



Access

COMMON GROUND JOURNAL • ISSUE 3: ACCESS

Creativity in Heritage • Youth voice & work • Project case studies



WELCOME TO COMMON GROUND'S JOURNAL - ISSUE 3: ACCESS

This is a collaboration between the Common Ground team and young people involved in the project. We want this to act as a tool to inspire you to develop your own ideas and activities around youth-led heritage projects and creative youth engagement more generally.

Through project case studies and youth voice we'll look at ways to break down barriers, encourage meaningful engagement and see heritage in new ways. We'll share young people's thoughts on Common Ground and heritage sites around the East of England, as well as highlight their ideas around the future of young people in heritage.

Each issue's content is curated around a theme selected by the Common Ground Leaders Programming Group. The Leaders are a community of 18 to 25 year-olds interested in arts and heritage

who have been involved with guiding and designing Common Ground over the past three years. The Programming Group are three Leaders who helped to plan and produce the Common Ground Symposium on the 25th November 2022

The Group chose an umbrella theme of alternative ways of seeing heritage. Under this, they chose the 3 sub-themes of Non-traditional, Play and Access to help underpin the programming and content for the Common Ground Symposium.

The Leaders feel that each theme helps to communicate important elements of Common Ground's work and helps to frame the most successful ways of engaging young people.

We hope this guide informs, inspires and energises you to create your own projects with young people!

Artwork by Collective Impact participants at Ipswich Museum

WHAT IS COMMON GROUND?

Common Ground was a Norfolk & Norwich Festival 250 project, made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It was an action research project which connected young people in the East of England with their local natural and cultural heritage through the arts. The three-year funded project began in 2020 and finished in March 2023.

Over three years the project engaged creatively with young people, providing opportunities for 12 to 25 year-olds to take part in events, projects and skills development. Young people were given paid roles, steered the project and gained opportunities through the Common Ground Leaders group for 18 to 25 year-olds.

An ambitious and radical project, Common Ground worked to make natural and cultural heritage relevant and meaningful for young people of all backgrounds, as well as challenge stereotypes. We collaborated with artists from across the country, working in diverse art forms, to build new creative connections and ideas.

Common Ground was delivered in partnership with Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service, Peterborough Limited, Norfolk and Norwich Festival, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, SHARE Museums East, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, The National Trust, The Prince's Trust and a wider creative community.

Who Are The Programming Group?



Jordan Hunnisett

24 | he / him

Alongside engaging in events that celebrate holistic approaches to art practices and the natural world, Jordan studies and writes environmental fiction.



Oscar Woodiwiss

22 | he / they

Oscar is a freelance illustrator and recent graduate of Norwich University of the Arts.



Aston Howe

25 | he / him

Aston is a multi-disciplined creative and curator who focuses on connecting audiences to content.



ACCESS

Common Ground has been striving to identify methods of making heritage accessible, inclusive, and meaningful to young people.

Young people involved with Common Ground have had repeated and various opportunities to have their voices heard, whether as project participants, Common Ground Leaders, or Young Community Artists. In inspiring young people to share perspectives and in attempting to catalyse a power shift in heritage, not only has Common Ground urged young participants to get involved with heritage, it has also shown that heritage can be approached progressively.

MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR



Ceara Coleman

27 | she / her

Ceara is a Norwich based Illustrator heavily inspired by textiles, fashion illustration and comic arts.

HOW DID YOU INTERPRET THE THEME OF ACCESS?

I wanted Inclusivity to be a big part of my Illustration within the theme of Access in Heritage. I decided to draw lots of different young people representing a range of Common Ground projects and events. I chose to use National Trust Peckover House as the background for my illustration as I was drawn to its beautiful grounds when researching the various locations of the Common Ground projects.



Photographer:
[Kerry Bensley](#) at
Ipswich Museum



FLIP THE MUSEUM



WHAT WE LEARNT

- Allow young people to openly share their perspectives on local heritage sites and what they mean to them
- Take stories outside of traditional heritage spaces to give access to a wider audience
- Use accessible technology to allow audiences freedom to participate when and where they can

When October 2020

Where Lowestoft

Participants 3 young people

With

MUTINY – Arts organisation combining performance & technology

NessFest – Lowestoft youth arts & heritage festival

Lowestoft Museum – Local history museum

In October 2020, we collaborated with Mutiny and young people from Lowestoft to flip Lowestoft Museum!

Over a series of workshops, young people created animations and spoken word pieces inspired by objects and stories from the museum's collection. Young people were given the power to choose what stories they wanted to tell and led the design of the project outcome.

These assets were collected into an immersive phone experience, geolocated around a park close to the museum. The public could take an alternative tour of the park, guided by the heritage-inspired storytelling of local young people. Young people learnt about creative writing, storyboarding and filmmaking and helped to produce the interactive films.

Participants discussed themes and ideas around the history of their local area and social issues connected to it, such as the rights of women and minority communities. They shared their perspectives on the history of Lowestoft and stories within it to help shape the future of their community.

WHAT DID YOUNG PEOPLE THINK?

"Common Ground has helped me to gain more knowledge on our local heritage. I've always been interested in our history so this experience has been exciting and I can't wait for more people to see and hear what we've achieved."



Artwork by Flip the Museum participants at Lowestoft Museum

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

When October 2021 – July 2022

Where Ipswich Museum

Participants 18 young people

With

Colchester & Ipswich Museums – Local history museums

Story Makers Company – Digital storytelling & immersive story experiences

Tom Jordan, Interplay Theatre – Immersive designer

Volunteering Matters – National volunteering charity

Hannah Aria – Performance & multi-media artist

Young Artist Anna Dupont – Illustrator

„WE'RE USING HISTORY TO CREATE THE FUTURE!“

Young people from Volunteering Matters' Peer Action Collective worked with Story Makers Company to creatively interpret Ipswich Museum's collections in an online space which told new stories meaningful to them.

The project combined visual storytelling with live art making, in a process Story Makers call a 'story weave'. During nine online workshops, the young people co-created ideas and concepts for their online space. Artist Hannah Aria delivered in-person creative media workshops at Ipswich Museum, where young people explored collections in relation to youth violence, crime and oppression/voicelessness and explored how visual art and performance can represent their experiences with injustice.

Objects from the collection were used to spark ideas and build a narrative. The young people were particularly drawn to items relating to crime and punishment, using them to make statements around youth violence and voicelessness in the past and today. The project culminated in an online space which highlights how artefacts from the past still reflect many injustices in our present.

„ WE'VE BEEN LOOKING AT HISTORY AND HOW IT'S AFFECTED US. IT'S PUT HISTORY INTO PERSPECTIVE “

Photographer: Kerry Bensley at Ipswich Museum



WHAT WE LEARNT

- Listen to and don't be afraid to incorporate the issues young people are facing into the project
- Give young people the space to explore, discuss and share challenging issues and ideas which are important to them and their communities
- Allow young people to lead narratives, keeping them passionate about what they're making
- Give young people access to opportunities both in-person and online



COMMON GROUND LEADERS

The Common Ground Leaders were a **community of 18 to 25 year-olds** interested in learning more about the arts, heritage, creating, producing, and changing the world around them. Over three years, they were involved with guiding and designing Common Ground, from curating exhibitions to commissioning artists and creating project content! We view the young people involved with Common Ground as co-creators of the project and ensure that the experience is valuable to them.

We ran monthly **Masterclasses** for the Leaders where they learned sector-specific skills from industry professionals: this helped, them to explore and progress in arts and heritage careers. The Leaders Masterclasses included professionals speaking about nature conservation, emerging technologies, freelancing, running your own workshops and much more!

Throughout Common Ground, we offered **paid commissions** to the Leaders, as well as opportunities to **volunteer on projects, steer our work, learn from professionals and gain practical skills** in working on a heritage project. We valued the diverse range of skills the Leaders brought to the project and, commissioned them to create content for us as writers, illustrators, designers and workshop facilitators.



MY LEADERS EXPERIENCE

BY COMMON GROUND LEADER

SASKIA REYNOLDS

I had never considered the possibility of a project where creativity and heritage could come together in a space made by and for young people. After hearing about Common Ground (CG), it felt like I was able to give myself permission to believe that that space did exist, that young people deserved to take up space in a sector traditionally resigned to old-fashioned, static forms of thinking.

Nearly three years later and I'm currently studying for my Masters in Cultural Heritage Management and hoping to have a career in youth engagement within the heritage sector, so it's safe to say that the CG project has had a big impact on decisions about what I want to do with my life!

As part of the programme, I led exhibitions from the initial planning stages to the point of delivery, supported by my fellow Leaders. I held workshops for members of the public and I developed my communication and project management skills. Most importantly for me is that through CG I have developed my own self-confidence and belief that I belong in this sector, and that my voice matters.

I'd like to thank everyone who has been a part of the project for their guidance and support; I hope that Common Ground can serve as a template for future arts and heritage organisations, to encourage and support young people to take control of their own narratives and redefine the heritage sector, transforming it into a space that is for everyone, not just a certain few.

Photographer:
Kerry Bensley at
NWT Cley Marshes
Visitor Centre



WHAT WE LEARNT

- Make experiences and opportunities valuable to young people – skills, payment, experience
- Value the input of young people and the fresh, creative ideas and skills they bring
- At different stages in your projects treat young people as equals and co-creators
- Make opportunities fit into young people's lives – think about when they work, how they'll get to events, why they'd want to join
- Let yourself be guided by young people and allow them to share their skills and lived experiences

JULIAN FENNEL, COMMON GROUND LEADER

27 | they / them

Julian is a multi-media performance artist based in Norwich. They regular perform as their drag alter-ego Dandy Darling and their work centres around queerness, neurodiversity and self-acceptance.

“ WHEN YOU COME FROM A LOW-INCOME BACKGROUND, THE ART WORLD CAN SOMETIMES FEEL ALIENATING. COMMON GROUND GAVE ME THE CHANCE TO ACCESS THAT WORLD - TO VIEW MYSELF AS A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST AND TO CONNECT WITH MY LOCAL HERITAGE IN A WAY I DIDN'T THINK POSSIBLE. IT'S VITAL THAT WE CONTINUE TO PROVIDE YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES LIKE THIS AS ACCESS TO ART AND HERITAGE SHOULD HAVE NO BARRIERS. ”

COMMON GROUND LEADERS GARDEN PARTY

When May 2022

Where [Norfolk and Norwich Festival](#) at Chapelfield Gardens, Norwich

Participants 5 young artist commissions

As part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival in 2022, we commissioned five Leaders to curate, design and facilitate a creative hands-on activity for families at the Garden Party – a free, open event in Chapelfield Park, Norwich with activity stations.

The activity introduced children and their families to the cultural and natural heritage of East Anglia as seen through the eyes of young people. The Leaders took inspiration from our heritage partners, sites and projects to pull out stories that inspired creative activities. Activities included poetry, collage and natural printing using plants. The event was designed, organised and facilitated by the Leaders to share the stories of local heritage.

This gave the commissioned artists new workshop design and facilitation skills, built their confidence in working in public participation and allowed them to make creative decisions on how to communicate the work and values of Common Ground and their views on the future of heritage in East Anglia.



THE BENEFITS OF BEING INVOLVED IN THE ARTS & HERITAGE

Written by Common Ground Leader, Bethany James

#1. Better your mental health and wellbeing!

Keeping you focused on a project or an idea, being involved in the arts and heritage is one of the most amazing ways to feel like you're doing something good with your days. Having time away from social media and the havoc of daily life is a key way to bettering your mental health and the arts are definitely a moment of solitude for the overworked mind.

#2. Industry experience and employability

When making applications for higher education, jobs and internships in conservation and galleries etc., the key thing which excites people is your involvement in various projects. Whether this is a new way of thinking, a proactive mindset or making the most of a pre-existing talent of yours, I believe that being involved in the arts and heritage, in a 'many fingers in many pies' type of way is a path to success in most fields.

And what better way than to impress people than to show how you have utilised your passion to get where you want to be. From my own experience, evidencing my passion for arts & heritage has been the strongest factor in getting me into positions within creative projects, and as my experience develops, so does my enthusiasm for the sector.

#3. Become part of new communities and projects

Within the worlds of heritage and art lie so many subcategories of interest. Due to the amount of opportunities to experience, so many activities are seen as 'niche' interests not open to novices.

I can personally say that in my late teens I thought I'd have to be good at something automatically in order to engage with the activity in a larger group – but I was just worried! Yet I think we can all agree that doing new arts activities can lead to surprising results – this experimentation is the beauty of it. When you find someone who has a common interest with you, regardless of ability or skill, you end up building connections, and as a result will end up growing a community and confidence in the realm.

#4. Be the change happening from within

Those of us dealing with ableism of all sorts (like class/gender/race/health) often bear the brunt of the ableism that can be found in the institution of arts and heritage. However, the arts as a sector are increasing their efforts in understanding the barriers facing these people, and making adjustments, to support them in these spaces. Thus making space for people who require the support and creating more room for adjustment in these spaces.

It is wonderful to see that areas of society are realising that further needs should not be seen as a burden to able-bodied people. By joining groups like Common Ground, you'll be able to see this movement moving forward and strengthening each month; and as a result you'll have more support and trust in the community. This is also a space for the voices of the minority to be heard and for us to take charge by being the change happening from within.



Photographer:
Kerry Bensley at
NWT Cley Marshes
Visitor Centre



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Aimee is a young local graphic design freelancer specialising in the arts & culture sector.

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Colchester+Ipswich
Museums

