Imaginary Journeys

WILDWORKS is an arts-led international theatre company with a focus on site-specific events.

Location
Seven Cornish locations: Liskeard, Bude, Wadebridge, St Austell, Penryn, Hayle, Penzance

Aim
Provide access to the Arts across Cornwall; build and communicate with new audiences; animate open spaces to support town-centre regeneration.

Photo by Steve Tanner

Imaginary Journeys was an Arts in the Community Project commissioned by FEAST, a programme to make great art happen across Cornwall. The project was located in seven venues across Cornwall: Penzance, Hayle, Penryn, St Austell, Wadebridge, Liskeard and Bude. The towns were selected to cover the length and breadth of Cornwall.

WildWorks commissioned 24 Cornwall-based artists to participate in the project. The artists came from a range of disciplines: visual arts, film, photography, performance, multi-media, etc. In every town there was at least one artist local to the area and one artist at an early stage of their career to provide a professional development opportunity within the project.

The theme was Imaginary Journeys: Travel Agencies. This was interpreted in diverse ways, but the metaphor of the travel agency provided unity to the project. Each branch was located in unconventional town-centre premises: empty shops, community centres and, in one case, it was peripatetic.

WildWorks Travel Agencies were designed to encourage interaction with non-traditional arts audiences. Content for the project was drawn from the community. The idea was that each town would feel a sense of ownership for their Travel Agency and that the community would find itself reflected in the installation. The WildWorks Travel Agencies were open for two weeks in late winter 2009 to provide people with an exciting and engaging activity during low-season, the timing also ensured that it was a predominantly local audience.

Engagement Events

Cloud 9 Time Travel - Champions Yard, Penzance

Cloud 9 Time Travel was designed to be an immersive environment, which invited participants to dream of travel through time and space. Cloud 9 was situated in very small premises on a busy shopping street in Penzance. The team decided to draw their audiences from the street, the shops, cafes and restaurants. The resulting demographic included shoppers, people running errands, college students on their way to classes, children on their way back from school. It attracted people from all ages including the notoriously hard-to-reach teenage group.

What would you miss?

What would you miss?
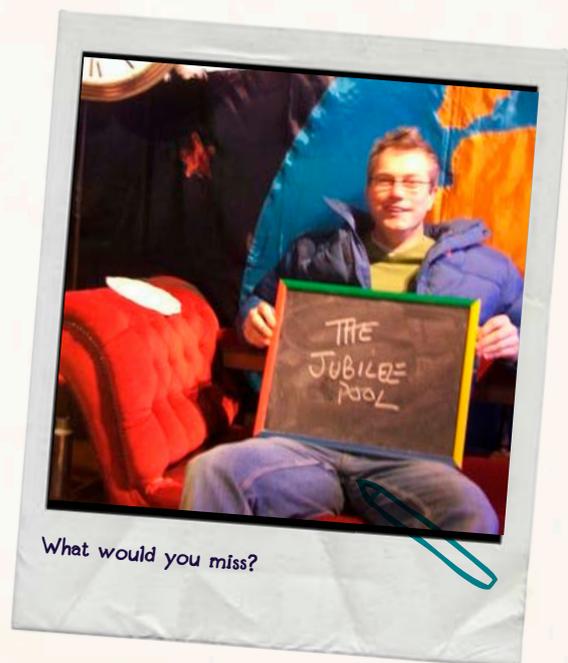
Hollows Shop of Time – The Passmore Edwards Institute, Hayle

The project started with a series of five workshops at Penpol Primary School, where the children created poetry and artworks around the theme of place. The children also planned a tea-treat for their elders, created invitations and were trained in interview techniques. The guests were asked to bring photographs, artefacts and share their memories of Hayle. As well as collecting memories, they collected time-travel requests from their guests.

One of my guests was Betty who is 91...she once did somersaults on the train.

Photo by Steve Tanner

The children created time-travel clocks that incorporated the images and stories they had collected, as well as their own poems and artwork.

The team then went on to create an interactive exhibition in the space at the Passmore Edwards Institute where they created a Shop of Time.

Hollows Shop of Time drew in the people of Hayle to a celebration of memory and pride of place, as well as an opportunity to reflect on their hopes for the future.

The Penryn Travel Agents – 40 Lower Market Street, Penryn

In Penryn, we were loaned the premises of an art gallery on the main shopping street for the duration of the project. The premises were large and had internet access. The team created an immersive environment in which audiences could create connections between their homes in Penryn and their imaginary travel destinations, engaging with the community out in the town. The project invited participants to select their destination — real or imaginary — and consider what they'd take with them, thus linking their future aspirations with what they valued in the present. The location was found on the internet and projected on to a screen, offering a prompt to other 'customers' to stimulate conversations.

You are ready to travel to the place of your dreams....What will you take with you?
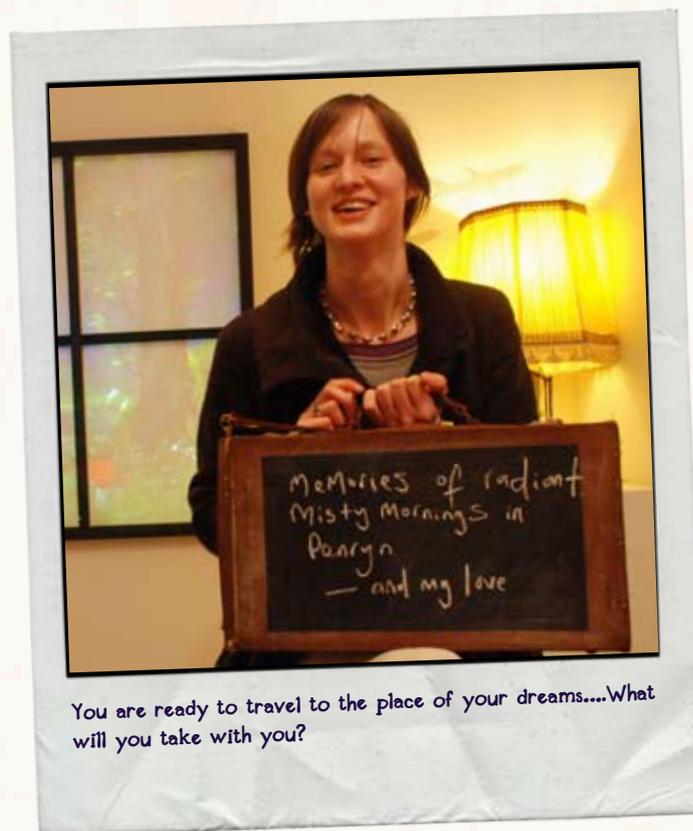
Thyme Travel Agents –The Florist Shop, Old Vicarage Place, St Austell

The St Austell Travel Agency was located in the premises of an old florists in the centre of town. This provided an ideal metaphor for growth and regeneration.
The team ran sessions with provocative and intriguing titles including 'Memory gathering', 'Flower-making' and 'Planting the seeds of hope' that were designed to encourage participants to think creatively about the past, present and future. They worked with Methodist groups, the Children's Centre and the over-fifties club, as well as setting up at stall at Par Market.

Thyme Travel Agency acted as a catalyst for people's memories and dreams of regeneration in St Austell.

Photo by Steve Tanner

Operation Wadebridge: Betjeman Centre and round about

Filming around Wadebridge, based at the Betjeman Centre

Operation Wadebridge was a film-based project. Three film-makers spent three weeks filming in and around Wadebridge, in people's homes, at the John Betjeman Centre and in the countryside around the town. The result was a series of short films that engage with the community and its sense of place from a number of different angles.

The films were premiered at the Betjeman Centre in Wadebridge to a local audience and were distributed by DVD at strategic locations within the town. The recipients were encouraged to keep the project alive by passing the disk onto family, friends or strangers within the community once they had viewed it.

Liskeard's Post Ladies
Photo by Steve Tanner

TRAVELLING POSTAL AGENTS – All around Liskeard

We were unable to find premises in Liskeard so the team turned this challenge into a strength by becoming itinerant. They became the Liskeard Travelling Post Ladies, travelling around the town on their bikes collecting and delivering specially commissioned mail to different parts of the community. At the community centre they gathered memories and turned them into postcards, at school children made 'Parcels of hope' containing gifts. These parcels were then delivered to the elders of St Austell, who respond with 'Letters of memory'.

Determined to make the most of the opportunity, the team went to the Cattle Market, the Darby and Joan Club, schools, the poetry group, the Echo Centre, the Liskerrett Art group, old people's homes, Stuart House, the Stroke Association, the pre-school groups, the Breathers group, collecting and delivering postcards as they went, creating an intergenerational dialogue about the future throughout the town.
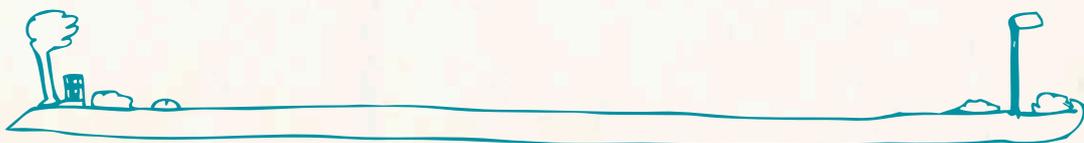
JETTISONS - 11a Belle Vue, Bude

In Bude, we found premises at an old Surf Shop not far from the beach. Some of the team visited the local schools and set up a project with the children making paper boats with messages. Hundreds of messages were floated down the river towards the open sea.

Other team members met with bin-men, beach-rangers, elders, fishermen, shopkeepers, business owners, guest-house owners, hoteliers, and scout clubs, with the aim of engaging them in a very peculiar project. Jettisons wanted the unwanted: objects that could enjoy a new lease of life as part of an installation. Objects flowed into Jettisons and their former owners were encouraged to add the story of each item so they accumulated significance, documenting a lost side to the town. And then, finally the process was reversed and people were given the chance to take away whatever they wanted.
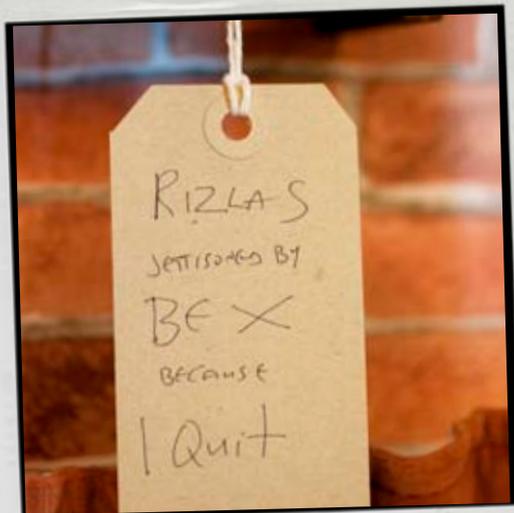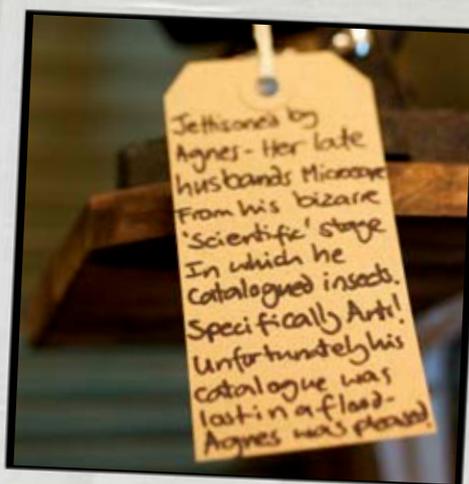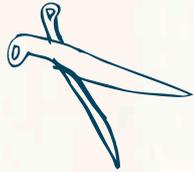

Photo by Steve Tanner

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Techniques

A host of different techniques were used on this project. Too many to itemise here, but these are some of our guiding principles.

Occupying empty premises in town centres.

Creating temporary convivial spaces in Cornish towns.

Gathering of photographs, artefacts and memories and presenting them back to the community through arts-based media.

Devising imaginative ways to stimulate community conversations.

Using arts-based strategies to facilitate creative engagement with place and community.

Key concepts

△ Exploring pride of place.

▢ Valuing memory.

△ Facilitating the imaginative expression of dreams, fears, hopes and aspirations.

▢ Imagining futures.