

Institution: University of Gloucestershire		
Unit of Assessment: 32		
Title of case study: Engaging Communities with Contemporary Art		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Sarah Bowden	Hardwick Gallery Director and Research Fellow	September 2015 to date
Jean Boyd	Senior Lecturer	2004 to date
Jessie Brennan	Senior Lecturer	Sept 2017 to Nov 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1/1/2016- 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Sarah Bowden's research on artistic co-production and community engagement encouraged residents of two deprived neighbourhoods in Cheltenham, St Peter's and St Paul's, to engage with contemporary arts as participants, producers and curators. From 2016 to 2020, a series of focussed interventions inspired hundreds of residents from a community of 3000 households to participate in multiple forms of contemporary art. Outcomes included: a community arts action group (2017) and an exhibition at Cheltenham's Wilson Art Gallery and Museum on town centre privatisation (2016) as well as two projects funded by Arts Council England, <i>Love St Peter's</i>, <i>Love St Paul's</i> (2017) and <i>Mudlarking</i> (2020). This initiative also highlighted aspects of a gentrified town's working-class heritage and built a new confidence in creativity for community members.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>This case study is based around Sarah Bowden's radical model of curation that bridges community needs and innovative contemporary practice. This model was rooted in Bowden's <i>Meantime</i> initiative, which she used as the basis of the theoretical model she developed after joining the School of Art and Design in September 2015 (R1).</p> <p>Bowden's model sits within a wider body of practice and scholarly research on artistic co-production and community participation across the School of Art and Design, which combined to inform the projects described in this case study. Jessie Brennan made contributions on contemporary art as a tool for regenerating urban landscapes while Jean Boyd provided input on discourses of social activism. This body of research informed the series of participatory practice-as-research projects across St Peter's and St Paul's, described in this case study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Papers from the symposium led by Boyd at Hardwick Gallery in 2017, <i>Cultural Dreaming: the gallery's role in social activism</i> (R2), - Brennan's practice as research projects and associated scholarly contributions on participatory arts and activism in contested urban sites including: <i>The Green Backyard</i> (R3) and <i>Soundcamp 2019, Vision</i> at Stave Hill Ecological Park (R4). <p>Bowden has directed the School of Art and Design's Hardwick Gallery since 2015. The University of Gloucestershire's Hardwick campus sits between the neighbourhoods of St Peter's and St Paul's in Cheltenham. Neighbourhoods in these wards are ranked in the bottom 10% of national deprivation indices and are the focus of activities included in this case study.</p>		

Bowden's creative practice research is strongly rooted in her role with Hardwick Gallery and is concerned with processes of artistic co-production and collaboration with community members, based in a model of negotiated curatorial practice. Her approach is a critique of the established curatorial models for contemporary art, offering participation as more important than authorship, as well as emphasising the role and value of visual arts in community building. In her account of the development of *Meantime* as a model for her methodology, she addresses collective activism, and place-making through grassroots dialogue. In particular, she asks how contemporary arts in community settings can support and sustain innovative artistic practice and activate a local arts audience (R1).

The original *Meantime* project provided artists with a critical space in Cheltenham to develop and test new work and offered the local community a public programme of exhibitions, workshops, talks and live events. The model Bowden developed at the University of Gloucestershire and Hardwick Gallery, following the formative *Meantime* experience, led to the series of externally funded creative practice research projects on community engagement with contemporary arts, which form the basis of this case study: *We Are Moving* (2016); *We Create* (2016 and ongoing); *Love St Peter's, Love St Paul's* (2017), and *Mudlarking* (2020).

In addition to her formal analysis of *Meantime* (R1), Bowden's findings to date from the initiatives in St Peter's and St Paul's were due to be presented at the *Social Making* conference (19-20 June 2020). This event is organised by National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) *Take A Part* and invites presentations on social engagement with the arts from leading practitioners, such as Turner Prize winners Helen Cammock and Assemble. This event has been rescheduled, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When it takes place, the conference will provide an opportunity to present an analysis of Bowden's methodologies for socially engaged practice along with the community co-chairs of the *We Create* arts action group.

The *Cultural Dreaming* symposium at Hardwick Gallery (7 June 2017) also explored wider questions of social engagement in contemporary art. Bowden's long-term collaborator, Jean Boyd, provided a keynote discussion paper on the role of the gallery in social activism (R2) together with contributions from curators and artists with a strong track record of developing and leading cultural engagement art programmes, including Ania Bas (PEER gallery, London), Emily Gee (FACT, Liverpool) and Viviana Checchia (CCA, Glasgow). The symposium asked *who is responsible for creating social spaces?* It explored the gallery as a location for engaging with ideas and possibilities, as rehearsal spaces for how we might live, and as a public facility to focus on what we need from local infrastructure to build communities. The *We Are Moving* initiative (R5) also incorporated a symposium at the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum (12 February 2016), with Jessie Brennan as one of the speakers.

This overall programme has received almost £50,000 in funding from external sources including Arts Council England, the National Lottery Community Fund, Cheltenham Borough Council and Big Local (G1, G2, G3, G4). External collaborators include Kim Wide MBE from social engagement organisation, *Take A Part CIO*.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1 Bowden, S (2020) *History(s) of Meantime*, to be accessed at <https://www.meantime.org.uk/>
- R2 Boyd, J. (2017) *Cultural dreaming: the role of the gallery in social activism*, conference paper presented at the Cultural Dreaming Symposium, 7th June 2017, FCH, University of Gloucestershire. May be accessed at: <http://hardwickgallery.org/research/cultural-dreaming-the-role-of-the-gallery-in-social-activism/>
- R3 Paper by Jessie Brennan *Re: Development: Voices, Cyanotypes, and Writings from The Green Backyard for the Aesthetics of Gentrification: Art, Architecture, and Displacement* international conference at University of Oregon, April 5 – 6 2019 <http://eprints.glos.ac.uk/9169/>
- R4 Jessie Brennan *Soundcamp 2019, Vision* at Stave Hill Ecological Park and *Sounds Interrupted* at London Bridge Station <http://www.jessiebrennan.co.uk/soundcamp>

R5 The Lower High Street Archive Project (2015) *We Are Moving: 233-269 High Street Archive*, Two Wood Press, Gloucestershire. <https://lhsarchive.wordpress.com/>

Grants and Awards

G1 Arts Council England (£13,000 - Grants for the Arts, 27/04/2017) – *Love St Peter's, Love St Paul's*

G2 SPTM Big Local (£1500 - Community Grant, 30/01/2017) – *Love St Peter's, Love St Paul's*

G3 National Lottery Community Fund (£9,800 -10/12/2018) – *Mudlarking*

G4 Arts Council England (£24,300 - Project Grant, 03/09/2019) – *Mudlarking*

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

A series of community-based initiatives led by Sarah Bowden generated a deep and active engagement with contemporary art by hundreds of residents from St Peter and St Pauls, two wards in Cheltenham that are amongst the most deprived in the country (bottom 10%). The 3,000 households of this neighbourhood are in the immediate locality of the School of Art and Design and its Hardwick Gallery - but residents typically have had little access to, or engagement with, the contemporary arts. By December 2020, the initiative generated two co-created exhibitions in public galleries as well as four innovative workshop series, and a community newspaper with strong local circulation. The newspaper, *Mudlarking*, replaced a planned archive-building project at the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum in Cheltenham, due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

We Create (2016 to date)

The *We Create* arts action group launched in 2016 as a partnership between the School of Art and Design's Hardwick Gallery and residents of St Peter's and St Paul's, supported by Take A Part, an organisation that works with communities to commission socially engaged art practice. Two local residents co-chair the group and *We Create* has around 14 active members at any time, depending on the project underway. In 2020, *We Create* became a Community Interest Company, in order to access a wider range of funds for future projects and give it a more permanent sense of local ownership (a). To date almost £50,000 raised from competitive public arts and heritage funding schemes has been invested in the local community through this project (G1, G2, G3, G4). As a Councillor and Culture Board Member for Cheltenham Borough Council explains:

"Setting up projects such as 'We Create Cheltenham CIC' has enabled people in the St Peter's and St Paul's areas of our town to benefit from such activities. Residents are not 'being done to', but deciding, designing and doing, themselves." (b)

The first major initiative to emerge from the *We Create* arts action group was *Love St Peter's, Love St Paul's*, which aimed to map the creative talent in the neighbourhood and further develop the area's creative potential.

Love St Peters, Love St Pauls (2017)

Thanks to £14,500 funding from Arts Council England and Big Local (G1, G2), Hardwick Gallery employed four professional artists from across the UK to work directly with local residents on a series of creative workshops (c). Each set of workshops comprised five day-long sessions, and included:

- Field trips and foraging for ingredients to radically reassemble Cheltenham's historic Dripper bun with activist baker, Samantha Jones
- Mockumentary script writing and film making with Jack Price and young people from a supported housing unit, *Bramah House* (d)

- Artist and gallery educator, Thomas Goddard worked with Year 5 pupils at *Gardner's Lane Primary School* to create the *Museum of St Peter's and St Paul* featuring objects the children designed and made themselves, following a research trip to the Wilson museum and gallery (e).
- Artist, Scott Farlow worked with local ceramicist, Kate Anderson, on the *Mobile Clay Experience*, which took clay dug from local soil around the neighbourhood on a trolley and invited passers-by to create small objects.

Love St Peter's Love St Paul's culminated in a public exhibition, co-curated by *We Create* members, from 4 – 15 September 2017 at Hardwick Gallery, which was attended by over 400 people. The exhibition featured works made by some of the 180 local residents who participated in the four workshops. One of the *We Create* community co-chairs comments:

"The final exhibition at the Hardwick Gallery was a very positive event. It has paved the way for future partnerships with the Wilson, and some of the artists involved. 2 residents who were involved in the project went on to form a CIC delivering community-based craft workshops." (f)

The Wilson's Cultural Producer, Collections and Interpretation, comments:

"Projects have been intergenerational and given participants the chance to think about how they would shape their town, tell their stories. For example, local school children made objects they hoped to see in their local museum in *Love St Peter's, Love St Paul's, 2017*, none of which were in The Wilson. This made us think about future collecting and our purpose as a local museum. It inspired us to follow a community and artist led approach for our WW1 exhibition in 2018...The Wilson's 2020 programme included an exhibition to bring together artwork created by Paam with *We Create* and residents of St Peter's and St Paul's. We still hope a possibility might arise to programme this in our Community Gallery." (i)

The success of Love St Peter's Love St Paul's has attracted a further series of external grants worth nearly £35,000 from Arts Council England and the National Lottery Community Fund to support the next *We Create* initiative, a community newspaper (G3, G4).

Paam: Mudlarking (2020)

Mudlarking (g) is a collaboration with artists' collective, *Paam*, and was originally conceived as a series of DIY-themed workshops, which launched in January 2020 but were halted by the Covid-19 lockdown. The project was swiftly repurposed as a community newspaper that celebrates the everyday creativity, artistic practices, interests and enthusiasms of local residents. The first two editions of *Mudlarking* were published in September and December 2020 with a print run of 500 each and contributions from around 40 local residents. *Mudlarking* is available from local independent shops and cafes, including the popular St Paul's Fish Bar.

One of the *We Create* co-chairs comments:

"It was initially thought that it would be a 16-page one off edition but such was the community engagement that this grew to 24 pages and two further editions. It has been hugely popular, well read and attracted completely diverse content...The online version of the first edition has been viewed over 500 times. One elderly resident, who was featured in the Winter edition, was so pleased that she has been sending copies to her relatives in Canada, New Zealand and Australia... the activities and projects we undertake make a real difference to the lives of local residents. This is particularly true of the last year during which people's lives and social connections have been severely disrupted. It has given many a sense of achievement to see their name in print, create something that is shared with others, make new social connections and rekindle existing ones." (f)

We Are Moving (2016)

Another way that Bowden and Boyd's research supported the heritage and interests of the community was with *We Are Moving (h)*, which focussed on the heritage, redevelopment and ultimate privatisation of Cheltenham's neglected Lower High Street.

Cheltenham's Lower High Street borders St Paul's and – until its gradual redevelopment between 2000 and 2017 - remained a budget conscious shopping street used by local residents rather than visitors. The area is excluded from more established histories of Cheltenham, which prioritise Regency heritage over working class history.

Bowden arranged for the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum to host an exhibition in its de Ferrieres Gallery, café and atrium space in January 2016 featuring photographs, recordings, archive material and responses by local artists, which questioned the ongoing redevelopment of the Lower High Street and celebrated its heritage. The accompanying *233-269 High Street archive* was funded by *Cheltenham Community Pride* and the exhibition was accompanied by a handmade artists' book.

The success of Bowden's community engagement initiatives led to a commission from Cheltenham Borough Council (worth £23,750) to develop the Honeybourne Line, a former railway track and now an off-road route. A three-year programme, *Art on the Line* (in collaboration with Kim Wide of *Take A Part*) will create an ambitious art trail along the 1.3 mile linear park in collaboration with users, stakeholders and communities, inspired by New York's High Line. This project was commissioned in May 2019 and due to start on-site in Spring 2020 but is currently on hold until pandemic restrictions are lifted (j). In 2020 Sarah Bowden and Kim Wide were awarded a Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grant by the Art Fund for a research visit to New York to inform the development of *Art On The Line*.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- a) We Create <https://www.we-create.org.uk/about>
- b) Cheltenham Borough Council testimonial (received March 2021)
- c) Love St Peter's, Love St Paul's <http://hardwickgallery.org/exhibitions/love-st-peters-love-st-pauls-2/>
- d) Addams, A., Foulds, C. and Price, J. (2017) *Bramah Drama: Visitors from the Afterlife*, video produced with residents in CCP's Bramah House. May be accessed at: <https://vimeo.com/240017055>
- e) Museum of St Peter's and St Paul's <http://hardwickgallery.org/projects/tom-goddard-at-gardners-lane-primary-school/>
- f) We Create co-chair testimonials describing the impact of the projects on the local community (received March 2021)
- g) Mudlarking <http://hardwickgallery.org/news/mudlarking-community-newspaper-for-st-peters-st-pauls/>
- h) We Are Moving <https://www.artrabbit.com/events/we-are-moving-the-future-of-the-high-street>
- i) Testimonial from Cultural Producer, Collections and Interpretation, Wilson (Feb 2021)
- j) Honeybourne Line consultancy proposal and budget (2019)