

arthur+martha CIC

Projects 2015-16

“This project is both a piece of history and an art piece. I don’t think I’ve ever come across anything like it before. It’s beautiful.”

(Ann Coffey MP, at the launch of The Homeless Library in The Houses of Parliament)



Achievements 2016

We have had one of the most remarkable years in our existence: with **exhibitions** in the Houses of Parliament, the Southbank, the National Gallery of Lithuania, **press coverage** in The Lancet and national news media in Lithuania. **Our public profile** has never been higher. *“The books and stories from The Homeless Library carry an impressive emotional and political weight.”* (The Lancet, reviewing The Homeless Library at The Southbank)

We have also formed new relationships and fostered **deep human connection**. *The Homeless Library*, our major HLF-supported project with the homeless community has helped open a new area of social history - it is the first ever history of British homelessness, now being shared via exhibitions and conferences. *Sing Me to Sleep*, the project we devised as a collaboration between homeless people in the UK and Lithuania, has been shown to acclaim in a large-scale exhibition in Lithuania: we brought a group of homeless participants from the UK over to Vilnius for the opening. It was very moving to hear the people involved describing the boost to their pride and self-esteem.

Paralleling our work with the homeless community was *Stitching the Wars*, a 2-year heritage project, which brought together war reminiscences from older people in Derbyshire, in the form of a quilt. This was given a Foundation Derbyshire **Award** for innovation and inclusivity, especially in regard to people with dementia. The *Stitching the Wars* quilt produced another two quilts in our ongoing series of social documentary made with stitches.

We also ran a pilot project with Bury Art Museum, *‘Thing’s to Do’*, working with older people living with dementia, budget 10K. *Bound About by Dreams*, a short 3D printing project, in partnership with Salford University, Fab Lab and Disability Rights UK.

THE HOMELESS LIBRARY

The first history of British homelessness. A collection of books handmade by homeless people, reflecting on their lives and how they connect with the wider, previously unwritten heritage of homelessness. The books describe lived experience in interviews, poetry, art.

Many homeless people live and die as “invisibles” who are not valued or acknowledged. This project seeks to redress that balance - and in doing so, help rebuild the self-image of profoundly excluded and damaged people.

Workshops took place in homeless resource centres in Greater Manchester. *The Homeless Library* was launched at the Houses of Parliament in May 2016, where they were welcomed by the Undersecretary of State Marcus Jones and Ann Coffey MP who listened to speeches by homeless participants. It made its public debut at The Southbank, London, accompanied by an online ebook. This exhibition was reviewed in *The Lancet* as a significant contribution to the welfare of homeless people.

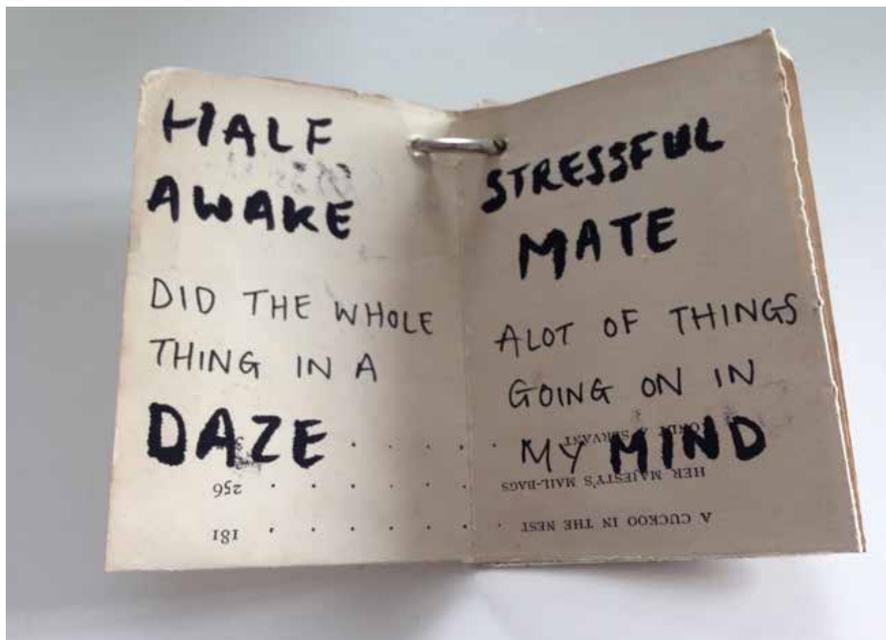
Participant feedback

Jack Q

With art I have a voice, now I can make things. Doing the art, giving me a chance to speak, you make me feel important. Going to the Houses of Parliament and speaking I felt very good. It's what I've got now, it's all I own.

Christine

The poems and art help people grow again. It taps into something un-used into their potential... I think poems and art can tell you the truth and that's healthy. It's facing up to reality.



Free to download Ebook <http://www.blurb.co.uk/b?ebook=586385>

Documentary Film <https://www.facebook.com/homelesslibrary/videos>

Start date: Sept 2014, to May 2017 Budget £55,124 Supported by: The Heritage Lottery Fund

Participants: 152 Live Audience: 30,000 On-Line Audience: 35,000

STITCHING THE WARS

Stitching the Wars, is a two-year collaboration between older people in Derbyshire and arts organisation arthur+martha. The project centred around artist Lois Blackburn, who met with local people to devise and stitch two quilts and gather reminiscence. In a sense, their work is a history, and these quilts are the page on which it's written.

The first quilt, *A Bomber's Moon*, describes the transforming effect of the First and Second World Wars on rural life. An ancient world of horses and humans is invaded by machines. The quilt is an aerial view of fields and hillsides. Perhaps it's the view from the bomber of the title. Into this "landscape" are sewn words and phrases that link to the reminiscence and poems in this book.

The second quilt, *Fresh Air and Poverty*, describes a quieter war, the struggle everyday people made to keep their families fed and clothed in the years between and after the two World Wars. The richness of the materials used for this quilt belie the words: "Two little love birds, fresh air and poverty." Here we find tramps on the march, children sleeping top to toe in crowded beds, scrimping and saving is everywhere. But we also find delight in one another's company, human warmth despite the cold.

Many of the quilt-makers were people with dementia. We noticed the beneficial effect that group stitching had, joining people together in an act of making that had short-term rewards (touch, colour, companionship, creativity) and an ambitious goal. *Stitching the Wars* was given a *Foundation Derbyshire Award* for its mixture of inclusivity and creative ambition.

Fresh Air and Poverty,

photographed at National Trust property Lyme Park.
Courtesy of Garry Lomas



Start date: Jan 2014, **End date** May 2017 **Budget** £38,460

Supported by: ACE, Derbyshire Community Foundation, Derbyshire Dales Council, Farming Life Centre, Age UK, The Alzheimer's Society, New Mills Volunteer Centre and The National Trust.

Participants: Aprox 700 people aged between 65 and 101

Live Audience: Aprox 14,000 so far (touring exhibition schedule starts Nov 2016)

On-Line Audience: 17,000 so far

Documentary Video: <https://www.facebook.com/arthur.martha.cic/videos>

SING ME TO SLEEP

Our first international collaboration received considerable press and publicity, for its launch at the National Gallery of Lithuania, it will go on exhibition at Bury Art Museum in November. The depth of involvement from homeless participants has been remarkable and the level of support from our partner The Booth Centre has exceeded the original commitment.

We invited homeless people in the UK to make artwork and poetry in response to fairytales, which was brought together in a quilt and sound recordings.

This project has exceeded several of our original aims in three main areas: engagement, public awareness, our own learning. **Engagement.** We were delighted to find that a regular group of participants became very deeply involved in the project, more so than in any of our previous projects with homeless people. The quality of making and concentration during the sessions was unusually high. A strong camaraderie developed in the group, which has had a positive effect on all involved. The homeless participants who then came to Lithuania were powerfully affected by the warm reception, the large audience for their work and the commitment of the gallery, devoting a huge space to the exhibition.

Public awareness. The British ambassador to Lithuania came to the press preview and spent time with some of the homeless participants. This exhibition in Vilnius is, so far as we know, the largest-scale exhibition of work ever made in collaboration with homeless people to be shown in a major gallery.

Brian: When I saw the quilt, (hung in the exhibition) I felt very, very emotional, so proud of what everyone had put into it. Their heart and soul. To see it being built up bit by bit every week, then to see it in the exhibition, with people from Lithuania coming up and taking photos and thinking we did that. Then seeing the Booth Centre name on the poster all over town, and our names up there, it was a proud day.

Our own learning. SING ME TO SLEEP project was originally devised by us, but our Lithuanian partners made a profound contribution to the project and we learned hugely from their ideas. The ambition and conceptual rigour of their approach challenged some of our notions and has helped us review our own practice. We've welcomed this opportunity to grow and learn - which is at the heart of cultural and international exchange. Some of these ideas will most certainly be carried forward into our future projects...

Start date: Oct 2015, **End date** March 2017

Budget £26,525, plus In-Kind £22,805

Supported by: ACE, Bury Art Museum, The Booth Centre. Socialiniai meno projektia.

Participants: 50 people aged 18-60

Live Audience: We are waiting for figures from The National Gallery of Lithuania.

On-Line Audience: 10,000 so far

CONCLUSION

This year has achieved great successes, it has also stretched ourselves and our organisation. We are now building the involvement of major galleries and venues into future plans. We are also considering international collaboration for future projects. We believe that this promotes awareness of project participants, who are often marginalised. It also protects the work from being ignored, or ghettoised. We hope to achieve these things without sacrificing the intimacy and quality of engagement with the groups we collaborate with - and to still make beautiful, affecting work with a wider health, political and social impact.

arthur+martha CIC

Directors: Lois Blackburn and Philip Davenport

<http://arthur-and-martha.co.uk> [facebook.com/arthur.martha.cic/](https://www.facebook.com/arthur.martha.cic/)



Sing Me to Sleep

photographed at The National Gallery of Lithuania
Lois Blackburn