

Creative Communities in Elmbridge



Making Surrey connected craft makers with 8 disadvantaged communities across the county during 2011-2012. The project was community-led, acting as a catalyst in each neighbourhood. All the craft produced during Making Surrey was co-created with the communities.



Artist Mary Branson and Apprentice Josie Davis worked with the local community of St Johns to create hundreds of lamps, inspired by the fact that their homes were built on the site of former agricultural allotments.

Seeds of Light at St Johns

Maker, Mary Branson, first arrived at St Johns in Easter 2011. She found a community which had a number of problems with dark alleyways and badly lit spaces, and who were reluctant to go out into their streets at night.

Residents and community leaders wanted to improve life at St Johns and - together with Mary - came up with a plan to create an exhibition at the heart of the community which would use light as a catalyst to address these issues.

More and more residents and community groups began to engage with the project. Josie Davis joined the project as an apprentice and found herself working with Mary with local primary and secondary schools; the Stamp Out Boredom youth group; the elderly lunch group; local care homes and play groups.

Each person created their own porcelain lamp and hundreds were fired in the lead up to the exhibition. The community identified a piece of waste ground as the exhibition site – a space which they are now hoping to reclaim as community allotments. Given the history of the St Johns (it was built on agricultural allotments), Seeds of Light felt like a lovely metaphor for what the residents were trying to do within their community.

A Fine September Evening

Once everybody had made their lamp, it was time for everyone to get ready for the exhibition. The plinth was designed and made by Nick Lott from the county's University for the Creative Arts. The weather forecast was checked at regular intervals.

Several hundred porcelain lamps were glazed and fired. The first firings were Bisque to stabilize the porcelain and burn out all of the organic material that had been used to decorate the lamps. The lamps were then dipped in a transparent glaze and then were fired a second time to 1280 degrees to make the porcelain translucent. Amazingly all the lamps survived – as did Mary's kiln.

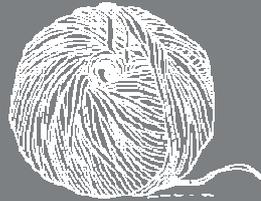
Invitations were designed and hand delivered around St Johns. Over a hundred people visited the exhibition; search for their lamp and witness the transformation of the estate. One young visitor was overheard asking: 'Mummy is St Johns a different country now?'

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Creative Communities in Elmbridge



Legacy

- Making Surrey links with the 'Safe Estate' project for which Elmbridge Housing Trust has been awarded a Best Practice commendation from the Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group.
- The Seeds of Light exhibition travels to further locations in the county before the craft work is returned to the many hundreds of participants.
- More residents than ever are out at night – some of them attending a new weekly ceramics group established as a result of the project.
- The housing trust is in discussions about funding a permanent lighting solution on the estate, designed by the community.
- Josie, the apprentice, takes on the lead artist role in a new project.



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The Seeds of Light exhibition held in the heart of the St Johns community in September 2011 attracts over a hundred people.

Key Figures

- 277 members of the community took part in the project
- 615 saw the Seeds of Light exhibition
- For each pound invested by local authorities in Making Surrey, a further three pounds was levered in from external funding sources.

“TO GET THAT MANY PEOPLE TO ATTEND ANYTHING - EVEN WHERE THERE IS FREE FOOD - IS A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT! WE ARE LUCKY TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH SUCH CREATIVE AND PASSIONATE PEOPLE.”

GARRY BACON, COMMUNITY CHAMPION