll, we used to copy what we'd seen in the films—I used to really fling her around.'

Dance has always been a cornerstone of social life and it thrives today in disco, Zumba and Morris. Formal dance has been enjoying a revival: in Swaffham students at Xavier Navarre's dance school learn Ballroom, Latin, Swing and Tango to competition standards. People also enjoy music, theatre and art, as Russell Chitty, another resident of Magdalen, explains:

'There are classes all over the place. We do an art class in the village hall and an exhibition once a year, sometimes more. There's a singing group, and a choir in church. We've got a film club as well once a month. There's a sports club, with badminton and archery; new age curling and skittles. There's jive and dance classes just up the road. If you want to go a little bit further they do ballroom, tea dances, all sorts of things. You could be out every day, doing something.'

While some, like Jan Godfrey, discover art in childhood and keep it as a friend for life, others take it up later, often when their circumstances change. Joining an art class or a drama group opens doors when you move into a village. The social side of the arts matters, as Jan Jarvis, another member of the Magdalen art group says:

'When I'm painting, I forget everything else, talking with people who have got the same outlook. Most of the chat is art-based: what we're doing, what we're seeing and what we've done.'

People go because they want to improve, whether it's the Cha-Cha, playing the blues or mastering watercolour. Rachel Haines Stuart:

'You can see yourself getting better. When we had the exhibition in the church about two months ago I'd got this beautiful picture in—it's one of my eureka moments, in pastels that worked. It isn't just a moment of joy: it continually gives you joy when you look at a picture and you think, "Good Lord, I actually created that. I didn't think I could".'

This blend of artistic commitment and social life might explain why, perhaps against expectation, country people *participate* in the arts more than those who live in towns.

People living in rural areas are more likely than people living in urban areas to actively participate in a rehearsal or performance of a play/drama, play a musical instrument for pleasure, play a musical instrument live for a performance, sing to an audience, dance, undertake photography as an artistic activity, engage in visual arts activity (painting, drawing, printmaking and sculpture), read for pleasure and engage in textile crafts.

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND, 2015



Seeing art

'It demonstrates to people here how committed they are to their art, because they travel here, unload their van, set up the stage, and the lighting and whatever else, and perform whatever they're performing. And then, at the end, they take it all down, pack up the van and move on to yet another venue the next night. They're doing this night after night after night. And you think, well, there's something special about these people. They love their work and, I don't know, somehow or other that means more than seeing some international star on television.'

The distinction between participating in the arts and seeing them is important and we shall return to it later. But it can shift and blur, especially in rural arts activities, such as touring, which rely on people being participants *and* audience members. The village hall hosts professional musicians, amateur actors, dance classes and art exhibitions until, when it's over, everything is put away for tomorrow's playgroup or lunch club. The audience are active participants in making it all happen.

Walsham le Willows in Suffolk is like many villages in this respect. Its voluntary groups include a cinema club, a drama club and a reading group; it also promotes shows through Creative Arts East. With a popular village school, half-term performances can attract more than 100 children and parents. Buoyed by its successes, the Community Council has gone on to promote independently, including a Led Zeppelin tribute band whose visit made an indelible impression in the Suffolk night.

Villages like Walsham become local hubs, providing art and cultural activities for neighbouring communities with fewer resources. Others, like Welborne in Norfolk, put on annual festivals, with a mix of professional, amateur and volunteer input.

Bergh Apton's few hundred residents run a Conservation Trust, a Local History Group and a Community Arts Trust which also promotes shows in the village hall. Their most notable achievement may be the Sculpture Trail the village has run over three weekends in Spring since 1997. Like the old Norfolk and Norwich Festival, it is a triennial that now brings thousands of people to see the work of contemporary artists in the village, all thanks to the commitment of volunteers.

Vast numbers of the public can be found wandering the labyrinthine lanes that thread through this exceptional place. Mere strangers are then encouraged to let themselves into a selection of private gardens without so much as a 'Hello, d'ya mind?' to the owners, who are often on hand to facilitate your 'trespass'. In each of them is a display of sculptural work by a huge range of artists, many of international repute. Somehow Bergh Apton allows us all to feel that sculpture is important but also part of our everyday experience.

MARK COCKER



Producing art

Perhaps this shyness in cultural self-promotion goes with the sense of separateness, retreat and ‘du different’ that was always part of the Norfolk and East Anglian spirit—and still provides an attraction for those who come here to get on quietly with their own work.

MALCOLM BRADBURY

Many professional artists live and work in rural East Anglia. Their reasons for doing so, like the balance of advantage and disadvantage they find, are naturally personal but their creative presence enlivens communities and shows that there are also many kinds of artistic career.

The practical challenges of running a theatre company from a village can be substantial though. They include everything from finding rehearsal space to accommodating actors brought in for the few weeks of a production. Cordelia Spence, director of Stuff of Dreams, works in Norfolk because it is her home and the stories she wants to tell are rooted in the place and its people. Her production about the Burston School strike—at 25 years, the longest in labour history—recreated the struggle of rural people for education and civil rights.

‘At the moment what we do is of East Anglia and about East Anglia. So with a story about the Burston School strike, you get a very different reaction from the audience on the opening night, when it’s made up of the children of the children who went on strike.’



The company’s new play, *The Poisoner’s Pact*, explores a local murder. For Cordelia, living here, where she was brought up, is inseparable from her wish for a strong relationship with local audiences.

‘I love the idea of being part of a community and going to other communities with our plays. We’ve done four shows now. Our standard has been consistently high, and I think people become very receptive to that. They want you back and you build your audience; it’s about going back and building and building and building.’



'Loyal supporters who've been getting older have been gradually replaced by younger people. We draw from a 40-mile radius and we survive on our reputation and word of mouth, really—and a lot of commitment.'

Cordelia hopes to establish a permanent base for her work in South Norfolk. On the other side of the county, at Westacre Theatre, Andy Naylor and Isobel Smith have achieved that, after long years as a touring company. The core of the building is a former chapel converted into an 80 seat studio theatre, but that has since been extended with offices, a café and workshop space.

Years of open air Shakespeare in the grounds of West Acre Estate have allowed them to build a local audience for what is now a very busy arts centre, offering professional and amateur theatre, cinema, classes and workshops for young people. Although much fundraising was required to refurbish and extend the building, and it gets some small grants, the theatre largely depends on sales for its everyday running costs.

A cultural ecosystem

We have inherited from the Classical world an idea of the rural and urban worlds as opposing cultures. In this landscape of the imagination, the country has older virtues of constancy and tradition, while the city is shallow and changeable. But, like all dualisms, it can be reversed, so that the urban world has energy and excitement while the rural plods slowly on, stolid and dull. Nowadays the city is supposed to offer ‘world-class’ galleries, theatres and concert halls, contemporary art, media and other creative industries. The countryside, by contrast, is usually described in terms of heritage, its museums and country houses safeguarding the cultures of societies we find attractive because we no longer have to live in them. While the country looks after the past, the city can safely explore the future.

But town and country are interdependent. They need one another. Without trade in food and goods, neither can prosper. If hostility sometimes flares up between them—as it did in 2002 when the Countryside March brought 400,000 rural protesters to London—it may be because interdependence can be frustrating. And in England, where few rural communities are more than an hour’s drive from a big city, the relationship is especially tight. Many villages empty in the morning as commuters go off to work (while farm labourers travel in the opposite direction from the cheaper housing in nearby towns). They are also home to increasing numbers of retired people with expectations and tastes formed while living in the city. Second homes are common in the prettiest areas: they make up about a quarter of all houses in the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Finally, the growth of mass media during the 20th century has further eroded ancient cultural differences between town and country. When the press, radio, television and, most recently, the Internet

reach into every home, there is far more common ground than difference between the cultures of their residents.

‘That’s what I think is really special, when you start getting arts out to villages. I love this whole concept of opening it out so it’s not just cinemas in the city that are getting these wonderful performances, but it’s really engaging lots of communities in lots of ways, because not everyone can afford to. You know, going to London, we do it, but it’s a real big treat and it’s very carefully budgeted for.’

That interdependence, facilitated by proximity, applies also to the artistic lives of rural and urban communities. There may be few Arts Council funded organisations in rural East Anglia but there is still access to the arts, most obviously because many people travel to see plays, films and concerts. There are theatres and galleries, cinemas and concert halls in the region’s cities and towns—not just Norwich and Cambridge, but King’s Lynn, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and elsewhere. Although seeing an exhibition in London requires a day out, and a show means an overnight stay, people do go. Jan Jarvis took her husband to see *War Horse* in the West End. They made a short holiday of it, visiting exhibitions at the British Museum and Tate Britain, a workshop at the Society for All Artists and catching a show by Derren Brown. But *War Horse* was the heart of the trip.



'I had read it and seen the film, because we had it here at the village hall. I wanted to see the play more than anything. It was absolutely amazing. It was really moving and you quickly forgot that they were actually puppets. It was so well-executed that you were there, you were watching this horse—this was a horse: people were crying.'

When such trips aren't possible, there are opportunities to see professional artists closer to hand. Organisations in Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge take their work to rural communities. Some, like Suffolk-based theatre company, Eastern Angles, make touring the heart of their work, building relationships with rural communities over many years. Others, like the Theatre Royal Norwich, focus on arts education: it has led an opera programme in Norfolk schools for many years. Norfolk & Norwich Festival runs a major programme of art in schools, in addition to its annual festival, the open studios event and outdoor shows.

Like earth and water in the Fens, the interdependence of artistic life in town and country is so pervasive that is often impossible to say where one begins and the other ends.



'Professional acts are inspiring and amazing, but art is accessible at every level, for nearly everybody. Join a choir, go to a gallery and look at beautiful paintings, watch old films. It shouldn't be that you can't go because you don't come from the right kind of class or the right kind of financial background. It shouldn't be like that. A lot of the time it is though, because you can't afford to go to the big theatres, which is why something like this is so important.'

4

Long roots

Nurturing the arts in rural Norfolk

There's a familiar crunch of gravel as the community hall car park fills up in the autumn sunshine. It's Creative Arts East's regular showcase, and promoters have gathered from villages all over Norfolk and Suffolk to hear about next season's programme and see extracts from some of the shows on offer. It's also a chance to meet other promoters, share experiences and talk over ideas with the Creative Arts East team. Today is a Friday and most of the





people who've come are retired—the active stalwarts with time and commitment to invest in their community. The hall fills as people sit down to a sandwich lunch before the presentations. Today is rather special, because it also marks Creative Arts East's 20th birthday, and there's an air of modest celebration in the room. It's been a long, and sometimes rutted path to this moment of achievement.

It began in 1991 with a pilot touring scheme for Norfolk. The task was taken on—part-time and freelance—by Nicky Stainton, who is here for the celebration. In the first year, she persuaded six villages to join the scheme and the success of those first events soon attracted more communities to get involved. So an independent company was established to sustain the work, with Nicky as its first director. Arts in Rural Norfolk, as it was called, thrived on the popularity of its village hall shows. Before long it was being invited to extend the service to Cambridgeshire and

Suffolk. It also launched an exhibition scheme to present the visual arts in rural Norfolk. In 1997 it adopted a new name, Rural Arts East, that reflected its wider reach and confidence. More change came in 2002, when Arts Council England encouraged several Norfolk arts organisations to come together as a new agency, Creative Arts East. Still under Nicky Stainton's leadership, the re-launched company was now working in youth music, disability arts and literature, alongside its existing programmes.

'The arts in one way or another is a huge part of my life because I'm an amateur performer and I've always been surrounded by that. I can't imagine any part of my life without being involved in either creating or bringing arts into communities, because it's people who make it go round and who need it..'

There have been ups and downs. The loss of Arts Council funding in 2008 was an unexpected blow, and saw the first contraction of the rural touring scheme. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of active promoters fell from 23 to 16 and the number of shows from 46 to 27. The total audience halved to under 1700 and the scheme was struggling for lack of funds. CAE adapted. It strengthened its work in other areas, developing participatory arts programmes with a focus on creative employment and wellbeing, in partnership with other bodies. New staff, board members and volunteers have also become involved over the years and each person brings fresh ideas and energy.

Film proved to be a particularly fruitful development. In partnership with the British Film Institute and media organisations in Cambridge and Nottingham, Creative Arts East developed a Village Screen programme that now brings cinema to more than 50 Norfolk villages. The scheme uses the same partnership model and has greatly extended CAE's offer to rural



communities with affordable nights out. In March 2015 alone, 21 different films were shown at 68 screenings.

'If you're watching it with other people, rather than on a DVD at home, I think there's a bit of a community spirit. You can get in to see a film in King's Lynn, but you can't get home again: there's no bus. Apart from that, we show these fringe films that you can't normally see at the cinema.'

Films with local connections are also popular. Audiences at Magdalen Village Hall enjoyed *One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942) and *Revolution* (1985), which both used King's Lynn as a location. One spectator at a screening of *Barnacle Bill* (1957) recognised a relative on Hunstanton Pier, destroyed in a storm 35 years ago.

Satellite links unite film and performing arts, bringing live performances from the Royal Opera House, the National Theatre and the RSC to villages like Thornham, on the North Norfolk coast, which has a population of 478. Such opportunities are highly valued in Norfolk. Last year, more than 60 residents of Hindolveston eschewed the garden centres to spend their Easter Sunday afternoon in watching a film of Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* in the village hall.

In 2012, Creative Arts East was able to expand its live touring work again, thanks to an grant through the ACE Strategic Touring programme. This set out to extend the rural touring scheme to districts where there was less take up. Three years later, the organisation's resilience and new ideas were recognised when it



won back regular funding from Arts Council England. In 2015 the number of arts organisations in ACE's 'National Portfolio' was reduced from 703 to 664 as a result of budget cuts, so Creative Arts East's success as one of the few organisations joining the portfolio is especially impressive. That 20th birthday celebration last autumn was a justifiably happy event.

'We are aware, as an organisation, of the artist's phenomenal talent and the impact that experiencing that creative offering can have on an individual, because we've all experienced it ourselves. I do think of it as an offering. I always feel so grateful when I'm at the theatre to be experiencing somebody else perform for me and give me this creative offering.'

Creative Arts East has been through many changes (and several names) during its 25 years but two things have remained fundamental and constant. The first is the belief, expressed in the organisation's mission statement, that 'creative use of the arts' can and should improve community life. This idea is not universally shared. Some people argue that the arts should not be asked to serve a social purpose, and that doing so leads merely to bad art. Others question the idea of community itself, in an increasingly individualistic, privatised society.

To both challenges Creative Arts East offers the same response: the hundreds of people who promote shows and events with CAE do care about community life and do see art as a life-enhancing way of improving it. They are empowered through their work because it enables them to act in, with and for their communities. And they are the second constant in Creative Arts East's life. Many promoters and volunteers have been involved for 10 or 15 years; some have been there from the start. Former staff and board members stay in touch and contribute to the work in

other ways. Nothing obliges people to invest themselves in this way in local arts promotion. They do so because they love it.

Reaching further

In the years since its first village performances in the early 1990s, Creative Arts East has brought more and more communities into the scheme. Even so, some parts of Norfolk and Suffolk have participated less than others. In the western districts of both counties—Breckland and King's Lynn & West Norfolk districts, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury in Suffolk—there have always been fewer villages promoting the arts with Creative Arts East. In 2005, seven villages in South Norfolk District, and five in both Broadland and North Norfolk, were part of the touring scheme: 17 in three districts. At that time, there were just five villages participating in the four western districts. This becomes less surprising if we recognise the differences that exist even in apparently similar places.

East Anglia is full of variety. Norfolk alone, according to Natural England, has nine separate 'National Character Areas', including the Broads, the Fens, the coastal areas and the Brecks. Each place is shaped by the land and the life it supports. Fertile soil allows a fenland agriculture quite unlike the dry pine forests around Thetford, a few miles away. The beauty of the North Norfolk coast and the Broads attract holidaymakers and part-time residents who rarely trouble less pretty settlements. The professionals and retired people who live around Norwich give another character to villages within easy commuting distance of the city. Even the air

force, which has had such influence around Mildenhall in Suffolk owes its presence to the suitability of the land.

Generalisations about small communities are not very wise (except, perhaps, that one). A single village can include residents with very different education, wealth and social status. Data can be misleading here because small numbers disappear into the limbo regarded as not 'statistically significant', though the experiences they signal might be very significant to the people concerned. The closure of a single pub can transform the life of a village, though the event vanishes in general statistics about retail trends. All this complex, individual difference helps explain why a programme that works well in one place might not succeed elsewhere. Villages that seem similar on the surface might actually have quite different resources, lives and characters.



The sensible response, as Creative Arts East has found again and again, is to take time to get to know people and their places. Only then can the offer correspond to their interests and be made in a way they can use. Through 'New Places, Extraordinary Spaces', rural touring has taken root in communities where it not had previously thrived. It has done so because Creative Arts East had the time to try new ideas and build relationships.



New places, extraordinary spaces

The chance to do something for the western districts came only when Arts Council England launched a new Strategic Touring Programme in 2011 with the aim of ensuring that people across England *'have improved access to great art visiting their local area'*. The fund was part of a wider ACE commitment to reaching *'people and places with the least engagement'* in the arts. These had been identified in the context of data on people's engagement in sport called 'Active People'. Between 2008 and 2010, this national survey also included a question about whether people had *'either attended an arts event or participated in an arts activity at least three times in the past 12 months'*.

Because it was a very large survey, Active People provided data for every district in England and so ACE could say, for the first time, where people were most and least likely to have engaged with the arts. Kensington and Chelsea led the table with 66% of

respondents saying that they had attended an arts event. At the other end of the list, though only 10 miles away, was Newham, where the figure was just 33%. The average was 44% for England as a whole. The Strategic Touring Fund prioritised the third of local authority areas where people reported the least engagement in the arts. Among these were Forest Heath in Suffolk, at 37.9% and King's Lynn & West Norfolk, at 40.2%.

'Norfolk is so rural and there are so many people who do not have access—really, I had no idea about that. I'd always been in Norwich, and thought, "Oh, it's dead easy". I had no idea how incredibly difficult it is for a lot of people.'

One might doubt whether such a broad survey is very meaningful but it is at least consistent with Creative Arts East's own experience in the western districts of Norfolk and Suffolk. Active People reported higher levels of arts engagement in the districts where take up for the rural touring scheme is also stronger. In Broadland and North Norfolk Districts, for example, over 47% of people said they'd seen the arts, while in South Norfolk and Suffolk Coastal, the figure was over 51%. Of course, this does not imply a causal connection (i.e. that more people report seeing the arts because there are more touring shows). But it might be that the factors which have made it easier to develop rural touring in the east of Norfolk and Suffolk are related to greater engagement in the arts in those areas.

Another aim of the Strategic Touring Programme was to broaden the range of venues presenting high quality touring work. Most touring theatre, music and performing arts goes to arts venues that are designed to receive it, such as the Corn Exchange in King's Lynn, the Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds or Haverhill Arts Centre. There are many advantages to this system, which for the

most part works well. However, it does require anyone living outside the towns with arts centres to travel to see a show. It is also possible that such venues are unknown to or ignored by many people who might, in other circumstances, enjoy what they present.

Rural touring schemes complement conventional arts touring by responding to both limitations. First, by bringing the work much closer to where people live so that travel becomes unnecessary and, secondly, by presenting it in ways that it reaches people who might not see it in an urban arts centre. The audience survey undertaken for *Only Connect* found that a third of those who saw village hall performances had not seen the arts elsewhere in the previous 12 months. Many of these people also said that the show had been unexpectedly enjoyable. Going to the village hall to keep company, or even out of a sense of social duty, they had found that an evening of opera or jazz or poetry could actually be very entertaining.

The Strategic Touring Programme gave Creative Arts East a chance to extend its network of village halls and to try some alternative venues that might reach people who don't go there. *Only Connect* found that people in their teens and twenties were much less likely to use a village hall. Working with pub landlords to put on shows might reach another audience. Libraries, which are still accessible and well-liked cultural spaces, were another possibility. Perhaps live shows could be part of the response to the multiple pressures of reducing budgets, changing social habits and the reinvention of the book in digital form. Schools, residential homes, festivals and outdoor events provided further intriguing opportunities to bring live art to new audiences.



With all these ideas, Creative Arts East submitted an application to Arts Council England to extend its touring scheme in Breckland, King's Lynn & West Norfolk, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury (Readers unfamiliar with this part of East Anglia will find a sketch map on page 113.). The proposals were supported by the four District Councils and both County Councils, Norfolk and Suffolk library services and several arts organisations. A partnership group was formed when the Arts Council approved the project in 2012 and work was begun by the Creative Arts East rural touring scheme manager.

5

New shoots

A good harvest

Arts Council England's touring funds had a transformative effect on Creative Arts East's work in West Norfolk and Suffolk—and, indeed, on its rural touring work as a whole. In the year before it started, the scheme was operating at reduced level due to lack





of funds. There were just 27 shows in 15 villages, a third of them in a single district, North Norfolk. The western districts of Breckland, Forest Heath and King's Lynn & West Norfolk had just three promoting groups who put on seven shows attended by 594 people. At this level the viability of the scheme itself was doubtful. Rural touring is increasingly cost effective as more groups participate because essential overheads can be spread more widely. Similarly, better deals can be made with performers if there is the possibility of doing several shows in a few days. Below a certain level of activity, the cost of each show becomes prohibitive and the model comes apart. In 2011, Creative Arts East's 20 year old touring scheme stood, like a coastal bungalow, on the edge of an crumbling cliff.

Three years on, the picture is completely different. There are now 68 promoting groups in Norfolk and Suffolk—four times as many as in 2011. They are also more varied: there are businesses and public bodies as well as voluntary groups. Between them, in the year to March 2015, they put on 129 shows in village halls, libraries, pubs and at festivals and community celebrations. Performances at open air events have greatly increased the number of people seeing live theatre and cabaret through Creative Arts East. More than 5,000 people have attended ticketed shows in village halls, libraries and pubs and many more have seen performances in shopping streets and countryside festivals.

The focus on the western districts has engaged new communities, especially in Breckland and King's Lynn & West Norfolk, where there are now more promoters—14 and 13 respectively—than in any other district served by Creative Arts East. The much smaller districts of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury have nine promoters between them. The promoting groups involve about 250 volunteers who select, manage and market each event. It is their commitment and enthusiasm—and Arts Council England's renewed support—that will allow Creative Arts East to sustain professional arts performances in rural areas in future.

A further reason for optimism is that Creative Arts East's touring programme has revived elsewhere in Norfolk and Suffolk. Activity in Broadland, North Norfolk, Great Yarmouth, Mid Suffolk and South Norfolk districts has grown during the past three years, despite not benefitting directly from the Strategic Touring funds. The number of promoters there has increased from 12 to 32 and the number of events from 20 to 49. This further underlines how rural touring schemes do best at a scale that achieves cost-

effectiveness and generates its own momentum. When people see exciting shows in their own village or local town, they often look out for others elsewhere.

The success of the last three years demonstrates the enthusiasm in rural communities for theatre, music and other live shows and people's willingness to invest their resources into making it happen. It shows too that engaging people in the arts depends on a partnership between equals. In sharing their complementary knowledge and resources communities and artists can create new experiences of value to both—and rural touring schemes are an effective way of enabling that to happen.

Community venues

'Fab evening! Lovely community feel—Enjoyed the wine, beer and ice cream—A great event that didn't break our budget. Thank you.'

Despite all its experience, Creative Arts East faced challenges in reaching out to new communities. Inviting new village hall promoters to join the scheme was straightforward enough, but it meant understanding why they had not done so before. Was it the cost or the idea itself that put people off? Perhaps the shows themselves did not appeal, or the hall committee just had its hands full already. Gradually, new contacts were made, often with the help of local authority staff. The scheme found ways to involve other partners, such as festival organisers, town centre managers and pub landlords. Trusted theatre companies and musicians were suggested for a first show, and confidence developed when audiences enjoyed themselves.



In the autumn of 2012 the new programme began at Magdalen Village Hall with *Love Your Chocolates*, a one man show by Tim Bentinck, the familiar voice of David Archer from the world's longest running radio drama. Over the months, the number of community shows built steadily from 7 to 24 and finally 34 in the third year. Audiences grew too, as promoters made relationships with local people and learnt more about what they wanted to see. The average audience was 58 in the first year, 67 in the second and 78 in the third. Given the size of rural venues, this growth is encouraging, even if it is partly achieved through open air events.

There is also a balance to be struck between popular shows that attract big audiences (often because they're familiar), and work that is more unusual but may also be more rewarding. Jane Leitch, who promotes at Freckenham in Suffolk, programmes to appeal to different interests across the year. Her most popular show was *The Vicar of Dibley*, by Lowestoft's Seagull Rep, which played to 138 people in the parish church—a venue that added a certain realism. Although the next show in the village hall attracted 80 people, Jane wanted to do something for children at Christmas time. *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, by Garlic Theatre was a puppet show that delighted its family audience. Like Jane, many promoters use popular shows to support events that risk making a loss but may be important for other reasons.

Watching a performance in the dark cocoon of an arts centre can be a powerful experience as all the venue's technical resources focus the audience's attention on the stage. Seeing the same show in a hall that also serves for basketball and wedding receptions is very different. The seats may not be very comfortable, the sightlines less than ideal and the blackout patchy. But such shortcomings are balanced by the closeness





between performers and audience, and the shared experience it nurtures. An urban audience mostly don't know each other and disperse after the show. A rural audience, by contrast, includes people who know each other well, or at least by sight, and so there can be an almost palpable sense of community as people greet one another and chat while they wait for things to begin. People want the evening to go well because they know who has arranged it and how much effort is involved—and also because they have an idea of community life, which in fact may be the main reason why they have come out on this damp November night. They are interested in what their friends feel about an evening that will, in time, become another layer of the local memory that is part of what makes people feel they belong somewhere.

'People want that sense of community and identity. It is as much about the social interaction as the art form, but I'm blown away by the impact that great art, great film, great theatre has on a community.'

That sense of community is also why rural audiences often enjoy shows that include a degree of interaction with the performers. The success of theatre companies like The Gramophones and Scary Little Girls is partly due to the skilful way they handle the social and artistic conventions of playing a character in a space, such as a pub or library, that is not normally designated for performance. Stretching these rules is one delight of this kind of theatre. You see something similar when children approach the stilled puppets after a show to see how they're made, uncertain quite what brings them to life. Light-hearted plays, comedy and cabaret might seem, on the surface, to be the art world's fast food—appealing, easily digested and as easily forgotten. But content is not always the most important part of a performance; its gifts may lie in how it is created. A one man show in which Gavin Robertson used comedy and physical theatre to play in the universe of Bond films was a highlight of Creative Arts East's programme in 2014. But the post-show discussion between audience and performer was not an extra: it was central to the experience, opening up ideas about art, reality and performance and lasted as long as the play itself.

With 'New Places, Extraordinary Spaces' Creative Arts East also wanted to explore how live performance might work outside the village halls and community venues they were used to. So they took work to festivals, events and even shopping streets. For short but crowded events such as Christmas lights inaugurations, CAE brought in theatre artists like Swank, Fools Paradise and Glitter Belles to create a little magic with music, acrobatics and fantasy.

At festivals, where people have time and curiosity to spare, they offered Highly Sprung's *Traveling Treasury* storytelling caravan and Pif Paf's *Bee Cart*. To the Aylsham Food Festival, CAE brought the London Vegetable Orchestra, who made their instruments from carrots, courgettes and pumpkins before playing for the audience. If these forays could not create the lasting relationships on which rural touring depends, they introduced people to unfamiliar performers who left delight in their wake.

'I like that shiver that runs down my spine when I experience something. It is spirit-lifting, spirit-creating and I get passionate. It is what makes your life not grey, dull and dreary. If I had to sum it up, it has certainly been the colour in my life.'

Libraries

There is barely room to move in Kedington's one room library this afternoon. All the chairs are taken and adults stand or perch on the edges of tables. On the carpet, 15 or 20 children gather round an odd assemblage of suitcases and drapes. July sunshine leaks round the curtains, but nobody wants to be outside. There's a hush of anticipation, then music. Puppet rats scurry over the cases which transform into houses—it's the Pied Piper of Hamelin, recreated by Norwich Puppet Theatre for the children of a Suffolk village. Over the next hour, puppeteer Gemma Khawaja holds her audience's attention in her agile fingers, like the rods of the puppets bobbing about the set. There are jokes, drama and wonder, as bits of cloth and wood seem to tell their story. It's a funny story, but a dark one too, when the children finally vanish from sight. This is children's theatre: more than entertainment, it

can create strong impressions and feelings. There are children here who may recall this when they have children of their own. Certainly, everyone has lots to say over tea and cake afterwards in the community centre. It has been a special afternoon.

Libraries have always been more than places of quiet study. As approachable cultural centres, they host exhibitions, events, classes and meetings. They adapt to new social trends and technologies, though the pace of that change seems to be faster and faster. Today, libraries may be as important in enabling access to the Internet as to printed books. They're unusual in being the only cultural service that local authorities are legally obliged to provide. Some people argue that the arts should be protected in the same way, but libraries have also seen cutbacks, as councils struggle to balance their budgets. It was these pressures that encouraged Creative Arts East to look for partnership with the library services in Norfolk and Suffolk, in the hope of meeting new audiences.

As the experience in Kedington illustrates, many libraries responded enthusiastically to the opportunity and brought in writers, performance poets, theatre companies and even musicians. At the Breckland Book Festival, Creative Arts East supported events by Susan Hill and Louis de Bernières alongside performances by Scary Little Girls. Another theatre company The Gramophones, devised a 'Story Exchange' in which they offered library visitors performances in return for their own stories: the show visited several Suffolk libraries and even spent a couple of days with the mobile library. More surprising, perhaps, was the welcome given to the Anna Mudeka Band, who performed and gave workshops in libraries at Dersingham, Kings Lynn, Downham Market and Hunstanton.

“The Pied Piper was the perfect event for our small space and a lovely traditional experience for the children. The puppeteer was excellent and both children and adults really appreciated the opportunity to ask questions after the show and to be able to handle the puppets. I had so much positive feedback.”



'What a great idea to organise this event in the library! It would be helpful to understand the words but still, what a wonderful gig with an opportunity to dance!'

It's all a long way from the stern look and the finger pointing at the 'Quiet Please' sign.

During the programme's second year, following some pilots to test what might work in a library context, CAE supported 54 events in 16 libraries, attended by almost 2000 people. Since then, however, progress has been uneven and there has been a sharp reduction in library events, with only 11 in the final year.

There were different reasons for this. In Norfolk, budget cuts saw donation boxes installed in libraries, so it is understandable if librarians cannot face additional commitments. But in Suffolk, several libraries have taken on the promoter's role and put on shows. Hadleigh, Glemsford and Newmarket also welcomed the Pied Piper, while Haverhill and Clare had theatre performances and visits by the poet, Henry Raby. Teresa Bailey, Kedington's Library Manager, is keen to host further shows from Creative Arts East. The experience of the past three years has shown that libraries can be suitable venues and that both library staff and users welcome the enrichment that live performances can bring. The challenge, of course, is developing these opportunities when savings have to be made.



Pubs

With church, shop and school, the pub has been at the heart of village life for centuries, but like those other institutions it has struggled in the face of social change. Some of that affects pubs everywhere. People's habits have evolved, and there's more competition for their leisure time, on the high street and at home. It's also hard to compete for sales with supermarkets. But rural pubs face particular challenges, including the small population base. The ties that held when villages worked, lived and socialised together have loosened. With few planning restrictions preventing the conversion of pubs to other uses, landlords and breweries can find themselves with valuable property that is giving a poor return on capital. The Campaign for Real Ale estimates that 29 pubs now close their doors each week.

Some village pubs have responded by improving the quality and range of their offer, aiming to become destinations through good food and special events. Creative Arts East saw an opportunity there by working with landlords to introduce theatre and poetry, alongside the more familiar programme of quiz nights, bands and karaoke. Initial discussions with pubs and a brewery chain were encouraging, but the first attempts were not successful. Some landlords were willing to give it a try, but did not see that they had to get behind a show, talking to customers about what was happening and promoting it locally. As a result, audiences were small and customers did not always understand what was going on. If they had come out for a drink and a chat, an actor's unexpected appearance was not always welcome. Above all, there was a need to show cash-strapped landlords that paying for a theatre or poetry performance, even at a subsidised rate, was a sound investment. It takes time to find an audience and gain its





trust. Whether they come back, even after a great show, depends also on the rest of a pub's offer.

CAE responded to the pub's very different world by offering landlords a different range of artists. Scary Little Girls, a young theatre and cabaret duo, were an early success with a new piece that had fun with the pub quiz. *It's Your Round* brought comedy, music and audience participation to a staple of modern life and showed what might be done. Henry Raby's *Poet in a Pub* was another fruitful experiment. Taking up residence in the bar, Raby offered to write a poem for the people he talked to, its subject coming out of their conversation. The relationships made during these sessions encouraged several landlords to invite the poet back with his one man show about growing up, *Letter from the Man (to the Boy)*.

As each side got to know each other better, and learn what did and didn't work in a pub, the work grew and diversified. Comedy, music and audience participation were its foundations,

understandably enough when there is no obvious boundary between performer and audience and the usual business of serving drinks and socialising has to go on. Swervy World brought mid-20th century show tunes and Nabokov their rock-framed theatre stories, *Symphony*. The murder mysteries of Walking Theatre also proved popular: who could resist a Fawlty Towers spoof for £8 at the Railway Tavern, to include fish and chips?

'What a nice change to have an actor on stage in the village local.'

After an uneasy start, it seems that Creative Arts East has found ways of bringing live performance to the rural pub. The number of shows has grown steadily. There were three in the first year of the programme, 15 in the second and 27 in the third. That success is reflected in the audiences, which have grown from an average of 21 at the start to 44 now. While some of the first pubs involved have not taken more work, several who joined the scheme in the second half have become regular promoters. The Kings' Head in North Lopham tested the water with Henry Raby in November 2013 and has gone on to book six more shows, including Scary Little Girls, Walking Theatre and Living Spit. There has been a similar response from other venues, which suggests that a good match between artists and audience has been found.

Financing pub performances remains as much a challenge as it is in libraries, though. Landlords are mostly not yet ready to meet the performers' full fees, to say nothing of the management cost involved in making the work available to them. The willingness of Arts Council England to subsidise such shows in future is one issue to be considered. Another is the appropriateness of subsidising commercial businesses, as opposed to the public services that are libraries. But, if more rural pubs become

Bag of Seeds (For Bronwyn)

I am clutching raw seeds
Beneath the deep silky curtain
Between myself and the pitch black sky
Dotted with purples and royal blues.
I used to walk over fields
And see the sky above the colour of these seeds
Now I walk by the river, rippling a bluish black
This tight colour, these light seeds
Click and run smoothly along my fingers
Sore from typing 39 poems.

Henry Raby



community enterprises, like the King's Arms in Shouldham, which presented two poets with CAE last Autumn, the question will be irrelevant. Touring is often about making new relationships: in the pubs of Norfolk and Suffolk, Creative Arts East have successfully begun the difficult feat of winning over a new audience for theatre, music and poetry.



Artists and audiences

'Empty the hall of chairs and lets dance!—Excellent! Very enjoyable energetic and invigorating.—Ambitious and very brave choice of band. Very enjoyable and excellent performance.—Very exciting and lively.—Absolutely terrific.—Fantastic evening. Great to have something of this quality locally.—I really enjoyed this event: very powerful and thought provoking. Thank you very much.'

These comments about the Anna Mudeka Band concerts are typical of the enthusiasm of Creative Arts East's audiences. In fact, people can be so generous about their experiences of rural touring that you might wonder whether any plays and concerts can be that good, especially if you did not enjoy the performance as much. But no assessment is objective because art does not exist independently of the person experiencing it. Art, like love or the smell of a childhood home, is a personal matter.

Every performance by the Anna Mudeka Band is different because of what the musicians do and how each listener responds. Indeed, a performance could be defined as the mutual influence on one another of artist and audience. That is the nature of live art and one reason it remains valuable when art can be so easily and cheaply replicated. Anna Mudeka's ensemble plays a fusion of Zimbabwean music. A concert in a fenland village hall will feel different from one in a London arts centre. It will change between the library and the pub in the same village. What matters in live performance is not whether the art is excellent, in some abstract, unchanging sense, but whether something is created that is excellent on this night, in this place, for this audience.



The same is true of other qualities, such as excitement or innovation. Innovation is rare, if that means something that has not existed before. But people with open minds may come across innovative experiences quite often. What someone makes of Gavin Robertson's *Bond* will be influenced by their familiarity with the James Bond films, with British humour, with physical theatre and much else. The experience might be innovative but

disappointing, if they don't get the references, or innovative and exciting because it gives them a fresh perspective on something they thought they knew. Whether it is the first or the second, or something else again, is not in the actor's control. Their talent lies in creating something rich and compelling enough that people want to engage with it and find there something that makes sense to them.

Audience members' views of their experiences are the only meaningful assessments of a performance and the only possible test of whether the artists, and Creative Arts East, are doing well. Happily, audiences are generally very positive. People do make criticisms, mostly of practical issues like the venue or publicity, as well as aspects of a production they feel didn't work. But those criticisms feel like suggestions for improvements, because there is a consistent appreciation of the effort involved in putting on a show. Even where they haven't enjoyed the evening, audience members recognise that others have and respect the performers' craft and professionalism.

'I cannot believe that young people with such huge talent are trogging round the Fenland villages for three and ninepence to entertain us. I feel quite humbled by it because they are so talented. That makes it a bit sad, that there isn't more opportunity for young people to perform. We've seen what these young people can do. Their spontaneity and improvisation and the timing is immaculate.'



Over the years, Creative Arts East has got to know the communities with which it works. It selects shows carefully to offer a variety of work at a range of prices. Some promoters are adventurous; others stick with what they know. Some can be persuaded to try something new, if they think people may like it. Getting costs right is like walking a tightrope. Small halls and hamlets may not be able to sell more than 50 or 60 tickets. But prices can't be too high: it is the village hall after all, with the facilities of a village hall. Promoters also worry about excluding neighbours on low incomes. Bringing the community together is the point, after all, and there are often discounts and free places. But the fact is, as one promoter says, *'incomes, locally, are pounds an hour less in Breckland than they are elsewhere—elsewhere in Norfolk, let alone elsewhere in England'*.

Many people are comfortable going alone to the village hall for a film or a play because they know there will be friendly faces when they get there. (That can, of course, keep others away, if they want to avoid someone or they don't feel part of the group that goes.) The fact that the audience know one another is the key difference between a community venue and a city theatre or cinema. It's not just that the first is much more accessible, in every sense, than the second, though that is important. It's that seeing something with family, friends and neighbours makes it a different experience. People are aware of each other and their reactions. This is not the anonymity of a crowd of strangers. When you see each other next, there will be common memories: how you reacted to the experience may influence how you see one another. It matters. But above all, seeing a great show in your village hall, library or pub is a breath of fresh air, a delight and a pleasure. It's a window onto another world and audiences value it very much.

6 Wide horizons



Managed realignment

The English coastline is often unstable, and nowhere more so than in East Anglia, where the North Sea washes against soft soils. Between Hunstanton and Wells-next-the-Sea, the Environment Agency is allowing nature to reshape the coast in a process it describes as 'managed realignment'. The intention is to soften

existing sea defences and find a more secure and sustainable balance between land and water. In different ways this process has been going on for centuries here, on the coast, the Broads and the Fens, as humans search for better ways of improving what they can, and living with what they cannot.

Managed realignment is a good description of what has been happening since the 2008 financial crisis. The historian David Marquand compares its shattering effect to the Wall Street Crash. Like a great storm, it battered the land and changed the course of things. One result is the reorganisation of public services now taking place. The cuts in spending on libraries and the arts (including rural touring) are one small part of that upheaval. With less money available, new ideas are sought for how public services can be delivered and by whom. Library services are turning to volunteers: in North Yorkshire, nine public libraries are now run by community groups.

Rural touring has *always* been run by volunteers. It is estimated that promoting groups contribute 100,000 hours of voluntary time each year in organising their events. In truth, people probably give much more time than this to setting out chairs, making teas and cleaning up afterwards: there is no line to separate 'volunteering' from mucking in. The thousands of theatre, music and film evenings that take place in villages across England would be far too expensive to put on without all this help. Only people's willingness to invest themselves in their community makes it possible.

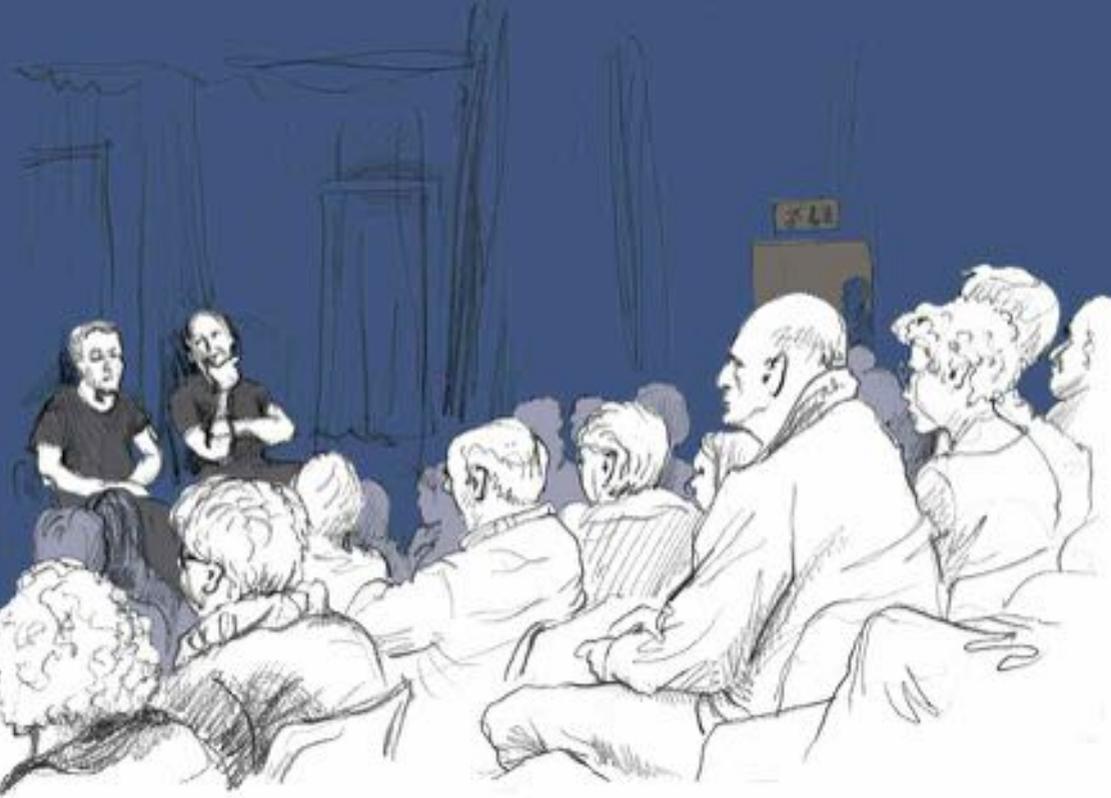
Volunteering has its critics. The argument that public services should not be had on the cheap by exploiting people's goodwill has force when it comes to replacing staff with volunteers, but it is not relevant to rural touring. Promoters do not replace public



services. They bring artists to their community because they value the arts, because they want to share their enthusiasm with others, because they believe their community will benefit and because they can. They are in charge of what they do.

That is why rural touring is so successful. It gives each partner—promoter, performer and funder—control over their participation. If a village does not want to promote something this autumn, it is under no obligation to do so. Perhaps everyone is too busy, or it's time for a break, or the available shows don't appeal: no matter. The promoting group chooses and need not justify its choices. It has only to live with them.

The arts are not exempt from the managed realignment of public services. Arts Council England has much less money than it did five years ago. Its funding partnerships with local government are under strain because councils must prioritise vital services like



education and social care. At the same time ACE is challenged to make 'Great Art for Everyone' a more equitable reality by getting resources out of London and the great cities. As the Active People survey shows, there are parts of the country, including many rural areas, where people do not see much of what the Arts Council supports with their money.

For all these reasons there is an urgent need to rethink the relationship between arts companies and the people who contribute to their costs. The publicly-funded arts world faces a period of realignment. In doing its best to manage that well, it could do worse than take inspiration from the rural touring model of coproduction and the schemes' success in empowering communities all over the country to see the arts they choose.

Enjoying and participating

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted and adopted very fast by nations reacting to the horrors of the Second World War. It is somewhat neglected nowadays, in spirit and in fact, but it remains a benchmark of what human beings aspire to be and, since it was ratified by the United Kingdom, it is a standard to which we must hold ourselves. Among its articles is the 27th, which begins by stating that:

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

We have made good progress towards meeting this promise since 1948. Science has benefited us greatly, especially through public services like the NHS. It has probably never been easier, despite recent spending cuts, to enjoy the arts thanks to the efforts of councils, publicly funded arts organisations and the BBC. The quality, diversity and accessibility of the arts in Britain is extraordinary and a justifiable cause for celebration.

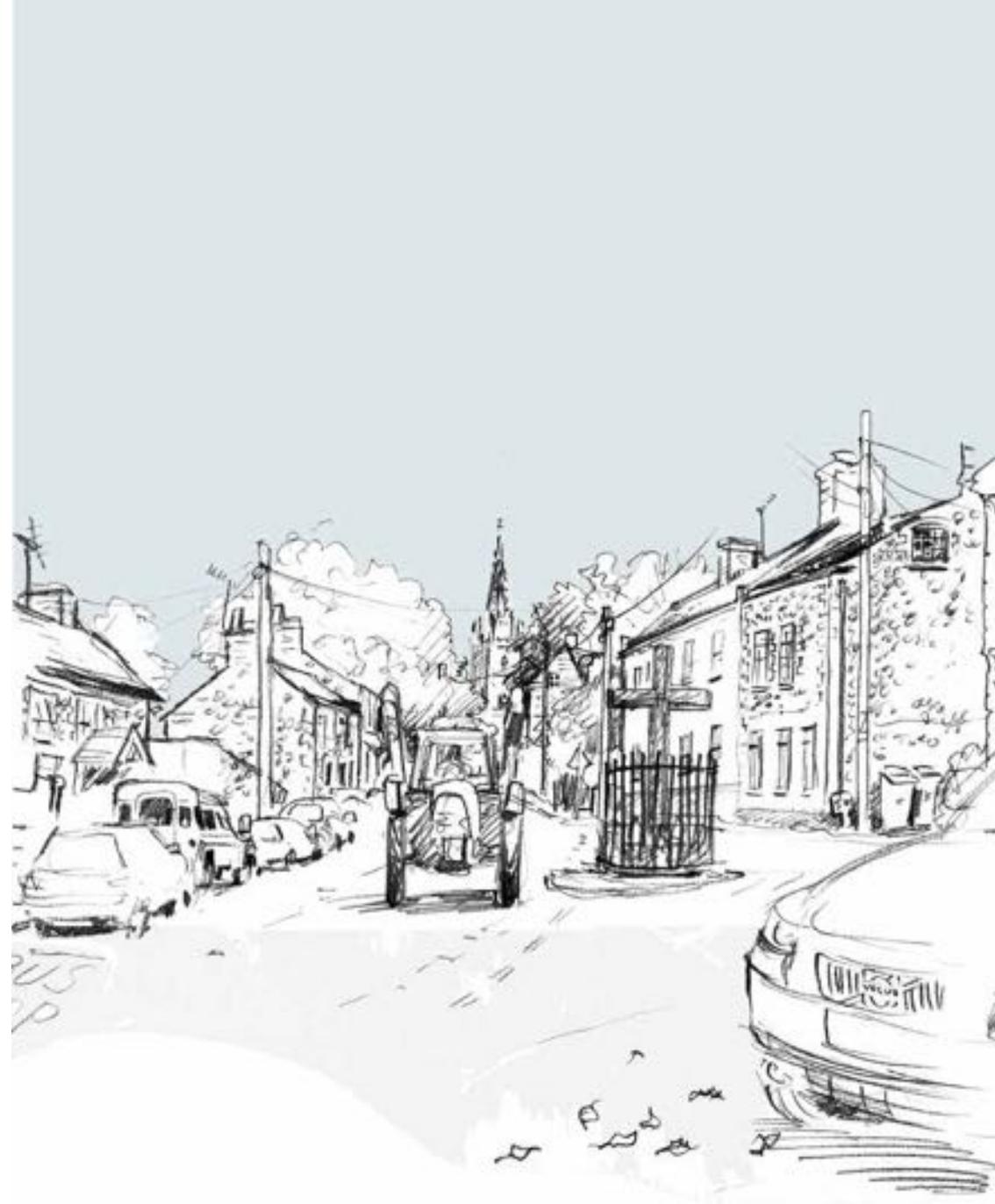
But the Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes an important distinction between *enjoying* the arts and *participating* in the cultural life of the community. Both rights are fundamental—and different. One can enjoy the arts alone, intimately, without anyone knowing about it. Millions of commuters do so every day, cocooned with their iPods, Kindles and tablets as the train rushes them from work to home.

In contrast to these private experiences, participating in the cultural life of the community is a public and shared act. And it is central to how individuals find and create the common ground that makes a community and a society. It is why Classical Athens

developed the civic ritual of theatre and the civic process of democracy simultaneously. Totalitarian regimes do not bother much with private artistic tastes as long as they control the cultural life of the community. It is the difference between passive consumption and active participation, and each has very different results for individuals, communities and democracy.

There are endless ways of participating in the cultural life of the community, as the sketch in chapter three of cultural life in rural Norfolk suggests. Rural touring is certainly one. In gathering for the evening in the village hall for an event that they or their neighbours have organised, people affirm not just their cultural tastes and values but also their willingness to be a community in the first place. In all my conversations with people about rural touring, over more than ten years now, the most consistent reason they give for being involved is that it brings the community together. Whether they are promoters, neighbours or incomers, the people who turn up on a cold night to see an unknown play by an equally unfamiliar theatre group do so to support the community. And, of course, the best way to promote our values is to enact them. It's not what we say but what we do that makes a difference.

'I think it's part of the community. It's another way of bringing people together. A lot of people that don't come to one thing will come to something else, so you still see the general core of the village coming to various things.'



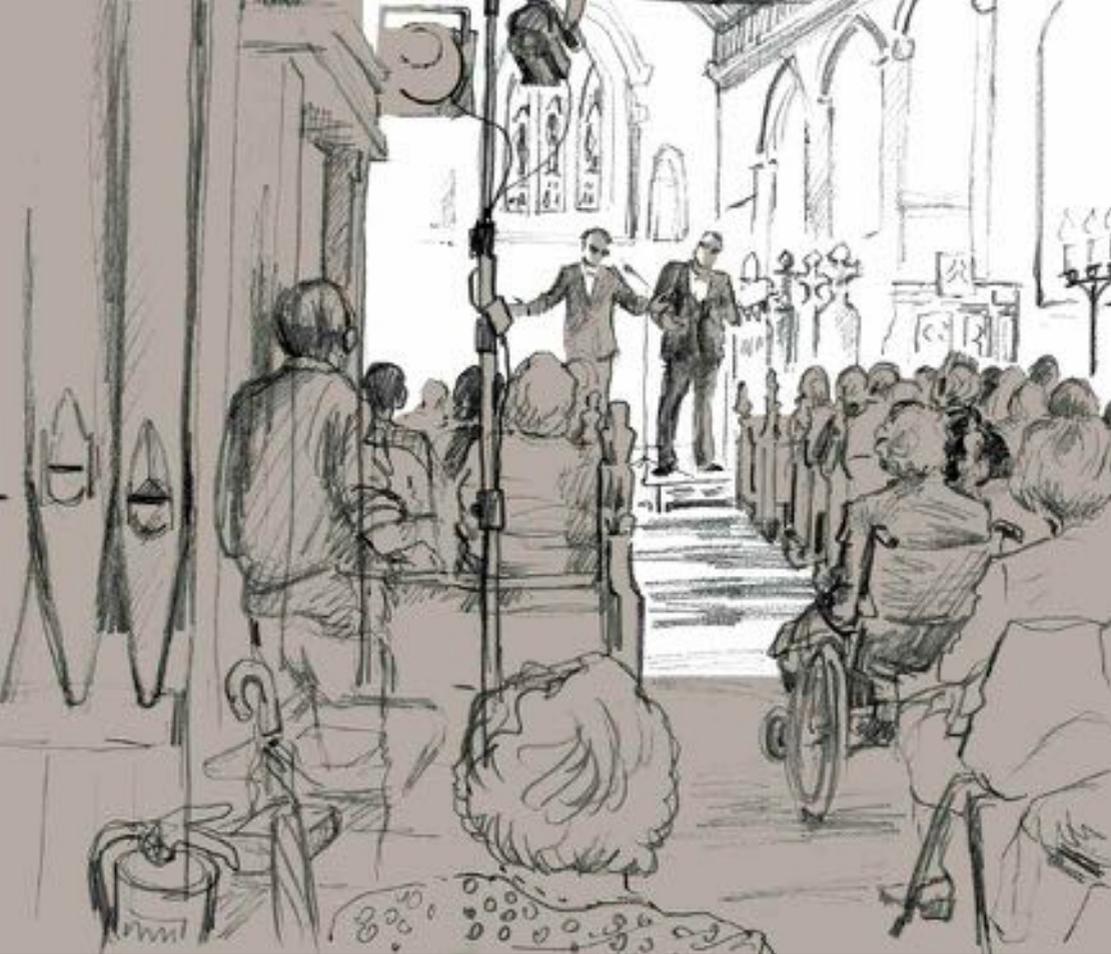


Balancing and rebalancing

The Arts Council was also created in reaction to the experience of the Second World War and the contribution the arts had made to comforting and encouraging people at a time of suffering. Its mission, as set out in the 1946 Royal Charter, was two-fold: to support the arts and to extend people's access to them: great art for everyone, in today's parlance. There has always been a tension between these goals, partly because art is not always easy or comfortable, especially when it is new, and that can make it unpopular. The Arts Council has not always found everyone

receptive to the art that it values, such as some modernist classical music or contemporary art. That tension is real but it can also be creative. In any case, there is no monopoly in the arts and many other commercial, philanthropic and voluntary organisations offer alternatives, to say nothing of those provided by artists, critics and others. Debates about the value of art's ideas, forms and expression are signs of a healthy democratic society and should be welcomed as such.

Recently, campaigners have argued for a managed realignment of Arts Council England funding to the English regions. In 2014, their



case was endorsed by a Parliamentary Select Committee which affirmed that *'Art and culture can and should be available to all'*. The Arts Council welcomed the report, stating that it would *'continue to rebalance our investment intelligently—to build capacity outside of London, whilst not damaging the infrastructure in the capital'*.

Everyone, it seems, is agreed on the principle that people should be able to enjoy the arts and participate in the cultural life of the community wherever they live. They also accept the need to find a new balance between centre and periphery in a time of austerity. How to achieve that in reality is another matter.

The process of arts development

Jane Jacobs was an American writer and campaigner whose work was influential, among other things, in challenging orthodoxies about the relationship between decision-makers and the communities they serve. In her study of urban economics, she writes something so simple that it is easy to overlook. *'Development cannot be given', she says. 'It has to be done. It is a process, not a collection of capital goods.'*

Since its foundation in 1946, the Arts Council has acted mostly as if arts development *could* be given, exactly like a collection of artistic goods. It has supported centres of excellence where people can enjoy art and used touring as a way to extend their reach to those further away. This system always had serious disadvantages and they are increasingly problematic today.

The first problem is simply one of cost. Most of the Arts Council's budget is locked up in the fixed assets of presenting venues such as galleries, theatres and concert halls. Those who live in major cities have access to excellent work, but other people are much less well served: a trip to see *War Horse* is a special and costly event for them. Secondly, cultural powerhouses are inflexible. Like all institutions, they serve continuity better than change. That isn't a bad thing in itself—we value stability and a connection with our past—but it doesn't make it easy to respond to the new ideas of artists and changing interests of audiences.

Thirdly, professional bodies enshrine self-belief. Since they are run by experts (and who else would you want to run a gallery, library or theatre?) arts organisations believe they know what is good in their field and, by extension, what is good for their audiences. The system perpetuates a binary opposition of experts and the rest when in reality there is a spectrum of knowledge and insight.

There are many fields in which we gladly accept that specialist expertise outweighs our own judgements. Art is not one of them. Much as we might value the guidance of artists, curators and critics, our opinions and our tastes remain our own. As John Carey says, no one can know what we experience through the arts and so no one can show that what they experience has more value.

Jane Jacobs was right about development: it cannot be given. It can only be done by those who want it. An intention to teach is hollow until it meets a desire to learn. Music is noise without a receptive listener. An actor is a fool without an audience.

As the industrial era recedes, so do its systems of production. The broadcasters and publishers who once had captive audiences are trying to discover how to listen to people engaged by the interaction of the social media. Arts Council England wants to reach beyond its existing audience, to those millions apparently unengaged by the arts, but how? After all, if the existing methods were any good, they would have worked by now.

The Select Committee was right to say that *'engagement will be increased if individuals feel they have had some influence in a decision to fund a particular activity or organization'* but its focus was on funding decisions. Most of us do not want to spend our time in committee rooms deciding between competing claims for support, even if we felt we had the knowledge to make good judgements. But we do know our communities and we can make good judgements about what we'd like to see there. And that is what rural touring scheme promoters do all the time.

The rural touring model works. It has shown its value over 35 years, during which it has touched millions of people, helped thousands of artists earn a living through their work, and made the live arts a regular and cherished part of community life across

the country. The performances it has enabled have delighted, challenged, amused, perplexed, intrigued and discomfited, as art does. And in doing all that it has supported arts development and community development without making a fuss about either.

There is an implicit belief in the work of organisations such as Arts Council England that its task is to open people to new experiences, to cultivate taste, to widen horizons. Rural touring shows that good arts development work is not a monologue but a conversation. Perhaps, after all, it is the arts world that has most to gain by widening its horizons.



Appendix

Regular marvels: a little explanation

Over the past three years, I have followed Creative Arts East's work in West Norfolk and Suffolk, going to see performances, attending meetings and talking with artists, promoters and village residents. I didn't want to repeat the approach I had used in *Only Connect*, especially since that work is still available. Since then, I have also become interested in art's own capacity to understand and articulate people's experiences of it. Art is essential to life partly because it enables us to know and express what we cannot know or express in other ways. That is why its methods are a valid means of research, even if the results might seem more ambiguous than those of scientific inquiry. It's not that academic theories and methods are wrong. They are vital, but they are not the only routes to knowledge and it is dangerous to act as if they were.

So in 2011 I began a series of documentary art projects I called *regular marvels* to explore these ideas. The title speaks of art as both everyday *and* extraordinary: its importance lies partly in that

paradox. Art helps us remember the inexplicable wonder it is to be alive. So far, I've completed *regular marvels* on amateur theatre, art in old age, migrant artists and the arts in village churches. These subjects, like rural touring, are not very fashionable but there's a lot to be said for, and about, what gets left on the margins. If nothing else, it tends to be an unfamiliar story.

Like all art, this is an essentially humanist project, recognising thinking *and* feeling, fact *and* experience, objectivity *and* subjectivity. That all this is paradoxical is something to explore, not deny. I have approached each subject as a writer, learning how to use a writer's methods, sensibility and imagination to understand and then tell what I found. And in each case I have worked with a visual artist who brought another, different but equally important eye to the process. The results have been published as short books, combining text and images: *A Wider Horizon* is the fifth in the series and the last for now.

I'm very lucky that Rosie Redzia agreed to join me on this journey. A gifted and subtle artist, Rosie grew up in the Fenland that has often appeared in her work. We travelled together and separately to see shows, responding creatively to what we saw and heard, sharing impressions and interpretations. She sat in on many of my conversations with people involved in rural touring, and her drawings document the experience as much as my text, albeit differently. The interaction between them is deliberate and intended to give you a richer insight than either could bring alone. The process of designing the book and selecting images to sit alongside text has been illuminating. I've been surprised how drawings that had seemed tangential found connections that I'd not suspected. The images do not illustrate the text; they are their own story, confirming, commenting on and sometimes at odds with the one I have written.

Each way of knowing is its own path into the complex experiences created through the strategic touring partnership. Each is partial and subjective, because, in artistic work, we acknowledge and work with, not against, experience's necessary subjectivity. At the same time, each aspires to be the most truthful account of what we saw, heard, read and felt. It was tested by us internally as we worked, and together in conversation, often in the long car journeys that come with working in rural areas. It has been tested in discussion with people involved in the programme including Creative Arts East staff, promoters, artists and others. Finally, it has been tested by readers with no involvement in the work but willing to bring an independent subjectivity to it. The result is a co-production in the sense that all the responses are heard and valued. It is not a programme report, such as might be expected by a funding body. It is neither as comprehensive nor as limited. Instead, we hope to give a sense of what rural touring is like, how it works here, why it matters and what people bring to and take from it. In that spirit, we see *A Wider Horizon* not as a last word but as a starting point for further conversations about the place of the arts in rural communities.



Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to this project over the past three years, mostly by being willing to talk to me about their experiences of the arts and of rural touring. I am grateful to all those named below and also to the many unnamed audience members, promoters and artists who chatted informally at events. It is only people's friendly openness that makes telling a story like this possible.

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Dave Carter	Mark Pitman
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Joan Freeborn	Isobel Smith
Rachel Haines Stuart	Cordelia Spence
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Sue Howells	James Turner
Jan Jarvis	Slim Wilkinson
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Hannah Smith	Sophie Clouston
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Beverley Bishop	Major Shreeve
Elly Wilson	Natalie Jode

Nicky Stainton	Greg Tebble
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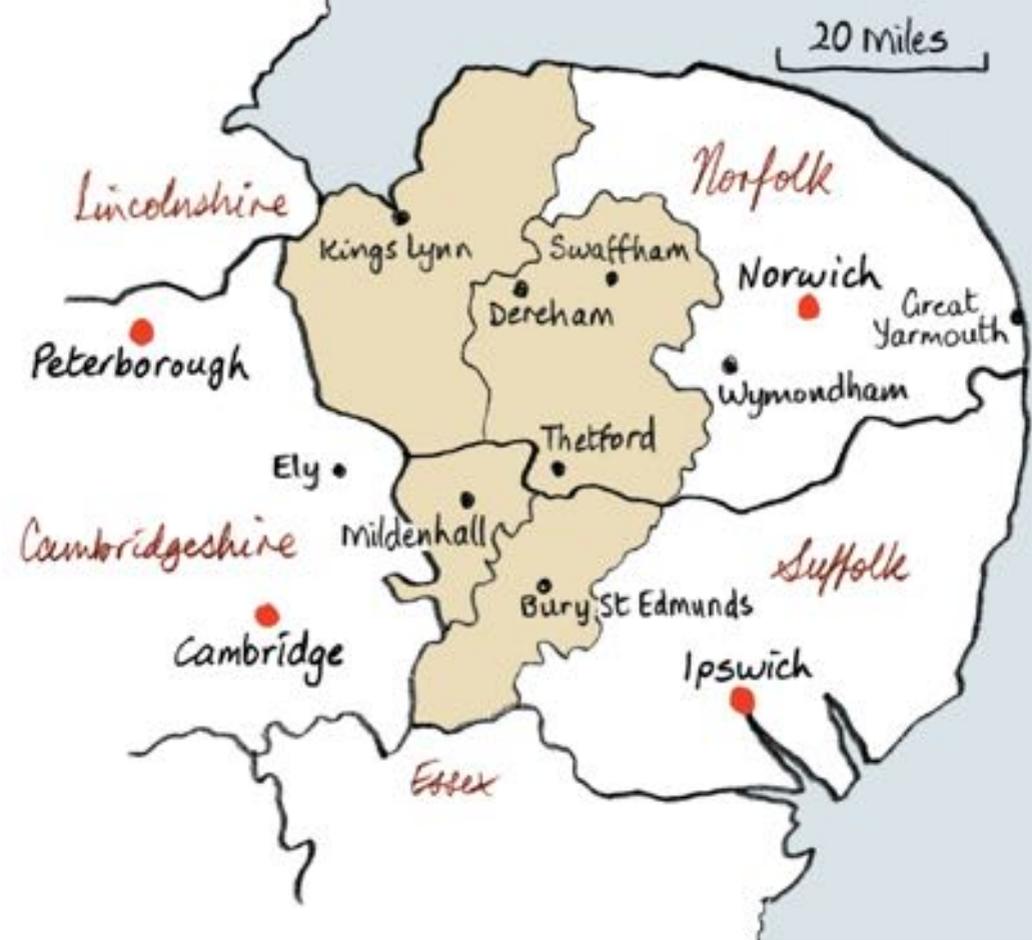
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- 29 *'There is a schizophrenic quality to East Anglian culture...'* from *East Anglian Landscapes: Past and Present* by Jack Ravensdale and Richard Muir, London, 1984 pp. 13-14.
- 30 *'I may be standing at a window on the upper floor of our house...'* from *The Rings of Saturn* by W.G. Sebald, translated by Michael Hulse, London, p. 179-180.
- 31 *'We had a wonderful head teacher...'* from a conversation with Jan Godfrey.
- 32 *'That's how I met my wife...'* from a conversation with Slim Wilkinson.
- 33 *'There are classes all over the place...'* from a conversation with Russell Chitty.
- 33 *'When I'm painting, I forget everything else...'* from a conversation with Jan Jarvis.

- 35 *'You can see yourself getting better...'* from a conversation with Rachel Haines Stuart.
- 35 *'People living in rural areas are more likely...'* from *Rural Evidence and Data Review, Analysis of Arts Council England investment, arts and cultural participation and audiences*, London 2015, p. 38.
- 36 *'It demonstrates to people here how committed they are...'* from a conversation with residents in Walsham le Willows, Suffolk.
- 37 *'Vast numbers of the public can be found wandering...'* by Mark Cocker in *The Guardian*, 30 May 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/may/30/country-diary-bergh-aptton-norfolk>
- 38 *'Perhaps this shyness in cultural self-promotion...'* by Malcolm Bradbury from the Foreword to *Literary Norfolk* by Julian Earwaker and Kathleen Becker, 1998, Ipswich. p. 8.
- 38 *'At the moment what we do is of East Anglia...'* from a conversation with Cordelia Spence.
- 39 *'I love the idea of being part of a community...'* from a conversation with Cordelia Spence.
- 41 *'Loyal supporters who've been getting older...'* from a conversation with Andy Naylor.
- 43 *'Second homes are common in the prettiest areas...'* from *Raising awareness for second homeowners of how they can help to sustain local communities*, Norfolk Coast Partnership Report, December 2013,
<http://www.norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk/mediaps/pdfuploads/pd002995.pdf>
- 44 *'I had read it and seen the film...'* from a conversation with Jan Jarvis.
- 46 *'Professional acts are inspiring and amazing...'* from a conversation with Julie Hewitt.
- 49 *'The arts in one way or another is a huge part of my life...'* from a conversation with Julie Hewitt.
- 50 *'If you're watching it with other people...'* from a conversation with Slim Wilkinson.
- 53 *'We are aware, as an organisation, of the artist's phenomenal talent...'* from a conversation with Natalie Jode.

- 57 'Norfolk is so rural...' from a conversation with Natalie Jode.
- 63 'The much smaller districts of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury...' – Forest Heath District Council covers 145 sq. miles and has about 60,000 residents; King's Lynn & West Norfolk is 550 sq. miles and has a population of about 150,000.
- 64 'Fab evening!...' from written audience feedback collected by the Audience Agency for Creative Arts East.
- 69 'People want that sense of community and identity...' from a conversation with Natalie Jode.
- 70 'I like that shiver that runs down my spine...' from a conversation with Jan Godfrey.
- 72 'The Pied Piper was the perfect event...' feedback from Teresa Bailey, Kedington Library Manager.
- 74 'What a great idea to organise this event in the library!': written audience feedback collected by the Audience Agency.
- 76 'The Campaign for Real Ale estimates that 29 pubs now close...': see <http://pubsmatter.org.uk>
- 79 'What a nice change to have an actor on stage in the village local': written audience feedback collected by the Audience Agency.
- 81 *Bag of Seeds (For Bronwyn)*, a poem in a pub by Henry Raby.
- 83 'Empty the hall of chairs and lets dance!...' from written audience feedback collected by the Audience Agency.
- 86 'I cannot believe that young people with such huge talent...' from a conversation with Rachel Haines Stuart.
- 87 'Incomes, locally, are pounds an hour less...' from a conversation with Jan Godfrey.
- 90 'In North Yorkshire, nine libraries are now run by community groups', see Arts Council England 2013, *Community libraries: 10 case studies*, p.35ff. and <http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/article/29733/Library-consultation---your-views-matter>
- 90 'It is estimated that promoting groups contribute 100,000 hours of voluntary time...' see the National Rural Touring Forum Audit 2011-13.



- 94 'I think it's part of the community...' from a conversation with Russell Chitty.
- 98 'Art and culture can and should be available to all' see House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2014 *Report on the Work of Arts Council England*, p. 21: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmcmeds/279/27902.htm>
- 98 'continue to rebalance our investment intelligently...' see <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/arts-council-news/our-response-culture-media-and-sport-committee-rep/>
- 100 See John Carey, *What Good are the Arts?* London 2005.

