

## THE FUTURE OF FAIRFIELD HALLS

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A discussion contribution by Sean

### FRED SCOTT, CROYDON PIANIST, ON WORKING WITH FH

FH has always been co-operative in allowing me to book events there focused on performances involving local young artists across genres of music.

'Soundpractice has staged events including lunchtime concerts, pre-concert foyer performances and events for last year's Coleridge-Taylor Festival. This last especially was a great forum for young people to perform; some students of mine were able to have premiered a piece they had written around SCT, also involving LMP in the performance.

Last November saw local Youth Theatre Company Studio 74 give the first performance in Ashcroft Theatre of a new musical by Stella Coussell (South London composer) called 'Song for the World', based around the life of SCT, a further performance for BHM 2013 is currently being arranged.

in addition, Soundpractice has been able to put on concerts as fund-raisers for Skeletal Cancer Action Trust, some of these have featured people affected by that disease. More of these concerts are planned for 2014.

There will be a series of concerts in Spring 2014 which will raise funds for SCAT, involving a celebration of the 80th birthday of eminent British composer, and South London resident, Justin Connolly, who will also be performing himself.

Future concerts in 2014 will also include prominent international artists in recital who bring their considerable following to Croydon.

Included in current planning is to stage a major international-reach multi-genre music festival culminating in a collaboration to find instrumentalists, composers and conductors of excellence.

I would like to help re-establish FH as a major centre within London for the staging of important musical/cultural events as it is my firmly held belief that if the profile can be raised sufficiently this will only benefit Croydon and demonstrate new possibilities to young people for avenues of achievement. Fred Scott runs the Croydon Music Piano Centre, and Soundpractice music agency.

### SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR FESTIVAL 2012

Croydon based Surrey Opera's Artistic Director Jonathan Butcher initiated the year long Croydon Samuel Coleridge Taylor Festival. Several events in the programme were held at FH, including the world premiere of the SC-T's opera Thelma, and those organised by Fred Scott of Soundpractice agency (see above).

#### Introduction

The content of the above boxes by Fred Scott and about the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Festival are examples of how individuals and groups can help to ensure that FH has a varied programme of events, in Fred's case with a particular emphasis on showcasing Croydon and South London young talent, and the Festival in celebrating a famous son of Croydon.

South Croydon Community Association is to be congratulated on the initiative to discuss the future of Fairfield Halls.

'The aim of the meeting is to organise ourselves so that we can present a coherent vision to the management and trustees of Fairfield Halls and ensure that their programme more closely meets the needs of the community.

By bringing together many groups from across the Borough it must also be possible to put together better bids for funding for Arts for the Fairfield Halls and other venues.'

## Questions

The Group has listed the following questions:

1. What entertainment, if any, would people pay for?
2. How can the Fairfield Halls best serve Croydon?
3. How can the Fairfield Halls generate employment, especially for young people?
4. Can we create links between the Fairfield Halls and various community groups?

Additional questions that could be asked include:

What improvements to publicity can be undertaken?

How can FH's publicity be linked to community websites and enetworks?

Can those involved in Croydon Tech City help develop a cultural enetwork?

Has FH got any spare space behind the scenes as office/workspace for cultural organisations?

What is the scope for increasing the number of exhibitions displayed at FH, including in partnership with other organisations e.g. the current exhibition Modern Masters in Print: Matisse, Picasso, Dalí and Warhol at Wandsworth Museum in partnership with the Victoria & Albert Museum?

Can lunch-time events be scheduled every day?

What can be learnt from other venues like Battersea Arts Centre?

How can the range of food and speed of service be improved at the café to make FH a venue for people meeting informally for social and business purposes?

## Some Comments

I have received the following comments.

- There needs to be a better overall mix of events = very little studio stuff - film showings should be very popular.
- Long term, the approach to the halls needs improvement - lighting at least - it is currently bleak and somewhat forbidding.
- How can the larger concert hall be better used for events which do not attract a full audience - e.g. partitioning - would it be sensible to have long term plans for smaller auditoriums - similar too, but better carried out, like many cinemas?
- The largest hall is poorly lit and badly in need of renovation if it is to attract conferences and weddings which would perhaps allow for occasional charity events/fairs.
- The food outlet needs huge improvement - expensive and not that good.

## The Future Role of the Council

Croydon Council's record over the last few years seems to have been one of cultural destruction.

The Budget Options papers 2013-14 approved earlier this year spelt this out as follows:

- *'Reduce the council role in facilitation of culture - including reducing the archive service to a statutory minimum.'*

It is deeply worrying when any local authority reduces its support for the wide range of cultural and heritage activities. We have already seen the damage done by the closure of the David Lean Cinema in the Clocktower, the shafting of the Warehouse Theatre, and the uncertainties about the future of the libraries. The rich heritage and history of Croydon is an important part of cultural activity. Fortunately after objections the Council reversed its position on the reduction in the role of the Local Archives/Studies service.

With further cuts that it will have to make, regardless of which political party is in control, the Council cannot be relied on to invest any serious sums of money in cultural activities. It will stretch the energies of campaigners to defend what little remains, especially in respect of the Libraries and the Archives/Local Studies Service. While it has a Cultural Strategy what it can do to implement it will be determined by budget constraints.

In sharp contrast to Croydon's approach is that of Tory run Wandsworth Council. The annual Arts Festival takes place this year from 3-19 May, and the Heritage Festival from 30 May to 16 June.

## **Towards a Community Cultural & Heritage Strategy**

Community and voluntary sector organisations involved in cultural and heritage activities could consider developing their own Cultural & Heritage Strategy, designed to foster joint working, identifying sources of money, sustaining what exists, and forming the basis for demands on the Council in the future.

Every community and voluntary organisation is involved or can be involved in cultural and heritage activity. See Appendix 1.

There a number of broader issues that need to be taken into account in preparing such a Strategy including the continuing recession, 'spiritual' capital, and community cohesion and diversity. See Appendix 2.

### **New Opportunities**

New opportunities continue to emerge.

- The Heritage Lottery Fund continues to support a range of local projects, many of which use a wide range of cultural approaches to telling historical stories and examining aspects of the heritage of the built environment. HLF has just announced a new programme for smaller funded projects - see Appendix 3.
- Whitgift Foundation has announced it would like to do more work on Croydon's heritage, but is looking for funding, despite its own massive asset base and income generation. Discussions need to be held with the Trustees to persuade them to invest funds in community cultural and heritage activities.
- Whether you agree or not with the massive funding redevelopment of the Whitgift shopping centre, the developers will have to provide a large sum of money under the Community Infrastructure Levy (which has replaced Section 106). There is a strong case for lobbying them (and the Council) to endow a fund for community cultural and heritage activity and perhaps to invest in a programme of rejuvenating FH if agreement can be reached between FH management and whatever Community Cultural & Heritage Alliance emerges from the discussions initiated at the South Croydon Community Association meeting.

### **Where Next?**

I hope that the discussion started at the meeting will continue, with perhaps a follow-up meeting in which those attending work in small groups on aspects of developing a Community Cultural & Heritage Strategy leading the formation of a Community Cultural & Heritage Alliance.

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See previous related discussion pieces at

<http://insidecroydon.com/2013/01/11/croydon-needs-to-keep-a-proper-grasp-of-its-history>

<http://thecroydoncitizen.com/campaigns/why-archives-matter-a-historian-writes>.

<http://historyandsocialaction.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/croydon-council-plans-to-reduce-its.html>

<http://thecroydoncitizen.com/culture/samuel-coleridge-taylor-remembered>

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Network: <https://sites.google.com/site/samuelcoleridgetaylornetwork>.

Wandsworth Arts Festival programme:

[www.wandsworth.gov.uk/downloads/file/8010/wandsworth\\_arts\\_festival\\_and\\_fringe\\_2013\\_brochure](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/downloads/file/8010/wandsworth_arts_festival_and_fringe_2013_brochure).

## THE RELEVANCE OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL ACTIVITIES

### Introduction

Most people like to socialise. People do not have to be able to draw or to play a musical instrument to be creative.

Socialisation and creativity can form the basis for community celebrations using environmental themes bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds.

The activity undertaken through shared projects can:

- help individuals become more aware of what they can do and the positive effects this can have for their local community;
- lead to a greater sense of community belonging, appreciation of the area's local distinctiveness and what people value about it, and awareness of broader environmental issues.

### How To Start

You can explore how the local environment has developed, or a well-known feature of the local environment through cultural and historical activities

### The Development of The Local Environment

The local environment (the buildings, the roads, the open spaces, the shops and other services) has developed over time to what it is today as a result of the local geography and the decisions of landowners, property developers, businesses, the Government, Parliament, the local Council, individual residents and community organisations.

The physical look has sometimes been the subject of local campaigns for a new service to be provided, or to stop or modify a development proposal.

Depending on how long they have lived in the area, most people know what the changes have been say in the last 5 years and whether they think they have been for better or worse.

Those who have lived in the area for longer know a lot more about how and when the changes took place.

This knowledge can help build up an understanding about how and why the local area has evolved into its current shape.

One of the strengths of this approach is its exploration of the past.

History is not just about kings, queens, famous people and wars. It is also about 'ordinary people'.

### A Well-Known Feature Of The Local Environment

The local environment might have a well-known feature. e.g. a common, an open spaces, particular trees, flowers and fruits, a church or other building. An activity can be based around celebrating this feature. This approach can also be linked in with history.

- Has the area been famous in the past for particular flowers, trees or crops (e.g. lavender, apples)?
- What used to be the traditional crafts of the area using local plant and trees?
- How did the common become protected from building development?

### Some Planning Questions

In terms of planning a cultural activity a community organisation may want to ask:

- What does it hope to achieve through the activity e.g. improve the level of shared community activity; open up people's eyes to their local environment and the part they can play it making and keeping it pleasant?

- Does it want to focus the activity on a particular aspect of environmental themes or concerns e.g. celebrate flowers and trees; highlight the need for action on litter and graffiti?
- What are the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of the local area? e.g. an old building, a common, a park, an old tree, a wood, a river or stream, the roads, derelict buildings.

### Different Cultural Approaches

You can use a wide variety of cultural approaches: drawing, painting, photography, video and film making, drama, dance, music, song, mural painting, writing. Craft.

A wide range of different cultural activities will result.

### Some Practical Ideas

- Exhibition of drawings, paintings or photographs. Perhaps a prize could be given with local business sponsorship.
- A book of old photographs and postcards with people's reminiscences and comments on them.
- A photographic display of the pleasant and unpleasant, good and bad features of the local environment. A wall newspaper could be put up for people to record their comments.
- A video about the local environment and its good and bad features, including interviews with local people. This could be shown at meetings of organisations in the community, and in local schools. People's reactions and comments could be recorded.
- An illustrated talk
- A book of reminiscences about life in the area and the key events that shaped it.
- Books could be launched with an exhibition and a social event.
- Exhibitions can be moved around different public halls, churches, local schools and colleges
- A play on an aspect of local history written and performed by local people.
- A Music Festival.
- A walk around the area asking those taking part for their knowledge and comments on what they see.
- A guide to local walks, the features along them, and aspects of the local history.
- A Neighbourhood Map: drawn, painted; sewn; made of tiles.
- A Flower and Tree Festival.
- A May Day or Mid-Summer Festival.
- An Apple Day.
- Story telling activities.
- Craft based improvements e.g. hedges, stonewalling, seats, wooden painted signs.
- A community garden.

From Sean Creighton. *Environmental Action Pack for Community Organisations* (Community Matters, 1996).

## BROADER ISSUES RELEVANT TO DEVELOPING A CULTURAL STRATEGY

### Culture and Recession

The economic recession has had a number of effects on cultural activities:

- reduced funding from local and central government, cultural agencies and charitable trusts
- reduced surplus income meaning fewer people can afford to take part in cultural activities as audiences
- increased entertainment and leisure activities in the home

These may have been counter-balanced by:

- a greater demand for involvement in cultural activities to ensure increased levels of enjoyment
- a greater demand to develop skills in cultural activities to give people an interesting hobby or to develop income generation or to increase chances in job prospects when the economy improves

### ‘Spiritual Capital’

Cultural strategy can be linked in with regeneration and neighbourhood renewal strategies. Such strategies talk about ‘social’, economic’, ‘environmental’ and ‘social exclusion’, and ‘social’, economic’ and ‘environmental’ capital.

Yet the fear of crime, the general decay of the state of the local environment, the lack of prospects, can all have adverse effects on individuals’ sense of well-being and mental health. The experience of social exclusion or the onset of sudden crises, whether economic or health, can adversely affect the way people feel. The constant experience of negative material conditions has an adverse effect on the human spirit.

We should also be talking about ‘spiritual capital’. This not the same as the religious concept of ‘spirituality’. A non-religious example is the conclusion of longitudinal historical medical research from the United States that the more intellectually stimulated very old people remain, the healthier they remain.

The sections of the population most likely to be adversely affected by a general low level of ‘spiritual’ capital and be particularly further disadvantaged by the economic recession are those in lower and fixed income groups, and those who are socially isolated because of economic, and cultural reasons. Therefore an important element in developing a Cultural & Heritage Strategy should be to concentrate on encouraging cultural activities which enable participation at a free or low cost basis.

### Community Cohesion and Diversity

One of the most difficult aspects of cultural strategy relates to its contribution to community cohesion and diversity. The cultural diversity of a Borough’s residents from different national and ethnic backgrounds can be showcased in various ways throughout the year. However, events do not necessarily attract large audiences from other national or ethnic groups. A good diverse attendance, however, does not mean that people attending will meet and talk with each other, as most people find meeting strangers difficult. There are no easy answers to how to encourage people to meet each other across different national and ethnic divides. It needs a small core of event organisers to make the effort to introduce people to each other and facilitate conversation. The occasions which offer the most potential are:

- Festival events, especially those based in parks and open spaces.
- Street festivals serving a small number of streets or an estate are excellent ways of beginning to encourage neighbours to meet and get to know each other better.
- Multi-faith cultural activities, especially as many Christian, and particularly Muslim, organisations have diverse national and ethnic congregations.
- Community Centres putting on events in which different user groups showcase their activity.
- Re-packaging School Fetes and Bazaars as Neighbourhood Festivals to attract non-parents.

Festival organisation is not easy and requires a reasonable level of funding for core organisational costs, as well as meeting all the costs relating to venue and equipment hire, health and safety, licences, as well as paying for performers.

## HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

The new Heritage Lottery Sharing History fund of £3m will enable community groups to commission people who can help them to tell their local stories through digital, print and exhibition design. The scheme, which will have a dedicated annually renewed fund pledging grants of between £3,000 and £10,000, has been given the green light following the success of its forerunner All Our Stories, a one-off HLF grant scheme.

All Our Stories is bringing several projects to bear, inc:

- The Raleigh project commemorates the Raleigh Bicycle Company's factory with an online archive for former workers to deposit their photographs and written and recorded memories, such as trialling the first ever Chopper.
- Lost Pubs of Chapel Street is a Salford-based community-driven digital and social media project aiming to capture the changes, but also show how some pubs have adapted and thrived as music and arts venues.

The HLF says the new Sharing Heritage projects are expected to cover a wide range of subject matter including local archaeology, a community's cultures and traditions, conserving sites or items of local significance and holding festivals and events to commemorate the past. For further information visit [www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply](http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply).