

A historical map of New Briggate, showing a grid of streets and various buildings. The map is rendered in a dark, textured style. Key streets include Merrion Place at the top, Merrion Street below it, Harrison Street at the bottom, and Brilbarn Street on the left. Buildings are labeled with names such as 'Grand Theatre', 'Old Grammar School Foundry', 'Victoria Club', and 'Street Mills'. There are also smaller labels like 'M.G.U. Pond', 'Fire Tank', and 'Chimney'. The map shows a dense urban layout with numerous small structures and larger, more prominent buildings.

HIDDEN HISTORIES OF NEW BRIGGATE



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INTRODUCTION

Hidden Histories of New Briggate was started in 2021 as part of the National High Street Heritage Action Zone programme taking place in 60 towns and cities across England. A partnership between Leeds City Council and Historic England, the New Briggate High Street Heritage Action Zone project delivered heritage-led regeneration through the use of government-funded grants for improvements to buildings and public spaces.

East Street Arts, working with a cultural consortium of seven organisations, delivered a complementary three-year programme of culture that showcased New Briggate's rich and diverse story with the help of specially commissioned artists and a wide-ranging process of community engagement. The New Briggate cultural consortium included Leeds City Council, Leeds Heritage Theatres, Opera North, Age UK, North Bar & Brewery, Leeds Civic Trust and the Churches Conservation Trust.





NEW BRIGGATE, 1929
© MARK LANE

INTRODUCTION

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

New Briggate is the gateway to the city centre of Leeds - the start of the busy and bustling commercial and cultural high street. Dating back to the 19th century and home to the oldest church in Leeds, St John's, New Briggate was a development of 'Briggate' and became the destination for Leeds Grand Theatre in 1878. Since then it has housed other world-renowned cultural organisations such as Opera North and the Howard Assembly Room, as well as a fascinating mix of shops, bars, infamous nightclubs, takeaways, cinemas, afro-hairdressers, trams and buses.

New Briggate is home to a transient community. What makes this street special is the range of people who have used it over time: frequent bus service users to Little London, Chapeltown and further afield to and from Harrogate; night owls using the taxi ranks after enjoying the independent bars, clubs, karaoke spots and take-aways; sex workers; lovers of live theatre, opera and music; and people seeking shelter in St John's Churchyard (which adds a welcome communal green space to the street). A unique mix, you will not find on any other street in Leeds like it.

Our primary aim was to celebrate the past, present and future of one of the most unique high streets in Leeds. We wanted

to ensure, despite the changing landscape and regeneration of the street, that the stories and footprints of those who have used it over the last century are not lost or forgotten. Culture has been, and still is, a critical part of New Briggate. We developed a cultural programme for the high street due to the danger of aspects of its culture being lost - New Briggate is at risk of gentrification, and having its history erased, and changes to the physical environment could alienate its diverse users. Communities living on the fringes of the city centre, in neighbourhoods like Little London and Chapeltown, are seeing themselves less and less represented, and now that the bus stops have moved the takeaways may well be the last remaining element people feel a connection or sense of ownership over on New Briggate. We wanted to celebrate and leave a lasting imprint of these identities on the high street, and include the community voice in what happens here in the future.

HIDDEN HISTORIES OF NEW BRIGGATE AND THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME

With high streets, and the amount of people using them, changing more than ever in a post-COVID and economically struggling country, we drew upon the multidisciplinary skills and independent nature of the New Briggate consortium to appeal to a wide range of people, create memorable experiences and become something other than just another, uninspired, high street. We added economic value by creating and facilitating new employment opportunities through the recruitment of artists and creative professionals for the cultural programme.

We commissioned artists working directly with identified communities to uncover, explore and respond to the stories of New Briggate. By directly relating this history to each community, we were able to create a greater understanding and appreciation of the heritage on their high street. When artists collaborated with consortium members they were able to act as a conduit between the community voice and the businesses and organisations on the high street, developing a dialogue between the two that ensured local needs, insights and narratives were listened and responded to. Ultimately we have sparked an interest, instilled pride and evoked an appetite for more presence of culture on our future high streets.



¹ NEW BRIGGATE, 2021

THE ARTISTS: YAKU STAPLETON AND HARRY CLAYTON-WRIGHT

Two artists were commissioned, from the beginning, to collaborate with us in celebrating the past, present and future of New Briggate. Through their creative lens, we were able to further showcase the rich history of the street, and the area, in exciting, provocative and engaging ways that complemented their practices and likewise gave the project a sense of integrity and depth. We were delighted, after many applications, to appoint Yaku Stapleton and Harry Clayton-Wright as our chosen artists. Both artists used research and community co-creation to devise new art pieces which uncovered untold stories and brought people's focus back to a place in the city which could easily be overlooked.

Yaku Stapleton is an artist and fashion designer, based in London. Yaku graduated from a BA in Fashion at Leeds Beckett University in 2021, then went on to study MA Fashion (Menswear) at UAL Central Saint Martins (2021-23). In February 2023, Yaku won the prestigious L'Oréal Professionnel Creative Award, which recognises exceptional talent amongst UAL's graduating students. Yaku's work focuses on perception, natural form, and self-exploration through the lens of Afrofuturism. He realises these themes through garments, sculpture, furniture, and digital design.

Harry Clayton-Wright is a performance artist, writer and radical creator whose work spans theatre, installation, zine and film. Harry's debut solo theatre show Sex Education premiered in 2017 winning the LGBTQ award at Brighton Fringe Festival and was nominated for a Total Theatre Award (Emerging Artist/Company) at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2019. Harry was also selected as one of the British Council's Artists to Watch as part of the Edinburgh Showcase 2019.



² YAKU - ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW, 2023



³ HARRY - A LIGHT AT THE PLAZA, 2023

PEOPLE, PERMANENCE AND PLACE

Without people there would be no high street, without heritage there would be no permanence, and without a sense of place there would be no community. It is people that have created businesses and historic cultural institutions on New Briggate, with them they bring their livelihoods and stories, leaving their mark behind. We, the people, are the future of our high streets and carry a responsibility to develop them in ways that evoke meaning, culture and significance as we adapt to the changing demands of our society. People have been the driving force of our programming through the project. Here are some of the best examples of how everyday stories have been immortalised through our work and beyond.





STUDIO 20, VIPERS SKIFFLE GROUP, 1955
© THE TERRY CRYER ARCHIVE

SOUNDS OF NEW BRIGGATE

Sounds of New Briggate is a series of four commissioned podcast episodes that captures the stories of the communities who have lived, worked and spent time on New Briggate and its surrounding areas. Local experts interviewed a range of contributors to bring the street's vibrant history to life. The series gives an opportunity to delve deeper into a range of topics and stories gathered throughout the project, such as: the Jewish community who began their journey in Leeds in synagogues, businesses and housing in the area; the area's Black history and connections to the Leeds West Indian Carnival; the wealth of jazz music history centred around Bob Barclay's Studio 20; and the many wild evenings spent dancing after dark with New Briggate's clubs and nightlife.

This series is a legacy of the project, bringing New Briggate and its stories to audiences everywhere, whilst using the podcast as a way of representing those who find similarities in their own lived experiences to the people on the street. It captures an important social history of Leeds, beyond the traditional narrative and resists the values of gentrification by honouring the stories of the people that created the New Briggate we know and love.

EPISODE ONE: NIGHTLIFE ON NEW BRIGGATE

Hosted by Suzy Mason, co-founder of
The Kit Kat Club, Vague and Speedqueen

EPISODE TWO: JEWISH HISTORY

Hosted by Simon Phillips, Leeds Jewish
Housing Association

EPISODE THREE: BLACK HISTORY

Hosted by Joe Williams, Heritage Corner

EPISODE FOUR: JAZZ HISTORY

Hosted by Steve Crocker, Leeds Jazz

With contributions from East Street Arts'
Alice Boulton-Breeze and Florence Simms.

Listen to sounds of new briggate at
eastst.art/sounds-of-new-briggate

ONE STEP AT A TIME

We successfully delivered two series of walking tours in 2022 and 2023. Both programmes helped us to identify new histories and stories deserving of a platform for audiences to engage with. Local community members showcased their knowledge and enthusiasm for the cultural heritage of the New Briggate high street and surrounding areas. A number of personal stories were uncovered and provoked further questions, discussions and celebrations between audiences and tour guides. The tours highlighted the impact and legacy of British colonial histories and practices, nightlife economies, and the lived experiences of those people working at the fringes of cultural life on New Briggate. The walking tours helped to reframe the built environment of the high street and offered new perspectives on topics as wide ranging as social integration, interfaith practices, the influence and significance of migrant communities, and the civic role of arts and culture. One person said that the events were, 'literally hidden histories exposing the diversity of what Leeds has been/is about.'

BACKSTAGE AT THE GRAND

The Grand Theatre invited participants backstage to look at the significant people and events in their 140-year history.

CINEMA MEMORIES

Hyde Park Picture House (part of Leeds Heritage Theatres) hosted a walking tour of the cinema history of Leeds city centre, including the cinemas on New Briggate.

ON STAGE WITH OPERA NORTH

Opera North hosted participants on stage to explore the production of theatre, before seating them to catch a dress rehearsal of their latest opera production.

STEP INSIDE SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH

Dr Lucy Jessop guest hosted participants in Leeds' oldest church, Saint John's, focusing on the significance of the pews and how they've been modified over time.

JEWISH HERITAGE OF NEW BRIGGATE

Leeds historians Robert Dyson and Nigel Grizzard explored New Briggate's history as a prominent Jewish hub from the 1860s to the 1920s.

LEEDS: A CITY OF JAZZ

Jazz expert Steve Crocker celebrated Studio 20 (now Cellar Bar) and the Trades Club (Chapeltown)'s history and New Briggate's flourishing, present-day jazz scene.

WALK, TALK, MAKE!

Yaku Stapleton shared his research into the clothing and tailoring industry across Leeds, asking participants to creatively respond with drawings along the way.

PROTEST AT THE PLAZA

Harry Clayton-Wright explored alternative histories of the Howard Assembly Room and New Briggate, involving stories of protest, cult films and more from the Plaza cinema.

BLACK HISTORY LEEDS

Historian Joe Williams gave insight into Leeds' hidden international narratives that speak to its rich diversity today. Revealing evidence of immense contributions from Africa and the Caribbean, going back many centuries and including the direct relevance of West Indian Carnival heritage to Leeds' history.

'Leeds is a very modern city that shrouds its history in modernity, economically and architecturally. Anything that can throw a spotlight on massive historical gems is a worthy endeavour!'

TOUR PARTICIPANT



4 WALKING TOUR, 2022



5 WALKING TOUR, 2022

STUART LINDEN RHODES: PHOTOGRAPHY AND ARCHIVING

Through commissioned artist Harry Clayton-Wright, we met Stuart Linden Rhodes, a prominent photographer known for documenting, and thereafter archiving, the gay and queer scene across nightclubs, private parties, local pubs and pride events in England. To further represent the queer community across Leeds and its heritage on New Briggate, whilst also platforming Linden Rhodes' very popular but less seen work, we curated a photography exhibition that took place on the street, during Leeds Pride month, in August 2023. Using the now-closed public toilets, once known as the cottaging spot 'Brill's Cottage', as well as shop windows and North Bar, the images were prominent on New Briggate. This on-street exhibition illustrated the importance of photography archives, within heritage projects, for marginalised communities and their place in the narrative, something that Stuart discussed with artist Emma Bentley-Fox in a recorded conversation for a podcast exploring the future of photography archives. Artworks were brought directly to people, outside of cultural institutions, sparking conversations and evoking memories.



⁶ STUART LINDEN RHODES, EXHIBITION PLANNING



⁷ STUART LINDEN RHODES ARCHIVE



⁸ STUART LINDEN RHODES ARCHIVE

DRAWING TIME

New Briggate is famous for its takeaway food. With that, we began to think about other things you might want to take away - tangible pieces of artwork to engage the public with the history and culture of New Briggate in an accessible way.

Drawing Time was a series of nine commissions for artists working in illustration and drawing, looking at representing the history of the street and its changes over time. The commissions each took different forms, such as collage, painting, illustration and lino-cut printing, and addressed myths about the infamous Central Hotel, fantasies of Star Wars spilling out of the cinema, and shop signs from different eras. We also selected two archive images, one of a band playing in Studio 20 jazz club (now Cellar Bar) on the street, and another of an animal rights protest outside the Plaza cinema. Using stylistic references to 1960s graphic design to create beer mats.

As well as being displayed on the wall in North Bar, a well-known venue that has been on New Briggate for over 25 years, the Drawing Time commissions were also transformed into a series of 'merchandise' for use in the businesses on the street, as the second edition of our Take Away Art series. This saw the designs adorning pint

glasses, pizza boxes, shopping bags, beer mats, bookmarks, postcards and more. This was a successful collaboration with 10 local businesses and for three of the nine artists selected, this was their first professional commission. We also created a further three series of Take Away Art for our final events programme including Carnival-themed flags, pop cans and bespoke ties.



TAKE AWAY ART - BEER MATS, 2022 - 2023



TAKE AWAY ART - BEER MATS, 2022 - 2023



ELLY BAZIGOS - TICKET TO NEW BRIGGATE, 2023



BRAD ALLSOP - TALES FROM AN OLD 'NEW BRIGGATE', 2023



HARRY CLOWES - WALK THROUGH TIME, 2023



CHLOE HENSON - THE CENTRAL HOTEL, 2023



ALASTAIR FLINDALL - NOT SIGNED OFF, 2023



AYDON ASPIN - SHADOWS IN TIME, 2023



ELLIS PEARCE - UNTITLED, 2023



DAN COLLINS - STREET OF DREAMS, 2023



MEGAN DOBBYN - A TIME TRAVELLERS MAP OF NEW BRIGGATE, 2023

A COMMUNITY OF CREATIVES

In 2023 we delivered a series of community workshops. The aim was to design and deliver engaging, interactive sessions of discussion and creative activity, in order to share some of the stories and research themes that had emerged from the project so far with the wider community of Leeds. Additionally, it enabled us to reach those who may not regularly visit the high street, but still had valuable memories or stories to share.

We used our commissioned Drawing Time Take Away Art pieces as inspirational starting points for participants to collage with archival imagery of New Briggate - including historical, social and cultural scenes - to restore and enhance the local character of the high street with new audiences and users of the street. The creative workshops acted as a vehicle for improving perceptions of the high street and its heritage, whilst encouraging new cultural activity and positive legacy.

A total of nine workshops were delivered with community groups across four organisations. A series of three workshops were delivered at Caring Together in Woodhouse and two workshops were delivered as part of Touchstone's 'Your Space' service.

Running these workshops meant we were able to reach a wider cross section of people who may not have come to events on the high street, and we were also able to uncover some fantastic personal memories of New Briggate such as this one from Maureen Kershaw at Caring Together.

'As a young teenager in love with Cliff Richard and The Shadows, I was to see my pop idols at the Odeon Cinema which entailed queuing for several hours for much coveted front row seats costing 12/6d! Tickets went on sale in the February of 1962 coinciding with half-term at my Secondary Modern (Brudenell) whereas my friends schooled at nearby Thoresby High were in term-time therefore they queued until school-time, with me buying the tickets on their behalf.

As the City awoke, the morning cleaners arrived at the Odeon and kindly offered to bring out one of their green velvet sofas for us to sit on in comfort! As my friends left for school the cinema's General Manager appeared, asking who was first in the queue? It was me and I was beside myself when asked if I would like to meet Cliff at the Show? Would I? Yes - but how would my friends accept my good luck!

Next to arrive was the Yorkshire Evening Post photographer and that night's paper was a photo of three ladies and myself in the Odeon's foyer against a large poster advertising the show. On 22nd March 1962 a packed house screamed at Cliff & The Shadows and I met Cliff in his dressing room during the interval!

Of course mention has to be made of the old cinemas on New Briggate. All individual in their styles and entertainment provided, the Odeon being luxurious with its thick green carpet and sofas, potted plants and above all the sweeping double staircase to the Circle.

By contrast the Plaza was much more brash, I seem to remember cheeky posters and garish light bulbs all round the entrance on New Briggate. The Plaza's programme was not for my young years therefore was not missed when it closed!

The good old days of New Briggate hold many happy memories for me and generations will continue to make their memories too.'

MAUREEN KERSHAW



9 COMMUNITY WORKSHOP, 2023



10 THE QUEER MANIFESTO, 2024



11 THE QUEER MANIFESTO, 2024

TEXTILES AND PERFORMANCE

With Leeds Grand Theatre, Opera North and Howard Assembly Room, performing arts have placed New Briggate centre stage for centuries in the North of England and beyond. The city's impressive textile industry can also credit New Briggate for its success, with its huge tailoring heritage and manufacture of woven materials - this street has seen it all. What better partnership of practices, textiles and performance, to create a vibrant street of celebration, community identity and belonging.





OUT OF HOURS ON NEW BRIGGATE

From the start of Hidden Histories of New Briggate we had ambitions to take part in Light Night Leeds 2023. Why wouldn't we? A momentous event, attracting thousands of visitors each year, right at the heart of the city, inviting people to explore our wonderful New Briggate through the lens of artists.

Commissioned artists Harry Clayton-Wright and Yaku Stapleton each exhibited their own piece, both with visual and participatory elements. We had over 10,000 audience members across the two nights.

LIGHT NIGHT: A LIGHT AT THE PLAZA

Harry Clayton-Wright devised an engaging response to his research into Leeds' notorious former adult cinema, the Plaza, responding to memories of the cinema and its original vibrant neon signage. Harry worked in collaboration with designers and neon artists to produce a playful concept for the visual art piece which included the name of the cinema and a small mouse eating popcorn; paying homage to the memories of people who dropped popcorn to the delight of a thieving mouse! The art piece was displayed in the window of 42 New Briggate (part of The Grand Theatre) with artist Harry invigilating both nights, using the opportunity to share the tale of the mouse and promote his finale performance, A Night at the Plaza.

LIGHT NIGHT: ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW

Yaku Stapleton worked with artist Dan Fox and his 'Boom Bike' system, a projector powered by a manual bicycle, to create live animated projections in St John's Churchyard. The projected characters were developed using the designs of the young people Yaku worked with in a series of workshops. He used digital software to transform the 2D drawings into three-dimensional beings, each with their own set of playful movements: a short salsa dance, and swimming, running and spinning actions. Dan's system then used further software to animate the characters, responding to the audience interaction with changing music, creating a visually impactful and exciting artwork. In contrast to the historic St John's Church, these otherworldly creatures danced and climbed around the old stonework, even chasing the young people, wild at times. It was a delight for all the families to enjoy together. Dan's collaborator, Hannah Fox, also used the Boom Bike system to project the creations onto a photo board, allowing families to have their photographs taken as the creatures, as a memory to take home.



12 A LIGHT AT THE PLAZA - LIGHT NIGHT, 2023



13 ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW - LIGHT NIGHT, 2023



14 ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW - LIGHT NIGHT, 2023

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

As part of Heritage Open Days, we delivered events for each year of the project. Year one was an overall introduction to the Hidden Histories of New Briggate project and wider High Street Heritage Action Zone programme, with an exhibition and some drop-in activities in St John's Church.

Year two was more interactive and had more presence on the street with a temporary tattoo commission by Stacy Sagoo and Ultimate Skin. After meeting Sylvia, who has run the tattoo studio Ultimate Skin on New Briggate for over 30 years, it was clear the project needed to harness this amazing artform. This resulted in tattoo artist Stacey Sagoo exploring the historical research available from the start of the project and turning those ideas into bold designs that could then be printed and used as temporary tattoos. These were then used as an engagement tool at the 2022 Heritage Open Days event, acting as a catalyst for conversation and storytelling with young people and adults.

Year three, the final year, was marked with a large-scale pop-up carnival event, to celebrate the legacy of Leeds West Indian Carnival and part of its former route through the city.



¹⁵ CARNIVAL LEGACY REHEARSAL, 2023

A LEGACY OF LEEDS WEST INDIAN CARNIVAL

For Heritage Open Days 2023, in partnership with Leeds West Indian Carnival, we hosted a free public pop-up performance on New Briggate celebrating the history of Leeds Carnival in the city centre. Created and directed by artist Khadijah Ibrahim, Carnival Legacy was a narrated performance that explored where Carnival came from, dating back to slavery times, and its 1967 origin in Leeds.

As part of the event, we created a series of Take Away Art which included Carnival-themed whistles, flags, bandanas and a set of postcards which illustrated Leeds' 56-year history of Carnival. These were given out at the event and really enhanced people's enjoyment of it as they could then participate and go home with a memento from the day.

This event was a highlight for the project as it marked the history of a community who have used this high street for years, but no longer frequent it. As well as New Briggate being a former part of Leeds Carnival route, it was also home to the bus stops to and from Chapeltown for many years. This meant the footfall of people using the street were predominantly of Caribbean heritage and it is interesting to think of the many conversations and stories that happened here as they were getting

on and off or waiting for the next bus. Now the bus stops have moved, as part of the regeneration and pedestrianisation scheme, this community is no longer present and those stories have become absent. Through the work on the Carnival Legacy event we have been able to bring some of those people and conversations back to the high street and showcase this important heritage.

'I think it's absolutely amazing, a great example of culture in Leeds. It's [carnival performance] awesome - it brings everyone together. It should still come on this route - it's absolutely brilliant.'

EVENT ATTENDEE

Carnival Legacy engaged directly with the Caribbean community of Leeds with over 40 performers and volunteers from the community supporting the performance, and a diverse audience of over 200 people. There were also audiences who don't usually attend Leeds West Indian Carnival

in Chapeltown who got to experience a taste of Carnival and learn about its history through this event. The performance had a huge impact on the businesses on New Briggate as we worked in partnership with San Co-Co cafe to provide packed lunches for all the performers and volunteers, and shops such as HomeSense, the newsagents and the bars and takeaways all saw a rise in footfall and customers that day. Consortium member Opera North also supported the event with use of their rehearsal space and facilities for the performers. It was also reported by the businesses that it brought the street back to life and restored vibrancy, busyness and diversity to the street at a scale that has not been seen in a long time.

The performance was an hour long and ran twice throughout the day with DJ music in between. The last performance turned into a full street party and the atmosphere was so brilliant that it could have gone on all night. Two hen parties joined in on the dancing and it coincided with Founder of Leeds West Indian Carnival, Arthur France's birthday! A complete community-owned and supported celebration.

Carnival Legacy was also complemented by another aspect of East Street Arts' public Programme; Reflections of

Carnival, a large-scale mural, was being painted by artist Rhian Kempadoo-Millar simultaneously in Chapeltown, as part of our A City Less Grey public art programme. The two projects happening together meant that the profile was raised for both and gained lots of press coverage. It also enabled a strong partnership to be formed between East Street Arts and Leeds West Indian Carnival, and one we hope to continue and develop in the future.

This event really demonstrates how important it is to bring music, dancing and fun to our high streets, and how culture really does play a part in people's happiness. Some of the performers commented on how it was the perfect timing (16 Sept) to do a pop-up carnival as it was just enough time to recover after the main Carnival in August, but the costumes were still fresh and everyone was still up for a party. The impact of being able to perform in the city centre again was really positive for all performers. Lots of the feedback from both performers and audiences expressed a desire for the event to be repeated annually.



16 CARNIVAL LEGACY, 2023



17 CARNIVAL LEGACY, 2023



18 CARNIVAL LEGACY, 2023



19 CARNIVAL LEGACY, 2023



20 CARNIVAL LEGACY, 2023



21 CARNIVAL LEGACY, 2023

YAKU STAPLETON: ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW

Commissioned artist and fashion designer Yaku Stapleton presented his project finale in December 2023 at 42 New Briggate. It consisted of an exhibition of objects and garments, inspired by the illustrious clothing, textile production and tailoring heritage of New Briggate and beyond. The exhibition showcased a reimagining of clothing for communities of Leeds, today and in the future.

To inspire the wearable artworks, Yaku researched into the communities, fashion, clothing and costume that has been present on New Briggate over the years. This was presented via three 'looks'; Invisible Stitch, Loraptor and Feel GOOOD, with an accompanying display that highlighted the work he did with local communities that was integral to shaping the exhibition.

INVISIBLE STITCH

During a creative tour in 2022, Yaku encountered Robert Dyson, a Jewish historian, who provided insights into Leeds' Jewish history, including the location of a former synagogue on New Briggate. This sparked Yaku's interest in the late 1800s, a period marked by significant Jewish immigration to Leeds and the establishment of their community in The Leylands.

This group's tailoring expertise was crucial in establishing Leeds as a leader in quality clothing and bespoke tailoring, with the city producing 60% of Britain's suits by the 1960s. Invisible Stitch explored this history, focusing on the Jewish community's impact on tailoring. Robert later introduced Yaku to Harold Rose, whose family had opened a clothing factory behind Leeds' Grand Theatre. Harold's and Robert's stories further highlighted the Jewish community's integral role in shaping Leeds' tailoring legacy, now woven into the city's very fabric.

LORAPTOR

Loraptor paid homage to the iconic Leeds West Indian Carnival, Europe's oldest authentic Caribbean Carnival which visited New Briggate as part of a former parade route. Yaku delved into the Carnival's costume-making culture by spending time with renowned Leeds costume-makers Lorina and Fenella Gumbs from the AnonyMas troupe, and Hughbon and Seph Condor of High Esteem. Assisting them in preparation for 2023's Carnival offered a deeper understanding of the intricacy, dedication, time, and effort that goes into this annual heritage event.

FEEL GOOOD

From the iconic jazz club Studio 20 to the elegant Leeds Grand Theatre and many bars, pubs and clubs in between, New Briggate has a long history of nightlife and entertainment; encouraging visitors to dress in their finest going-out gear and frequent the street's hot spots. After a creative workshop and conversation, Yaku invited some of the women from Feel Good Factor to co-create Feel GOOOD, a piece that blends elements of their most memorable outfits from their younger days.

Each look was presented on characters co-created with local communities from the Co-Op Academy and Leeds Grand Youth Theatre. Yaku introduced the local young people to New Briggate's history, encouraging them to use it as inspiration for creating characters that reflect the local historical dress fashion. This creative journey started with 2D collages and drawings, evolving into plasticine sculptures and draping with second-hand garments, which partly inspired the final designs. These sculptures were later digitally transformed into 3D and premiered at Light Night Leeds 2023 in St John's Churchyard, where they were animated and projected by Dan Fox.

The characters transitioned from the digital realm back into the physical world to wear the garments for the exhibition.

'The opportunity for our young people to work with a visual artist like Yaku was really unique and not something we would normally get to do at youth theatre, they all really enjoyed it and loved seeing that what they created then went on to be used in Yaku's final artworks.'

STEPHEN BRENNAN, LEEDS HERITAGE THEATRES

As part of our Take Away Art series, Yaku created 100 limited edition ties as part of our Take Away Art series. He adapted second-hand ties with appliques of his distinctive characters, for people to take home. There was a special opening event for the exhibition where Yaku delivered a talk about his work and experience of the project. The exhibition was open to the

YAKU STAPLETON: ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW

public for four days but unfortunately visitor numbers were quite low (72 over the duration), possibly due to the time of year (Christmas), despite the venue being central New Briggate. It isn't a known exhibition space or normally open to the public so we didn't benefit from drop-in footfall. If we had been able to exhibit the work in a public space like The Grand Theatre or the Howard Assembly Rooms, we predict it would have had more engagement.

'I hope for my work's legacy to continue through ongoing conversations and potentially through future display of the sculptures in other places to accommodate for this. The surrounding conversation is a big one for me. Being able to talk to people about it as a result of the project has been important, and I hope that continues.

And for the project itself, I hope it serves as a good example of how co-creation can be used to develop art. I hope that others can look at how this project went, and maybe notice any mistakes or things that can be done better within research projects that are similar to this one in the future. This project could show how to do things right or wrong, just as a learning point.'

YAKU STAPLETON



²² ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW, 2023



²³ ENVISAGING NEW BRIGGATE'S TOMORROW, 2023

HARRY CLAYTON-WRIGHT: A NIGHT AT THE PLAZA

A Night at the Plaza was a history talk, cinema mini-lecture and cabaret show telling the story of the Plaza cinema on New Briggate, which is said to be Leeds' first adult cinema, and holds a history much bigger than that. Charting a history of protest at the site, cult films, art films and the queer community, the show made the history engaging and accessible and sends it up in true camp style. Led by commissioned artist and theatre maker Harry Clayton-Wright, A Night at the Plaza also created opportunities with a new moving image commission, cabaret and drag performances.

The idea for this cabaret extravaganza arose early in the project, when Harry was intrigued by the rumour that the venue, now Opera North's Howard Assembly Room, was once a 'porn cinema' and he immediately wanted to focus some research time on uncovering more about this fascinating unspoken history. During the research process, Harry used the central library archives to discover what films had been shown at the cinema; used the online archive Leodis to see archival images of the venue, its films and the people who worked there; and conducted online conversations with people who had memories of the cinema. These online conversations revealed new characters

and stories, such as trips to see religious films by local catholic schools, with nuns allegedly asking children to cover their eyes and run through the cinema, as well as tales of all night horror triple bills and often repeated images of men in 'macs'.

Once we had compiled the list of films, the team began watching them to learn about the genres, styles and content. This selection of cinema would now be considered problematic with reductive depictions of women, different cultures and races. One particular film stood out: Deadly Weapons starring Chesty Morgan created by Doris Wishman. The film, which was made on a shoestring budget, charts the revenge of the protagonist Crystal following the murder of her husband by the mob and sees her take on different disguises, such as that of a burlesque dancer and stripper. The film's kitsch aesthetic, wild storyline and female perspective meant that this became a key theme for the performance and our research. We held two film screenings with invited guests from the film, arts, drag and adult industries to watch and discuss.

Additionally, we interviewed members of local gay men's group SAGE to document the history of the Plaza cinema and a neighbouring site on New Briggate, used

for cottaging. This history of the street was used as a lens to explore other elements of the gay experience from the 1950s to 1980s such as police violence, love, relationships and ageing. Harry transformed these recordings into a spoken word sound artwork to which he performed a lip sync during the show.

'The community groups were paramount to how we approached this from day one. In relation to the regeneration of the street, I wanted to acknowledge that Hidden Histories aren't just about people and stories from the past. There are a vast amount of queer people deliberately hiding themselves or living privately for their safety in the present day.

Meeting the members from SAGE, in the gorgeous conversations we had, we discovered people in the group who had cruised and cottaged on New Briggate, both at the Plaza (a former adult cinema that is now Opera North's Howard Assembly Room) and also at Brill's Cottage (a gent's toilet that used to be open on the street). For those unfamiliar, cruising is walking, or driving, about a locality, called a cruising ground, in search of a sex partner, usually of the anonymous, casual, one-time variety. Cottaging is a gay slang term, originating from the United Kingdom,

referring to anonymous sex between men in a public toilet. If you weren't already familiar, the more you know!

As someone who sometimes explores sexuality in the work I make, this was like hitting the jackpot double bingo as I knew I felt confident to be able to handle this subject matter with care and ease. Interviewing five members of SAGE, their stories became an interwoven 15-minute lip sync that told stories and painted a rich picture from that time on the street. Their beautiful voices and gorgeous stories filled Opera North's Howard Assembly Room during our event A Night at the Plaza, which felt like the biggest privilege to perform and share their words on a stage as prolific as that.'

HARRY CLAYTON-WRIGHT

HARRY CLAYTON-WRIGHT: A NIGHT AT THE PLAZA

A Night at the Plaza encouraged a younger, non-traditional, heritage or arts audience to engage with the project, and consortium partner Opera North venue Howard Assembly Room by collaborating with local queer artists and platforming the queer community at a prestigious Leeds venue. A larger budget would have allowed more development time for the commissioned artists and their work, though the show was bespoke and presented new works in addition to the expertise of a film historian to deliver a lecture on the history of 'roughies', also known as b-movies and soft-core adult films.

A Night at the Plaza has a legacy of its own: it was filmed and uploaded to East Street Arts website; has strengthened a continued relationship with Opera North and Howard Assembly Room; created skills development and new experiences for lead and local artists; contextualised New Briggate's film history with a lecture from a film historian; and created a large 'blue plaque' commemorating the event and the venue itself.



²⁴ FILM STILL FOR A NIGHT AT THE PLAZA



25 A NIGHT AT THE PLAZA, 2023



26 A NIGHT AT THE PLAZA, 2023



27 A NIGHT AT THE PLAZA, 2023

LEGACY

The success of the High Street Heritage Action Zone cultural programme, and Hidden Histories of New Briggate, will be largely defined by the legacy it leaves behind. Like the communities of New Briggate, past and present, leaving a mark on the street for future generations. The long-term social outcomes, that have been shaped and influenced by culture and creativity, define a legacy much bigger than the project's aim in the recovery and long-term sustainability of the high street post-COVID-19.





ODEON CINEMA - NEW BRIGGATE, 1946
© LEODIS, LEEDS LIBRARY

LEGACY

HERE TO STAY

Hidden Histories of New Briggate was, for me, about highlighting the remarkable history and life of a street that could easily be overlooked. Slightly off the beaten track, but with some significant old buildings, New Briggate is a true story of people, permanence and place.

Some of the community that once resided and set up businesses here have moved to other parts of the city, but some remain, retaining the long-standing history of a place of entertainment. From the horse circus of the 1800s to adult cinema, opera, Carnival and jazz, New Briggate hosts a world of memories for the people of Leeds and beyond. As the physical regeneration on the street begins to change the look, the feel and the people that use it, I hope that the cultural events and activities we have been able to deliver as part of this important national programme have brought back some of those memories, whilst creating new ones.

One-off projects have an important role but the long-term life of the high street is a challenge. Whilst some of the activities we have delivered have been more discreet and away from the street, and others loud and proud like 'A Night at The Plaza' and 'Carnival Legacy', our main aim has been to reinstate a sense of civic pride. Our

high streets and the way we use them is changing and we can't get away from that fact, but what we can do is help people to learn about and remember them, and try to leave an imprint of our past high streets on the future ones.

Artists always create a catalyst for transformation and change, challenging and enabling people to look at a place through a new lens. I hope with this project that in some small way for the business owners, residents, theatre-goers, bar and takeaway customers and general passersby that they have felt some ownership, are more aware of their own history, and most of all that it made them smile.

HELEN MOORE, EAST STREET
ART'S PUBLIC PROGRAMME
AND ENGAGEMENT LEAD

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Leeds City Council
Leeds Civic Trust
Leeds Grand Theatre
Leeds Heritage Theatres
North Bar
Opera North

COMMUNITY GROUPS AND SCHOOLS

Angels of Freedom
Caring Together, Woodhouse
Co-op Academy Leeds
Feel Good Factor, Chapeltown, Saturday Social Group
Gendered Intelligence
Leeds Grand Theatre, Youth Theatre
Leeds Jewish Housing Association
Leeds LGBTQ Forum
Mafwa Theatre, Eco-art club
MESMAC
SAGE Men's Group
Touchstone Craft + Chat Group
Touchstone Women's Wellbeing Group

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MERRION STREET

ALICE COURT

Synagogue
(built for 1810)

ST. JOHN'S PLACE

Posts Posts Posts

Harrison's

St. John's Church
(built for 1720)

B.M. 103-01

Almshouses

Grave

LA's Yard

Charity School
(1876)

B.M. 162-87

MARK LANE

164-1

149/0-4

OSBURN'S COURT

NAG'S HEAD YARD

HOPES YARD

GRAVEN'S YARD

WHEAT SHEAF YARD

WARTHINS
IRTH'S YARD

145/5

L.P.