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Heritage Pathfinders

at Leominster Meeting Centre for people affected by dementia

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Seedcorn Projects

January 2023

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Written and prepared by

Dr. Timothy J. Senior (supersum)

Dr. Shirley Evans (University of Worcester)

Photo credits

All images by the Heritage Pathfinders team or Pathfinder project participants

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Tom Metcalfe

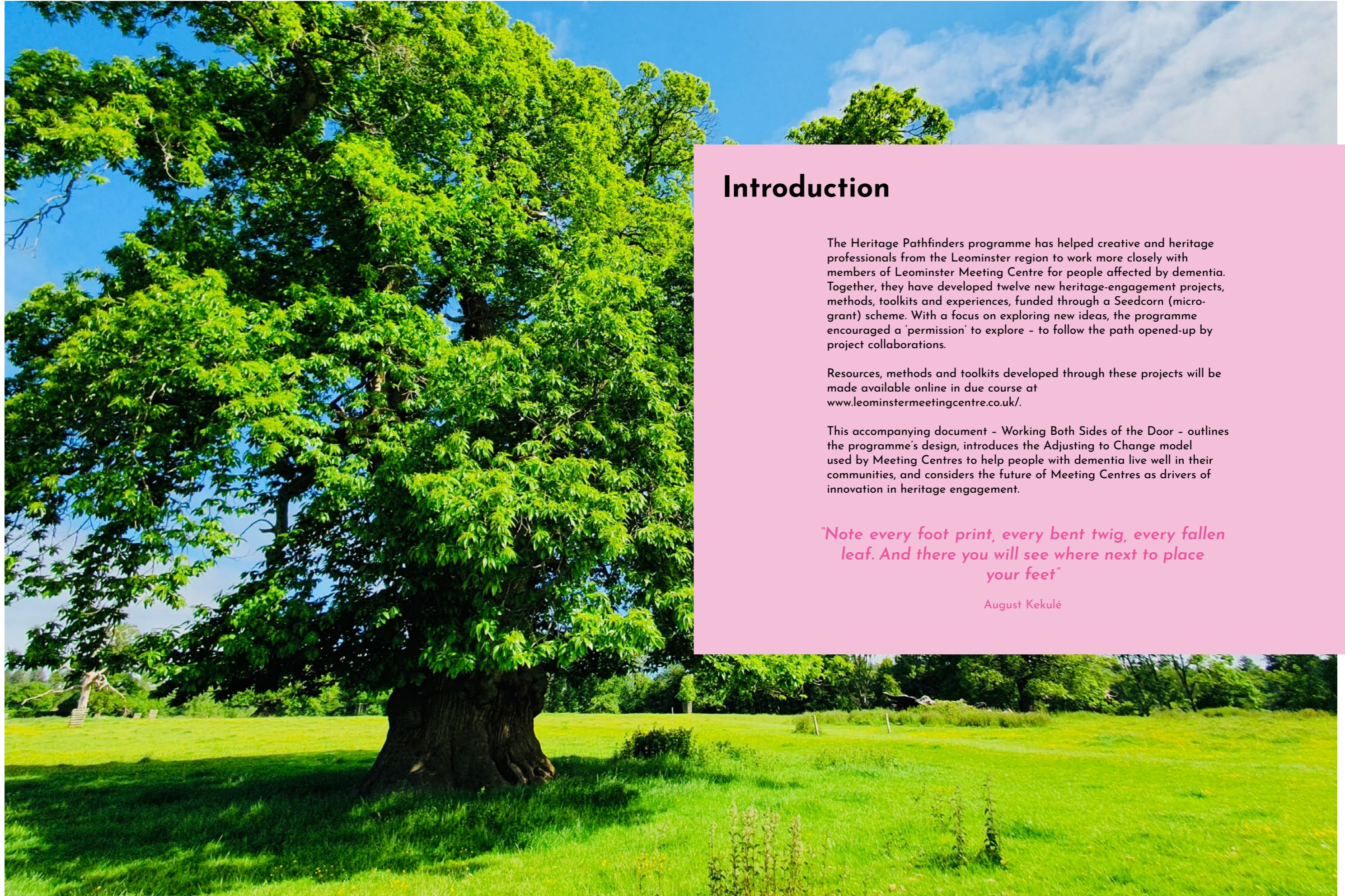
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Leominster Meeting Centre - Joy, Dawn, the staff and its members for their deep engagement with this project. We'd particularly like to thank Cindy Watson for helping Pathfinder projects integrate into Meeting Centre routines and connect into Leominster's creative and cultural life.

www.leominstermeetingcentre.co.uk

www.worcester.ac.uk

www.supersum.works



Introduction

The Heritage Pathfinders programme has helped creative and heritage professionals from the Leominster region to work more closely with members of Leominster Meeting Centre for people affected by dementia. Together, they have developed twelve new heritage-engagement projects, methods, toolkits and experiences, funded through a Seedcorn (micro-grant) scheme. With a focus on exploring new ideas, the programme encouraged a 'permission' to explore - to follow the path opened-up by project collaborations.

Resources, methods and toolkits developed through these projects will be made available online in due course at www.leominstermeetingcentre.co.uk/.

This accompanying document - Working Both Sides of the Door - outlines the programme's design, introduces the Adjusting to Change model used by Meeting Centres to help people with dementia live well in their communities, and considers the future of Meeting Centres as drivers of innovation in heritage engagement.

"Note every foot print, every bent twig, every fallen leaf. And there you will see where next to place your feet"

August Kekulé



Tuning In

Olivia Bradbury

Olivia Bradbury is a singer, composer and theatre maker. She holds a Masters in Music Leadership from The Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

www.oliviapreye.com



An Opportunity

The value of music for people living with dementia - whether formal music therapy or fun and informal sing-alongs - is by now well established. The question of how to integrate music-making into an established care culture is, however, less straightforward. Leominster Meeting Centre, for example, has its own culture of working with groups of diverse individuals at very different stages of their dementia journey. The Adjusting to Change model used by Meeting Centres also lays out 'what matters' when designing a new form of engagement as part of Meeting Centre life. Liv has asked: how might a music programme be designed to complement Meeting Centre culture?



Pathfinding

Working with members, Liv has developed the Tuning In method - an approach to music-making that uses structured improvisation and spontaneity to create an inclusive musical experience. Tuning In offers a flexible formula, one that might include a fun warm-up exercise before moving onto 'welcome songs' (to build connection), storytelling (to weave in ideas from participants), and gentle musical improvisation (to create moments of surprise). It also offers different routes into that experience, whether that's through leading, inspiring or just being carried along for the ride. Because Tuning In works just as well with body percussion (e.g. clapping, stamping, clicking, tapping) as with instruments, it can be responsive to whatever is available in the room or what participants choose to bring to a session. Finding a middle ground between music therapy and informal group singing, there is an element of music leadership required to deliver a successful session. A short training programme and resources are now being developed for this purpose, including advice on body language, stage presence, improvisation techniques, and responsiveness to changing participant-needs during a session.

"We sung for a long time together - maybe 15 minutes of unplanned improvisation. It was like going to a different world where words are not needed to communicate and connect. It felt as though everyone in the room was on the exactly the same level and afterwards people seemed very calm and relaxed. One member commented: 'That was quite magical.'"

from a project story canvas

Adjusting to Change

The Tuning In method offers multiple 'ways in' for members to participate in a rich musical experience. It's flexibility means everyone can find where they feel most comfortable or contribute in a way that's right for them in that moment - all routes to supporting a positive self-image. Through its gentle improvisation approach, participants can reveal their creativity or witness and respond to the creativity of others. This is an essential part of building a sense of connection with other people, which is important wherever you fit into the Meeting Centre community. There is also a wider significance to the role improvisation training might play in helping members manage the unexpected, whether that's letting go of plans, embracing spontaneous action or finding a different way through a problem.

For Meeting Centres

The Tuning In method is a great fit with with the values of Meeting Centres. First, it supports group connection whilst also creating space for individual expression. Second, it offers both simple and more advanced musical forms and language so that anyone can find 'their place' in the activity. The method is also highly suitable to anyone interested in delivering music sessions whether they have a background in music education or not. This recognises that Meeting Centres are an ideal environment to put such training in place and support people to develop new skills around music leadership and improvisation.

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See 'Creative Connections' on improvisation in song and storytelling.

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See 'Drawn Together' on the value of everyday creativity.



The Blacksmith's Art

Joshua Fincher with Hereford Make

Joshua Fincher is a blacksmithing graduate of Hereford College of Arts and a communications support worker for Hereford Make.

www.hca.ac.uk/student-showcase/joshua-fincher-l4



An Opportunity

Herefordshire has a long tradition of blacksmithing. As the wellbeing impacts of crafting and handling objects gains recognition, more people are asking how blacksmithing might benefit groups of people with specific health needs. Perhaps its value in connection to dementia isn't an obvious fit? The benefits of blacksmithing for people with autism, for example, lies in the high demands it makes on focus, learning, planning, fine motor skills, precision and emotional regulation. Its reputation as a forceful, solitary and overtly masculine practice may seem in contrast with a more gentle, collaborative model of care as practised by Meeting Centres. Josh has asked: if we strip away the myths and hearsay, what might blacksmithing offer someone with dementia?

Pathfinding

Working with members, Josh has asked which blacksmithing activities might open-up cognitive, physical and creative expression. Activities explored have included, for example, patterning pre-cut copper petals (later assembled into a rose) and stamping soft tin plate with simple tools to make decorative shapes. By combining both metal-work and reminiscence (e.g. about tin toys from childhood), greater inclusivity for all members could be supported. Learning has emerged around appropriately weighted tools, different sound-deadening solutions and the use of 'strike guides' to support more independent action. At Hereford Make, a small number of members have been able to try an induction forge. Working with a magnetic field to induce accurate and localised heating, this type of forge substantially reduces the risks associated with blacksmithing. With the right assistance, members were able to bend, twist and scroll metal bars to make seed markers - including one member of 90 with limited mobility. The first myth dispelled is that metal is hard: with the right method, instruction and assistance, anyone can heat and bend metal. Josh and his assistants now have a better understanding of which forge conditions can make blacksmithing an accessible and enjoyable activity for members.

Adjusting to Change

Whilst conventional wisdom might suggest that blacksmithing is out of reach for people with dementia, this pilot project suggests that hot and cold forging is not only accessible but an affirming activity, one that expands people's own conceptions of their physical and cognitive limits. Crafting an object in a way that was deemed previously inconceivable may be an important route for some towards a stronger self image when facing the challenges dementia brings. As Josh describes it: "Put members in a place where they are safe and can't do any harm, and it opens a release". Blacksmithing is also a community driven activity. For those members using the forge, it opened up a frame for creative interaction with others.

For Meeting Centres

A key realisation from this pilot is that the wellbeing potential seen during forge work at Hereford Make may be amplified if these activities could be brought to Meeting Centres directly. It is precisely the familiar, connecting and caring environment of Meeting Centres that could embolden more members to explore what blacksmithing has to offer. A Meeting Centre could better sign-post what to expect from the experience, support the integration of metal and non-metal work, and offer both indoor and outdoor sites for a range of activities. Portable and induction forge technology now make this possible. This could open up new spaces in which members craft in dialogue with a county's blacksmithing heritage.

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See 'Reconnecting Club' on bringing other organisations into Meeting Centre life

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See 'My Archaeology' on the agency of special objects



The Way I see It

Rachel Freeman with National Trust & Croft Castle

Rachel Freeman is a dance artist and founder of dance charity Everybody Dance. She has worked with elders with dementia since 2015, with a focus on the value of working outdoors in nature.

www.everybodydance.org.uk



An Opportunity

The positive impact that outdoor environments can bring to feelings of wellbeing and self-worth is considerable. This is no less true for people with dementia, where meaningful engagement remains possible despite cognitive decline. Traditional research methods can only go so far, however, in exploring the connection between Nature and wellbeing. It is now recognised that we need more creative approaches grounded in the experiences of people living with dementia to help us 'look through their eyes'. Rachel has asked: if we acknowledge that personhood emerges in interaction with other people, then how might exploring nature together reveal its true wellbeing value?

Pathfinding

Rachel has worked with National Trust's Croft Castle in Herefordshire to open-up their gardens to the perspective and insight of members. Working with a comfy Director's chair placed for special views of their own choice, members moved through the landscape, deciding where to stop, where to go next and for how long. Visits would last between two and four hours. As Rachel has observed, this extended engagement - really taking the



time to look with someone - has deepened her understanding of how Nature can unlock conversation, memory and reflection: "I noticed that it wasn't just about the words spoken but about the pauses between, the sighs and silences, the rhythm of conversation, returning subjects circling around thoughts, telling us their stories." To share this insight, Rachel has made fragments of conversation available, and locatable, through QR codes on a printed map of the gardens: this means the visiting public can now look over the same views, listen to members' in their own words, and imagine seeing the world through their eyes.

"It's lovely they've kept the old tree like that because there's all sorts of creatures that live in it I expect"

Meeting Centre member

"I found the reflections, stories and memories very moving - a window on the complexity of living with dementia and a reminder of our shared humanness"

Croft Castle visitors book

Adjusting to Change

For members, being outdoors with Rachel helped facilitate peaceful reflection and an expressive freedom. Creating a space where the observations of members are welcomed and respected for their own truths was essential. The choice to explore further, divert or turn back empowered some members to feel more in control and so reach out further. Over time, the effect of walking together helped many to relax and reconnect with their sense of self. One member in particular "became more relaxed during our walk, the loops of repetitive dialogue reduced, her movements seemed quieter, and her breathing settled". In the member's own words: "This makes me feel much more like my old self, because this is what I always used to do". Personhood comes to the foreground here not just as self-expression, but in the resonance between Rachel, members and loved ones on their walks together.

For Meeting Centres

Working with Leominster Meeting Centre's local knowledge and relationships, Rachel has been able to develop a stronger connection with an important heritage provider, one with significant regional and national influence. This has been a mutually beneficial one, with Croft Castle staff receiving Dementia Friends training, highlighting within the organisation the role they can play in improving access for people with dementia. Rachel's work has raised important questions about the longer-term benefits of sustained engagement with Nature on wellbeing - with implications for research and public engagement practices. Critically, Meeting Centres can be at the heart of this work: a builder of trusted local relationships and driver of new methods.

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See 'Living Orchard' on the value of nature engagement.



My Archaeology

Yvie George

Yvie George is a project coordinator and community builder. Yvie has a long-standing relationship with Meeting Centres in England and Wales as a Dementia Community Development Officer. She holds a BA in Heritage and Archaeology from Worcester University



An Opportunity

People and objects have always been interlinked, entangled together through ideas, thoughts, emotions and desires. In this sense, objects can have a type of 'agency' beyond their simple physical characteristics. They can disclose ideas about us and help us place ourselves in the world - help us understand who we are. Objects, then, can act as an anchor for personhood in a period of uncertainty, for example when someone with dementia is going through a transition into greater dependency on others for care. For many members at Leominster Meeting Centre, objects still hold this agency. Yvie has asked: is there more we can do with objects to help members live well with their dementia?

Pathfinding

Yvie has worked with members to develop five bold ideas for working in a new way with objects. Through a series of workshops and one-on-one engagements, she invited members and their families to select a personal object that represented them and facilitated a journey of self-exploration. With objects placed on a plush cushion, conversations explored how treasured objects reveal our shared humanity, our Western culture, regional identities, family character and, finally, ourselves. Five ideas about object agency emerge: first, the process of choosing a personal object is a reflective one - it allows people to select what aspect of their own life story they most wish to share; second, that the physical presence of a personal object during a conversation can support a flow of words and ideas structured to work best for that person; third, by exploring the personal and material properties of objects at the same time, the entangled nature of people and objects - potential strengths for living well with dementia - can emerge; fourth, recording stories can help preserve and share the unique essence of an individual to loved ones; finally, that the action of touching, seeing, mending, arranging and rearranging objects may help someone activate (or reconstruct) a sense of their own self when in a new environment.

Adjusting to Change

Thinking about objects as entangled in our lives (which is more than just the stories we connect to them) opens up great potential in terms of the Adjusting to Change model. Objects can offer a route for someone to maintain a positive self-image and emotional wellbeing through 'activating' the self and perhaps revealing more of who they are. They can help someone build new social connections with others and break down cultural barriers and historical prejudices. Finally, this work suggests there is more we can do to help people across the life-course through their personal objects, such as when making a transition into new environments and facing the uncertainties that this brings.

For Meeting Centres

Meeting Centres can play a central role in developing new and inclusive practices around objects. They offer the right caring environment to help members stay connected with important personal objects, explore their meaning, connect through them with others, and record their value for the future. By uncovering and adding-to these object entanglements, Meeting Centre life might help members in the present to pursue related interests (old and new) and to anchor a sense-of-self in the future when making a transition to other care and institutionalised environments. How personal objects might form an 'identity kit' that can support identity and autonomy for people with dementia is still a subject of research, one that Meeting Centres are well placed to support.

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See 'Polyphonic Voices' on new ways to record and share experiences.



Reconnecting Club

Enid Gill

Enid Gill is a dance artist, teacher and Dance Movement Psychotherapist, with over 30 years experience. She holds a Masters in Dance Movement Therapy and is director of dance and wellbeing company Golden Threads.

www.goldenthreadscic.com



An Opportunity

Over the course of someone's dementia journey, they may start to withdraw from work and leisure activities that once brought joy and were an integral part of their identity. Dementia may come to close-off those opportunities, practically, socially or emotionally. Much of that knowledge built up over a lifetime - a sense of "your tribe" - could, however, become a source of strength once more and inform new support strategies for living well with dementia. Enid has asked: how might we support members to reconnect with their sense of identity through past interests, and so draw strength to live well in the present?



Pathfinding

Helping someone reconnect with their past requires great care, sensitivity and support. Enid has worked with Leominster Meeting Centre to map out a gentle process, starting with a simple questionnaire to members and families about hobbies, followed by a discovery workshop using object reminiscence, music, movement and non-verbal communication to gauge interest in 'reconnecting'. A second stage then involves working closely with individuals to explore what reconnecting might look like ('future scanning') and identify interested local partners with something to offer. An initial, facilitated exchange is then put in place (two-way site visits), before a check-in with both parties explores the possibility for continued and deepening engagement. Enid's initial pilot has involved close working with one member and her love of horses. Connecting with a local stable and riding school, Enid has supported her to visit the stables, for the stable's staff to visit Leominster Meeting Centre, and for the wider membership to be introduced to 'her tribe'. Here, they were able to see carriages and horses being connected, enjoy the environment of the stables and help with grooming horses. Enid will continue to develop a handbook for Meeting Centres wanting to follow this path to reconnection, including advice on facilitating discovery workshops.

"I recognise that! Smiling, B. pushed herself out of the soft chair and reached for the bundle of leather straps. She held them, feeling the leather and smelling them."

from a project story canvas

Adjusting to Change

This pilot demonstrates the value of reconnecting members with their 'tribe', a route to affirming personhood, supporting a positive self-image and re-awakening self-knowledge and competencies. Reconnecting is a social activity that can introduce new people (and ideas) into a member's life within a safe and familiar environment - an interaction that the 'tribe' is uniquely able to support. Through the process of reconnecting, family, care givers and Meeting Centre staff may come to see a member in a new light, gaining insight into 'what makes someone tick' and, therefore, how to support that person in the immediate future and further along their dementia journey. One member's 'tribe' is also a gateway for new group experiences - a way for the membership to connect with something completely new to them.

For Meeting Centres

Meeting Centres are in a great position to connect with other organisations in their region and help them understand the core values of living well with dementia. These are potential partner organisations that can support members outside of regular Meeting Centre engagement. An initial questionnaire as part of the Meeting Centre registration process could help map members' interests and start the process of linking members with organisations able to help them reconnect to where they live, connect with each other, and express greater independence. These relationships to other organisations can be mutually beneficial, helping them engage with older adults with dementia in their work - as members, patrons and clients.

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See *'The Blacksmith's Art'* on connecting with cultural practices in new ways

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See *'Living Orchard'* on new types of caring environment



Your Way

Kate Green

Kate Green is a multidisciplinary artist who has lived, worked and walked in the English-Welsh border counties for twenty five years. She is studying for a Masters in Philosophy and the Arts at Warwick University.



An Opportunity

Heritage trails can be a great way to explore the world around us, engage with local history and spend time with others. For those with a dementia, however, the linear sequence of movements between places and the chronological presentation of time can be a barrier to engagement. For someone with dementia, the experience of how past and present relate (and how objects, places and people connect) can be very different. Kate has asked if 'wondering and wandering from the designated path' can be turned into a source of strength? In other words: how can heritage experiences be organised to work with, not against, the changes that dementia brings?



Pathfinding

Working closely with members, Kate has developed 'nonlinear' experiments in heritage engagement. In one experiment, the group used moveable objects (pictures of Leominster buildings attached to helium balloons) to create alternative Leominsters that make sense to members and stimulate conversation. In a second experiment, the group developed a Wheel of Walks (a suspended, spinning mobile of real and imaginary journeys), from which a single shared journey was developed and set, as lyrics, to favourite songs. A key outcome from Kate's work has been a protocol for live-streaming non-linear heritage walks using Zoom. Here, Kate would become the members' 'body' in the world, directed where they wish: onto the swings, to meet dogs and their owners at the park, sent into the sea to feel the water against her (their) legs. For those members with mobility issues, this has proven a powerful way to explore Leominster and beyond. Kate believes what matters here most is putting choice and collaborative creation at the heart of unravelling a new path together. This means being able to change your mind, discover a different purpose along the way, break routine and go where the experience takes you.

"It became a series of shared 'will it, won't it' moments as we tied more balloons to each place and watched to see if they would take off. It took three balloons to lift Morrisons!"

from a project story canvas

Adjusting to Change

Kate's work has been to understand with members what it means to explore your lived environment when dementia is also part of that experience. What emerges is an alternative to 'following paths' in the form of sequential moments connected through choice and imagination. That choice lies in directing a journey and working with others to create a shared experience - all of which involves conversation, play, negotiation, improvisation and shared discovery (of places and each other). This holds great promise in how members can engage with the world around them to refashion it as a caring and stimulating place centred on Meeting Centre life.

For Meeting Centres

Video conferencing tools like Zoom are now an established part of life for many Meeting Centres. The approach developed by Kate is low cost and can be delivered using a personal mobile device. This opens up new possibilities for Meeting Centres to work with Walking Arts practitioners, walking groups and family members to co-lead 'wondering and wandering' activities together. There is still much to be discovered in the potential of new nonlinear approaches, particularly in how they could support members at different stages of their dementia journey. Meeting Centres are best placed to drive this exploration through partnering with local creative practitioners.

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See *'Tuning In'* on new models of improvisation

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See *'The Way I See It'* on exploring nature and personhood



The Larking Stool

Jo Henshaw with Yvie George

Jo Henshaw is a Culture and Heritage project manager, active across Herefordshire. She is the Director of JRH Heritage and Culture Services and co-founder of the award-winning Hereford River Carnival.



An Opportunity

The Leominster Ducking stool is an infamous tool of punishment. Used against 'disorderly women' and 'common scolds', individuals would be ducked in the river Lugg as a form of retribution and social humiliation. The Tale of Jenny Pipes - who, undeterred, continued to speak out against magistrates - reminds us of the fragility of social contracts that decide who gets to speak their mind, and who doesn't. For many people with dementia, finding a voice, being heard and being accepted is an ongoing challenge. Jo has asked: how can this powerful symbol of punishment for speaking out be used instead to inspire new voices from those with dementia today?

Response

Jo's work with members has asked how the Ducking Stool might inspire a series of games (with rules, choices and outcomes) for conversations about local history, social change and lived-experience. In one game, a spinner (inspired by the stool's see-saw motion) offers a choice between a historical example of Ducking Stool use or the chance to share a personal experience of feeling left out - the start of a discussion together. In a second game, the group created an elaborate stool for members to be elevated and celebrated. Those enthroned could choose to "pipe up" about a social taboo or take the group to a wonderful or magical place in their imagination. A final game focused on constructing a new Larking Stool, where members chose how to contribute: maker or organiser, fabric-selector, commentator, duplo figure animator, willow rod and gold lamé coordinator. Jo's project has asked how the safe and supportive environment of a Meeting Centre can help members have difficult conversations about their lived-experiences, and always with a 'safety valve' - the choice to explore remote historical facts or lighten the conversation and take the group far, far away to somewhere fun.

"We're piping up for ourselves!"

Hilda

Adjusting to Change

For members, these games have been an opportunity to speak their mind, to take control over what they want to say, and to go somewhere in their 'Lifeworld' (the everyday world that we share with others). At heart, this is about maintaining a positive self image, building self-confidence to express yourself, valuing others' experiences, and thinking to the future. One member talked about her journey from diagnosis through denial and embarrassment to ease and acceptance because of the Meeting Centre. Another member expressed their hopes for the future, saying: "I'd like to see a more inclusive and better world for everyone...make the world a better place - lots of people don't get opportunities like this".

For Meeting Centres

Whilst the Ducking Stool is unique to Leominster, it points to the serious and imaginative ways we might re-situate shared heritage today in our conversations about living well with dementia. How might other Meeting Centres work with their local heritage to support difficult but empowering conversations? A key strength of Jo's experimental games lies in how they are open to everyone in Meeting Centre life. One session alone included members, staff, a Meeting Centre trustee, funding body representatives and academic researchers who happened to be passing by. Conversations about living well with dementia are shared conversations - they involve us all.

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See 'Creative Connections' on making safe spaces for difficult conversations

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See 'Polyphonic Voices' on finding a new voice



Drawn Together

Gemma Moore with Yvie George

Gemma Moore is an award-winning artist, holding a Masters in Fine Art from Birmingham City University. She was the recipient of the Sidney Nolan Trust Residency Award in 2021.

www.gemmamooreart.wordpress.com



An Opportunity

Promoting everyday creativity can nurture inclusion, participation and shared understanding. Yet, in the eyes of many, creativity (with a small 'c') is something you either have or you don't have, and Creativity (with a big 'C') has particular characteristics that make it a rare and exclusive skill. The result can be a fear to 'make art'. The world of contemporary painting, drawing and mark-making offers a different view. It is radically inclusive because 'the doing of it' is what matters more than the end result. Gemma has asked: how can the world of mark-making open up creative expression and help people overcome anxiety about what art is, what art is "for" and who has permission to make it?

Pathfinding

Gemma has developed Open drawing experiments with members to explore how simple mark-making can create interest, excitement and thoughtfulness. These experiments include a ping-pong collaborative drawing game, where two people draw something together in turn, mark by mark, responding each time to what the previous mark suggests. Reducing the visual complexity of the world to something more manageable, What's in a Frame? uses windows, patios and moveable frames as a springboard to a visual response and conversation. In No Boundaries, the mark-maker must respond to a pre-prepared line drawing by choosing to fill within/outside the lines, follow or crash-through boundaries, or leave gaps - an exercise in making and breaking rules. Through drawing, the group have explored taboos around representation versus abstraction in art, asked what happens when you leave gaps on a canvas, followed free-thinking associations to find 'drawing rules' that give members room to find their own way forward - all questions at the heart of contemporary art practice. By moving away from worries of "what is it?" to focus on the process itself and what it reveals, mark-making becomes a tool of inquiry open to all of us.

Adjusting to Change

Gemma's commitment to contemporary arts practice is about making art without fear of failure or fear of disability. When members draw, they are engaging with creative, sensory and affective experience in-the-moment - an expression of self-image and self-narrative. Through engaging with the whole drawing process (from searching for pens, through transforming mental images into physical space, to deciding what success in mark-making looks like), members will be making decisions, exploring competences and developing confidence in their own style. In this way, mark-making can be a way to challenge accepted norms (e.g. that a black cat can't be happy) and recognise that a unique way of seeing the world is a strength, not a problem. One member, who found the idea of mark-making initially quite stressful, has gone on to enjoy regular drawing sessions at her home with Gemma.

For Meeting Centres

Mark-making can support everyday creativity at a Meeting Centre and build both practical and imaginative connections between Meeting Centre life and members' lives at home. The endless possibilities for drawing (whether alone, in pairs, or in a group) open-up a world of creativity for the whole membership. As a highly generative act, mark-making can create materials that inspire future sessions and even lay the groundwork for establishing a personal practice - mark-making everyday that takes on a life of its own. The value of revealing unique differences in each person's approach and finding reciprocity between members lies in how it could shape a sense of membership identity.

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See *The Way I see It* on expressing one's own truth.

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See *Your Way* on building a shared identity through embracing difference



Living Orchard

Hil Norris with Echo and Fetch Theatre

Hilary Norris is an organist, choir director, teacher and local historian. She is the Director of Music Leominster Priory.

Hil is developing resources for working with nature at www.leominsterlivingorchard.org



An Opportunity

The Apple is a universal symbol - one of knowledge and the human condition. It is especially important in Herefordshire because of the county's cider heritage, a heritage that connects natural and social histories together. Much more attention is now being paid to the value of natural environments for health and wellbeing. At best, that relationship can be a mutually beneficial one: working with nature as a 'library' of creativity and resources, sustaining it in turn for future generations. This potential of the natural environment can so often be overlooked. Hil has asked: how might we reconnect with nature immediately on our doorstep?



Pathfinding

Hil worked closely with members over many weeks to observe and explore animal habitats, collect natural objects, share apple-related sayings, play traditional apple games with windfalls, work with orchard maps and landscapes... the possibilities have been endless. Her ambition has been to provoke curiosity in-the-moment with all of the senses: from rubbing bark textures, exploring the light and shadows of scruffy apples fallen into nettles, and seeking (rather than shying away from) bugs and bites in rotten fruit. Using produce from local orchards, members have regularly collected and prepared apples for different recipes of their choice. Project highlights have included staffing a stall at the annual Apple Fair, partnering with the charity Echo (who support young people with learning difficulties) to create their first ever public performance, and working with The Fetch Theatre Company to create eye-catching models of unusual wildlife, such as the Noble Chafer Beetle, to support conversations about natural history.

"It is fantastic to see that the people who go to the Meeting Centre are doing interesting stuff. I'm trying to persuade my mum to visit the centre, and I'll tell her about this"

member of the public at the Apple Fair

Adjusting to Change

Hil's impact has been to create a continuous 'linking' between nature, community and the lived-experience of members. For some, this linking has proved transformational for their interaction with the world and other people around them.

Encounters with orchard wildlife have helped members rebuild the confidence needed to engage with the natural world, to express their own knowledge, and to use their love of nature as a starting point for discussion and group exploration. Through building stronger local partnerships and engaging with Meeting Centre staff, families, carers and the public in new types of caring relationships, the Adjusting to Change model is brought firmly beyond the Meeting Centre walls. It is through the open promise that such an engagement with nature holds that members can be placed at the heart of sustaining local natural heritage.

For Meeting Centres

Leominster Meeting Centre has an abundance of nature immediately on its doorstep. This includes orchards, but also little spaces, hidden corners, and individual trees that many will walk past everyday without noticing. With a knowledgeable practitioner as a guide, this is Nature that can be brought vividly alive for everyone, everyday. This opens up possibilities for all-year-round programming and for the development of personalised member plans. Each Meeting Centre will have its own unique 'natural library' to hand. Exploring what different Meeting Centres can offer members will only enrich our understanding of Nature's potential to help people, including those with dementia, to live well.

Pathfinder Connections

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See *'The Way I see it'* on the power of outdoor environments

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See *'Drawn Together'* on the value of everyday creativity



More than Worship

Elizabeth Semper O'Keefe with Hereford Cathedral

Elizabeth O'Keefe is archivist at Hereford Cathedral. She has 20 years' experience of archival work including research into local and family history



An Opportunity

Questions of faith have become a bit of a taboo in modern society. The Christian heritage of this country is written in our churches and cathedrals, but also in our social values and language, sayings and expressions. During the Covid-19, Hereford Cathedral live-streamed their services, helping sustain their faith community, including those with dementia, at a time of deep crisis. Today, we can recognise that great strides have been made in developing dementia-friendly models of worship, with an abundance of practical advice for church communities, but there is so much more that could be offered. Elizabeth has asked: how can a cathedral like Hereford's shine a light beyond a traditional 'faith lens' to support more people with dementia?

Pathfinding

Elizabeth has been exploring 'questions of faith' with members at Leominster Meeting Centre, revealing not only curiosity about belief in God, but also an appetite for further collaboration with the cathedral. Starting with the question "What gives you hope?" conversations have addressed issues of faith, belief and religious practice. Elizabeth has sought for new ways to connect with members' own experiences, working with stories, archival materials and artefacts that connect Hereford Cathedral and the medieval Priory buildings at Leominster (where the Meeting Centre is based) across the centuries. This work has helped uncover how blurred the 'boundary' can be between faith and non-faith activities. And that beyond conventional worship, there are many ways in which a cathedral can help people with dementia find sources of strength. What has emerged from this work is a tentative model for long-term engagement: beginning with a spiritual assessment to uncover a need for connection, creative sessions can offer a route to map-out resonant themes; finally, a visit to the cathedral can bring those connections alive, open up further opportunities for an exploration of faith and heritage, and sow the seed for renewing connections in the future.

Adjusting to Change

Whilst it may be a dementia diagnosis that first brings people together at a Meeting Centre, discussions of faith and belief can help uncover the individuals and shared cultural experience behind the diagnosis. This is important not only for maintaining a positive self-image, but also coping with future uncertainty (a key focus of faith). As members confirmed, ambivalent or even negative responses to institutionalised religion may only mask a deeper faith, or the need for faith, in many. Exploring questions of faith together and connecting to those who feel at the periphery of organised religion is another way to build the diverse social connectivity on which Meeting Centres thrive - many members are still thinking and questioning.

For Meeting Centres

Meeting Centres are well placed, with the right support, to hold these ambitious conversations about faith and be confident in asking big questions. Just as the Mappa Mundi (a medieval map of the world at Hereford Cathedral) makes no distinction in importance between the biblical stories, mythology, human experiences and monstrous beasts it depicts, Meeting Centres can help members explore Faith at different levels, finding the one that is right for them at this point in their own dementia journey. This offers a broad and inclusive approach to themes of faith that might otherwise be seen as exclusive. It can support working relationships with faith centres (including non-Christian places of worship), that are far broader than organised worship alone.

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Polyphonic Voices

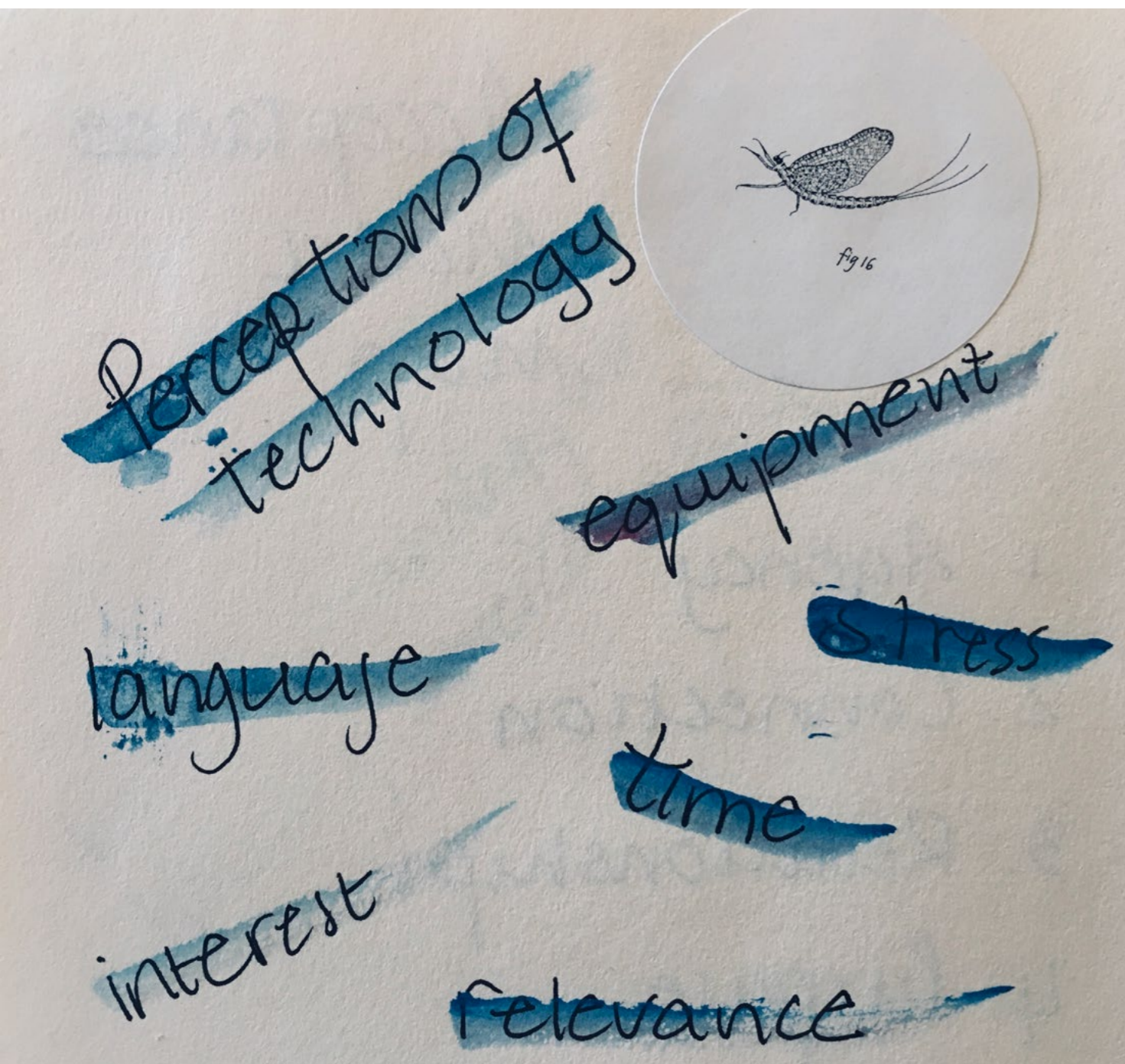
Marsha O'Mahony

Marsha O'Mahony is a writer, journalist and oral historian active in the English-Welsh border counties. She is an active member of the Oral History Society.

[instagram.com/marshaomahony](https://www.instagram.com/marshaomahony)

[facebook.com/MarshaWriting](https://www.facebook.com/MarshaWriting)

[Twitter \(Marsha O'Mahony\)](https://twitter.com/MarshaO'Mahony)



An Opportunity

New digital technologies hold the promise of enhancing the lived experiences of people with dementia. There are also legitimate reasons why such technologies might not be taken up. As Meeting Centres affirm, if technology doesn't support someone's agency, help them build connections to what matters, work with existing support relationships and have a clear purpose, then adoption is unlikely. Understanding people's relationships with technology is not straightforward, but an essential step if technology adoption at Meeting Centres is to be taken seriously. Marsha has taken a deep dive into the question of technology adoption, using the storytelling app Mayfly to both drive and document her work.

Pathfinding

Marsha has approached the big question of 'how technology might be meaningfully adopted' as an oral historian, working closely with a member-carer pair (mother and daughter) over many months to understand the deeper story of their relationship with technology. To guide her thinking, Marsha has turned to research on technology acceptance, paying close attention to everyday patterns of technology use and the personal and social factors that impact technology perception. Marsha has uncovered how digital apps can help ease someone's day as a carer and open up a window onto the world, so enabling new types of autonomy and agency. Technology-use can, however, be associated with anxiety, reveal real barriers to digital literacy, and perpetuate disabling social images of older age. A discrepancy between real-world success in technology use (as a savvy user) and the self-perception of being a non-user of technology can be hard to overcome, creating a stumbling block to further technology adoption. These conversations have also uncovered the social support networks that drive someone's skill-learning and skill-sharing, social activity that might support meaningful technology adoption at Leominster Meeting Centre in the future. In this process, Mayfly has been the way for Marsha and her interviewees to tell this story together.

Adjusting to Change

There are many digital technologies that could help members make practical adjustments to the changes dementia brings, support their agency, and help build purposeful social connections within Meeting Centre life. Marsha's oral history work reminds us, however, that even if these opportunities are out there, successful technology adoption cannot be guaranteed on usefulness, and the simple provision of training, alone. For example, 'digital literacy' training will likely fail if it doesn't take account of cultures of technology use - from the language associated with technology, through personal perceptions of digital risk, to personal digital experiences across the life-course. Thus, Marsha's work has started to uncover how technology acceptance at Meeting Centres might be achieved in practice, whether through leveraging social networks and skill-sharing to teach people new skills, or the value of close-listening and 'taking care' in helping build confidence in new technology users.

For Meeting Centres

There are exciting new possibilities for bringing technology meaningfully into Meeting Centre life. This could include not only wider engagement with the community to leverage technology expertise and learning strategies, but also opportunities to work with micro-businesses themselves (like Mayfly) to develop and improve App design, access and functionality. By understanding the deeper life of technology-use, we may not only benefit from what digital technologies have to offer but also change the social image of technology-use amongst older adults and people with dementia.

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See 'The Blacksmithing Art' for driving change in heritage practice.



Creative Connections

Sal Tonge with Herefordshire county archives

Sal Tonge is a spoken word artist, with over 25 years' experience as a storyteller, singer, guitarist and coordinator of community storytelling projects. She is a former Director of the Society for Storytelling.

www.sallytonge.co.uk



An Opportunity

We're all familiar with the power of singing to trigger reminiscence, with it well documented that people living with dementia can excel at recalling song lyrics. Singing can offer a pathway to being active in our bodies and connected through the unity of shared voices: toes might tap, others may dance in their armchair, whilst some will enjoy standing to dance, balancing, hopping and turning. Singing can be a great way to activate a 'flow' state in which participants are ready to take their creativities and capabilities to another level. But, are we always ready to follow where the 'flow' takes us, to embrace the 'unknowingness' of what comes next?

Pathfinding

Sal worked with simple improvisation techniques to help members take risks, embrace spontaneity and explore personhood. Starting with singing, members worked with familiar and new songs, learned simple seated dance moves to animate choruses, and supported each other to bring more reluctant singers into the flow. This is



where Sal introduced historic photographs into the process, using democratic techniques such as voting, listening and cooperating to create a shared story in response. With no pressure to give a 'right answer', new pathways into storytelling that uncover personhood, wisdom, autobiography and emotion emerge. There is a technique to choosing provocative images, and plenty of archives and image stores can be easily accessed for this purpose. Here, Sal turned to iconic photographs by fashion photographer Norman Parkinson and the prolific Herefordshire-based social photographer Derek Evans.

"In New York, John flirts with a colleague on their way to a hotel room. John asks 'would you like some strawberries and cream, or some madeira, my dear?'"

from a project story canvas

"At a football match, Ian watches closely but is a little overwhelmed by the noise. One of the boys had brought some eggs for his lunch and didn't seem to care that he had lost his dog and he was holding an empty dog lead!"

from a project story canvas

Adjusting to Change

Singing and storytelling can bring about emotional acceptance, in part through not seeking the 'right answer' and relieving the pressure to remember. As a group experience, members worked with the emotional charge in the images used, a strong starting point for imaginative conversations that take fragments of storywork, then gild, humanise and refold them into a shared experience with new life. The opportunity to make such choices is an important expression of personhood. Members were thrilled with what they'd made - new stories, together. In improvisation, there is always the very real possibility of touching on taboos. Whilst handling taboos can be difficult, they can uncover stories that matter - stories that need working-through. There is value to visiting uncomfortable ideas with the support of a skilled practitioner, to share the moment, understand together and navigate away towards positive ground. There is trust and honesty when we can hold both pleasantness and unpleasantness in a single storytelling session.

For Meeting Centres

Sal's work shows how traditional singing and storytelling sessions can be expanded to create a low-threshold, but high-ceiling, activity for all members. When working with change in people's lives, uncertainty is a key ingredient that can be invited into such sessions through improvisation techniques - a way to explore and understand those changes. Meeting Centres are in a great position to bring new improvisation techniques into their ongoing relationships with members, introducing them into the caring routines and rhythms that Meeting Centre life offers.

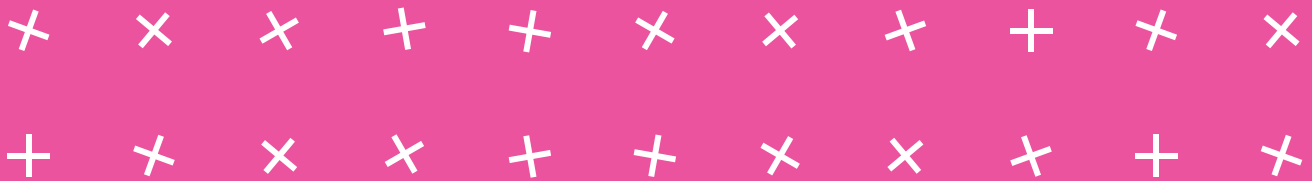
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Leominster Meeting Centre helps people and their families adjust to living with dementia by offering exercise, educational sessions, one-to-one meetings with support workers and advisers, as well as therapeutic activities and having FUN! The Centre provides a safe place where people are supported to understand and adapt to living with memory problems. All sessions are built around the hobbies and interests of the people who attend and everyone is fully involved in shaping what happens in and around the Centre. The Centre adheres closely to the Adjusting to Change model as set out within the Dutch ethos of Meeting Centres focused on supporting people affected by dementia to adapt to their changing social, emotional and cognitive needs.

The Association for Dementia Studies, established in 2009, is a designated research and education centre at the University of Worcester. It now has national and international reach as a centre of excellence in research and education in person-centred dementia care. Its work is delivered by a multi-professional group of educationalists, researchers and practitioners who are expert in the field of person-centred dementia care and support. Our aim is to make a substantial contribution to building evidence-based practical ways of working with people living with dementia and their families that enables them to live well. We do this primarily through research, education and scholarship.

Supersum is a non-profit Wicked Problems agency. Wicked Problems are those that speak to different fields of expertise and so resist single, easy solutions. In asking how we might communicate, live and work better together, we recognise how Wicked Problems disclose some of our most pressing shared needs. Only by bringing new partnerships to life, exploring alternative models of experience and driving innovative ways of working can we address such problems more completely. Supersum does this through actively building cross-sector teams and securing the funding needed to drive new work forward. Design, innovation and social science methods are at the heart of our work.

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