

Those Northern Lights, So Pretty





All estate, all es, all estate agents alive
Yell down nights in hysterical breath
Those Northern Lights, so pretty
Those big big big wide streets

'Hit the North', The Fall, 1987

Those Northern Lights, So Pretty

Dingy Butterflies CIC is a social enterprise that works across Gateshead and beyond, developing participatory and socially-engaged art projects and events with artists, local community and cultural organisations and residents. We aim to work and support local, national and international artists in developing participatory projects; increase creative participation; develop and improve creative and digital skills; and support local services in health, wellbeing and community engagement.

www.dingybutterflies.org

The name 'Dingy Butterflies' comes from the 1934 book *English Journey* by JB Priestley. When visiting the Bensham Grove Settlement in Gateshead, he described the unemployed men he met as "the dingy butterflies of the backstreet". We aim to re-claim the phrase for Gateshead and reuse it in a creative, positive and humorous way.





Introduction

In early 2018, Dingy Butterflies CIC was invited by Gateshead Council to propose a participatory art project working with Gateshead community groups and residents in the area of Bensham & Saltwell. The launch of the Great Exhibition of the North in June 2018 was fast-approaching, and we realised that there was a gap for creative and community engagement that had not been filled. At the same time we were in discussion with the Friends of Saltwell Park concerning running creative projects in the park, and with Durham University Business School who were working with artist Toby Lloyd. It made sense to combine the three opportunities.

The proposal we put forward was to work with two North East-based artists, Dominic Smith and Toby Lloyd, through the themes of heritage, environment and community. We wanted to highlight and consider the past, present and future of Gateshead, framed by the context of living, playing and working in the area of Bensham & Saltwell. So, throughout July and August 2018, Dominic and Toby worked with various voluntary groups, a school, a youth organisation and the general public, in public spaces such as Saltwell Park and the Shipley Art Gallery. The artworks produced from the outcomes of the workshops were then shown in the Shipley Art Gallery in September and October 2018.

Toby and Dominic, whilst having different art practices and approaches, both have a deep understanding of working with groups of people and developing participatory art projects with community groups, schools and individuals; through workshops and events in art galleries and in non-art-specific spaces such as houses, parks, and community buildings. Both their practices have an

interest in social action and interaction through participation, but from varying perspectives; Dominic has a specific interest in art and technology and Toby explores ways to build environments to share experiences of everyday life.

It is no coincidence, however, that both artists use maps and mapping as a way of engaging with people, to understand a place and to allow people to view where they live, work or play from a different perspective. Maps are, however, not a true representation of the world we live in and can only show a simplified version of a place without the detail of the streets, trees, parks, houses and the people that populate them. For this project, maps of central Gateshead and Saltwell Park were used to help people understand which areas they used and navigated, which areas they didn't and to write down stories and facts, whether personal or historical, in relation to a certain building, space or place. From these workshops and creative responses, the two artists created artworks from participants' experiences and knowledge of living, working and playing in the area. Dominic created an online game about the history and people's personal experience of Saltwell Park; and Toby created a series of posters to question what we see as public and private spaces and services.

Saltwell Park became a focus for the overall project. The park is an important part of the area that surrounds it, as a place to meet, to play, to work, to be healthy, especially in an area where most people do not have their own gardens. It is known as 'the people's park' and can be seen as the lungs of central Gateshead. Saltwell Park was opened in 1876 during a period of heavy industry and growing inequality in wealth, life expectancy and living conditions, alongside an increasing awareness of the importance of public health. The park was and continues to be a valuable part of the community.

The park has had its ups and downs. From being in disrepair in the late twentieth century with a derelict and falling down Saltwell Towers, to receiving significant funding in the early 2000s resulting in the park winning numerous awards, including being voted one of the top ten most popular parks in the UK. Now, as austerity measures cut funds further, the importance of the work of the Friends of Saltwell Park volunteers becomes more and more apparent.

The title of the project, *Those Northern Lights, So Pretty*, comes from the song 'Hit the North' by Manchester band, The Fall. The late lead singer and driving force behind The Fall, Mark E. Smith, said that for him 'Hit the North' has a dual meaning; to punish it, or to go there. This project relates to both meanings. As recreational and leisure activities are at the forefront of public service cuts, it is important to remember the historical purposes of local places such as Saltwell Park, Gateshead Libraries and the Shipley Art Gallery and make sure they are used and cherished. They were built to improve the health and wellbeing of Gateshead people and to encourage education. We must consider their future, what they may become and how we can preserve as well as support them to develop and grow.

Ben Jones

Director, Dingy Butterflies CIC

The Keeper is a piece of interactive fiction, a text-based adventure game created about Saltwell Park that highlights parts of the park's history and heritage and its many important landmarks, structures and buildings.

When approaching a new piece of art or a new creative project, Dominic often thinks about the artwork as the seed that will grow to be something of use and benefit to others if it is planted in the right conditions and given what it needs to grow successfully.

When invited to take part in *Those Northern Lights, So Pretty*, it was apparent from the ethos of the people involved that the artwork would grow, mature and reach its purpose via its interaction with others. This is how *The Keeper* came to be. This was also a residency and not a straightforward commission. With a commission it is often the case that you are asked to produce a piece of work that fulfils a specific need. With a residency you are given time to meet members of a community, to learn from them and draw inspiration from the environment where they live and work. An artist's residency is a chance to search out new ideas and try new things.

The Keeper is a narrative, text-based game that takes place in Saltwell Park. It has a branching structure, giving the person playing it multiple options and ways of engaging with it. As they play, the history of the park is revealed. It was developed with the Friends of Saltwell Park, The Comfrey Project, St Joseph's RCVA Primary School and Saltwell Park users. Through these engagements, Smith began to understand just how important the park is to people in Gateshead, why it came to be and how it is still vital to the wellbeing of a strong and diverse community.

Games are disarming. They are fun and engaging. Smith states that:

When I walk into a room full of people and say 'we are going to play and make games today' the reaction is one of openness and a desire to engage. It was through these game-building interactions with people that I was able to make something that would then lead to unexpected creative outcomes, such as the creative work made by the pupils of St Joseph's Primary School.

Asking a group of smart, visually and game-literate young people to illustrate a story was, for Dominic, an amazing point of departure. They approached this task with incredible amounts of enthusiasm and imagination, the results of which form the basis for the images exhibited at the Shipley Art Gallery accompanying the main artwork. They illustrate the potential that new stories and narratives have when engaging people in a place and its heritage.

The Keeper is the start of something. The seed is still in its early stages of growth and is revealing its potential to become a bigger thing. It could become a fully realised piece of interactive theatre. It could become an immersive multimedia game. It could become many things. One thing Dominic has done to facilitate this is to give it away. *The Keeper* as it currently exists is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. This means that the source material is free for anyone who wants to remix, remediate and reuse it.

Go for it!

<http://thekeeper.online/>



THE TOWERS AS A MUSEUM
 UNTIL 1969 THEN BECAME
 DERELICT - UNTIL HERITAGE
 LOTTERY FUND) ENABLED IT TO
 BE RESTORED (AROUND 2000)
 SCAFFOLDING AROUND IT FOR
 YEARS / BARRIERS TO KEEP
 PEOPLE OUT





THE KEEPER

Choose your
own adventure

Play at home or at
Saltwell Park

VISIT

<http://thekeeper.online>





Toby Lloyd
Six Honest Servants



Six Honest Servants by Toby Lloyd questions what we understand as 'Public Services' and what we expect from them. Why do we need public services? When do we use them? Who makes decisions about them?

Lloyd worked with several groups of Gateshead residents including Friends of Saltwell Park, Gateshead Clubhouse, The Comfrey Project and Gateshead Youth Assembly as well as members of the public. Through a series of workshops, each group explored their experiences of Gateshead and the factors that influence how they interact with public and private spaces and services. Using mapping exercises, participants were asked to plot locations that they visit regularly and places that they valued, as well as to create mono-printed signs and posters that reflect what they feel and think public and private spaces should be and how they should interact with and welcome people. They reflected on how Gateshead has or has not changed over the time they have lived and worked there and marked areas that they thought were public spaces or privately owned. These activities lead to discussions around what role businesses and local government play in the way Gateshead functions and the affects these have on their lives.

Recurring themes that emerged during the workshops were the city's heritage and how it should be protected for future generations, the importance of public transport and meeting spaces, and the growing role volunteers have in maintaining valued resources. These conversations fed into six posters Lloyd created which are based on the Ishihara colour vision test cards that arrange seemingly random coloured dots in a way to create numbers or words that will be completely invisible to those who are colour blind. This is to reflect how our view of what public services are

differs from person to person. Also, the general consensus may have shifted over the years, especially since the 2009 financial crash and the shrinking of local council budgets, limiting what they can deliver. Over the six posters the dots become larger, gradually distorting the text until it becomes almost unreadable. Do the services we consider as 'public' still function the same way and how much influence do we have as 'the public' in how they are run?

The work takes its title from British poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling's 1902 poem *I Keep Six Honest Serving-Men*, in which the writer identifies the six enquiry words: What, Why, When, How, Where and Who. These words became pointers for people to question and consider public and private services and are reflected in the six posters created.

The project has been influenced by research at Durham University Business School by Professor Laurence Ferry into the accountability and transparency of decision-making processes by local councils when implementing austerity measures and making cuts to public services. This influence and collaboration feeds into Lloyd's research and art practice and in turn supports Ferry's research into public accountability and transparency. The research is accessible beyond the accounting and academic worlds and opens it up to the everyday experience of communities. This enables grassroots groups and community organisations to consider where they fit, to understand public and private places and services in their everyday lives and, potentially, to see how they could influence how they are delivered.



Public Services

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WHAT ARE THEY?

'Fireworks displays' 'Roads' 'Essential Things' 'Public Toilets' 'Museums' 'Restaurants' 'Housing' 'Transport' 'Street cleaning' 'Phone boxes' 'Cinema' 'Care homes' 'Charities' 'The Council' 'Hospital' 'Parks & Gardens' 'Bridges' 'Buses' 'Police' 'Trees - we need them so we can breath, so they should be considered as a public service' 'Refuse collection' 'Shops' 'GP' 'Doctors' 'Church' 'Art Galleries' 'Libraries' 'NHS' 'School Universities' 'Randomers can go in them' 'Airport' 'The Military' 'MPs' 'The Council' 'Parks and libraries' 'Emergency Services - Fire, Ambulance and the Police' 'WiFi' 'should be a public service' 'Water' 'Community support' 'Mental Health support' 'There should be showars for the homeless to use' 'Street lighting' 'Community centres' 'The Post' 'The Police'

Public Services

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WHY DO WE NEED THEM?

'They make life easier' 'They help us to meet our essential needs' 'Without those services I think we'd be snookered' 'People use them to come together to create a sense of community' 'For education' 'Socialising' 'Green spaces are very important. We need places to relax and ponder' 'Historically Britain is a nanny state. Too many people expect the council or government to sort out their problems. we need to look after each other more' 'We need the police, they arrest the baddies' 'Old people need to chat to people' 'For places to visit and to use the facilities' 'They help people to achieve their ambitions' 'To take away the rubbish' 'Quality - they help us to get up to a good level if you are struggling for any reason' 'Access for all people' 'If you can't afford the services, the council should help you'



Afterword

I first met Toby Lloyd when I was looking for an artist who could translate my ideas and research into something creative that would engage people. I was impressed by Toby's work and how it had a strong societal message. My world-leading research covers issues of public accountability, where officials/politicians who set policy and those who deliver services are held to account for their actions and decisions regarding the use of resources in the policy-making, planning and delivery of public services, including by grassroots groups. My research shows how this works in public services in England, and especially local government since 2010 under austerity and localism.

I am interested in such areas as by profession I am a chartered accountant specialising in public services, and as a working class lad from Wallsend, where I still live, I feel very strongly that people should get the best life chances, and that public services have an important role to play. You can also see this need and desire in both Toby's and Dominic's art practices.

I am a fan of Rudyard Kipling's poem, *I Keep Six Honest Serving Men* and Toby thought of colour blindness as a way to highlight the difficulty people have in seeing messages, or what I call a metaphor for the difficulty in using transparency as a means for accountability and vice versa. It was important that these artworks were collaborations between academics, artists and the community to bring the ideas alive and give people the opportunity to have a voice.

Working with Toby has been great. He listens and asks questions, we have short debates and then he disappears. He comes back with something that to non-art folk looks odd but that after a bit of refining, enables people to question, understand and challenge the inter-relationships between accounting, organisations, institutions and society.

Laurence Ferry, Professor in Accounting at Durham University Business School and Parliamentary Academic Fellow in Public Accountability 2018/19 with the House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee

Dr Dominic Smith is an artist and curator whose practice involves a hands-on, open and interrogative approach to working in the overlapping fields of art & technology. This has presented itself as ad hoc artists' groups, surreptitious apocalypse-proof file sharing systems, socially-engaged drone-based narratives and research into Blockchain technologies and Machine Learning.

His curatorial practice focuses upon the use of new technologies and audience engagement through experimental participatory methods. It spans close to twenty years of working with artists to produce exhibitions in a mix of circumstances, ranging from traditional galleries, large-scale ad hoc spaces and the development of multiple innovative online platforms. In recent years this has included Pixel Palace at the Tyneside Cinema and the curation of the Digital War Memorial for the Society of Chief Librarians. He currently works as associate digital curator with a number of organisations and galleries including 'D6 Culture in Transit', Helix Arts and Queen's Hall Arts, developing innovative digital arts programmes.

www.dominicsmith.info

Toby Lloyd is an artist currently undertaking a practice-based PhD in the Fine Art Department at Newcastle University. His research examines public attitudes to work, the value of free time and the emancipatory affects Universal Basic Income could have on society. He uses interactive exhibitions that pose rhetorical questions to instigate conversation and activities that challenge perceived values and experiences of everyday life.

Recent projects include: *Between Eating and Sleeping* at Fuse, Bradford and The NewBridge Project, Gateshead and *Are Washing Machines More Important Than Smart Phones* at CGP Gallery, London and Newcastle University.

www.tobyhipslloyd.co.uk

Dr Laurence Ferry is a Professor in Accounting at Durham University Business School and a prestigious Parliamentary Academic Fellow 2018/19 with the House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, looking at public accountability. His extensive research has covered issues of public accountability that is concerned with how those who set policy and deliver public services are held to account, including by grassroots groups.

Dr Ben Jones is an artist, curator, researcher and director of Dingy Butterflies CIC. His artistic and curatorial practice and research concerns creating spaces for communities to connect, be creative and consider the social issues that affect their everyday lives and communities. He completed his PhD at Newcastle University in 2015 which was concerned with the understanding of creative digital strategies at grassroots level in the urban area of Bensham & Saltwell, Gateshead. Since completing his PhD, he has curated participatory art projects around Gateshead with Dingy Butterflies CIC working with various local community and creative organisations; project managed the HLF-funded First World War digital heritage project 'Reflections of Newcastle 1914-18' for the Lit & Phil, Northumbria University, Newcastle College and November Club; and developed outreach projects for Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums for the Big Lottery-funded project 'Live Well', supporting older people across Tyneside to engage with museums, galleries and archives.

www.dingybutterflies.org

Dingy Butterflies

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Those Northern Lights, So Pretty was part of Gateshead Council's outreach programme during the Great Exhibition of the North, 2018. Toby Lloyd's project was directly supported by Newcastle University Fine Art Department, Durham University Business School and Professor Laurence Ferry's research into public accountability. An exhibition of the artwork was at the Shipley Art Gallery from the 15th September to 27th October 2018.

Thank you to the participants who took part in the project: Gateshead Clubhouse; St Joseph RCVA Primary School, The Comfrey Project, Gateshead Youth Assembly, Gateshead residents and Saltwell Park users and the Friends of Saltwell Park, in particular Michael, Diane, Sue and Helen for supporting its development.

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Those Northern Lights, So Pretty was a project curated by Dingy Butterflies CIC, a Gateshead-based arts organisation. It involved working with North East-based artists Dominic Smith and Toby Lloyd to develop an engaging public-facing series of workshops, sessions and events over Summer 2018. It concluded with an exhibition at the Shipley Art Gallery, Gateshead in September and October 2018. It looked at how we use spaces and places framed by the context of living, playing and working in Gateshead.

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