

The Light Ships: Engaging village communities



Image: Electric Egg, The Light Ships Celebration

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Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

By harnessing the energy of
Church Wardens, Transported
successfully connected with village
communities and developed arts
activity that cast churches in a
different light.

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Published 2015

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Background

The Light Ships: engaging village communities

About the project

Transported is a community-focused programme which aims to get more people in Boston Borough and South Holland enjoying and participating in arts activities. It is funded by Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme.

Transported had been through a long process of consultation in the areas of Boston and South Holland but had not worked with any of the fourteen villages involved. It wanted to complete consultation with all of the villages by beginning a dialogue with the communities about what they might be interested in. It was a creative commissioning process.

The artist's idea was based around the importance of churches in the community; many people care about churches without necessarily being 'church-goers'.

The Light Ships project ran over eight months and involved all fourteen villages. It was delivered by artist François Matarasso and explored the art of Lincolnshire Fenland churches.

The project concluded with three two day celebration events held at Whaplode, Wrangle and Gosberton. During these events art was displayed, archive films were played, and 'The Light Ships' book was launched.

Objectives

- To consult with residents in each of the fourteen communities to find out what matters to them and how Transported can enhance their lives through the intervention of art.
- To make people feel valued and that their life, experience, village, and what they care about is valued.
- To help people from each community to see their churches in a different light.
- To give the churches the opportunity to derive some income from the sale of the resultant book.

Target Audience

- Residents in the villages of Bicker, Cowbit, Fishtoft, Gosberton, Holbeach St Marks, Moulton, Moulton Chapel, Moulton Seas End, Pinchbeck, Quadring, Sutton St James, Swineshead, Whaplode and Wrangle.

Process & Outcomes

Process

Transported commissioned an artist to work on the project.

Transported, the artist and the church wardens set up meetings with the community (those people who had a connection with the church but were not necessarily part of the congregation).

Conversations with the community were recorded by the artist, who ended up with approximately 80 - 90 thousand words of transcripts.

A book entitled The Light Ships was produced and published, consisting entirely of the words of the people whom the artist had met. Those words were edited into one long conversation with nothing added.

Community events were held to celebrate the work and present everyone involved with a copy of the book.

Outcomes

- People feel valued and that their life, experience, village and what they care about is valued. 'That is the strength of a book. In the world we live in books pertain a significant value and status. Something in a book is deemed to be important. It can be of significance' (Artist)
- People from the communities see their churches in a different light - more people have visited them as a result and may use them again in the future.
- Each of the churches will get 100 copies of the book to sell at flower festivals and to visitors. Transported is using the church as a mechanism to distribute the books to give them a return (the church will keep the money and it will go into church funds). If the book sells (it is also listed on Amazon) Transported will recoup a certain amount of money (sale of £5 per book).

Conclusions

The project took about twice as long as planned and a greater budget than planned, so may not be replicable.

The website created for the project and plans to communicate digitally proved unsuitable for the target audience. Many community members didn't have access to the internet. As a result, the website became a public-facing 'telling of the story' and people had to be written to instead of emailed.

Church Wardens played a crucial role in brokering relationships with the villages and organising practicalities.

It was really important to produce a tangible outcome; the book exists and has outlived the actual project.

Figures

- The project cost £15,000
- 120 people across the 14 villages were consulted
- 169 people attended the celebration events in 4 villages
- 100% of those asked would recommend the activity to others

Developments

- Transported has since consolidated taster sessions to five art forms which were identified as preferred by the community. Taster sessions took place in March/April 2015 as informed by audience surveys.
- Conversations with Waterstones and local sellers are taking place about stocking The Light Ships in store as well as with Amazon online.

Find out more

Project website:
<http://thelightships.com/>

Explore the gallery of the celebration event:
<http://www.transportedart.com/gallery/the-light-ships-celebration-event/>