

Salisbury Arts Centre

Written by Juliet Brain & Kate Dalton

Kate and I, like so many other people who have enjoyed a life-long relationship with the Arts Centre, both began our arts careers as young striplings in the Five-Penny Festival, where David Grout and Jessica Langford encouraged and inspired our imaginations to reach beyond our known world and to go on adventures that we suspect wouldn't be allowed nowadays, on risk assessment grounds alone! We have such memories... from Kate's big sister Andi, sat on a throne in her paper crown, Gary Nunn's Medieval Fayres, watching 'Larkrise' (Salisbury's first ever Promenade Community play), catching local artist Mike Charlton sketching in the grounds, Ruth Jones rehearsing in her band 'The Kitchens', and together bringing the first resident Dance Company (Obelisk) to Salisbury Arts Centre. We also watched our children grow here, making things in various incarnations of the Arts Centre's infamous children's workshops, dressing up for carnival processions, dancing alongside Black Umfolosi and seeing them off to Bass Connections Gig's.

One thing that struck us as we sifted through the diverse and chaotic archive we inherited, is how St Edmunds was always destined to be linked to the arts. It was built as a college church in 1269 under the patronage of Bishop Walter de la Wylie in memory of his friend Edmund Rich. Edmund, prior to his ordination had taught the arts in Oxford. In the 1970's, facing the end of its religious purpose, it was the church that helped guide it towards its incarnation as St Edmund's Arts Centre, insisting that the building remain a living and active place to be used only for social, educational and recreational purposes. Over the years it has faced challenges and risks of closure and each time the local community has fought fiercely to keep it open and running as a 'community arts space'.

Following the major redevelopment programme; Centre Director Jill Low, Centre Manager Polly Mason (daughter of ex-Director Peter Mason '78 - '82) Resident Ceramicist Julie Ayton, Professor Simon Olding, Jo Day, artists David Kay and Mathew Burt created the 'Yew Tree Project' - a new work that used the old Yew Tree, removed as part of the re-development, as the source material to create over forty works of art including furniture, sculpture, objects and books. The project symbolised a new beginning for the Salisbury Arts Centre, a rebirth. It also reflects and represents the arts here in Salisbury, the roots that go deep, connecting people, places and memory. New shoots and branches, providing shade, shelter, spectacle, myth, marking the passage of time, relationships bursting into life and dying back. These roots already linked Salisbury Arts Centre, Salisbury Festival and Salisbury Playhouse through the people, the artists, the collaborative narratives, the youth theatre, the children and young people's programming, the Carnival Processions and a plethora of projects.

Perhaps what is most exciting and dynamic about the arts performed, created and experienced here at the Arts Centre is.. what is not here, what you can't see in this exhibition, the footprints of people gone, their energy and their vision.

Kate and I are profoundly aware that there are many people: artists, staff and past volunteers, local families, donors, funders, businesses, trustees, board members, both past and present who deserve a mention in this exhibition and we sincerely apologise for all omissions. The Archives have a thousand more stories to tell.

The legacy of Salisbury Arts Centre lives on. A history of diverse art forms for the community and by the community continues to have a space where creativity thrives. Humans need to create, sometimes in isolation and sometimes in groups. Even the people who haven't yet realised that there is an art form out there for them... when they find it, they will love it with a passion. Here's to people, to community, to all the cultural, creative activities that are the glue that bring us together to celebrate, laugh, love and commiserate, to ponder and to reflect.

It's not just a building..." As the headline in the Salisbury Journal press cutting says "All Life Is There", we simply didn't have the space to share it all.

Juliet Brain & Kate Dalton,
Salisbury Arts Centre Archive Curators, August 2018