



## Art and Archives

### BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES in ERDINGTON

*'We were fantastically pleased to take part. What was being offered fulfilled a need we'd identified as a group – to find out more about the house...  
... We jumped at the chance to visit the archives.'*

Phil Mist, chair of Rookery House Research Group

### *About Birmingham Central Library & Archives*

Birmingham Central Library & Archives (BCL&A) is run by Birmingham City Council. They were keen to be involved with the Cultural Champions programme because it enabled them to continue the in-depth community engagement that the service developed during the HLF-funded Connecting Histories project (2006-2008).

BCL&A appointed Dr Andy Green, community historian and artist, as their cultural practitioner in Erdington.

### *What happened?*

#### **DELIVERY STAGE 1: recruitment**

Once Andy had identified three constituency groups with whom to work, the first set of workshops aimed to build each group's awareness of places and resources. Encouraged by the cultural practitioner, group members visited the Archive searchroom in Birmingham Central Library and other cultural spaces in Erdington; and participated in facilitated hands-on learning and heritage sessions in their local environment.

#### **DELIVERY STAGE 2: participation and facilitation**

Building on the platform of cultural awareness, the Rookery House Restoration Group and Castle Vale workshop participants worked with the practitioner to create their own collective scrapbook history which included oral stories, photographic artefacts, community information, leaflets, artwork, etc depending on their needs and interests.

Artists from the Cube produced art works as a response to their perceptions of the area's history and the archive collections. The resultant art works are in a variety of media including collage, paint, 3-D models, ceramic, photography, sound and film.

In addition to the planned workshop activities with the 3 main groups, the practitioner facilitated a number of sessions/engagements with other groups in order to build bridges between other cultural and community organisations in both the constituency and the city centre.

Final versions of the 2 group scrapbooks were produced for the groups by the practitioner with the support of arts/heritage practitioners and designers. Intended to function as an informal heritage guide they will be accessioned into the city archive collections. They could also be added to the local collection in the area's community library.

The artworks created by the artists at the Cube were displayed in their workshops as part of the **'Art & Archives' exhibition** from 19 February to 6 March 2011, alongside copies of the archive materials consulted.

It is hoped that some of the artworks and scrapbook materials might also feature in the new Library of Birmingham gallery exhibitions connected with 'place', 'identity' and 'history'.

## About Erdington

The constituency of Erdington is located 5 miles northeast of the City Centre and comprises four largely residential wards: Erdington, Tyburn, Kingstanding and Stockland Green.

- The population is 92,526 and is slightly older than the city average.
- 84.2% of the population are White compared with 70% for Birmingham as a whole. The remaining 15% is split between Mixed, Asian and Black ethnicities.
- 21.5% of residents have Limiting Long Term Illness compared with 19.7% for Birmingham
- 42% of Erdington's working age population have no qualifications.
- 33.6 % of the working age population is employed, compared with 40% for Birmingham.
- 30% of residents live within the 5% most deprived super output areas (SOAs) in the country. Kingstanding has a high proportion of 'hard pressed' households, but Erdington has a mix of relatively affluent and less well off households.



[Socio-economic context based on 2001 Census, and data provided by *Identifying the Barriers to Cultural Participation and the Needs of Residents of Birmingham, a Final Report to the Birmingham Cultural Partnership* by Ecotec, 31st March 2010.]

## About the partners

### Castle Vale Library

**Recruitment:** The practitioner directly approached Mandy Neary, Library Manager at Castle Vale & Erdington and Support Community Librarian, Lesley Aston to help set up a local history group in the library. Staff were frustrated about past failures to launch heritage projects in Castle Vale, in part because no local volunteers had come forward to run a group. The practitioner aimed to

- 1) Provide participants with access to archive collections that may be of interest
- 2) Establish whether there was enough community interest to develop a more permanent heritage group based in the library
- 3) Provide practical support for library staff to facilitate ongoing development of the group

### The Cube

**Recruitment:** Andy Green met Heather Rowlands, artist at The Cube, at the opening of Erdington Library's Community Room. Such a partnership is not new to the Cube: over the past 5 years, the artists have worked with IKON Gallery, constituency Arts Champions.

The Cube are a grass-roots, community visual-arts cooperative based in the Erdington 'Instore' market. The group comprises around a dozen members who wanted to access the archives via monthly workshops as a way of supporting and developing further art work. They also wanted to enhance the reputation and profile of the Cube workshop space.

This group offered their workshop space as the venue for '*Art & Archives*', the final exhibition of Birmingham Central Library's Cultural Champions outputs.

### Rookery House Restoration Group

The Rookery House Restoration Group (RHRG) are a long standing community group dedicated to raising residents' awareness of the history of Rookery House and its potential value as a community venue and focus of heritage activity. They have their own website: <http://www.rookery-house.co.uk>

**Recruitment :** According to Phil Mist, chair of Rookery House Research Group, The practitioner was introduced to the group by a mutual connection, local arts worker, Patrick Hayes. The group had not previously worked with Birmingham Central Library & Archives or any similar organisation.



(right to left) Dr Andy Green, cultural practitioner, Phil Mist chair, and other members of Rookery House Restoration Group visiting the Archive searchroom, Birmingham Central Library, 23 Nov 2010

### **Outcome 1: Increased awareness and understanding of the cultural institution partnered with the constituency through project activity and associated outreach and visits**

***'By their very nature archives are hidden from view and people don't know where to find them even when they have heard of them. Further, archives are difficult to access and interpret.'***

Paul Hemmings, BCL&A Heritage Services Manager

#### **Awareness**

% of respondents who HAVE HEARD of city centre venue	25%
% of respondents who HAVE visited before	20%
% of respondents who HAVE NOT visited before	80%
% of respondents who WOULD LIKE to visit	No data
% of respondents who have been to another art gallery, museum or library in the preceding 5 years	48%

Visits to the archive searchroom introduced Erdington residents to a new resource and one which suddenly seemed more relevant to their own experience:

***'It made me realize what a treasure trove we have in the archives- it was a great, really interesting session and enjoyed by everyone there. I could spend several happy hours looking through the different materials- something else for future retirement perhaps!'*** Pat Pedder, Erdington Community Librarian

Despite a shared interest in local history, the Rookery House Restoration Group has not worked with the Erdington Historical Society in the past and there is little or no membership crossover or skills and knowledge sharing between the groups. Several of the members interviewed had never carried out any local history research before the Cultural Champions project:



*'I am involved because I want to save RH. Local History is OK but I wouldn't do it otherwise. I have never done any before.'*

### ***Outcome 2: Increased desire to contribute to or participate in cultural activity in city centre***

% of new participants (engaged once only)	63%
% of return participants (engaged more than once)	37%

In Erdington, a constituency where 41.97% of residents in 2001<sup>1</sup> had no qualifications (against 37.09% across Birmingham and 28.85% in England as a whole), Paul Hemmings, BCL&A Heritage Services Manager, acknowledged some of the difficulties in maintaining participants' interest in a service perceived to be highly academic.

The participants who did make it to the archive searchroom were introduced to a new resource and one which suddenly seemed more relevant to their own experience:

*'[The artists] visited the archives where Andy Green showed them the public areas and how to use search tools. They all wanted to return as soon as possible! It stimulated a lot of interest.'*

Heather Rowlands, artist, The Cube

### ***Outcome 3: Increased uptake of cultural offer through participation in activity and visits to partner venue***

<b>Museums and galleries attendance by Erdington residents</b>	
% adults attended in previous 12 months (2008-09) <sup>2</sup>	16.81%
% of Cultural Champions participants attending (2010-11)	49%

The percentage of participants in the Cultural Champions activity who visited the partner city centre cultural venue was far higher than the percentage of constituency residents who said, in the Annual Opinion Survey (2008-09), that they had visited a museum or gallery during the preceding 12 months.

However, it should be noted that the average proportion of the population of each constituency participating in Cultural Champions activity was 0.01%.

As none of the Cultural Champions organisations consistently collect demographic data from visitors who are not participating in a specific project activity, there is no quantitative data to prove an increased uptake of the cultural offer through participation in activity and visits to partner venue outside the project delivery period.

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics taken from 2001 census

<sup>2</sup> Constituency participation figures, p.62 *Barriers to Cultural Participation*, 2010. Source: Annual Opinion Survey, 2008 and 2009

It is to be hoped that during the next Opinion Survey and DCMS Taking Part survey, there will be an increase in the % of adults visiting museums & galleries.

#### **Outcome 4: Personal / Community growth:**

**Increased ability/confidence to carry out self-supported cultural activity as a group or an individual and improved skills**

*'The extra information we've found out about the house will enable us to plan a much more comprehensive awareness-raising campaign. We hope to use this to attract local volunteers, and to begin an education programme for young people to inspire associations with the house and try to combat vandalism.'*

*'We now feel we can talk with confidence and authority about the house to the Council, HLF and other potential funders. The process has been a catalyst for us to strengthen our Board ... [to] ... enable the group to successfully take on the house if the Council hand over the keys.'*

Phil Mist, Chair of Rookery House Restoration Group, Erdington

The artists at the Cube found the experience of working with a Cultural Champion to be stimulating to their own practice:

*'[Art & Archives] has inspired me to make a feature film – about a paranormal investigator at Rookery House – blending fact with fiction. Directly inspired by the archives.'*

Andy Spence, artist, The Cube

*'Seeing these archival materials stimulated artistic production. The group began to interpret what they'd seen in a visual format. The photos were particularly powerful at inspiring artwork.'*

Participating artist, Art & Archives, The Cube

#### **Increased enjoyment of cultural offer and creative activity**

All participants and community leads interviewed enthused about the accessible approach undertaken by Andy Green, the constituency's cultural practitioner.

*'Andy Green – is a do-er. Lovely guy – nicest fella I've met in years. A gifted communicator, really got us thinking – provoked our curiosity. I wish I'd had teachers as talented as him at school. We were blown away; he was fantastic.'*

Phil Mist, Chair of Rookery House Restoration Group

*'The best part of this project has been the level of interest from members of the public. It has held people's attention. It's done a lot of people a lot of good... It brought different people together in Erdington. It's a transient community and this has given people roots here.'* Heather Rowland, artist, The Cube

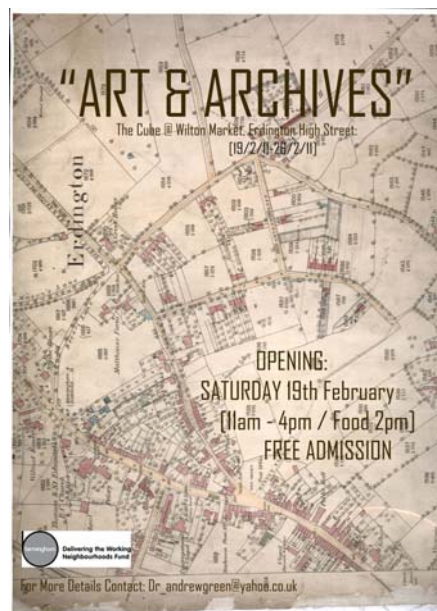
### ***Outcome 5: Increased understanding of constituency and residents***

Andy Green, cultural practitioner, used his increased understanding of the constituency to build links locally and enable local interest groups to act autonomously.

Although he did not carry out extensive work with the Polish Ex-Patriots Society, the practitioner was directly involved in aiding the group to forge new relations with Erdington library, chairing a meeting between the two organizations to explore future joint working. This has proved a lasting alternative to a short series of tailored sessions, as the group now meets monthly in the library community connections room.

At an early stage, Andy noticed that although Rookery House Restoration Group and Erdington Historical Society are both concerned with researching the local history of Erdington, their motivations differ.

Andy brought the two groups together for the first time at a workshop in the Archive searchroom in BCL&A. He also met with library staff to discuss possible ways of working. It remains to be seen whether, through meeting at the joint workshop and the community library staff's efforts to encourage joint working in Erdington Library, there will in future be a *rapprochement* between the two groups.



Poster for Art & Archives exhibition in The Cube, Erdington

### **Outcome 6: Creation of sustainable local/ organizational infrastructure to bridge the gap between city centre institution and constituency members**

***'We recognise from past experience how long it takes to build links trust and sustainability with communities'.***

Paul Hemmings, BCL&A

Central Library & Archives had not worked previously in Erdington for a substantial period of time (12 months), so this was regarded as a beneficial opportunity to reach groups hitherto unknown to the service.

Paul acknowledged that during project delivery some community links were stronger than others because the groups concerned were already well embedded within existing local networks:

- The Cube had worked with Ikon, the Art Champions in the constituency, and also supported by Birmingham City Council Community Arts Team
- Rookery House were introduced to the practitioner by Patrick Hayes, the constituency Arts Development Officer

***'This was a difficult aim in such a short time, starting from scratch. We had to be confident that the cultural offer was understood by the community group'***

Paul felt that successful delivery of the project was further hampered by the funding difficulties encountered in early summer 2010 and an over-demanding reporting process.

However, he felt that bringing 30 people directly into the Archives has been beneficial, as 80% of them had never before visited and all had expressed a desire to return. He expressed a hope that *'there will be a continuing knock on effect'* and that *'links have developed with constituency and community Library'*.

The work created during the Cultural Champions project has served to raise the profile of the Central Library & Archives in the constituency and has also created historical exhibits and artistic works which will form a part of the heritage galleries in the new Library of Birmingham, giving other city residents an insight into the historical and cultural life of Erdington.

When interviewed, Paul Hemmings stated his intention to *'build this work into our core offer and maintain relationships beyond the end of the project'*. The service has no further plans to continue Cultural Champions activity in Erdington without dedicated funding.

### **Outcome 7: Increased enjoyment and creativity in working with constituency groups**

*'Our Archivists have learnt a lot from the Community Team who weren't archivists and conversely the Community Team have learnt a lot from Archivists'*

Paul Hemmings, BCL&A

Paul Hemmings, BCL&A Heritage Services Manager felt that the Cultural Champions activity has served to raise the profile of the Central Library & Archives in the constituency. It has also created historical exhibits and artistic works which will form a part of the heritage galleries in the new Library of Birmingham, giving other city residents an insight into the historical and cultural life of Erdington.

The community librarians themselves were very grateful for the support given by the practitioner and the opportunity it gave them to revisit the Archive and its collections:

*'It made me realize what a treasure trove we have in the archives. ... it was a great, really interesting session and enjoyed by everyone there. I could spend several happy hours looking through the different materials- something else for future retirement perhaps!'* Pat Pedder, Erdington Community Librarian

*'We always signpost visitors to go [to the Archives]... now I'll know better what they might find'*

Erdington Community Library staff member

### **LESSONS LEARNED: Develop a local infrastructure**

Aware of the limited resources of BCL&A and building on his experience in delivering Connecting Histories, Andy Green, cultural practitioner, used his increased understanding of the constituency to build links locally and plan an exit strategy that would enable local interest groups to act autonomously.

A key success was his facilitation of a meeting between the Polish Ex-Patriots Society and Erdington Community library staff to explore future joint working. An attempt to provide the Society with tailored sessions had failed because the group had nowhere to meet and



no enthusiasm for the project. The meeting provided a lasting alternative to a short series of sessions, as the group now meets monthly in the library community connections room and is thus more visible to constituents who wish to join.

Similarly, Andy noticed that although Rookery House Restoration Group and Erdington Historical Society are both concerned with researching the local history of Erdington, their motivations differ and they have not worked together to share their knowledge and skills.

Andy brought the two groups together for the first time at a workshop in the Archive searchroom in BCL&A. He also met with library staff to discuss possible ways of working. It remains to be seen whether, through meeting at the joint workshop and the community library staff's efforts to encourage joint working in Erdington Library, there will in future be a *rapprochement* between the two groups.

The confidence engendered through Cultural Champions in participants has empowered them to work autonomously and plan ahead to develop a cultural activity of their own:

*'We now feel we can talk with confidence and authority about the house to the Council, HLF and other potential funders. The process has been a catalyst for us to strengthen our Board to include more professional people that would enable the group to successfully take on the house if the Council hand over the keys.'*

Phil Mist, Chair of Rookery House Restoration Group, Erdington

Working with artists from the Cube to develop creative responses to the archive collections has captured people's imagination.

*'People have visited the [BCL&A] archive searchroom as a result of seeing what we're doing at Cube. [We are] keener to work with the public on an archives project – people came in from the street during installation to help out. Public have also started bringing in things from home that they think others will be interested in.'*

Heather Rowlands, artist, The Cube, Erdington

#### **DEVELOP A LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Think ahead and develop an exit strategy
- Be responsive to the needs of the participants and accept when you are not needed
- Seek to empower whenever possible

## RESIDENCY FACTS & FIGURES

<b>Cultural practitioner</b>	Dr Andrew Green, community historian and artist
<b>Cultural partner</b>	Birmingham Central Library & Archives
<b>Constituency</b>	Erdington
<b>Length of residency</b>	9 months
<b>Community partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Cube</li> <li>• Rookery House Restoration Group</li> <li>• Castle Vale Library</li> </ul>
<b>Other groups &amp; organisations approached</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ikon Gallery</li> <li>• Erdington Library</li> <li>• Polish Ex-Patriots Society</li> <li>• Erdington Historical Society</li> </ul>



<b>OUTPUTS against project targets</b>	<b>Initial targets</b>	<b>Revised targets</b>	<b>ACTUAL totals</b>	<b>Performance +/-</b>
<b>Participants &amp; engagements</b>	<i>(Mar 2010)</i>	<i>(Aug 2010)</i>		against revised target
No of individual participants/beneficiaries	30	30	<b>107</b>	<b>+77</b>
No of individual contacts	250	200	<b>198</b>	<b>-2</b>
No of participants at public sessions	200	150	<b>294</b>	<b>+144</b>
<b>Sessions, exhibitions and publications</b>				
No of sessions	25	20	<b>26</b>	<b>+6</b>
No of sessions	25	20	<b>26</b>	<b>+6</b>
Exhibition	0	1	<b>1</b>	<b>On target</b>
Digital scrapbooks	3	2	<b>2</b>	<b>On target</b>
<b>Proportion of participants by location and frequency of engagement</b>				
% of sessions in constituency				65%
% of sessions in city centre venue				35%
% of new participants (engaged once only)				63%
% of return participants (engaged more than once)				37%
% of participants attending constituency-based sessions				51%
% of participants attending sessions in city centre venue				49%