

Unsung Stories

Seeing history
in a different
light



heritage open days



A good story, well told. Is there anything more powerful?

I believe we are storytellers at our core. That's why I spent my early career in theatre (as an actor and producer), and what drew me to Heritage Open Days. This unique, annual festival has become a movement; an opportunity for people to share tales of the diverse individuals, places and events that have shaped their communities.

I also believe passionately in the importance of seeking out stories that have been ignored, under-explored or pushed to the sidelines. Without them, our country's history and culture is both incomplete and far less interesting. Heritage Open Days has always championed such 'unsung stories', and is now the country's foremost platform for voices from history that have previously gone unheard.

I was incredibly fortunate to join Heritage Open Days in 2017, just as generous extra funding from players of People's Postcode Lottery had been secured to pair artists and local organisers. The Unsung Stories project was conceived to create impactful work that would shine a different light on familiar places and stories, engage new audiences and offer powerful experiences. Unsung Stories chimes perfectly with my professional beliefs; I know artists and their work can enrich our understanding of history, and that

artistic work rooted in history and community can have a powerful effect on both participants and audiences.

This year's commissions gave an opportunity to reflect and commemorate the anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales, focussing on LGBTQ stories. Moreover, these projects empowered artists and local organisers to reveal extraordinary lives and events that were touching, painful, fascinating and, most of all, important.

The results exceeded my hopes. Four distinct but equally compelling works, offering new insights into our past and present and our communities. I am hugely proud of Heritage Open Days' achievement, and look forward to discovering more *Unsung Stories* in 2018.



Annie Reilly
Heritage Open Days Manager



All photography by Chris Lacey,
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Further information, images and videos
can be found at:
www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/unsung-stories



Introduction





In 1945, lifelong partners Dennis Wirth-Miller and Richard Chopping moved to Wivenhoe, setting alight what was previously a sleepy Essex town.

72 years later, artist **Scottie**, working with **Radical Essex** gathered the anecdotes, stories and recollections about the couple from Wivenhoe residents, re-telling their lives in a performance made up entirely of local gossip, hearsay, speculation and distant memory.



100% of visitors rated the quality of the event as good or very good, with 64% saying that the performance had changed their perception of Essex.

Images (left to right): (1) Artists Nando Messias, La John Joseph and Mem Morrison before a performance (2) Wivenhoe Harbour at sunset (3) Artists mid-performance (4) Artists chatting as the audience arrive

“*Absolutely charming, entertaining and thought-provoking. How lucky is Wivenhoe!*”

-Audience Member



JOE MEEK
RECORD PRODUCER
CAUGHT BETWEEN WORLDS
1929 - 1967
AN INTERGALACTIC
SPAGHETTI WESTERN WITH
AN OUTER SPACE
MUSIC FANTASY

FISH & CHIPS
BREAKFASTS

ATLANTIC
RESTAURANT

ENGLISH BREAKFAST

HOLLOWAY

OPEN 24 HOURS - OFF LICENCE - BAKERY

EXPRESS

GROCERY - FRESH FRUIT & VEG - FREE CASH MACHINE

senso

senso



The complex story of sixties music producer Joe Meek is one of extraordinary, albeit short-lived success, before a shockingly destructive demise. Convicted for 'importuning for immoral purposes', his subsequent downward spiral ended with the murder of his landlady, and his suicide.

“Holloway Road does not have many community events of an artistic nature, and it was great to have such an original one on my doorstep.”

-Performer/Participant



Live artist **Julie Rose Bower** created a trail around the area of north London where Meek was based. It included multimedia installations, digital projections onto his former home studio and a live community performance.

This unique and groundbreaking project is estimated to have reached over 18,500 people from the local community and elsewhere, shifting perceptions of both Meek's music and LGBTQ history.

Images (left to right): (1) Projection mapping onto Meek's former home studio (2, 3, 4) Performers in various locations on the Joe Meek trail around Holloway Road







In 1952, mathematician, codebreaker and pioneer in computer science Alan Turing was found guilty of gross indecency, following a trial in Knutsford, Cheshire.

A live theatrical performance and immersive VR experience from **RE-DOCK** in collaboration with **SHIFT** offered visitors the chance to engage with several different aspects of the trial, in the very courthouse where it originally took place.

All live performances were at full capacity, with 92% of audience members giving it 5 out of 5 stars.

“It made me very aware of the change in society’s attitude...providing a stark contrast between past and present in the same courtroom ”

-Audience Member



Images (left to right): (1) Seeing the trial in VR from the judge’s perspective (2) Alan Turing provides his defence during the live performance (3) The exterior of the courthouse where Turing and Murray were tried (4) Experiencing the trial in VR, this time from the perspective of the accused







This project, created by **Olivia Winteringham**, with **KILN Ensemble**, took its title and inspiration from love letters exchanged between two WWII soldiers, Oswestry-based Gunner Gilbert Bradley and infantryman Gordon Bowsher.

In tribute to these two extraordinary men, members of the public wrote their own love letters, which were burnt on the final day of the HODs weekend. The resulting ash has been used to create a commemorative diamond ring, which will be displayed permanently in the Oswestry Town Museum.


The sheer number and diversity of people and organisations brought together by this project form its greatest and most enduring legacy.

Images (left to right): (1) A love letter is committed to the flame (2) A photograph of Gilbert, with the original love letters (3) Letter writing prompts used during community workshops (4) Letter writing stall in Oswestry town centre



“The feedback has been tremendous, heart-breaking, but most importantly real - and from the deepest parts of our community’s lives”
-Corrie Davies (Shropshire Council)


Then all the world could see how in love we are
Gilbert & Gordon:




Unsung Stories will return in 2018, shining a light on the achievements of women whom conventional history has overlooked. Working with local communities and artists, Heritage Open Days will bring together the stories of hundreds of women who have changed our lives in different ways.

These 'Extraordinary Women' will be celebrated in recognition of the centenary of the Universal Suffrage Act, when some women finally gained the right to vote - an important milestone on the route to equality.

Hear the latest news at:
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