



ADVENTURES IN REGENERATION

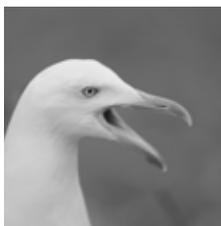
Folkestone's New Tide

Nick Ewbank

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For Sarah

With thanks to:

Sally Abbott, Professor Robin Baker, Peter Bettley, Robert Bliss, Alison Brooks, Russell Burden, Wesley Burden, Dan Burrows, Philip Carter, Sarah Dance, Angela Davis, Alain de Botton, Roger De Haan, Stephen Deuchar, Clare Foster, Philip Gearing, Gina Glover, Professor Fred Gray, Robert Green, Professor Grenville Hancox, Art Hewitt, Sean Heslop, Yvette Illsley, Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, Emma Long, Trevor Minter, Brigitte Orasinski, David Powell, Chris Price, Lord Radnor, Matt Rowe, Andrea Schlieker, Sir James Spooner, Rebecca Smith, Niamh Sullivan, Dr Peter Twomey, Kay Vanderhoeven, Dr Trish Vella-Burrows, Professor Michael Wright.

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*Assuredly of all the strange experiences that I
have ever had, or imagined, or read of other people
having or imagining, that little raid I made... on
the Folkestone Leas, under the influence of the New
Accelerator, was the strangest and maddest of all.*

The New Accelerator
HG Wells

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that does fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.*

Ariel's Song from The Tempest
William Shakespeare

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Foreword

This is the inside story of how, at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, an English seaside town was rescued from creeping decline and set along a path towards vitality and prosperity. The remarkable transformation – or rather the beginnings of a transformation – has been led by Roger De Haan, former Chairman of Saga. His visionary but steady insistence that Folkestone has a bright future both as a community and as a centre for exceptional creativity has been backed and bolstered by considerable personal investment and, it must be said, dogged determination.

Folkestone is back on the map.

I have been fortunate to find myself for the past several years a Trustee of De Haan's Creative Foundation, the small organisation responsible for seeing through much of the programme, especially in relation to the town's development as a centre for the visual, literary and performing arts. The Folkestone Triennial, Book Festival, Creative Quarter, University Centre and Quarterhouse arts venue are just some of its manifestations to date.

Nick Ewbank was the Creative Foundation's founding Director, helping conceive all these significant projects, and more, from the start. Interwoven with a cogent description of many complex layers of local and national context, his account provides an important record of how the much-touted (but usually elusive) ideal of 'urban regeneration' through the arts was to emerge, in Folkestone, as a reality.

Of course, as De Haan is the first to point out, most of the work in that respect lies in the future, not the past. But it's some start.



*Stephen Deuchar with Brigitte Orasinski
at the opening of Strange Cargo's Like
The Back Of My Hand installation
© Strange Cargo*

Stephen Deuchar CBE
Director
The Art Fund

EBB AND FLOW

Folkestone and the De Haans

In late November 2010, ten years to the day after I first met him, I went to see the multi-millionaire philanthropist Roger De Haan in his office on the Kent coast, overlooking the English Channel, as the first storm of the winter came blowing in. Now, as I write, the sea is flat calm and shivers with silver and gold in the bright sun. Back then, in complete contrast, huge grey-brown walls of seawater topped with white foam reared up in an endless procession to smash on the shingle and the rocks.

De Haan is a private man who is wary of publicity, but he's agreed to talk to me about the scope, ambition and progress of our remarkable regeneration project for Folkestone. This is the man about whom Prince Charles said, on awarding him one of the first Prince of Wales Medals for Arts Philanthropy in 2008:

"Most philanthropists will content themselves with supporting a handful of carefully selected institutions. Roger De Haan is a bit different: he is attempting to regenerate an entire town. The town in question is Folkestone... As one of his nominees, Alan Davey, [the Chief Executive of Arts Council England] said "We all theorise about cultural regeneration - Roger has just got on and done it. He's a hero really."

Until I moved to Folkestone in early 2001, my only experience of the place was of passing through it. I'm far from being alone in this; every summer, hundreds of thousands of holiday-makers used to make a beeline for the harbour to



Roger De Haan

Above right: Folkestone's Sunny Sands beach at high tide

© Russell Burden

Right: The Sea Monster by Charles Avery, for Folkestone Triennial 2011. Horse skeletons, python, wallaby, carp, llama and mixed media © Thierry Bal



escape to mainland Europe from a bleaker Britain by boarding the Sealink ferries that busily criss-crossed the sea-lanes from Folkestone to Boulogne. I went through the port as a teenager on my way back from a school trip to France in the mid-seventies, but my memories of it are fleeting: as our coach climbed up from the bustling harbour, back towards the A20 and home to the west London suburbs, I was far more interested in the cigarette lighters and flick-knives purchased from Boulogne's souvenir stalls and smuggled through customs by my more daring school mates.

The next time I came to Folkestone was in 2000, to be interviewed by a panel, chaired by De Haan, for the job of Director of Folkestone's Metropole Arts Centre Trust. Trains from Devon, where I lived at the time, weren't getting out of the west country because of torrential flooding, and so I'd flown from Exeter Airport, via Jersey and London City Airport, and then taken a taxi and finally caught a train to be in Folkestone on time. My tortuous journey to Folkestone turned out to be the start of an extraordinary ten year voyage of change for me, De Haan and, indeed, an entire community.

Over a period of thirty nine years, De Haan had built up a huge personal fortune through the growth of Saga, the holidays and financial services group for the over fifties that has always had its base in Folkestone. Ironically, his success was mirrored in reverse by the town itself, which went into decline from the sixties onwards as its role as a traditional holiday destination came to an end. Having witnessed the sad process of decay and its impact on the local community, De Haan chose to invest, from 2001 onwards, more than £50 million into charitable creative projects to benefit the faded resort. Just as significantly, he's given a large proportion of his time and energy to efforts to improve the town, at a stage in life when others in his position might have succumbed to the lure of rum punch nirvana on a yacht in the Caribbean. What motivated De Haan to become so involved in one particular place? Why Folkestone?

De Haan begins at the beginning: *"From the earliest days of Saga, my father Sidney De Haan and my mother Margery both had a strong feeling that they should support the community and the institutions of Folkestone, where the company was based and from which it drew the vast majority of its workforce. Before the Second World War, Sidney had*

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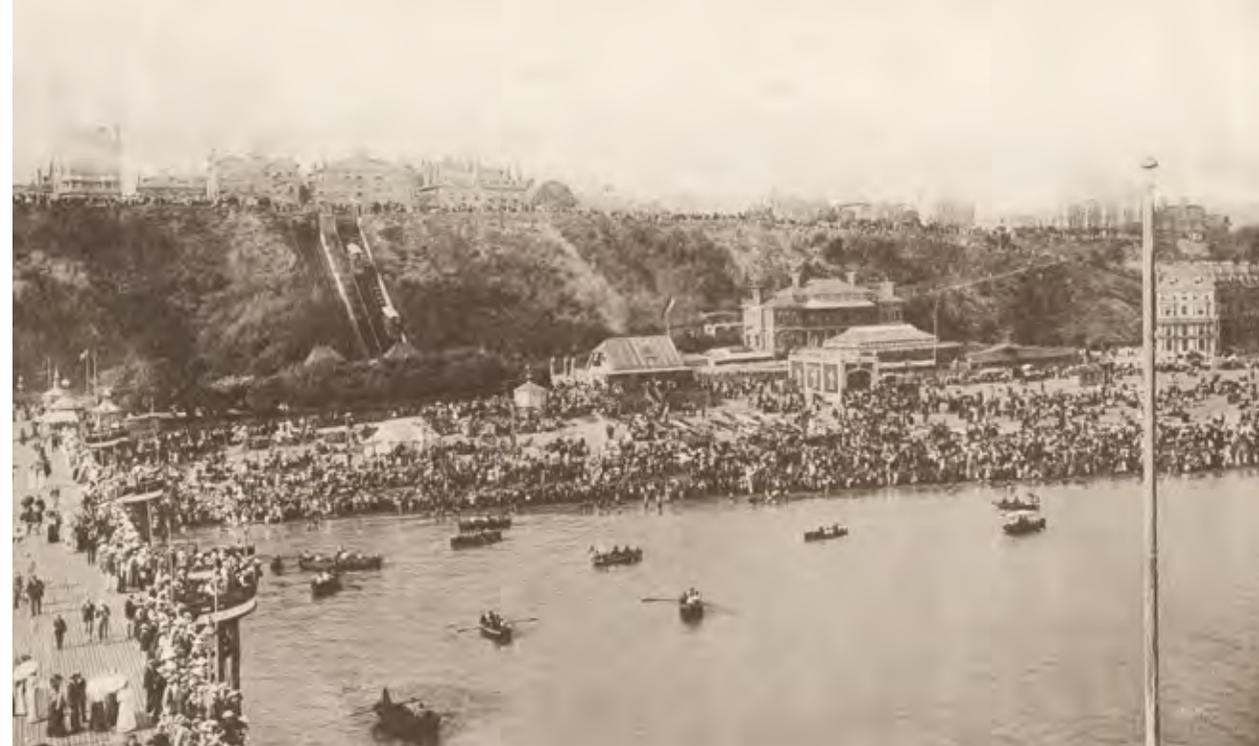
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The Sealink ferry Vortigern at Folkestone Harbour



Sidney & Margery De Haan



Above: A busy day on Folkestone's beach - taken from the pier c1900



Rhodesia Hotel © Russell Burden

been a trainee chef at the Waldorf Hotel in London, but when war came he volunteered and became a cook in the army. He was captured at Dunkerque and forced to march to a German prisoner-of-war camp; he used to tell me the story of how he and his fellow prisoners were paraded through hostile German cities on the way to their camp. He ran the hospital kitchen at the camp until 1943, when somehow The Red Cross managed to negotiate the repatriation to Britain of some of the most seriously ill prisoners, and he was chosen to accompany them. He had proved to be brilliantly resourceful at devising nutritious meals from the most unpromising ingredients and the invalids needed someone to cook for them on their return journey, which took them through Norway.

"On his return he recuperated at a hospital in Surrey, where he met Margery. They began dating and quite soon they married and started a family - my brother David was born in 1945 and I followed in 1948. After the war ended, Sidney became the catering manager of a hospital in Northampton. With a loan from Margery's father, who worked in a bank in London, they were able to buy The Rhodesia - a small hotel on the Leas in Folkestone. It was known as a private hotel; a notch up from a guest house. Running hotels in the years after the war was a struggle. At first they operated it year-round because they had some permanent guests, but soon

they decided to keep it open just in the twelve week summer season. In those days the whole of Folkestone closed in the winter, with the exception of two or three of the grandest hotels. Sidney and Margery lost money during the winter because the hotel had fixed costs which they couldn't avoid. So they came up with the idea of opening in the spring and the autumn and organising really inexpensive package holidays for retired people. It was the first time anyone had done anything like that. Originally the plan was just to cover costs, but it soon grew into something more than that."

Travel agents at the time weren't interested in selling these specialist holidays for the elderly because the prices were so low that there wasn't enough commission for them. A week's out-of-season holiday with the De Haans cost just £6 10 shillings in old money - about £170 at today's values - which covered travel, full board and three excursions. So Sidney had to find his own way of reaching customers - firstly by touring all the Darby and Joan clubs in Bradford and Leeds, and then by inventing his own form of direct mail marketing. Through the couple's hard work and determination the business prospered and soon they bought a second hotel. Demand continued to grow and they started to sub-contract to other hoteliers, initially in Folkestone and then in other south coast towns. A company was needed to handle the growing business and so the startlingly frankly named "Old People's Holiday Bureau" was born.

By the time Sidney retired in 1984, the company had changed its name to the altogether more catchy "*Saga*" (Sidney used to allege this was short for the Sexually Active Geriatrics Association). Saga had launched what was to become a hugely popular magazine, started world cruises and was experimenting with the provision of financial services which would, by the late 1990s, transform it into one of the UK's largest and most successful family-owned companies. Just as importantly, Saga had begun to redefine how people thought about their retirement years and had become a powerful voice representing the needs and aspirations of older people. Staffing numbers grew dramatically and, as the company expanded, so did its commitment to Folkestone. Not only did Saga contribute financially to local community endeavours, it also opened the beautifully laid-out grounds of its new head office to the community and made the stunningly designed Saga Pavilion, which doubled in the daytime as a staff canteen, available free of charge for community events.

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The Saga Pavilion, designed by Michael Hopkins Architects



De Haan had commissioned the leading architect Michael Hopkins to design the new Saga HQ, with its accommodation for 900 staff. The £22 million building, which opened in 1999, is a stunning example of high quality contemporary design, with large airy spaces, and a massive atrium, filled with greenery, overlooking the sea. Understandably, staff were more enthusiastic to work at the Hopkins building than at Saga's other main base in Folkestone - a much more traditional office block. To everyone's surprise, this enthusiasm translated itself into far lower levels of staff sickness and absenteeism, and higher levels of productivity, at the Hopkins site than at the other location. This was the start of De Haan's enthusiasm for high quality contemporary architectural design and his appreciation of the wider benefits it can bring.

But as Saga steadily rose, the town in which it was based continued to slide. Philip Carter moved to Folkestone in 1971; for twenty two years he ran the Executive Club in the town centre, which served a membership made up of the town's business people. Becoming a district councillor and eventually the leader of the local council, Carter witnessed the deterioration at first hand: "*The town was going down and down and down; gradually it lost its grandeur, its heart. It all seemed inevitable - much of the time the council just saw its job as managing gentle decline.*" Carter got to know Sidney De Haan when

he was on the point of retiring from Saga: “*Sidney was a shy man, who didn’t like publicity, but he had a clear sense of what he wanted to do and he wasn’t afraid to take on the authorities or to speak his mind. He had a strong sense of right and wrong and he was a very gentle gentleman, but hard*”. They worked together to try to save Folkestone Football Club by setting up a charitable company and planning a major redevelopment involving a hotel, a conference centre and a new stadium, but small town politics got in the way and the scheme came to nothing.

On Sidney’s retirement, Roger took over as Chairman of Saga and continued the policy of generously supporting local causes. Rather unexpectedly, there turned out to be commercial method in Saga’s largesse: “*Our analysts told us that we had much greater market penetration in Kent than in any other part of the country. We were a direct marketing company and we advertised nationally, not regionally; if anything there should have been a higher concentration of customers in the north, where our traditional markets lay. The only explanation we could find was Saga’s commitment to supporting Kent. I firmly believe there’s a strong connection between community spirit and commercial success. We generated enormous goodwill in the local area.*”

This drive to strengthen the community spilled out into all sorts of areas. In 1996, designers Philip Gearing and Clare Foster were living in Folkestone and producing their own handmade ceramics. One day there was a knock at the door of their home which doubled as their studio. Standing there were a woman with a baby in a pram. She asked if she could see their stock and she bought a few items, paying with a cheque with the name De Haan on it. Clare Foster recalls: “*We didn’t realise at the time, but it was Roger’s wife, Lyvie De Haan. A little while later she rang us up to say: “My husband would like some tableware for his ship.” We thought she must have meant boat.*” But in fact it turned out to be a commission for the Saga Rose, the company’s recently purchased 584 berth luxury cruise ship. Then Roger De Haan asked them to come up with some design ideas for the floor of the crèche he was having installed at Saga’s new corporate HQ. Philip Gearing continues: “*We didn’t really like the way the crèche had been laid out – it was divided up so that it compartmentalised the children. We suggested they open it up and take away the age divisions so the children could all sing together or dress up and play together. De Haan got turned on by*

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Philip Gearing and Clare Foster



The Saga Rose

the idea it could be a very special place; we ended up influencing the layout and designing all the furniture. Saga became one of the first large businesses to employ its own crèche staff. One of the inspectors from Ofsted said it was the best crèche in the country. De Haan gets turned on if you can show him something he hasn’t seen before or awaken him to ideas he hasn’t thought of before.”

But it’s one thing for a large company to set up a crèche for its employees’ children, or to sponsor local arts groups, sports clubs and scout troops as part of a corporate social responsibility policy. It’s quite another for a wealthy private individual to make multi-million pound philanthropic interventions in the social and economic fabric of a place, as De Haan has done in Folkestone over the past decade. And it’s even more distinctive for these interventions to be linked together by an over-arching theme – that of the power of the arts and education to change lives and transform communities. What led him down this road?

De Haan recalls: “*In the late 1990s Folkestone’s Metropole Arts Centre was dire and failing. Arts organisations such as Strange Cargo and others in the local arts scene were energetic and enterprising but they weren’t engaged with the Metropole. Somehow, I got dragged in.*”

The building of the Channel Tunnel in the late eighties was one of the biggest civil engineering projects ever undertaken, with thousands of construction workers drafted in for the massive tunnelling works. A sprawling temporary workers’ village was set up in the countryside between Folkestone and Dover to house them and their collective spending power caused a major uplift in the local economy, particularly in its night life. But once the project was completed the workers moved away. And Folkestone, with its ferry industry fatally undermined by the ease and convenience of the tunnel, was left higher and drier than ever.

Eurotunnel, the operator of the Shuttle train which carries cars and freight under the Channel, wanted to make a big splash to mark the tunnel’s official opening. They decided to organise a large scale community art event to bring local people together in celebration. Among those brought in to plan and deliver the event was Art Hewitt, a community artist, who moved down from Yorkshire. Hewitt teamed up with the town’s part-time arts officer,



The Saga Crèche © Foster Gearing

Simon Bolton, who had already developed a network of talented artists, and together they formed Strange Cargo Celebratory Arts Company. Strange Cargo brought a refreshing, people-centred approach to community celebrations. Out went lorry-based floats with tacky rigid tableaux and beauty pageants; in came influences from around the world – salsa, samba, dhol – and with them, hundreds of young people from local schools, who made their own costumes for the annual Charivari Day and paraded noisily through the town. Before National Lottery funding opened the way to “arts for everyone” and New Labour encouraged local authorities to develop arts strategies, Strange Cargo set out to challenge the received wisdom that the arts were the preserve of the privileged few.

But not everybody appreciated their mission, with its commitment to diversity and social inclusion. The company encountered stiff resistance in its early years and clashed repeatedly with locals who resented, for example, being told that the traditional carnival’s Beauty Parade was a tired and sexist hangover from the past. And when Strange Cargo re-routed the Carnival so that it ended with a free celebration on The Leas, Folkestone’s superb grassy cliff-top promenade, rather than, as it always had done, at the seafront funfair with its slot machines and rides, they drew fire from vested business interests. But they confronted the doubters and fought off the attacks. Gradually local people’s understanding of their work grew and, with it, an appreciation of the importance of culture in the life of the community. The company opened a gallery at their base at the top of Folkestone’s Old High Street and blazed a trail for what was later to become the Creative Quarter. Over the course of fifteen years, Strange Cargo’s painstaking, groundbreaking work, now under the artistic directorship of Brigitte Orasinski, has done much to help create the trust and the openness within the community that has allowed our regeneration project to take root and to flourish.

Meanwhile the local council, having gone through a lengthy period of cultural inaction in the 1970s and 1980s, was also building up a head of steam. In 1998 Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz was appointed as the council’s Arts Development Officer. She started a district-wide Arts Forum and worked with Kent County Council and the local regeneration team on a series of innovative projects: Chummy’s Seafood Stall on the harbour was rebuilt

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Chummy’s Seafood Stall



Strange Cargo’s Georges House Gallery

© Russell Burden

Opposite: The Annual Charivari Parade

© Russell Burden



and, despite a budget of just £45,000, an international competition was held for the design (English Heritage later declared it the best seafood stall in the country); Lottery funding was secured to create the beautiful Lower Leas Coastal Park and artists were commissioned to make permanent works there; Turner Prize winner Chris Ofili was commissioned to make glass screens for the refurbishment of the central library, while architect David Adjaye worked on its interior design.

Against this background of increasing activity, the ongoing stagnation of the Metropole Arts Centre was becoming an embarrassment.

The Metropole was one of the UK's earliest provincial arts centres. It was founded in 1960 by Gerald Glover, lawyer, property developer and racehorse breeder, and by Sir Kenneth Clark (later to become Lord Clark) resident of nearby Saltwood Castle, Director of the National Gallery, Chairman of the Arts Council and presenter of the groundbreaking TV programme *Civilization*. Glover had acquired the massive and once-grand Metropole Hotel which occupied a glorious position on the Leas overlooking the English Channel and the French coast. Once the haunt of aristocratic holiday makers, the Metropole had failed as a hotel because it couldn't compete with the lure of destinations such as the French Riviera, and it lay empty. Glover converted the five upper floors to desirable apartments but the public rooms on the ground floor, with their huge windows and their six metre high ceilings, didn't lend themselves to conversion and no one could decide what to do with them. Supported by his daughters Alison Spooner and Gina Glover, both now respected artists, and by John Eveleigh, who became its first director, Glover decided to turn the ground floor into an art gallery, performance space and restaurant.

For a decade, through the swinging sixties, it swung. Exhibitions by Brigitte Riley, Roy Lichtenstein, Epstein, JMW Turner, Picasso and Yoko Ono – in part facilitated by Clark's unparalleled connections in the art world – drew the fashionable London set down at weekends. Present day concerns about security, humidity and temperature control seem not to have arisen.

But those heady days lasted barely into the early seventies, and the story of the Metropole after Glover sold up, through

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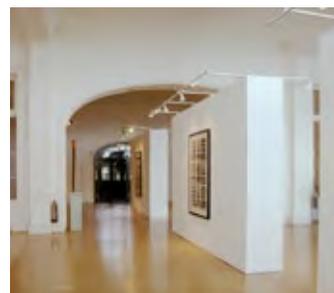
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*Chris Ofili: Glass Screen (detail),
Folkestone Library*



*Folkestone - from the Sea
by JMW Turner*



*Metropole Gallery interior
© Russell Burden*

*Opposite: Folkestone's Lower Leas
Coastal Park © Russell Burden*



to the late nineties, is one of steady decline illuminated by occasional highlights, such as a Henry Moore exhibition in the early 1980s. By the mid nineties the Metropole's funders, including the Arts Council, were getting increasingly concerned by the absence of a professional curator and the poor quality of exhibitions and events.

As De Haan explains: *“The Arts Council had recommended a new direction for the Metropole, but they seemed to think that the Trustees at the time weren’t behind it and didn’t have a commitment to change, so they withdrew their funding. The Metropole people came to see me and I foolishly agreed that Saga would provide them with three years’ replacement funding at £30,000 per year to give them time to sort themselves out. In return I simply asked for one of my senior guys, Peter Carr, who knew a fair bit about the arts, to join their Board. Very quickly he came back to me saying that the Arts Council had got it right and he made a strong recommendation that we should withdraw the funding I’d pledged. Well, I obviously couldn’t do that, so I agreed to take over temporarily as Chair of the Board and make some changes. It was a temporary thing. We thought we could fix it, but as I got more involved I began to see the scale of the challenge.”*

Eventually the Board employed a headhunter and, after a lengthy interview process, found themselves a new Director, in the shape of me. I took up the role in early 2001 knowing almost nothing about Folkestone but impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of De Haan and excited about the potential of the place: such a rich history; so many challenges; a relatively small, cohesive canvas on which to operate and seemingly a real openness to change. De Haan and his fellow Trustees made it clear that they didn’t want the all-too-obvious limitations of the Metropole building to restrict our thinking about future options for arts provision in the town. My formal brief was to *“review options for expanding the Arts Centre, obtain funding and manage the project”*. In other words, the Trustees had come to a tentative conclusion that the town needed a more relevant and sustainable new cultural building in a more suitable location - and my job was to be to deliver it. But, very quickly, it became clear to me that Folkestone wasn’t ready for this: frankly, it could scarcely even handle the arts centre it had. At that time there were already too many examples around the UK of major cultural buildings being constructed, often with National Lottery funding, without the audiences to sustain them. Folkestone certainly didn’t need another one.

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Clearly it was going to take time to work towards a new cultural centre. Time to build audiences; time to win hearts and minds; and time, potentially, to begin to transform a whole town.

De Haan and I started a conversation - one which flowed and evolved over the ensuing decade. At its heart was an unfolding of our understanding of what it means to change the economic and social fabric of a place. In the process, we seized the opportunity to conduct a unique experiment into the capacity of culture and education to improve people’s livelihoods.

We needed a plan. Back in 1996, before De Haan became involved, the then Trustees of the Metropole had secured a grant from the National Lottery, through the Arts Council, for a study to look into whether the Metropole had the potential to become a “regional centre for contemporary visual arts”. This was in the early days of the Lottery when funds for capital arts projects were flowing relatively freely and arts organisations were being encouraged to think big. Consultant Loveday Shewell had been appointed to carry out the study. But, in her interim report, she pulled no punches. She said it was unrealistic to think that the Metropole might expand into a significant regional centre: it would need: *“fundamental changes, starting with the Board. Such a radical change*

The Metropole
© Russell Burden

is extremely difficult to achieve and would require external support.” All other options, she felt, were equally flawed: “Without being able to demonstrate that there is to be a major change in the leadership of the organisation, it will not be possible to make a convincing argument for any future investment in either revenue or capital funds.” Having delivered her bombshell report, Shewell very honourably ceased work on the study, leaving some £50,000 of allocated Lottery funding unspent. As I took up the job of Director five years later, in 2001, the Arts Council was in the process of “clawing back” the unspent funding. Fortunately, I was able to persuade Moss Cooper, then Head of the Lottery Unit at the Arts Council, that the Metropole had indeed gone through the “major change of leadership” which Shewell had called for, and that we should be allowed to reallocate the funds to a very different kind of study: the production of a cultural regeneration master plan.

De Haan reminds me of another aspect to the story: *“Around this time, you and I agreed to join the local Single Regeneration Budget Partnership Board. I’d been persuaded to be the Chairman, but the whole thing turned out to be a bit of a waste of time: there weren’t any new government funds to disperse and our job was just to monitor the activity of various projects that were already running. But it became obvious to me that there was a lack of any kind of strategic approach from the public agencies. Several million pounds of government money had been allocated to a series of worthy projects, but without any kind of framework or plan.”* So into this strategy vacuum we boldly stepped.

At a conceptual level, I felt that our overall approach needed to address three key, interlinked issues - to use a computing analogy; we needed to sort out the hardware, the software and the branding of Folkestone.

- Hardware:- In terms of place, we championed high quality design in the built environment and focused on resuscitating Folkestone’s Old Town as a creative zone, thus restoring the broken physical and spiritual affinity between the town and the sea - its original raison d’etre and its life blood;
- Software:- From a people perspective, we aspired to transform Folkestone into a great place to live, to study, to work, to play, to bring up a family and to visit. And we realised that changing the learning

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Folkestone Seagull

© Russell Burden

Opposite: Artists taking part in the annual Boxing day dip at Folkestone’s Sunny Sands © Russell Burden



environment and the range of opportunities for cultural engagement were at the centre of this process;

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- Branding:- We set out to turn the town's negative image, both internal and external, into a new, positive sense of identity – a source of genuine pride for local people and an attractor for visitors and inward investors.

In De Haan, Folkestone had finally found a champion who was willing to drive forward positive change across these diverse fields in a forceful, focused way.

I convened a planning group and invited the relevant public and private agencies to join: Kent County Council, Shepway District Council, Saga, the regional development agency SEEDA and the regional arts board South East Arts all came on board the project. The price of a seat at the table was a financial contribution to the costs of the study.

I drew up the brief for the study. It explained that we wished to appoint a team of consultants to undertake feasibility work and generate a master plan, supporting the development of a phased series of initiatives, which together would amount to the establishment of a Creative Quarter in the Old Town and the re-branding of Folkestone as a regionally significant centre for the arts.

In summary, the planned phases I set out were: the development of a cluster of affordable workspaces and residential units for artists, craftspeople and creative businesses in the Old Town; the establishment of University provision specialising in the arts and the creative industries; the founding of an innovative arts and health research centre; the creation of a new performing arts centre, incorporating a theatre and live music venue; the setting up of a media production centre, focused on skills training for young people; and the development of a world-class sculpture project for Folkestone's public realm.

I toured all the key agencies, presenting these ideas. No doubt it all came across as a highly aspirational “*wish-list*” at the time. Robert Bliss, current Leader of the local district council, Shepway, recalls: “*When you first came to give your presentation to us we all felt it was such a different approach. The council had not been a great art supporter up to then and these sorts of things were new to Folkestone. Some aspects seemed very ambitious and there were definitely some raised eyebrows.*”



Folkestone Harbour

© Russell Burden



In fact, with the exception of the media production centre, which remains on the stocks, all these aspirations have been met over the course of the last decade. Indeed, we've exceeded our own targets in a number of key areas, with the addition of major initiatives such as The Folkestone Academy and the hugely ambitious project to redevelop the town's harbour and seafront.

But it was one thing to get the support of the agencies (and they did indeed all give their endorsement to our plans); it was quite another to win the backing of the general public for such a radical programme of change. We knew that it would be essential to bring the community along with us as we embarked on our voyage of change, and we were lucky that an ideal opportunity to do just that presented itself.

After Philip Carter sold his Executive Club in the late nineties, he decided to reinvest the proceeds in a mixed-use property development in the area, and in 2001 he sought advice from the local business advisory service. He was shocked by what he was told: “*It's a great idea, Mr Carter, but it won't work here. Folkestone is a lost cause for investment - you should take your money somewhere else*”. Stung into action, Carter persuaded the flame-haired deputy editor of the local paper, Rebecca Smith, to put her weight behind a campaign; 35,000 leaflets were printed posing the question “*Is Folkestone Dying?*” and inviting people to attend a public

Above: Is Folkestone Dying?

meeting. Seven hundred and fifty local people turned up to the first meeting, filling Folkestone's cavernous Leas Cliff Hall – angry, frustrated, disillusioned, but hungry for change, and “Go Folkestone Action Group” was born. I took the opportunity to speak about our project at the meeting and the new group immediately became one of our firmest supporters. With the backing of Go Folkestone, we began to build a popular consensus for the changes we were planning.

We advertised widely for the consultancy contract and appointed a team comprising Tim Mason (the former Chief Executive of London Arts Board), Colin Mercer (Professor of Cultural Policy at Nottingham Trent University at the time) and Locum Destination Consulting to carry out the work and write the report.

De Haan made it clear to me that he was no great fan of consultants; he reminds me: *“You recommended and I accepted that we needed to have our thoughts written up by a team of consultants. I wasn't very happy but it seemed to be the game we needed to play. The purpose was to give our ideas the official stamp of approval, and to get our partners meeting round the table to find solutions to some of the problems the town faced. But the report itself mainly told us what we already knew.”*

De Haan isn't the type to sit around waiting for consultants to produce reports. While the study was going on, we moved into action. De Haan continues: *“I'd already come to the conclusion that efforts to regenerate the town and the seafront were not likely to succeed while the Old Town was a slum area. Together, you and I came up with the idea of turning the Old Town into an arts quarter.”* De Haan is being typically generous. My simple proposal was that we should aim to persuade the owners of empty shops in the Old Town to allow artists and creative businesses to take short-term occupation of their premises at low rents. I explained to De Haan that, where this had happened before in major cities, it had often proved effective in revitalising and regenerating run-down areas. But I also explained that the artists and creatives who kick-start the regeneration process are often forced out as more commercial businesses are attracted to the area and rents increase, giving rise to the so-called “Hoxton Effect”. De Haan's solution to this potential pitfall was both beautifully simple and breathtakingly bold: *“That's easy, Nick,”* he said at the time, *“We'll buy the buildings and then we can control the rents for the long term”.*

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We established a new charitable organisation, which we called The Creative Foundation. As is sometimes the case with innovative charitable projects, we found ourselves at the vanguard of best practice. Charities in England are regulated by the Charity Commission, and governed by charity law which has evolved over hundreds of years. In 2002, the idea that charities could undertake regeneration work was still relatively new and we worked hard with the Charity Commission to agree an acceptable *modus operandi*. As the Charity Commission sees it: *“Charity must confer a benefit on the public as a whole or on a sufficient section of the public. Most of the tangible benefits of urban or rural regeneration would normally seem to go, in the first place, to individuals and individual businesses rather than the wider public.”*

Our intention was to generate widely-felt, but largely intangible, benefits through a series of interventions – and we found that charity law is not ideally suited to dealing with the intangible. But with the help of our legal advisers we eventually won the blessing of the Charity Commission to proceed, and we began acquiring derelict and disused properties. Where we could, we then sub-let the properties on favourable terms to artists and start-up creative businesses. Initially we were dependent on public funding and progress was slow. Subsequently, De Haan decided to allocate significant private charitable funding through his

*“Chess board” terrace on the roof of
the Leas Cliff Hall
© Russell Burden*

family trust for the purchase and refurbishment or rebuilding of properties, and our programme accelerated rapidly.

We didn't stop there. At the same time as our work to establish the Creative Quarter was getting under way, we began a range of ambitious projects to improve Folkestone's educational infrastructure. And we started developing an extensive programme of exhibitions, festivals and events, building on the visual arts traditions of the Metropole and the long history of literary activity in Folkestone. Then, before long, De Haan involvement deepened still further – he began planning the massive project to regenerate the town's harbour and seafront.

At the time De Haan wasn't able to reveal one of his key motivations for getting so deeply immersed in Folkestone: *“I was preparing to sell Saga. The sale went through [for a remarkable £1.35 billion] in 2004, but for at least eighteen months beforehand I had to demonstrate that my management position within the company was not crucial to the success of the business. I was used to working incredibly hard, so the planning process for the Folkestone project channelled my energies. Because I had a bit more time, I also got involved in the Kent Partnership, which was an extraordinary education for me. I was able to build links with people like Graham Badman, Des Crilley and Sandy Bruce-Lockhart at Kent County Council and I realised Folkestone had a role to play in helping the County Council achieve its objectives.”*

“It was great fun; we saw huge potential and we just got on with it. It was exciting and before long there was no turning back. We were getting lots of encouragement from Kent County Council and SEEDA; we could see the need; we knew local efforts were ineffective; we had a small and effective team; we thought we could make a difference and we did. There's no stopping now.”

Although, at the outset, no one had any real concept of how ambitious our project was set to become, we nevertheless recognised that there was a need – and an opportunity – to act in a joined-up, holistic manner in addressing Folkestone's problems. We'd examined arts-led regeneration projects in the UK and internationally. In particular, we'd looked at the problems facing many of Britain's coastal towns and the potential role of culture and education in addressing the key issues of decline and

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peripherality that so many of them faced. We agreed with Professor Fred Gray's analysis as he expresses it in his book *“Designing the Seaside”*: *“In Britain seaside regeneration has had relatively weak economic, political and cultural foundations, and the process therefore has been often unsure, protracted and piecemeal”*.

We were determined that, as far as possible, our approach would neither be unsure nor piecemeal. We knew we had to produce an economic model that led to sustainable improvements in the local economy. We realised we needed to draw the public sector close to us in order both to generate political support and to align reform of public services with our own plans. And we understood the need for a fundamental cultural shift.

But, as far as timescale went, we saw little alternative to a protracted process. From its earliest days our project was conceived as a long term endeavour. We're ten years in now, and extraordinary progress has been achieved in that time, but the decline of Folkestone took place over the course of nearly half a century and a successful strategy to reverse the decline needs to give itself a suitably lengthy timeframe. Paradoxically, given his own description of himself as *“a man in a tearing hurry”*, perhaps De Haan's greatest insight is to take the long view.

Aerial view of Folkestone

© Russell Burden

THE CREATIVE QUARTER

By the tail-end of the last century, on all objective measures, Folkestone was doing very badly. Educational attainment, unemployment, average earnings, health inequalities, unfit housing – these and other indicators of deprivation told a consistent story: Folkestone was failing to thrive. The problems were at their most severe in central and eastern Folkestone, and particularly in Folkestone Harvey Central ward, where the Old Town is located. In 2003 this area was the worst in Kent for health deprivation, and the worst in the south east of England for unemployment, putting it into the bottom 0.4% most deprived parts of the UK. A startling 34% of the working-age population was in long-term unemployment and had no formal qualifications.

On the ground, the reality of the statistics was all too apparent. The Old High Street, once the bustling heart of the town, linking the sea to the main retail zone on the cliff-top, was lined with empty shops. Tontine Street, once reputedly known as *“the Bond Street of the South Coast”*, had become a no-go area for most locals.

From temporary offices in the Metropole Gallery, the fledgling Creative Foundation opened for business. Following an intensive cycle of funding applications, reports and assessments, we were successful in securing modest amounts of capital grant funding from the Arts Council and from the regional development agency SEEDA. These grants allowed us to acquire three run-down, empty properties in the Old Town and to rent three more on favourable terms.

The Old High Street, Folkestone
© centralphotography.com



However most of the buildings were in extremely poor condition and we lacked the resources to refurbish them for use by artists and creative businesses.

Things moved forward frustratingly slowly, although with occasional flashes that gave a foretaste of a different approach. Linking The Old High Street with a large “brownfield” site known as Payers Park was a small but strategically important piece of derelict land - a partially filled-in bomb crater left largely untouched since the Second World War. This site was due to come up for auction at the same time as a meeting of the partners for the feasibility study was being held in November 2001, and the following extract from the minutes of that meeting reveal much about De Haan’s ability to accelerate the process of change:

“Payers Park could be an option for arts development. Much discussion about Payers Park as possible centre for Cultural Quarter. All partners very positive about location of land at this point. Roger De Haan contacted auctioneers to bid for land adjoining Payers Park. It was confirmed later in the meeting that the land had been purchased.”

But such dramatic interventions by De Haan were rare, and the process of securing public funds for the refurbishment of our properties and for further acquisitions was a lengthy and frustrating one.

After eighteen months of steadily working in this way, two things had become clear: firstly, that taking over derelict and run-down buildings without the financial means to restore them meant buying a cluster of unpleasant headaches; and secondly, that if we waited for the public sector to provide the capital funding we needed to fulfil our ambitions we’d be waiting a very long time. Our intention was to control enough properties to reach a tipping point – a critical mass of creative activity which would be sufficient to attract private investors to move into the area. But, at the rate we were moving, this began to seem an impossible goal. Fortunately Roger De Haan was able to engineer a solution to these problems and in early 2004 his family trust, the Roger De Haan Charitable Trust (RDHCT), proposed an innovative way of working with the Creative Foundation:

- Acting on Creative Foundation advice, RDHCT would buy a portfolio of buildings in the Old Town, retaining the freeholds for the long term;

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Tontine Street before regeneration
© Russell Burden

- The Creative Foundation would plan and manage the process of restoring the buildings to a high standard – or rebuilding them where necessary, drawing on RDHCT funds for the purpose;
- On completion of the refurbishment or rebuilding projects, the properties would be leased to the Creative Foundation on 125 year leases at zero rent;
- The Creative Foundation would then be free to let out the completed properties to creative or educational tenants, on the condition that the rents it charged remained affordable;
- The Creative Foundation would retain the income from rents to fund its own staffing and running costs and to manage and maintain the property portfolio;
- Once the break-even point was reached, the Creative Foundation would invest any surpluses in running arts events, festivals and educational programmes in the Old Town and beyond.

Naturally the Creative Foundation leapt at this extremely generous proposal. In the medium to long term, it meant that we would have a property-based endowment which would guarantee our future stability. In the short term it meant we could rapidly accelerate our programme of property acquisition and refurbishment. We were on our way.

In order to cope with the increasing workload associated with our rapidly growing property programme, we needed an experienced Property Director, and we found one in the shape of Robert Green.

Green was born at Station Cottages, Dover Road, just five hundred metres from where the Creative Foundation’s offices now stand. A bearded bear of a man, he thinks of himself as a son of the East End of Folkestone and has lived in the town all his life. Green left grammar school at sixteen and went to work in the Folkestone Glassworks, now the location of the University Centre Folkestone campus in the heart of the Creative Quarter. But his window fitting skills clearly weren’t up to the mark and he only lasted there for a month. In September 1975 he joined Saga as the van driver’s mate; one of about a hundred and twenty staff at the time. When he left the company twenty nine



Robert Green

years later to join the Creative Foundation, he was a senior manager and Saga's staffing levels had grown to well over two thousand.

Green recalls the De Haans' unerring instinct for marketing and customer care, and their pioneering use of direct marketing methods: *"Sidney and Roger kept individual cards on all their customers and used them to record all the personal information they could: birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and they would keep in touch by mail, sending people birthday cards and so on. They believed in the personal touch and found that it increased sales and loyalty. The De Haan's breakthrough idea was that you get to know as much about your customers as you can, and use the information to target sales information, whether that's a taste for overseas holidays, ballroom dancing or whist – and they would keep sending them information. At that time the company had about thirty outworkers in different houses around Folkestone. We used to drop round boxes of envelopes and brochures in the afternoon, the stuffers would spend hours every evening stuffing them, and we'd pick them up and post them in the morning. One of the best was Linda Cufley, who later became leader of the local council. She roped her mum and dad in and they would sit around watching TV while they had a little production line going. It was piecework – they would earn hundreds of pounds doing it. There might be two or three hundred thousand envelopes in a mailing of one of the big seasonal brochures."*

"Eventually we moved over from the hand-stuffing system to a mechanised mailing company with a computer, based in a warehouse in what is now the car park of Wembley Stadium. The computer was unbelievably primitive by today's standards, but at the time it was cutting edge. It eventually struck me that it would probably be cheaper to do it all ourselves rather than use external mailing houses. Off my own back I did a report on the idea, waited until Roger was in a good mood and asked him to read it. Within six months it had been worked into a detailed plan and the Board of Directors decided to go for it; we bought Metromail, a mailing business in the north east, and within a few years it had grown into one of the top three mailing houses in the country. In the nineties I babysat this new business for about two years after the original Managing Director left, and my wife Kaaren and I considered moving north permanently with the kids, but I'm a Folkestone lad at heart. I continued on the Metromail board, and also oversaw all of Saga's print buying. By 2000, I was

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The Creative Foundation's first office in The Old High Street

managing Saga's properties as well and I was responsible for over a hundred staff – gardeners, cleaners, security guys. That's why I stayed at Saga so long – plenty of times I was bored and thought "I've got to do something else", but another opportunity would always open up.

"Roger liked to promote internally. He'd say: "life's too short to work with someone you don't like." He's always been loyal to me and given me opportunities. It's important to Roger that he has people working in positions of authority he trusts and knows will give 100% effort, but are also independently minded enough to disagree. He can be a very difficult man to work with - there have been times when I could have punched him - but he's always looked after me. There's something about him that makes you want to carry on working for him. He's a remarkable man.

"In late 2002 Roger announced he was planning his departure from Saga. I had no idea at the time he was working on the Folkestone regeneration project, but I gradually started hearing more and more about it. Then, over an informal lunch, I was sounded out about working on the project – but I didn't respond for a while; the world of the arts seemed such a foreign land to me. Eventually I got a call from Roger: "Look, do you want this job or not?" I woke up at 3am the next morning and thought: "Why am I even hesitating?" I could have stayed at Saga but I'd be slowly going out of my mind. I started with the Creative Foundation on 1st April 2004. It felt like stepping back into the 1970s."

Green joined me and just two other members of staff. He continues: *"I had to do my own letters and phone calls – everything. I was lucky to have the contacts to build up a really good bunch of advisers – Peter Godden, Grant Fennell, Paul Allen, Nick Lawn, they've been amazingly loyal and hard working – they've played such a huge role in our success. Back in those early days Niamh Sullivan, the Project Assistant, made the place tick – she did the mail, answered the phone, dealt with all the tenants. We had seven properties when I started and Niamh had the daily job of going round to empty the buckets from all the leaking roofs."*



Niamh Sullivan with cup of tea
© Matt Rowe

Straight from graduating from the Kent Institute of Art and Design, Niamh Sullivan joined the charity in September 2003, when it had been operating for less than six months.

Like many members of the Creative Foundation team, Sullivan grew up in Folkestone and has strong roots in the town. As a teenager her parents wouldn't let her go into the Old Town as they felt it wasn't safe. Perhaps they had reason to be concerned: her father Joe Sullivan was, and still is, a dentist in Folkestone, and used to spend his Saturday and Sunday mornings fixing the broken teeth of patients who had been involved in fights outside the nightclubs and pubs of Tontine Street and the Harbour. He used to say it was easy to find your way to the Old Town: *"Just follow the flashing blue lights"*.

Niamh Sullivan says it's much safer now: *"I haven't seen a fight in Tontine Street in ages. East Folkestone in general is a lot better than it was, partly thanks to council initiatives and the new health centre which gives people with drink and drugs problems the chance to sort themselves out. The Shed Youth Centre, Route 25 Adolescent Resource Centre and Cafe IT have all made a difference - even the Roma kids are a lot more integrated."*

She recalls the early days of the Creative Foundation when it was tiny, under-resourced and somewhat chaotic: *"We started hot-desking at the Metropole Gallery then we got our hands on a run-down former baker's in the Old High Street and moved in there for a few months. We had to borrow furniture from wherever we could and I didn't even have a computer. Anyone could wander in off the street at any time to see what we were up to."*

Then a rambling collection of buildings in Church Street was made available on a short-term rent-free lease from Kent County Council, and the Creative Foundation moved in. Sullivan recalls: *"It had a great atmosphere for a series of studio buildings: no formal social area, but lots of corridors and places for informal meetings and a great bunch of artists"*. Within a couple of months the buildings were full with twenty five creative tenants, and we were on our way to establishing a vibrant artistic community.

2005 saw another office move, this time to The Glassworks. As Sullivan recalls: *"Things changed: we were growing, taking on staff and getting a lot more properties, a lot more tenants."* The Creative Foundation recruited a receptionist and people couldn't just drop by for a chat any more; they had to make an appointment to arrange a meeting. *"We had to knock down our only light industrial building to make way*

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for our new theatre; it was a pretty derelict building, but it meant we lost a metalwork foundry and for a time the lack of industrial spaces narrowed our range of tenants."

One of the key issues for the Creative Quarter has been the question of how many properties are needed to create the critical mass that would encourage others to come in and invest. We believed that once our charitable endeavour had secured the requisite number of buildings, refurbished them and found tenants to run successful businesses from them, entrepreneurs would move into the area and the regeneration process would gain an unstoppable momentum. But we didn't know how many buildings we would need.

Green recalls: *"There was a discussion quite early on when it was thought we needed to own maybe forty buildings. Later it was decided we needed at least sixty buildings. In the end we decided there isn't a definitive critical mass - we just have to keep going until it works. Now we have eighty four properties, spread across sixty different addresses. We often weren't in a position to negotiate prices downwards, but fortunately there weren't too many other buyers out there; we were the only game in town and we had the patience to wait. We did need to keep things as quiet as possible, though. As soon as a pattern emerged, a few of the owners started to get rather inflated ideas of what we'd be willing to pay for their properties."*



Charlotte Harris, BP Portrait Award winner, in her Church Street studio

Above: Glassworks offices

It seemed we were about to reach the tipping point in the summer of 2008: June saw the launch of our first Folkestone Triennial of newly commissioned contemporary art in the public spaces of the town. The exhibition generated massive media interest in Folkestone and in our work, and we witnessed a huge upsurge in interest from potential investors. But, just at that point, the economic downturn hit, and it was as if a tap had been turned off; enquiries from people wanting to move into the area dried up almost overnight. Confidence has been slow to return, but since late 2010 conditions have started to improve and private investors have started to reappear. De Haan now believes that the tipping point will soon be reached, and he is determined enough to take the long view. Fortunately for Folkestone, the Roger De Haan Charitable Trust was in a position to continue investing in property despite the downturn, and the ongoing construction activity involved in bringing a constant stream of disused buildings back to life has helped to keep the local economy ticking over through the recession.

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Green continues: *“When I first started I was really shocked by the buildings we were buying – both by the appalling state of the structures themselves and by the dreadful conditions people were prepared to live in. Looking back I feel as though I was wrapped up in cotton wool during my time at Saga. The over-riding feeling was of squalor. When I first walked into the building we call The Wedge [one of the earliest acquisitions, now home to the regional film agency Screen South] I couldn’t believe anyone could live in that amount of squalor. The building itself was in a terrible condition structurally and it was filthy. The baths were so dirty you’d have stepped out dirtier than you got in. One of the landlords showed me round some of the flats he owned and apologised for the state of them – I remember him saying “These people live like pigs”. I told him “If you make people live in pigsties, they don’t have much choice”. There were slug trails all over the carpet, fungus growing up the walls and rising damp. In one place we found seven people living in a two bedroom flat; the granddad sleeping on a put-up bed in the corridor. It was like Slumdog Millionaire, but here on the south coast of England. The windows didn’t fit properly, the staircase was creaking, everything was damp. How did the local authority tolerate it? Usually in such places the council was responsible for paying out government housing benefit to cover the rent – how did they let it go on? Why wouldn’t use their powers to make the landlords fix things? I doubt whether Folkestone is any different from anywhere else in the same boat.”*



Structural issues in a newly acquired property



Abandoned sofa in the basement of a newly acquired property

The economy in the Old Town of Folkestone had failed. Many of the buildings had come to the end of their economic lives and had become so expensive to fix that the market on its own could not bring them back into use. It needed charitable or tax-payers’ money to put them right.

“Landlords have no incentive to spend tens of thousands of pounds refurbishing their properties,” Green continues. *“As long as the council keeps paying the rent and giving landlords a good return, they’d be wasting their money. At the time Tontine Street was a no-go area. Hardly anyone, other than benefits claimants, was prepared to live there: it was becoming a vicious circle.”*

According to Green, *“Another reason the landlords wouldn’t do anything to upgrade their buildings was because the rules say as soon as you modify anything, you have to bring it all fully up to specification with the latest building regulations. But if you do nothing, the regulations don’t kick in. One property we bought in The Old High Street had been operating as a bakery up until just before we took it over. The kitchen was in a filthy state - there must have been four inches of rancid grease around the base of the cooker -*

Above: Evidence of damp in newly acquired property

and it was a deathtrap too: there was no way out from the kitchen if there'd been a fire. Mind you, in *The Old High Street* generations of people had made alterations to buildings without consulting the authorities: taking out supporting walls; taking out chimney breasts with no support - in one of the buildings you could almost ski down the slope from the front to the back. In another, the top of a door had been sliced off at a twenty degree angle so that it could be shut after the side of the house had slumped.

“A lot of the buildings were very old. In the basement of one old cafe there were dates notched into a wooden pillar to mark children’s birthdays going back several centuries. And there was a smugglers’ tunnel running part of the way up *The Old High Street* on the north side. Many of the buildings probably hadn’t been properly maintained since they were built.”

The Creative Foundation’s policy has been to invest in good quality contemporary design whilst retaining historic elements that are of importance to the heritage of the area. As Green puts it, “We always wanted to retain the history and the character where we could. For example, we spent £30,000 extra on meticulously restoring the metal fretwork around the windows of *The Wedge*, which wasn’t even listed. It would have been far cheaper and easier to replace it, but it was so beautiful we felt we needed to keep it. The basement of *The Wedge* was a classic - there was a clearly defined stain running around the walls at about five foot height - that was the high water mark whenever it flooded, and it was perilously close to the incoming mains power supply. We tanked the basement and now it’s used for meetings and film screenings.

“In one building we found that a main supporting roof beam had rotted at both ends and the ceiling had dropped by six inches. Instead of replacing the beam the landlord had tacked on a couple of bits of wood and re-plastered the ceiling underneath to hide the problem. Our engineer said that the roof could have collapsed at any moment - and there were people living and sleeping there at the time. In another place the beam had rotted away and the builders had used empty video cases to pack out the hole and support the roof. God knows why they thought it was better to use video cases rather than go and get a few bricks!”

We’ve kept a careful photographic record of our work, so that people can see what the buildings were like before we took them on, typically how close they were to needing

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Filming at Screen South’s offices in *The Wedge* © centralphotography.com

Opposite top: *The Wedge* before refurbishment

Opposite bottom:
The Wedge after refurbishment
© centralphotography.com



to be pulled down, and how we've transformed them. Our aim has been to extend the life of these buildings by at least a hundred years.

As Green says: *“Commercially the things we’ve been doing make no sense. There’s no incentive for landlords to improve their buildings; unless they’re philanthropic they’re just not going to do it. We constantly met with total disinterest on the part of the landlords and I don’t know what you can do about it. It’s a problem in run-down areas everywhere. Of course I blame the landlords, but I also blame the council that should have made them do something about it.”*

How does the Council react to this criticism? Their spokesperson Sarah Smith said: *“Unless people living in the buildings complain to our housing team about their living conditions there is very little we can do to help. When tenants do approach us for assistance we always make it clear to the landlord that evicting the tenant will not affect any action we need to take and we will always ensure that the property is brought back up to a safe and decent standard either with the tenant in situ or before another tenant occupies the property. Currently, there is no legislative link between housing benefit claims and the condition of a property. The housing benefits system is geared up for the person claiming, not as an incentive to landlords to improve their properties. Therefore, the only route for improvement is for the tenant to negotiate with the landlord, or for them to call our team for assistance.”*

So, landlords are free to carry on receiving rent from the taxpayer for maintaining a slum. If the tenant is foolish enough to complain, they will almost certainly end up being evicted. Something doesn't feel quite right.

Another of the challenges the Creative Foundation and its tenants faced was coping with the disruption to normal life caused by the seemingly never-ending programme of building works. Part of The Old High Street's charm is that it's a steep, narrow, winding, cobbled route, but this means that a single parked builder's van can block all access for other vehicles and make it difficult for pedestrians to get past. External scaffolding compounds the problem and, with typically six or seven construction projects going on at any one time, it's sometimes been easy to form the impression that the Creative Quarter is one large building site. Naturally this can be off-putting for shoppers and frustrating for tenants. In an ideal world the Creative Foundation might have closed

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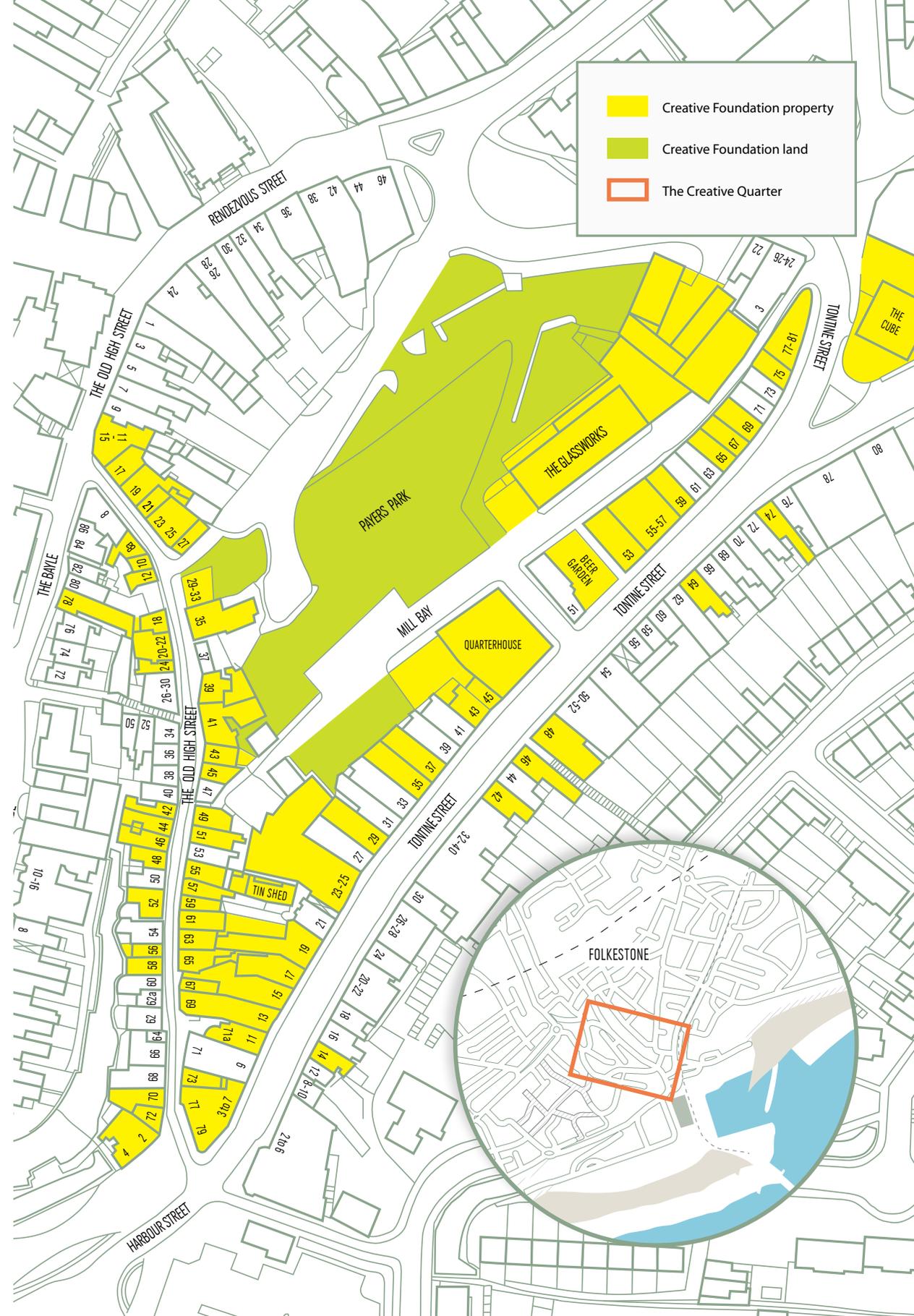


43, The Old High Street: before



43, The Old High Street: after
- centralphotography.com

Opposite: Property map of the Creative Quarter



off the whole area for two or three years and done all the refurbishment and rebuilding work in one hit. But that was never a realistic option. For major arts festivals organised by the Creative Foundation, in particular during the three months of the Folkestone Triennial, all building work ceases: for these periods the whole town has to look its best.

Philip Gearing of Foster Gearing Designers designed several of the new shop fronts for Creative Foundation properties, particularly in the early years. He recalls: *“We met real problems early on with public perception and among planning officials. I wanted planners to understand how you could use modern materials on historic buildings and I gave the example of Venice, where you have wonderful but crumbling old buildings on the upper stories, but the shop fronts are minimal glass blocks, beautifully lit. Unfortunately this was misinterpreted and the local authority seemed to get the idea we wanted to turn Folkestone into Venice. Getting planning permission got more difficult for a time. In those early days, planners were keen to stop what they saw as a unified appearance, whereas we wanted there to be a recognisable style.”*

Those early challenges have eased now, and there is a good understanding with planners, often helped by support from English Heritage. We used a wide range of architects and designers, many locally based and some with international reputations, and this has led to a richly patinated look and feel throughout the Creative Quarter. The Old Town has a fascinating social history, and some of the buildings we have acquired there have architectural merit – generally these have been sensitively and lovingly restored. But others have been poor, crumbling examples of pre- or post-war design, and in some of these cases we have agreed with the planners that it would be better to make a fresh start by rebuilding a site in its entirety.

In the early years of the project we allowed ourselves to be convinced by the local council that it would be advantageous to us if the Conservation Area covering the historic Bayle area of Folkestone was extended to take in the Old Town, as we were told that this would give us access to grant funding. This move met with a certain amount of derision in the local press and among the community, who felt there was little worth conserving in the area at the time. And it turned out that the scale of grant funding was extremely modest: we had tied ourselves up in volumes of red tape for no real advantage.

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56/58, The Old High Street: before



Right: 56/58, The Old High Street: after

The Creative Quarter still has quite some way to go before it develops into a specialist retail zone which large volumes of people will choose to visit from far afield. As Gearing says: *“In a way, you’re developing a shopping precinct, but they have to have attractions – anchor stores. We didn’t have that because of the way the project developed organically over time. Now the harbour needs to be developed to make it really succeed – it’s the driver that pushes the footfall and the economy. The harbour is the destination that Folkestone needs.”*

Tenants who rented Creative Foundation shops were often very good craftspeople and artists but they sometimes had little or no retail experience; in these cases they needed to learn about business very quickly. Wherever we could, we helped tenants with business advice and employed designers to design logos, marketing materials and shop interiors for them. In partnership with the Arts Council and the regional development agency SEEDA, the Creative Foundation piloted a Creative Industry Business Advisory Service, which evolved into a specialist Enterprise Gateway advice centre, initially led by Martin Roche and subsequently by Jason Martin. The funding for this service came from SEEDA and unfortunately it has come to an end as the agency is wound up – but Jason Martin has formed his own company, CAP Enterprise, and is carrying on providing advice to Creative Quarter tenants at no charge.

Until October 2008, demand for Creative Foundation properties exceeded our ability to bring it on stream and we maintained a healthy waiting list. In the early years of the project we had expected a fairly high degree of business failure, but by 2007 and the early part of 2008 we were seeing a lot less “churn” as businesses grew, matured and began to prosper. Unfortunately, as the economy slowed towards the end of 2008, levels of spending by consumers and demand for property both fell away sharply. Although some tenants have continued to thrive, it’s been tough for others to weather the conditions. A number have been forced to close and the Creative Foundation has had to be flexible on some of its rental terms. Green explains: *“We now have 117 studios and offices, 35 flats and 40 shops and restaurants spread across 84 buildings. In the second quarter of 2011 we had 77 per cent occupancy overall – that’s 76 per cent for studios; 69 per cent for our retail units and 85 per cent for residential accommodation. It’s below where we’d like it to be, but it’s not bad considering the economic conditions.”*

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Retail, studio and residential tenants all have their place in the mixed-use zone that the Creative Quarter has become in recent years. An important priority has been to transform the night-time economy of the Old Town, in order to stop it from being a no-go area after dark. We’ve done this by refurbishing flats to provide a high quality urban living environment and by introducing combined living and studio accommodation so that spaces are well used day and night. And we’ve encouraged in a vibrant combination of cafes, bars, informal education centres such as The Cube and entertainment centres like Quarterhouse Performing Arts Centre, so that the area has become much more populated in the evenings.

How much control should the Creative Foundation expect to exert over the mix of tenants in its properties? Clearly we aspired to have artists, artisans and creative businesses of the very highest calibre in our spaces, while at the same time we wanted to be supportive to local creative enterprises and to ensure that there was a healthy mix to attract visitors – that hairdressers, cafes, florists, cake makers and tattooists, for example, were part of a varied street scene alongside artists and niche designer-makers. We formed a committee to consider and approve applications for spaces: most applicants were accepted but sometimes they would be vetoed on the grounds of artistic quality; just as often we’d



Shane Record’s gallery has expanded since it first opened in 2005

Above: Late night opening in The Old High Street

have doubts about the sustainability of a potential tenant's business plan.

“Generally the tenants get on very well together,” Green says. “There’s a great deal of camaraderie, helped along by regular breakfast meetings and social events. The tenants who are here all want to see the project succeed – although of course you get the occasional moan. So many people are working so hard to drag this area up. We have had some criticism for “social engineering” of the area, but people seem to forget the millions of pounds we’ve invested to turn it from squalor into a place you’d be proud to bring up your family.”

There are clear signs that the wider regeneration of the area has now started. Independently of the Creative Foundation, creative activity is spilling out into other parts of the town. Studio buildings, craft shops, web-based businesses and galleries have sprung up, some initiated by former Creative Foundation tenants who have moved on to find alternative premises. Many of the shops in Rendezvous Street, on the fringes of the Creative Quarter, have been refurbished and several art galleries and specialist shops have moved in. Within the Creative Quarter, but under their own steam, Paul and Karen Rennie have beautifully refurbished their own property, where they base their successful business selling art objects from the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Sweet Rendezvous is established as a successful cafe and also runs the catering operation at University Centre Folkestone. Rachel Jones has bought three buildings which she has had refurbished and where she has based her own specialist handbag fabricating firm, Quake. Publishers and architects have moved in, and View London, which is the most popular entertainment and listings website for London, has bought a disused nightclub which it is refurbishing as the base for its thirty five staff. As the national economic climate begins to lift, the Creative Quarter is rolling.

For artist and curator Matt Rowe, Folkestone has already come past the point of no return. Having grown up in Folkestone, Rowe went to Cardiff to do a masters degree. He moved back to Folkestone in 2004 and set up the B&B Project Space in Tontine Street. He says, *“Folkestone’s enough of a destination to be on the map and near enough to London to be accessible. But it’s small enough to know everyone and it’s isolated enough to be its own entity. That’s what attracted me to come down in the first place – it was like the Wild West.*

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Quake

Opposite: Karen Rennie outside her shop in The Old High Street



Nowadays the initial excitement has passed and it's become more polished. Over the years there have been successive waves of newcomers forming new social networks; places get colonised quite quickly but then people fall out and it becomes competitive. It's become quite intense: it reminds me of a small city like Cardiff. I wasn't sure the idea of an artists' quarter would work very well – I was worried it would be too polite. But I wanted to settle and invest my time locally; I've always made work about Folkestone and I was very keen on becoming socially engaged. The Quarter gave me the ability to develop a curatorial practice without having to conform to an institution. It's run on enthusiasm and adrenalin; I rent the B&B space from the Creative Foundation and I just let people come in and use it. Even though it's tiny the B&B has credibility in the artworld – the impact per square foot is immense. In Folkestone you can still make your own identity – although the more developed it becomes, the harder it gets to carve a niche for yourself. Burn out is the biggest problem for people, because they want it all to happen now.”

As De Haan puts it: “We're well on our way to creating a vibrant arts community in the Creative Quarter. Market forces will determine which businesses survive in the long term but these are all pioneers, bravely setting up ahead of the audience as the building programme is still ongoing and can be physically off-putting for visitors. It is getting noticeably better – already there is a growing night-time scene as a result of tenants living in the Quarter as well as working there. I enjoy working with people from the creative industries - they have a wealth of ideas. But part of our challenge is harnessing these ideas and applying business discipline to actually deliver them. Although there is, naturally, some tension there from time to time, we have developed a model, we are working effectively – and it's great fun.”

What of the economic impact of the investment? It is hard to measure changes to the local economy with any real degree of accuracy, partly because many small creative businesses are below the VAT threshold and don't appear in official statistics. But we know that Creative Foundation tenants themselves account for at least 300 jobs. And a further 150 jobs have been created as an indirect result of Creative Foundation activities such as construction work and the Folkestone Triennial.

It is also hard to separate the efforts of the Creative Foundation from other important regeneration projects in

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The bottom of The Old High Street

Above right: High speed trains

at St Pancras

© Russell Burden



the area – and in particular the commencement, in December 2009, of the High Speed Rail Link from London St Pancras to Folkestone. This has meant that the time it takes to get from London to Folkestone by train has been cut from around one hour and forty minutes to just 53 minutes.

The fast transport link, the creative focus and the relatively low prices of property all appear to have combined to attract a wave of innovative new businesses to the Folkestone area, many of which are web-based. Unlikely as it may seem, Matt Brittin, Google UK's Managing Director, was quoted in the local press in May 2011 as saying: “We have recognised Folkestone as one of the top international business centres in the UK. Geographically, it is well positioned to be a leader in foreign business.”

The media seem to recognise that something is going on:

Folkestone is one of the top three places in Britain to live for those looking to make money from property ownership, according to a study. Lifestyle website MSN Local found the town is undergoing one of the highest rises in prices for housing, despite the ongoing economic uncertainty. Analysts used information from the Land Registry to compile their statistical survey which also highlighted Sittingbourne and Brentwood in Essex in the top three.

Kent News

Top 10 places to buy in the UK

With signs of recovery in the property market, now is the time to invest.

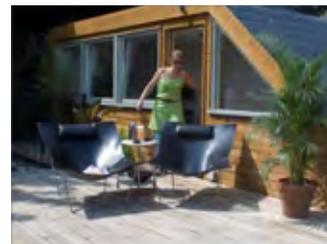
1. Kent – *This is an easy domestic winner. Commuter favourites such as Sevenoaks are now vying for attention with new hot spots including Ebbsfleet ... Folkestone and Ramsgate, where you can still buy a family house for £200,000.*

Daily Telegraph April 2011

Ultimately, though, the Creative Quarter is a long term project. The De Haan investment will mean that the Creative Foundation's properties are set to remain in charitable hands indefinitely – and well into the next century. Rents will remain affordable for artists and the surplus income that is generated will continue to fund a vibrant arts programme for the town. The quality of refurbishment work being undertaken ensures that the accommodation will remain in good condition for the long term. Folkestone will be a haven for artists and creative practitioners for many decades to come, and it will be for future observers to assess the long term impact of this unique vision.

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Urban living with new rooftop terraces

B&B's Vernacular Spectacular aboard Zoe Walker and Neil Bromwich's Celeste
© Matt Rowe



EDUCATION

It was clear from the outset of our project that Folkestone's educational provision was in need of fundamental reform. I knew that our efforts to regenerate Folkestone through culture, however ambitious, would fall short if we ignored the dire educational standards and prospects of so many of its young people. In 2001 Roger De Haan was already well aware of the seriousness of the issue: Saga recruited many of the staff it needed (principally to answer the phones in its call centres) from local schools, and he was concerned at the poor levels of literacy and numeracy among many of the applicants. We quickly agreed that something radical needed to be done.

De Haan's initiative to transform the failing Channel School, which served (or, rather, failed to serve) the families of central and east Folkestone, would come a little later, with the spreading of the government's Academies programme into non-metropolitan areas.

But, from the outset, De Haan and I agreed that the lack of any kind of university-level education in the town was a serious and urgent problem that needed to be tackled.

So we set out to establish Folkestone's first ever university campus.

*Opposite: Folkestone Academy interior,
designed by Foster and Partners*



University Centre Folkestone (and Folkestone Harbour)

The absence of higher education provision in Folkestone had two main detrimental effects:

Firstly, young people wanting a university education were forced to leave Folkestone. Most never returned, leading to a “brain-drain” and a demographic problem: the retired population was over-represented, but the district was well below the national average for the all-important economically active 21 to 65 year old age group.

Secondly, more generally, aspirations were lowered – the majority of local young people felt that university was “*not for the likes of us*”. This lack of confidence spilled over and had a negative impact on the town’s self-esteem and its pride in itself.

The rate of participation in higher education among young people in the district was 34% - significantly lower than the national rate of 40%, let alone the 50% target set by the Labour government in its 2001 Manifesto:

Education - Labour's number one priority

Education remains Labour's top priority. Excellence for the many, not just the few is our driving passion...

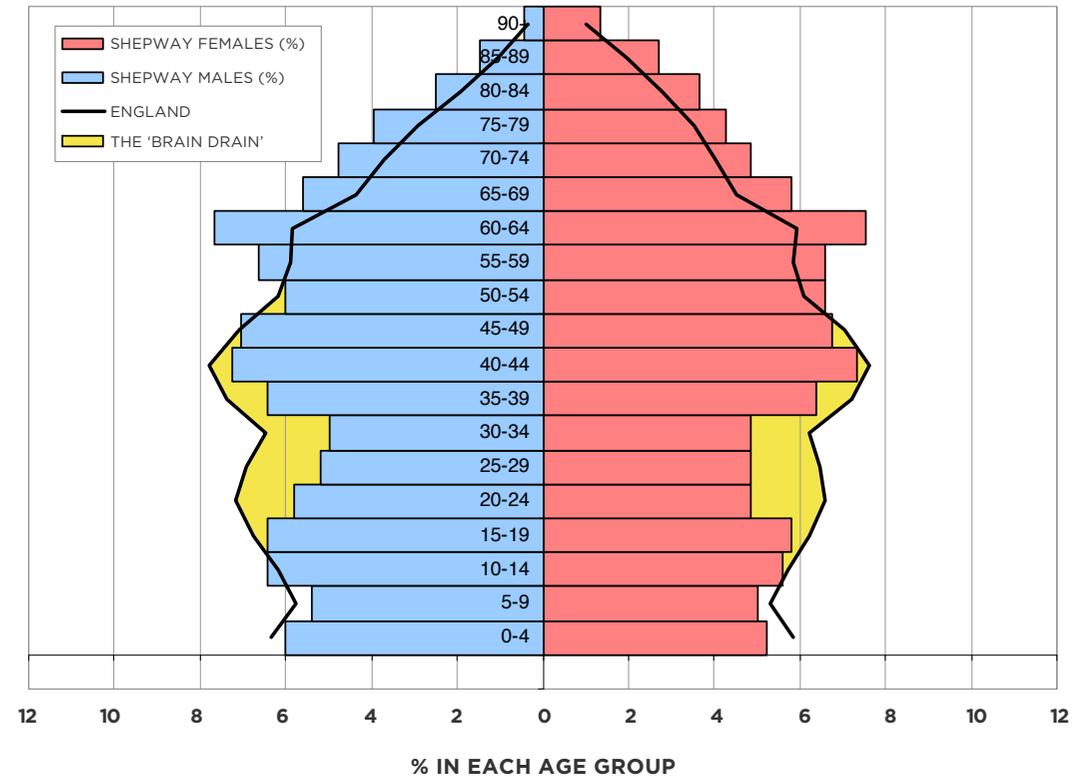
Higher education brings on average 20 per cent higher earnings and a 50 per cent lower chance of unemployment. It is time for an historic commitment to open higher education to half of all young people before they are 30, combined with increased investment to maintain academic standards.

Labour Party Manifesto 2001



6th Form Dance Student

SHEPWAY DISTRICT POPULATION MID 2008 SHOWING DEFICIT AT AGES 16 TO 50



SOURCE: ONS MID-2008 POPULATION ESTIMATES (ROUNDED)

It is well known that towns and cities with student populations tend to be more dynamic, more creative, more happening places, with more highly skilled and more productive workforces. Of course, students inevitably bring problems in their wake, particularly where large numbers are involved, but it is generally agreed that, on balance, they are a good thing in a community. And we wanted some of that positive energy for Folkestone. As De Haan puts it: “*Students are the fuel for every local economy. Bright, energetic, lateral-thinking people are needed here, to drive our economy forward.*”

Above: The demographics of Folkestone and its environs

In a report written in 2006, consultants KPMG expressed the case in management-speak:

“The market failure in the provision of education, a classic merit good, is long established and accepted. In the case of University Centre Folkestone, the rationale for intervention can be made on both social distributional and economic efficiency grounds. Viewed at a regional and sub-regional level the project seeks to address issues of distribution and equity derived from the current socio-economic status of the area. This is based on the fact that local people will have an opportunity to improve their skills and thus contribute to productivity gains within the local economy.”

But, even accepting the moral, social and economic arguments for launching a new university project in Folkestone were all strong, this was no small undertaking. How do you go about starting a new university campus from scratch?

We began with two common-sense guidelines: to build on the education landscape that already existed in the town and to focus our efforts on creative arts subjects. We wanted a distinctive higher education offer that complemented all the other aspects of the regeneration project, and we wanted to be able to attract students, both from the local area and from further afield, who would be good at creating a buzz in the town and giving something back to the community.

In 2001 South Kent College (SKC) was a further education college of frankly no great distinction, teaching local 16 to 19 year olds who preferred to learn outside a school environment, and numerous part-time adult learners. The College had campuses in the neighbouring East Kent towns of Dover and Ashford as well as in Folkestone, which tended to mean that its focus was quite diffuse. But from our perspective it was the only game in town and, in the shape of Jim Crewdson, it had a Principal who was ambitious to drive it forward. Our first step was to persuade Crewdson that it would be a good idea to consolidate all the College's pre-degree arts and media courses into Folkestone and

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Performing Arts students
© Edward Sumner

that a university partner should then be invited in to offer higher level diplomas and degrees.

The University of Kent at Canterbury (UKC) already had links with South Kent College, so it was the obvious next port of call. In October 2001, Crewdson and I went to see one of the Pro-Vice Chancellors of UKC to ask whether the university would be interested in coming in with us to extend the range, depth and quality of what was on offer to students in Folkestone across a broad range of creative subjects. The answer was a clear **“No”** – UKC had too many other important projects in the pipeline at the time, we were told.

So we turned to other potential partners. Professor Vaughan Grylls, Principal of The Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD) was first off the blocks. Grylls saw potential benefits for KIAD in joining a new Folkestone project at a time of considerable government-led expansion in higher education. A partnership board was formed to take the project forward and detailed discussions began with the key figures at SKC and KIAD.



Students on the beach
© Edward Sumner

By this point, De Haan had become the sponsor for a new Academy in Folkestone, and he had met Andrew Adonis, now Lord Adonis, the architect of the government's Academies programme. Adonis visited Folkestone and was impressed by our vision to link the transformation of the town's secondary sector to the establishment of a vibrant Creative Quarter via the introduction of a university campus. He arranged for Sir Howard Newby, the head of the Higher Education Funding Council for England at the time, to pay us a visit and to give us the benefit of his advice. Newby was very encouraging. He urged us to think big, and to seek a second university partner – not just to put all our eggs in the KIAD basket. This turned out to be wise advice. We invited Professor Michael Wright, Principal of Canterbury Christ Church University College, to join the initiative.



Prof Michael Wright

Until his retirement in July 2010, Michael Wright had been at the helm of Christ Church's involvement in Folkestone for eight years. What led Wright to come on board?

“The University of Kent was already a well-established university in Canterbury and I felt we could have been criticised for trying to compete with them in the city which is, after all, quite small. I felt we needed to broaden out to

East Kent and this view crystallised when I looked at the demographics of the area. One of the principal centres of population was Thanet, which covered the seaside towns of Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate, but it had no higher education provision. This was the late 1990s and it was the era of social inclusion, widening participation and expansion opportunities for universities. So we set about launching a new campus in Thanet. I was having terrible issues with the planners in Canterbury at the time and in part the Thanet campus was a little bit of gamesmanship – a little nudge to show them we were serious. Take-up of higher education by young people in Thanet was 7% below the south east average, very similar to the Folkestone figure, and that 7% represented the group we were trying to do something about.”

“Over in Folkestone, Roger De Haan seemed to me to be entirely in tune with the times – an entrepreneurial business leader willing to engage in regeneration, so someone we should be working with, both in an idealistic sense and also more objectively. By that time the mantra had developed that you had to have a feasibility study to do anything – but I preferred to go with my gut instinct. Grenville Hancox [Christ Church’s Professor of Music and Director of the Arts and Health Research Centre] played an important role, banging on in my left ear, keeping Folkestone on the map. There was no intensive internal debate at Christ Church; we just decided to go for it.”

Professor Hancox casts a slightly different light on the process: “Michael Wright was up for it; bold, persuasive and determined, and able to bring his colleagues kicking and screaming to the table. There were those who said it just didn’t make sense – it was a very exciting time”.

Crewdson left his post at SKC in 2002 and unfortunately the college entered an extended period of financial instability, falling standards and multiple changes of leadership. For a time the college remained engaged with the project; in mid 2003, the new Principal reported to the partnership board that “SKC expects to consolidate its media, multimedia, performing arts and music technology offers to Folkestone – with the intention to move as much as possible, as soon as possible to the Creative Quarter”. But he too swiftly moved on to new pastures and soon we were startled to learn that SKC was in fact planning to move all its creative courses to a brand new £45 million Learning Campus fifteen miles up the motorway in Ashford. In all, we got to know seven principals of the college over the

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Exterior of the Glassworks before refurbishment



Proposed Campus for Payers Park

course of seven years. This remarkable lack of continuity inevitably led to a serious sense of drift within the college. Eventually, in April 2010, SKC ceased to exist when it was merged with the more stable and successful West Kent College to form the funkily rebranded “K College”. The Ashford Learning Campus has yet to be built.

So, we proceeded without the active engagement of our local college. By July 2003, Michael Wright had agreed to allocate to Folkestone up to three hundred Christ Church student places in music, music technology and performing arts. And KIAD’s David Hawkins had submitted a national bid for funding for five hundred students to take “fast-track” two year honours degrees in multimedia, fashion technology and arts curation. The idea was for the students to be based at a yet-to-be-built new university campus on Payers Park in the heart of the Creative Quarter. The plan was that the new campus would open from September 2006, although we were never entirely sure where the considerable capital sums needed to build this new campus would come from.

Around this time, the Roger De Haan Charitable Trust purchased the Glassworks building, which adjoins Payers Park. This 30,000 square foot factory building comprised two dilapidated Victorian towers and a 1960s extension.

The Glassworks business had closed and the initial idea was that the site would provide “dirty space” to be let at affordable rents to artists and craftspeople needing to use industrial processes in their work. But, having examined it, all the steering group partners agreed that it would make an ideal first phase campus building: a series of large, adaptable spaces with a suitably raw aesthetic; able to accommodate at least five hundred students for the first phase of the project; and, most importantly, with the funding already in place through the RDHCT for its initial refurbishment. So we agreed to designate the building for the university project and, at our own risk, while we were still unsure that our university partners were fully committed, we commissioned architects Pringle Richards Sharratt to create designs for the essential preliminary conversion work to make it suitable for use.

In terms of design, Robert Green describes the redevelopment of The Glassworks as “*beautiful work*” by Gordon Abbott of Pringle Richards Sharratt. “*It’s perhaps not the most attractive building on the outside*”, he says, “*But Abbott did a tremendous job of introducing twenty first century architecture into the gap between the three existing buildings and making it look as though it had been there forever. It’s a classic example of our approach to design: we took two clapped-out Victorian towers and a pretty horrible sixties block and through the introduction of new elements we’ve created something beautiful that will last for another hundred years.*”

But there remained a funding gap. Our university partners were not in a position to lose money in setting up the Folkestone campus. Around £3 million was needed from public funds to complete the fit-out of the Glassworks in order to make it suitable for use by students, and to support the running costs of the University Centre for the first five years whilst it built up momentum. We spearheaded the efforts to raise the sums needed.

As De Haan puts it: “*We secured the site, we brought the partners together and then we moved to raise the necessary funding. It was incredibly hard work lobbying the regional development agency SEEDA and the Higher Education Funding Council. It took vision and persistence, meeting after meeting, report after report, and endless presentations to boards and panels.*”

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Above right: The Glassworks refurbished

Right: The Glassworks foyer
© Edward Sumner

Shortly after we secured the Glassworks, Michael Wright began to advise us that our plans were too modest. If the campus proved really popular we would need to make provision for future expansion – to fifteen hundred and, potentially, three thousand students.

This was heady stuff and De Haan became anxious. Was there a risk that a key plank of our regeneration strategy would be undone by a lack of ambition? Never one to hold back, De Haan took decisive action – acting in a private capacity, he bought Folkestone Harbour. His intention was to donate the land required for university expansion should it become needed over time.

This was the start of De Haan's involvement in the regeneration of Folkestone's 40 acre foreshore; a massive project that will, perhaps, come to define the long term future of Folkestone. De Haan engaged the internationally renowned architect Norman Foster to produce a masterplan for the area and local people were invited to an extended series of presentations and consultation sessions. Residents enthusiastically embraced the various elements of the plan: the new marina; the extension to the coastal park; the new university campus overlooking the harbour; the new sports and arts facilities; significant changes to the highways network and the restoration of the harbour arm as a visitor attraction. It was never De Haan's plan to become a property developer: the scheme required external investment in the order of £800 million, and it needed to be delivered in one huge single parcel. Massive public support was generated for the Foster plan: expectations were high that Folkestone was within striking distance of a brighter future. Then, in 2008, the economic downturn, coupled with toughening Environment Agency requirements to mitigate flood risk, caused the scheme to hit the buffers.

Naturally enough, confidence within the local community was severely dented. But intensive efforts continued behind the scenes and eventually Sir Terry Farrell was engaged to produce a new plan which would be viable in the post-recession economic realities. This plan allows for building to take place in small phases. In the early stages the focus will be on housing and on sea and beach sports: there will be a sea-sport centre, and a stadium for beach sports; beach rugby, beach volleyball and beach soccer. Given the recent tightening of university funding, the harbour-front site for the future expansion of the university campus has understandably been dropped.

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Public consultation for the Farrell plan

Meanwhile, back in 2005, plans for the first phase of our university centre, by then provisionally named Folkestone Creative Institute, rolled on. But they were brought to a grinding halt when one of the founding partners abruptly pulled out. In summer 2005, KIAD merged with the Surrey Institute of Art and Design to form the University of the Creative Arts with campuses at Farnham, Epsom, Rochester, Maidstone and Canterbury. The leaders of the newly merged institution quickly realised they needed to focus all their attention on the complexities of yoking together two disparate higher education institutions with five existing campuses; the Folkestone project would have been a major distraction, and so they reluctantly withdrew.

For a few weeks that summer, our plans lay in pieces. Although Christ Church remained committed, the government agencies, which had seemed to be on the brink of agreeing the funding we needed, made it clear that they were much keener on two universities being involved, rather than just one. It seemed as though the whole project might fall. Not for the first time, Graham Badman, Director of Education at Kent County Council, intervened on our behalf. He brokered a meeting with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Greenwich, Baroness Tessa Blackstone, the former Minister for Education. We met her with a number of her senior colleagues at the magnificent university headquarters in

Greenwich. Within days of our meeting we had secured a commitment from the University of Greenwich to step into the breach, and the project was back on track. Not quite the same track, but a track nonetheless.

At the behest of the government agencies who were being asked to fund the campus, a seemingly endless succession of studies were commissioned, all carried out by firms of consultants and all paid for by the agencies themselves: A Demand Study (2005); A Revised Demand Study (2006); A Financial and Economic Appraisal (2006); A Review of the Financial and Economic Appraisal (2006). Eventually, perhaps partly because we didn't just give in and go away, funding to complete the fit-out of the Glassworks and to kick-start the campus for the first five years was granted by the South East of England Development Agency and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The importance of the contributions of Sir Howard Newby and Richard Blackwell at HEFCE, Susan Priest and Ed Metcalfe at SEEDA, Margaret Noble and David Wills at Greenwich and Sue Piotrowski, Jan Druker and Andrew Ironside at Christ Church, in getting University Centre Folkestone off the ground, really cannot be overstated.

The original plan had been for the campus to be launched in September 2006. Given the obstacles and delays we'd faced, it's a tribute to all those involved that University Centre Folkestone opened its doors for its first intake of students in January 2008.

How does Michael Wright, now Emeritus Professor at Canterbury Christ Church, think it's gone so far? *"It's done pretty well. It's still sub-critical and its future success will depend on strong relationships with schools, with K College and Christ Church's Broadstairs campus to make sure it's not competing. But increased costs for students make it more likely that people will seek a low cost solution to their needs and Folkestone can benefit from that."*

In 2009, the University of Greenwich exercised its option to pull out in 2012, leaving Christ Church happily ensconced as the sole remaining partner. Wright is frank: *"Perhaps I made a mistake – I could have gone it alone at the time and said "we'll do it". But Greenwich came into the mix. They didn't put the effort in. Nobody was at all surprised when they pulled out."*

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"If Folkestone thrives, the University Centre will thrive. Now that Greenwich is leaving the scene there is an opportunity to play in a much wider range of courses. The specialism in the performing arts was a departure for Christ Church - that came from Grenville Hancox - it was a logical extension of his exceptional work in music, and it was important to present a distinctive offer. Our tie-in with Quarterhouse, Folkestone's new performing arts centre, is unique and is helpful for recruiting students."



Ian Shaw conducting UCF students at the opening of Quarterhouse
© centralphotography.com

Kent County Council (KCC) intervened in two significant ways to help the university project forward. Firstly, they agreed to move their extensive Folkestone-based adult education provision to the Creative Quarter. Courses now take place in The Cube (a large property we converted specifically for the purpose, adjacent to the University Centre), and also in Quarterhouse performing arts centre and in a specialist ceramics workshop. This initiative has brought 4,000 part-time students into the Creative Quarter and resulted in the emergence of a "learning zone" where adult leisure-time learners are encouraged to consider extending their learning by signing up for more formal higher education at the University Centre. Secondly, we developed an innovative partnership with KCC's central library in Folkestone: the library is just 100 metres up the hill from the University Centre and we realised it would be

Above: The Cube Adult Education Centre
© centralphotography.com

a waste of space and money to install a new library on the campus; instead, part of the public library has been given over to the university, and students have access to most of the learning resources they need there. The spin-off benefit is that visitors to the public library are also introduced to the university presence, and encouraged to consider taking up higher level courses.

Wright reflects: *“Looking back, I was lucky. Even if colleagues thought I was wrong, they were loyal enough to help make it happen. For example Sue Piotrowski, one of Christ Church’s Pro-Vice Chancellors, is a very rational thinker and knew what we were doing was daft. But she stuck with it. And even though they’re no longer part of it, you needed people like Vaughan and Tessa as well.”*

Now, according to Campus Director Chris Price, university students are making Folkestone their own. Naturally enough, they occupy the bars, clubs and cafes of the Old Town. And, as part of their coursework, performing arts students are required to form small companies and work to commission in the community. They’ve put on shows at Quarterhouse; they’ve been hired by the Kent Wildlife Trust to make a performance piece about the great crested newt; they’ve presented street theatre in the town’s precincts and squares; a Romanian student has introduced Eastern European mime to Folkestone; and they’ve donned suits and dark glasses and patrolled the Folkestone Book Festival as Men In Black. Residents are getting used to them, but at first they didn’t know what to think ... one was heard to mutter: *“I think they’re CIA”*.

Professor Robin Baker took over from Michael Wright as Vice Chancellor of Christ Church in 2010. Previously the Vice Chancellor at the University of Chichester, a hundred miles to the west of Folkestone, Baker had been aware of the Folkestone campus from afar, and of the parallels with his own efforts to contribute to the regeneration of Bognor Regis through establishing a university campus in that particular run-down resort. As he puts it: *“People like getting a university in their town – at least to start with: it’s a status symbol. They like the idea of young people coming to study in their community. We’ve been bombarded with initiatives to open campuses. But Folkestone has the X-factor; a millionaire philanthropist committed to its regeneration. Having someone who is local trying to make the change, and having the material basis to do so, that’s unique amongst coastal towns.”*

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“Although it’s our smallest campus, University Centre Folkestone is a very important part of our university. The partnership between Christ Church and the Creative Foundation is a very exciting one and we now need to be playing in other partners – the schools, the academies and the local FE college. The effect of higher education can be transformational - I’ve seen it at Medway - as long as there is an “escalator” in place with other education providers, to make sure that young people can find their way through to university without hitting unnecessary obstacles.

“The radical shift in higher education funding is the big unknown for us; for places like Oxford and Cambridge it’ll make very little real difference, but for an institution such as Christ Church it’s a very major change. We don’t know if the types of students currently coming to us are going to be debt averse – but, whatever happens, they are going to start having very high demands in terms of the student experience. And our numbers are capped now, so we need to work hard to find an economically sustainable future for our Folkestone campus. That might mean a change of the curriculum, especially now that the University of Greenwich is leaving, and we might need to find different kinds of partnerships and different ways of working. We’re seriously committed to this project though. We’d very much like to stay in Folkestone and enable the kind of economic, social and cultural regeneration that’s sustainable in the long term.

Above: UCF Performing Arts students

© Edward Sumner

The Folkestone Academy

Dapper and bright-eyed, Sean Heslop took up the post of Principal of The Folkestone Academy in March 2009. Before coming to Folkestone he had been head of Tiffin School, a popular selective grammar school in affluent Kingston-on-Thames.

He says: *"I'd always worked in successful schools, but I was getting a little bit bored. Even the tough schools I'd worked in had a middle class core. Deep within, a voice said that, whatever the ups and downs, these kids will be alright. So I was attracted to the Academies programme because it's a chance to work with a very different set of parents. The staff have all chosen to work here; there's an excitement about it. It feels like we're part of a movement. In a way it reminds me of revolutionary Russia, with the intelligentsia going out and making a difference."*

The Channel School Folkestone, which the Academy has replaced, was a troubled institution. Its dreadful academic record made it, in 2003, the fifth worst performing secondary school in the country. De Haan had attended a gathering for Academy sponsors and potential sponsors at No 10 Downing Street, where Tony Blair spoke of his desire to see top public schools supporting previously failing state schools as they were being transformed into Academies. De Haan went away and quickly persuaded The King's School in Canterbury to join with him in sponsoring a new Academy to replace the Channel School, if funding were made available by government. Blair responded positively and it was quickly agreed that the Channel School would join the Academies programme. De Haan put up the £2 million sponsorship required.

Together De Haan, Graham Badman from KCC and the team from King's led the process of transformation. All Academies have to choose to specialise and it was a natural piece of joined-up thinking for the Folkestone



Sean Heslop with Folkestone

Academy students

© Martin Taylor, DigitalMemories

Photography



Academy to select European Culture, Media and the Arts as its specialisms.

Rather surprisingly, De Haan had to confront considerable local opposition to the new school. The Channel School had been in a relatively bleak location on the fringes of an industrial estate; the site for the new school building was to be shifted to the other end of the school grounds, a few hundred yards to the west, so that it abutted the leafy residential area of Broadmead Village. Locals were furious that a school with such a dire reputation was to be relocated to their backyard. Fortunately, Kent County Council was able to determine the planning application itself. Otherwise there's little doubt the local district council at the time would have refused planning permission for the Academy – and with it the £40 million investment it was bringing to the district's young people.

The new Academy opened its doors in September 2007. Its first Principal was John Patterson, who had worked tirelessly with De Haan in overseeing the construction process, recruiting staff and pupils, developing the curriculum and the pastoral care system and opening the new school. The new building was a success from the start, as was the mix of vocational and academic learning. But it came as a huge shock to the nascent school community

when Patterson died quite suddenly, less than a year after the opening.

Heslop continues: *“I’d been in the recruitment pool for Academy headships for some time and I’d had a series of interviews. I’d met a few sponsors but we didn’t really click. It comes down to personality I suppose. Then I spoke to Roger De Haan about Folkestone; I liked the fact he had a real sense of vision for making education part of the community, and I was struck by his energy and passion.*

“When I first saw the new building I thought it was absolutely awful. I drove down in the October half term so there were no kids about and I thought it felt quite intimidating: a big looming front; a cavernous foyer; it was hard to visualise it with kids in. On my second visit, which was on a normal school day, I was amazed how people transformed the building – it was clear that kids liked it and respected it. I love the building now. The architects, Foster and Partners, cut their teeth on the Bexley Business Academy, and they’ve got better and better at educational projects. From the outside it’s maybe rather flat and two dimensional but inside there’s a real sense of colour and space. Most schools are just functional; here there’s a magic. The inner part of the school works like a market place. It has the kind of buzz you find in successful towns and cities – a real sense of the community coming in. And it’s rare for a school of this scale to be under one roof. We use the space well – when you see all 1,350 kids packed in to the sports hall, as we do on occasions like Remembrance Day, it’s dramatic and awe-inspiring.

“The high level walkways are great and mean that there are no corridors in the whole building. The school that the Academy replaced had a big problem with bullying, but here any bullying can be spotted and dealt with very quickly. There are eight timber clad pods within the main building and the beauty of them is that the huge numbers of kids we have here are broken into eight small families. Although it’s quite a brutal building, there’s an almost tangible sense of family. Sadly the days of £40 million pound school buildings are gone now. This is one of the last we’ll see on this scale in my professional life.”

So, I asked Heslop, has it been successful?

It’s perhaps revealing that he chooses to talk about discipline first. The old Channel School was a tough school

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Folkestone Academy students in the science laboratory
© Russell Burden

Above Right: Folkestone Academy exterior
© Russell Burden

Opposite: Folkestone Academy interior



with ingrained behavioural problems. Whenever I visited in 2002 or 2003, I got the sense that it was part school, part prison. Beefy teachers spent their time as more-or-less full-time security staff, linked together by walkie-talkie. Police were an almost permanent presence. De Haan recalls the former headteacher leading him through the old school, unlocking and re-locking every door as they went. According to Heslop, behaviour has improved beyond all expectation. When the school opened it adopted a very rigorous disciplinary policy, with seven times the national average of permanent exclusions. But by 2009/10 the number of permanent exclusions had dropped to the national average. The tough policy has been relaxed, whilst, according to Heslop, a calm, well-ordered atmosphere has been maintained.

Perhaps one of the best measures of success is popularity with pupils and parents. Being under-subscribed is a real problem for schools: funding goes down; it can lead to an unstable school population and eventually a reputation for being a “sink school”, which can lead further into a spiral of decline. In the year it closed, the old Channel School was about 100 places short, typical of a failing school. As a measure of its transformation, for the 2010/11 entry, there were 676 applications for 240 places, making the Folkestone Academy the most over-subscribed non-selective school in Kent.

But it's results that matter most to parents and to the media. Here the Academy has had a transformational effect. In 2003 only eight per cent of its pupils achieved five good GCSEs. In 2010, a remarkable seventy three per cent of pupils reached this benchmark level.

One of the big question marks about Academies is the impact they have on other schools in their area that haven't had the benefit of a massive capital injection and sponsor attention. I raised this issue with Andrew Adonis, the architect of the Academies programme, when he visited Folkestone in 2005. His response was: *“It's not a zero sum game”* – rising standards in Academies, he said, would drag up standards in other neighbouring schools. But is this overly optimistic?

Heslop thinks not: *“All the schools in the district have raised their game and the stimulus has been the Academy. There are six local secondary schools and we are all improving on the two key measures at GCSE, although we still have a*

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way to go before we reach the national average if you include English and Maths results. However, demographics are changing and local schools are currently chasing fewer kids – one of the other local schools is now under-subscribed in years 7, 8 and 9 even though its results have been improving.”

And how does the Academy fit into the broader push towards a more creative community? *“There's far more to do”* says Heslop, *“creative subject areas such as dance, drama and graphics are incredibly strong, and shows by performing arts students and choirs are very popular. Just as interestingly, though, we're starting to bring creativity into the broader curriculum. Most of our kids start from below average attainment and, on the surface, a more creative approach is a risky way to go about raising their attainment levels. But this year we've brought in a brand new curriculum for ten and eleven year olds in Year Seven. Sixty five per cent of their teaching will be by just one teacher, with other staff being brought in for specialised subjects. This allows for a much more holistic, modular approach to learning. Attendance is at 96.8%; our highest ever.*

Above: Folkestone Academy students perform to their classmates

© Martin Taylor, DigitalMemories Photography

“The Channel School used to be the worst option for parents and kids; there's a pride now about coming to the Academy. Our catchment is exactly the same as the Channel's used to be; all selection is by distance from the school or by special

educational need. The governors are emphatic that we do nothing to advantage an able child in the selection process. But it's still too early to talk about our impact on the wider community. Only 70% of parents engage with us. That's a longer battle. This school was founded to serve the deprived wards of east Folkestone. It needs to stay that way."

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So what are Heslop's predictions for the future?

"The school will continue to improve academically", he thinks, "and the Academy's impact on local primary schools will grow through increasing levels of professional development and support. We're going to see much more collaborative working, both with our feeder schools and with other secondaries across the district."

In 2009 the Academy took over its neighbouring primary school and became one of the first "All-Through Academies" with a total of 1700 pupils aged from 4 to 18.

Heslop continues: *"With funding increasingly coming directly to schools we will need to organise ourselves to take on the strategic role that the Local Education Authority has fulfilled up to now. The numbers of students going on to higher education will increase, although some of those with the potential to go on to university are very concerned about fees, especially those whose parents have no university background. And we'll start to be able to measure our impact on the wider community. But we've all seen enough green shoots to be optimistic."*

For De Haan the issue is one of improving the quality of education for all the town's young people, through from early years to university level:

"We're working on the Academy developing closer links with University Centre Folkestone. It's essential that there's a good working relationship to ensure that as many young people progress on to higher education as possible. As you've always insisted, Nick", De Haan reminds me, "it's essential that our education sector is successful if we're going to sustain the regeneration of the town in the long term."

Creative Learning

At the heart of the Creative Foundation's thinking is the idea that one of the keys to the successful development of communities lies in giving people the opportunity to develop their own creativity.

We are all creative beings - indeed, creativity is one of our defining human characteristics. As the educational guru Sir Ken Robinson puts it: *"Creativity is not a separate faculty that some people have and others don't ... human intelligence is essentially creative ... creativity is not a special quality confined to special people and it can be taught."*

Creativity is by no means just about the arts: creativity helps us to be more rounded, more self-fulfilled, more integrated into society, better at solving problems, more prosperous and more successful. And, on a profound level, creativity is closely linked to empathy. It makes us more human.

But sadly most adults don't regard themselves as creative: all too frequently our innate creativity is switched off as we move from childhood into adulthood. A long term drive is needed to break this pattern and it's important to focus efforts on children and young people before their creativity is suppressed as they go through their teens.

The Creative Foundation's work in this area is part of an important broader movement. Old approaches to education were fit for a bygone industrial age but they aren't suited to the emerging economic and social realities of the twenty first century. We need a new educational paradigm if the UK is going to continue to compete internationally in the information age. The UK has been a leading global force in the development of new creative thinking in educational practice over the past couple of decades and it is important for the future of our young people, and of our economy, that this momentum is maintained.



*Students taking part in Shakespeare Schools Festival
© Martin Taylor,
DigitalMemories Photography*

In 2007, we started designing a small scale project to deliver an entitlement to cultural engagement for young people in our local area. Then, in February 2008, just as our project was about to be launched, the then Education Secretary Ed Balls and Culture Secretary Andy Burnham jointly announced that they were opening an eight week “window” for bids from around England for funding to run ten pilots for a scheme they called “*Find Your Talent*”, the government’s trial “cultural offer” for young people. They wanted to experiment with different approaches to providing young people with five hours a week of cultural activity. This opportunity chimed perfectly with our creativity agenda. Once again we approached Graham Badman at Kent County Council, and he secured for us the local education authority’s support, without which a bid could not be considered. Working closely with Kent County Council, we then put in a joint application to host one of the ten national Find Your Talent pilots in the Folkestone district.

In our bid we explained how we would aim to offer creative opportunities linked to the ongoing regeneration of the area to all the young people in the district, from early years to the age of nineteen, in and out of school. Thanks to the intensive work of Liz Duckworth at Kent County Council (whom we subsequently recruited as the Creative Foundation’s fundraiser) and of consultants David Powell and Debra Reay, our bid was successful. We were given a funding allocation of £1.2 million to cover a two and a half year period. I took on the role of Chair of the Project Board and convened a highly experienced steering group to guide the programme.

We knew that the funding we’d been awarded, whilst significant, was not going to be anywhere near enough to pay for five hours of quality cultural activity per week for each young person in the district. In fact we worked out that the funding came to less than 10p per day per young person. But we also knew that plenty of young people were already taking part in a great deal of arts activity and there was clearly no need for us to reinvent the wheel. The questions were: How much were they doing? And, more importantly, was it any good?

Ours was, by some margin, the smallest of the ten national pilots, and one of only three that was not led by a local authority. With a great deal of excellent practice already being undertaken elsewhere in the country, we

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Folkestone school children at a music day.

needed to decide how our relatively small-scale project could make a difference.

We decided to focus on two key issues:

Firstly, most people involved in the so-called “cultural offer” took for granted the proposition that engaging young people in cultural activity was a good thing. And yet international research had shown that up to 25% of cultural interventions with young people were negative. In other words, a quarter of cultural experiences tend to put young people off the arts. To us, this was a shocking statistic. Surely it’s better for a child to do nothing at all than to have a bad experience that undermines their confidence in their ability to sing, or dance, or play an instrument, or paint, or write expressively? We set out to find ways of reducing the negative experiences that seemed to be alienating young people from the arts and switching off their creative potential.

Secondly, we could see that while some schools were brilliant at nurturing creativity in their pupils, others were pretty dreadful at it. But mechanisms for distinguishing good practice from bad were largely non-existent.

To address these two linked problems, we saw the need to develop a tool that offered young people and their schools a systematic approach to measuring the quantity and quality of cultural engagement. Our aim was to encourage young people, through their schools, to take control of their own creative learning and become autonomous creative individuals. But we realised the last thing that was needed was a heavy-handed evaluative framework – it needed to be light-touch, fun to take part in and creative in its own right.

We started by commissioning local arts organisation Strange Cargo to send teams of artists into every classroom in the district. In an exercise run with military precision, the artists persuaded twelve thousand children to record their individual levels of engagement in various cultural activities, the extent to which they enjoyed doing them and what they aspired to do if they had the chance. Strange Cargo used a simple, fun method which relied on the young people themselves placing stickers onto a personalised chart. And the process was so well designed it held the attention equally of five year olds and sixteen year olds for the forty minutes it took to run.

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Stickr chart
© Strange Cargo



The resulting mountain of data was digitised and turned into a series of reports that schools were able to use as a planning tool. Then, working with Wave, a web design co-operative based in Hastings, we developed an online tool – which we called Stickr – designed as a fun and engaging way for schools and young people to take control of their own cultural and creative lives. Using the data we fed back to them, we invited schools to submit proposals for creative projects that addressed gaps or met young people’s aspirations. As a result, an amazing range of creative projects flowered in every one of the forty or so schools in the district: film-making; photography; street dance; Bollywood dance; scriptwriting; outdoor sculpture; ukulele lessons; drumming workshops; artists in residence; professional development for teachers; trips to London galleries – the list goes on and on.

Crucially Stickr allows teachers and parents to see which activities young people enjoy, which they hate and which they would like to try. It permits data to be analysed at the level of district, school, year group and class – right down to every individual pupil. And it allows for changes in the quality and the quantity of engagement to be measured over time. Stickr has been widely praised and was due to be completed and launched nationally in 2011. Unfortunately, in June 2010 the incoming coalition government decided

Above: Taking part in the audit
© Strange Cargo

to pull the plug on the funding for the final year of the Find Your Talent pilot programme and further development work on Stickr has subsequently slowed to a snail's pace.

We must hope that the momentum behind creative learning is maintained at a national level if we're to ensure that we have a future workforce and a society equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities that the coming decades will bring us.

Feedback we have received from teachers and students gives an insight into the power and importance of this work. The quote below is from the Head of Drama at Folkestone Academy and was written after her students had taken part in the Shakespeare Schools Festival, supported by Find Your Talent, at Quarterhouse Performing Arts Centre:

"I just wanted to thank you and your team for all of the work that you have been doing. Many of my more deprived students have never been to a theatre let alone performed Shakespeare in one. They can be particularly chippy about not being good enough to go to one of the grammar schools in the area and this festival has allowed them to socialise with grammar school students but also to recognise their learning and innate comprehension of the text in contrast to other schools. They revelled in the feedback given by the National Youth Theatre workshop directors. They loved the fact that they now have privileged knowledge of the newly built community theatre. I see this festival as an investment in my students. They have few people on their side and low expectations of themselves. This has really opened up Shakespeare to these children and I cannot express my gratitude for allowing them to tell me that "this is the best play we've done, Miss". Equally hard to accurately express is the pride that I felt when two of the boys were having a debate about how Petruchio would say a line - I almost burst into tears."

Kay Vanderhoeven
Head of Drama, Folkestone Academy

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*Above right: A full house of young people for a Find Your Talent event at Folkestone's Leas Cliff Hall
© centralphotography.com*

*Right: A Find Your Talent film making workshop
© centralphotography.com*

EXHIBITIONS, FESTIVALS AND EVENTS:

New Approaches to Art in Public Places

Alongside our plans to develop the Creative Quarter and our initiatives to transform Folkestone's educational landscape, we introduced a third strand – a series of exhibitions, festivals and events designed to engage local people in the arts and to raise the profile of Folkestone as a place where diverse and exciting cultural activity happens.

Often working in partnership with other organisations, we developed a year-round programme of popular Arts Festivals in Folkestone. The Hook Music Festival takes place throughout the month of March; May sees The Sacconi Chamber Music Festival; the Fizz Children's Festival takes place over the summer; Folkestone Skabour Festival brings top ska bands to the harbour every September and the Folkestone Book Festival is a firm fixture of the literary calendar every November. And in the visual arts, Folkestone is becoming famous for the Folkestone Triennial, the UK's largest recurring show of contemporary art commissioned for the public realm.

*Above right: Open air film screening
at Folkestone's Amphitheatre
© Screen South*

*Right: Seth Lakeman and his band at
Quarterhouse
© centralphotography.com*



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The Folkestone Triennial

In the early 1980s Folkestone's Metropole Arts Centre hosted an exhibition of drawings and maquettes by Henry Moore, the greatest British sculptor of the twentieth century. By then in his eighties, Moore loved the light and airy Metropole space and its glorious setting overlooking the English Channel, with the French coast often visible in the distance. He generously offered to lend some of his large scale sculptural works for display on the Leas promenade in front of the Gallery. But the Trustees of the Metropole at the time inexplicably turned down Moore's offer. Were they worried about public opinion at a point when Moore was still quite controversial? Or did they have anxieties about disturbing local residents' quiet contemplation of the hallowed turf of the Leas? In any event, Moore was snubbed and the proposal was shelved.

But the seed of the idea - the concept that Folkestone should be host to outdoor sculptural interventions - refused to die, and it broke surface from time to time over the following decades. A quarter of a century later, it finally flowered into the Folkestone Triennial.

William Pleydell-Bouverie became Lord Radnor at the age of fifty three, on the death of his father Jacob in 2008. He inherited the magnificent Longford Castle in Wiltshire along with the family estates in London and Folkestone. He has been involved in the Folkestone regeneration project since its early days and when I met him, on a crisp winter's day in South Kensington, he explained that, a bit like De Haan, he too was carrying on a family tradition

He says: *"Folkestone was seriously developed by the third, fourth and fifth earls during the eighteenth century; the Estate used to be much larger in those days and my family had a big influence on the way the town was laid out, with huge areas of open space and gardens everywhere. Most importantly, they preserved the Leas, the mile and a half long sward along the cliff-top which in its day was a major draw for everyone from royalty down. HG Wells used to walk it when he was living*



Portrait of William Radnor



in Folkestone and the Estate had its own private police force to maintain good behaviour. It's the most pleasant place for people to walk; you can look down to the foreshore and over to France - it's part of what makes Folkestone so special. It has also kept development away from the cliff face; now it's protected forever and a day.

"The London to Folkestone railway, which was completed in 1843, was a major boost to the town. The Metropole and the Grand Hotels were as fine as any hotels you could find anywhere, dozens of smaller hotels and guest houses sprang up and the steam ferry carried travellers and day-trippers over the Channel to Boulogne. Before the days of mass international travel, the Leas were absolutely packed on summer days. Folkestone was a major holiday destination.

"When I was a lad I used to come down to Folkestone with my father and I feel a close affinity for the place. Over the last 25 years the town has begun to feel a bit worn around the edges, although the Old Town always had its own separate character.

"Every year we give a dinner to which people involved in Folkestone are invited. It's an opportunity to discuss how the town could be enhanced. Roger De Haan had been to a number of these over the years. I knew he was a very successful

Above: Architect David Pleydell-Bouverie's modernist masterpiece - Folkestone Foreshore Development

businessman and through meeting him I began to understand why. He was driven, energetic and very direct; all the qualities one would expect in someone who had developed such a phenomenally successful business. Becoming a Trustee of the Metropole allowed me to get involved in Folkestone in a way that wasn't geared towards business. Up to that time, the Metropole had been a provincial arts centre which had no sense of operating on a national scale."

In fact, The Metropole was the wrong building in the wrong place. Research commissioned by the new Board of Trustees of the Metropole, soon after Roger De Haan took over as Chairman, showed that it was perceived by locals to be remote and elitist. As Philip Gearing puts it, *"Its entrance was intimidating and inaccessible and it was at the posh end of town, a mile to the west of the town centre. But the first exhibitions after the gallery was relaunched were packed."* After a much-needed refurbishment, we re-opened the Metropole Gallery in September 2001 with my first show as Director - an exhibition of Derek Jarman's Late Works, most of which he painted during his final illness at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness. As I wrote in the catalogue, as far as I knew, *"only one internationally renowned film-maker, designer, writer, gay rights activist, gardener and artist has lived within sight of the Metropole. It had to be Jarman."*

Jarman's extraordinary huge canvases, laden with oils in angry reds, purples and browns, and daubed with phrases such as Love, Sex, Death; Dizzy Bitch; Infection; and Drop Dead, made quite an impact on a local community more used to sedate exhibitions of watercolours by local painters. As Gearing puts it: *"The sense of excitement was palpable. De Haan came in really, really turned on. It was the fact something different was going on - it was very challenging."*

Later on, in 2002, I curated Harvey's Bodies, an exhibition which celebrated the Folkestone-born medical scientist, William Harvey, who, in 1628 had discovered that blood circulates around the body. The exhibition comprised Harvey's anatomical tables - 400 year old human blood vessels and nerves, dissected out and stuck to cedar boards - set against new artworks created by contemporary artists, including Phyllida Barlow, Steve Hines and Joanna Jones. The exhibition was *"nationwide choice"* in The Times.

The Greatest Show On Earth in 2003 was a group exhibition of contemporary work curated by Pete Fillingham.

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One of William Harvey's anatomical tables



Prospect Cottage



Thirty two artists were represented including Tacita Dean, Douglas Gordon, Charlotte Moth and David Medulla (who told me he had previously appeared at the Metropole in the 1960s with Yoko Ono).

These early forays proved there was a hunger for exciting visual arts shows within the locality - but after a year or two it became hard to maintain the momentum with so much going on in other parts of our operation. Funding for visual art was always tight and the gallery spaces, which we held on short leases, were expensive to maintain and unsuitable for many first class exhibitions. Cathy Westbrook had a successful spell as Exhibitions Curator in 2004, focusing particularly on innovative educational projects and on supporting emerging artists, but ultimately, we needed a new, more sustainable model for delivering high quality contemporary art in a provincial community.

As Lord Radnor puts it: *"When I joined the Board of the Metropole in 2002 it was an organisation looking to expand and to make a significant impact nationally. We recognised we had to get some heavy hitters from the art world on board. In the beginning we went down one or two blind alleys, which was almost inevitable. We were initially thinking of a sculpture park on the Leas, but then we realised*

*Above: Opening of Derek Jarman's Late Works exhibition at The Metropole Gallery
© Martin Wills*

it was a model that had been tried once too often. We needed something that engaged the town and changed and evolved over time. I suggested we bring in Madeleine Bessborough, the Director of the New Arts Centre at Roche Court: we were neighbours in Wiltshire and I liked going to Roche Court; I'd occasionally buy something if I could afford it. Madeleine came to Folkestone on the worst possible day, with driving horizontal rain, but it didn't seem to put her off. She suggested Tim Llewellyn for our Board; he was the Director of the Henry Moore Foundation. When he agreed, it felt like a major step forward. And then getting Stephen Deuchar, the Director of Tate Britain at the time, to join the Board was the icing on the cake. It really gave the Board gravitas in the art world and the fire power to attract a top class curator."

Lord Radnor continues: *"When I worked at Christies in the early 1980s, there wasn't such a thing as a contemporary art department. Now, a big auction of contemporary art might fetch £100 million – a lot of money. So we knew that, if we wanted the project to become an international success, it had to be based on contemporary art. All of us, including Roger, bought into the idea that the Folkestone Triennial needed to be contemporary because that is where the interest and the attention lies. It's not as if Roger's disinterested though: he's bought some substantial examples, including an important Gormley. That's not to say he likes everything. Of course, not everything is going to be to everyone's taste. The idea is that the Curator puts together a stimulating show that people will want to see. For me, being on the Arts Sub-Committee of the Creative Foundation is enormously exciting and great fun."*

Andrea Schlieker was invited to visit Folkestone and asked to put forward ideas for a major new project. A hugely respected figure in the contemporary art world, Schlieker needed to think carefully before getting involved in Folkestone:

"Before I began on the Folkestone project, working in the public domain was already familiar to me – I'd done lots of public art projects: in Manchester; in London; in Ireland; and with Rachel Whiteread in Vienna; but Folkestone was quite a different scenario – here was a chance to work with a whole town. I was already very familiar with Skulptur Projekte Münster, which was the best project I knew of to bring art of the highest calibre to as many people as possible. This was an opportunity to bring the same sort of experience to Folkestone."

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In fact, Schlieker was brought up in Münster, in the west of Germany, although she has lived in London since 1980 – longer than she's lived in Germany. Since its inception in 1977, the Skulptur Projekte exhibition, held in Münster every ten years, has put itself at the forefront of the debate about the relationship between art, the public and urban space through commissioning internationally renowned artists, so far over one hundred and fifty, to explore the particular situation of the city.

Schlieker recalls: *"It was 2005 and I was on a train coming back from one of the venues for British Art Show 6, which I was co-curating at the time. My phone rang and it was Tim Llewellyn. I'd known him for ages, originally from my days at the Serpentine Gallery. He started explaining about Roger De Haan and his plans for Folkestone. Of course I knew about Saga – my car was insured by them – but I'd never been to Folkestone. Tim talked a lot about the harbour and the Academy; Norman Foster was mentioned. Over the course of two or three phone calls I learned more. It sounded like an extraordinary cocktail of ambitions and history. But it worried me that Folkestone was so far off the art map – and so very ... provincial."*

"I had worked once before in a provincial setting, curating the Claremorris Open in County Mayo in Ireland, which is



Andrea Schlieker.

Above: Folk Stones by Mark

Wallinger

© Russell Burden

actually far more remote than Folkestone. There, the whole town gets involved. There's a group of eight or ten people who run it: teachers; bank managers; accountants; housewives; led by John Kirrane – it was his brainchild fifteen years ago and every year he appoints a different curator. And my experience with Rachel Whiteread in Vienna working on the Holocaust Memorial taught me a lot. It was my first really big project, which I was working on at the same time as *The Angel of the North*. At first Rachel's project seemed to be very straightforward. It started in January 1996 and it was meant to be done in nine months, but it wasn't finally inaugurated until summer 2000. The memorial itself was fabricated quite quickly, but then it just sat in a warehouse for three and a half years. The right wing of the Jewish lobby was against it, even though it was initiated by Simon Wiesenthal; the archaeological lobby was against it; this was the time of Jörg Haider and the Freedom Party and the Austrian right agitated against it; the local community opposed it because they thought it would be bad for business. I've never come across anything like it. By comparison the Folkestone project was easy.

“But I was nervous about what expected of me in Folkestone. Tim had mentioned a sculpture park but I was keen to know if it could be something more open in concept. I was told I had carte blanche: I was asked simply to write a paper and present it to the Trustees. I went to Folkestone on a very beautiful summer's day and I was completely blown away. All my reservations were swept aside. I was so convinced of the potential of the town. It was so evocative: Folkestone's historic connections with major art-world and literary figures such as Duchamp, Beckett and HG Wells; purely on a visual level the location by the sea was amazing; the mix of dilapidated buildings, sites full of history and grand hotels – so much narrative buried. It was instantly captivating, nothing like a model village – a real rough diamond, with areas of huge deprivation. You could read the social context very clearly, which made it so interesting for artists; more interesting than Münster for instance – the heterogeneity of Folkestone makes it so perfect as a platform for art. I had lunch with Roger De Haan, who was very affable, very charming, open and friendly. Then, towards the end of 2005, I was asked to present my paper to a meeting of the Trustees, in Roger's office with its incredible view of the sea. At the end of my presentation there was silence for a few seconds, and I remember thinking “This has gone very badly”. Then, one by one, the Trustees started to say they liked the idea.

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There was tremendous enthusiasm, but how was it going to be funded? Then Roger said “Yeah, I think it's great”. There was some scribbling of calculations and he announced “I'm going to give four and a half million pounds for the first three exhibitions - do you think that'll do it?” I'd certainly never been to a meeting that produced such results.”

De Haan's generosity meant that core funding was committed for major exhibitions in 2008, 2011 and 2014. What led him to take such a decisive step?

“We want everything we do to be world-class,” he says. “We'd had two sets of consultants come up with ideas based on a fairly traditional sculpture park model; it was immensely frustrating when we realised their ideas wouldn't work. Andrea took what we'd been working on and moved it to another level.”

Andrea Schlieker proposed a recurring three month summer exhibition, featuring major new artworks by some twenty artists – a combination of renowned UK and international contemporary artists and those she considered would be leading lights of the future. Each work would be newly commissioned for Folkestone, and would respond in some way to the town, its stories, its situation and its people. Schlieker proposed that a proportion of the works

Above: Holocaust Memorial at Judenplatz Vienna by Rachel Whiteread

should remain in situ permanently. De Haan particularly liked this aspect of the concept, and insisted that at least six permanent pieces should result from each iteration of the Triennial. As he puts it: *“The genius of the Triennial idea is that over time the whole town is converted into a new kind of sculpture park. It gives Folkestone an amazing long term legacy.”*

The clock started ticking immediately. It was quickly agreed that the gap between exhibitions should be three years rather than two for the more familiar Art Biennial. It was important to allow sufficient time for art practice to evolve significantly between shows, but not so much time that momentum would be lost. And it was decided that the first Triennale (initially the European version of the word was used – later we switched to the more anglicised Triennial) would be held in two and a half years’ time, in summer 2008.

Schlieker began to invite a compelling mix of artists – Turner Prize winners, international names and rising stars – to Folkestone, and she gave them an open brief to make unique works in response to what they encountered.

Although Schlieker had free rein artistically as the Curator, there was healthy dialogue with the Metropole Trustees. Clare Foster was a Trustee when Schlieker presented her initial selection of artists for the first Triennial. She recalls *“Andrea was very impressive and spoke very convincingly about why she wanted each artist – how they all fitted together. But I actually didn’t know any of the artists. I was worried that, although the Triennial would be of interest to the art world, it wouldn’t be newsworthy in the local community. It seemed to me that having someone with local links but with an international name would be a good idea and I suggested Tracey Emin. When Tracey came along everyone knew who she was; they knew what to expect.”*

After one or two false starts in getting to grips with the project management for the Triennial, Robert Green and Jon Davenport in the Creative Foundation’s property department took on responsibility for managing the fabrication and installation of the work. Green brought a refreshing degree of pragmatism to the task: *“Slap me down – who’d have ever thought I’d be involved in an enormous art festival? If you’d told me a few years ago I’d probably have decided to stay at Saga, but I’ve had more fun working on the fabrication and installation of Triennial*

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Visitors to the 2008 Triennial take a break on Mark Dion’s Seagull

©Russell Burden



The author with Tracey Emin, Andrea Schlieker, Torange Khonsari and Niamh Sullivan at Mermaids Cafe, Folkestone



artworks than anything else I’ve done. A giant fibreglass seagull; a bloody great illuminated sign on the roof of the old post office; huge steel letters spelling out Folkestone on the harbour arm: you’d think this is lunacy, but it’s actually incredibly rewarding. It was the job that pulled us all together and made a team of us at the Creative Foundation – the Triennial demanded that we all work together, and that people like me, who didn’t really get contemporary art, got stuck in.”

Alongside the complexities of getting the artworks made and installed in time, we had to deal from scratch with a huge range of complex issues: planning permission and licences; gaining consent from land owners; road closures; insurances; car parking; setting up the visitor centre; recruiting and training invigilators; co-ordinating a major marketing and PR campaign; setting up the website; producing guides and maps; selling merchandising materials; organising cleaning and on-going maintenance; co-ordinating the process of getting the town to look its best; running an extensive education and outreach programme and, of course, organising a fantastic opening night party. One of the team’s largely unsung achievements was ensuring that all the works were installed two weeks ahead of the opening date so that they could be photographed in situ in order for the beautifully produced 105 page catalogue to be designed, printed and delivered in time for the launch.

Above: Disco Mecanique, Folkestone Triennial 2008

© Russell Burden

Green continues: *“I can appreciate that works like David Batchelor’s piece at the Metropole, gently rotating from the ceiling with the sunlight shining behind it, was just beautiful.”* In fact Batchelor’s installation at the Metropole was the last exhibition to be held there and the gallery closed when the lease ended a few months after the end of the Triennial. Green recalls: *“To have brought it all in on time and on budget was a huge achievement. My biggest whinge is that quite a few local people didn’t really see the benefit of it. But it’s different for 2011. I’m glad it only comes round every three years though.”*

Niamh Sullivan agrees. In 2006 she moved across from the Creative Foundation’s property department to work on the Folkestone Triennial, co-ordinating artists’ visits and supporting Andrea Schlieker as one of three Assistant Curators. *“Folkestone was very buzzing and busy during the first Triennial; there was a lot of very good press; it brought in loads of people from out of town and there was a great community of arty people working on it. But there wasn’t enough of a lasting impact from the first one; everyone was exhausted and some of the good feelings and goodwill dissipated. Nobody really realised how big the first Triennial would be, but it opened local people’s eyes to what contemporary art has to say. We’re much better geared up now.”*

The eight permanent works from the 2008 Triennial are:

- Tracey Emin’s *Baby Things* – seven tiny realistic bronzes of baby’s clothes and toys, scattered around the town as if dropped from pushchairs and prams
- Mark Wallinger’s *Folk Stones* – a square pavement of thousands of numbered pebbles that forms a simple war memorial
- Pae White’s *Dog Park* – a pocket park for dogs and their owners, maintained in perpetuity by the local council
- Nathan Coley’s *Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens* – lyrics spelled out in fairground-style lightbulbs on a scaffolding grid overlooking Quarterhouse performing arts centre
- Richard Wentworth’s *Racinated* – a series of ten enamel plaques, dispersed around Folkestone, giving information on the town’s exotic plant life

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Tracey Emin’s Baby Things - Shoe

© Thierry Bal

Above right: Heaven is a Place Where Nothing Ever Happens by Nathan Coley

© Thierry Bal

Right: Richard Wilson’s 18 Holes

© Thierry Bal



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- Richard Wilson's 18 Holes – the abandoned crazy golf course lifted from the seafront as a series of concrete slabs and reborn in the form of beach huts still coated in green felt
- Adam Chodzko's Pyramid sign and accompanying film, reporting on a mythical utopian Folkestone of the future
- Patrick Tuttofuoco's "FOLKESTONE" sign – spelt out in huge multi-coloured steel letters on the harbour arm, recalling the artist's epic journey across Europe from Istanbul to Folkestone on the Orient Express

The 2011 Triennial leaves a legacy of a further half dozen outstanding works in Folkestone's public realm. Already visitors make their way to the town to see the works between Triennials – this trend will inevitably increase as the range and diversity of the work on permanent display grows over time.

As Lord Radnor says: *“Overall the first Triennial must be regarded as a great success. Artistically there were almost unanimously positive reviews – some almost euphoric. And I can't remember another regional art show that's made the national ten o'clock news on the BBC. To have a first show that's instantly regarded as being internationally important is a pretty good achievement.”*

“If there's a downside, it could possibly have achieved more footfall, but we don't know precisely how many people visited. That's something we're working on for future Triennials. Folkestone is not on most people's route; if you don't live nearby you have to find a reason to come. But the high speed link is now in operation and London is under the magic hour. And Folkestone has the Channel Tunnel, so there's no reason why we shouldn't be attracting a large audience from Europe too.”

We had no idea how many visitors to expect, nor how they would react to the artworks. So we commissioned researcher Dr Richard Ings to produce a comprehensive evaluation of the first Triennial. Despite the difficulty in measuring attendance at a free event taking place in the open air at dozens of sites over a twelve week period, Dr Ings devised a methodology which concluded that a conservatively estimated 171,000 people saw the exhibition. A further 1,597 took part in talks, tours, workshops and other educational events.



The response from visitors was overwhelmingly positive, although as Lord Radnor points out: *“Locally it was regarded with a certain amount of scepticism by a percentage of the Folkestone population and that's not surprising. Some of the art is quite challenging to people who don't follow the contemporary art scene and may prefer more traditional forms of art. But people realise it draws visitors into the town and will help put it back on the road to prosperity. Of course that's not to say the Triennial stops other forms of art being produced in Folkestone. There is room for other strands of art activity taking place at the same time and it's important that the Triennial boosts artists and new businesses based in the Creative Quarter. The town belongs to the people who live in it, and the Triennial is bound to help shops, restaurants and hotels. During the first Triennial hotels were pretty much choc-a-bloc.”*

“For the first Triennial we all held our breath – it could have fallen completely flat. Convincing world class artists who are hugely in demand to come to Folkestone to make new commissions was always going to be an uphill struggle, but we didn't just do it with one or two – we did it with a whole host of them, twenty two in total. The nature of the second Triennial is more outward looking than the first. It may be a bit edgier, but the important thing is that people want to come and see it.”

Above: Folkestone sign by

Patrick Tuttofuoco

© Thierry Bal

Artists certainly approved, as the following emailed messages attest:

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Firstly congratulations, seems like you cracked it! This could actually be quite a moment for Contemporary art in that now what you have done seems perfectly logical and part of the UK's wider acceptance of contemporary art, a bit like Frieze, it seems so obvious once its done that there would be an audience for this kind of thing, before hand though it seems like a risk. Again well done! Jeremy Deller

Congratulations once again for such a great show! You must be so happy!! i had a wonderful time at the opening. the fireworks where out of this world! I've never seen anything like it. my feet where so sore from dancing by the end of the night i had to walk home bare foot. It was a night to remember. I've had some great feed back about my work. I'm really happy :) Susan Philipsz

In spite of not seeing it all, the generous and engaging spirit of the Triennial stays with me – the various ways in which the works invite us to imaginatively reinvest in the people and the town, the light but poetic touch that does not shy away from the sad but entertains hope – providing a foundation for mental change on which all change, and certainly change for the good might rest, is simply heartening, inspiring and transformative. With great admiration and gratitude, Antony Gormley

And the press could hardly have been more enthusiastic:

“This town is the most specific of sites and the sea air has done the artists good. Folkestone isn't Venice. Or Basel, or Miami, and I hope it will never try to be. But it has bagged itself the most refreshing show of public art I think I have ever seen. I can't recommend it enough ... This is a triennial that will transform our experience of a seaside town and should attract global interest.” Financial Times

“There's something wonderful about taking the early train for an impromptu sea-side jaunt. Arguably Folkestone offers the best-value day out of London this summer.” Evening Standard

“Magical moments as Folkestone emerges from the waves... witty, thoughtful and definitely worth a day at the seaside.” Guardian

“If the Folkestone Triennial has anything to do with it, the town's woebegone fortunes are about to change.” Daily Telegraph

As De Haan puts it: *“Our whole regeneration project is all about trying to make Folkestone a more successful place to live and work in, and the Folkestone Triennial is an important part of this. Many local residents were ready to condemn it but I haven't heard a single person who hasn't praised it. The art has resonance with them. However, there's no doubt that more can be done to engage them in the future. We now have the beginnings of a permanent collection of the best contemporary art that will draw people to Folkestone and over time make it into an artistic mecca. We need to ensure that the concept continues to appeal to leading artists here and abroad and that the Creative Foundation continues to develop the skills necessary to deliver a first-class, well organised show. I'm hoping that, by 2014, the project will have its own momentum and that, after nine years of funding, I will be able to step back.”*

Above: A Folkestone Triennial
education workshop
© centralphotography.com

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Quarterhouse

In the 1990s Folkestone and its community had seemed unable to sustain a successful arts centre. But by 2010, alongside the other developments that had taken place, the town had a successful and vibrant arts, conference and entertainment venue, in the shape of Quarterhouse Performing Arts and Business Centre, where healthy audiences attended live music, comedy, film, dance, theatre and children's shows in the auditorium, took part in learning activities and enjoyed food and drink in its restaurant and bars, alongside a cluster of creative businesses occupying the top floor office suites.

From the outset, the Trustees of the Metropole Arts Centre had wanted somewhere that could meet the needs of local audiences for live events. If the Metropole was flawed as a visual arts space, for the performing arts it was disastrous. It had no real auditorium and it was severely constrained by neighbours who objected fiercely to virtually any noise we made. As the Creative Quarter developed, so did the need for a hub, where people could come together to socialise and to experience high quality performances, and where local performers could experiment and try out their shows in front of a home crowd. Initially the concept took a back seat whilst we built up the property portfolio in the Creative Quarter, got on with important educational projects and began to develop the Folkestone Triennial. Then, in 2005, the Leader of Kent County Council at the time, Sir Sandy (later Lord) Bruce-Lockhart offered to commit £3.5 million of Kent's capital funding towards a "business support centre for artists" to be located on the seafront.

We were bowled over by this great news – but then we had to admit that nobody was really sure what this centre would be, or how it would operate. And whilst it would undoubtedly have been "nice to have", the concept didn't seem to differ significantly from what the Creative Foundation was already able to provide. We felt sure that a performing arts centre would be a better use of this funding and set out to make the case. It proved to be a tough argument to win; for one thing experts at KCC advised us that a new arts centre couldn't be built for the available budget. I had the experience of building an excellent performance space



in Exeter for less than £2.5 million, albeit eight years earlier, and I was sure it could be done, but we realised that the KCC capital sum, generous as it was, would have to be increased by contributions from other sources.

I drew up the design brief for the Centre, and we went to work. The site for the building was a derelict former builder's yard on Tontine Street. The freehold of the land was owned by the Creative Foundation itself, so our model of being able to draw on capital funding from the Roger De Haan Charitable Trust didn't apply in the usual way. Fortunately we were able to secure an additional £500,000 from the regional development agency SEEDA (through the support of Janice Wason and Geoff Miles at the Channel Corridor Partnership) which proved to be a decisive boost to the budget. The Arts Council, having originally helped us with the acquisition of the site, also provided a grant of £150,000 to allow us to purchase the technical equipment we would need to put on high quality shows.

By this point Paul Carter had taken over as Leader at KCC. Initially reluctantly, but with increasing enthusiasm, Carter and his team came on board with the concept.

We knew that we needed to find an outstanding architectural practice to implement our vision. We convened a panel which

*Above: Dunks Builders Yard
prior to demolition*

comprised Roger De Haan, the architect Piers Gough (in his capacity as Kent Design Champion), Creative Foundation trustee Tim Llewellyn, local authorities representatives, Robert Green and me, and we ran an open competition, inviting all-comers to respond to the brief. Sixty-eight architectural practices responded, and we shortlisted six.

Unfortunately Piers Gough was unhappy with the panel's selection and resigned from the jury, stating in the architectural press that he *“disagreed with the selection criteria that led to the shortlist of so many established practices and so few young ones for such a small commission.”*

In the event, Alison Brooks Architects were appointed. At the time this young practice had never designed a public building, nor taken on a project with such a substantial budget. But they turned out to be an excellent choice, going on to be co-winners of the 2008 RIBA Stirling Prize, the UK's most prestigious architectural award, the following year, for their work on the Accordia housing development in Cambridge. Brooks was the first female architect to win the RIBA Stirling Prize, and hers is the only practice to have won all of the three main UK architectural awards – the Stirling Prize, the Manser Medal and the Stephen Lawrence Prize.

The site for the building was relatively small – and all the facilities had to be tightly packed together. This forced the design team to come up with inventive solutions and helped keep the capital costs under control. The auditorium is the ultimate in flexibility – it can seat up to 270, but the seats can go back at the push of a button to provide a flat floor with a standing capacity of 500 for music gigs. The space can also operate as a cinema and the acoustic is deadened so that the spoken word and amplified music both sound great.

Our funding partners were clear: none of them wanted us to build a centre that would need ongoing revenue grant funding. So the plan was for the centre, after an initial start-up period, to become financially self-sufficient. We are permitted to receive public funding towards the programme of events in the auditorium, but the core staffing operation had to be sustainable. This would be quite a hill to climb in a big metropolis or a vibrant regional city. But in the middle of one of the most deprived areas in the south east, it was a real challenge. The top floor is given over to twelve creative industry business and learning units and a meeting room, all of which generate rental income. There are three bars, including

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one in the auditorium itself, to maximise drinks sales. And we struck a rental deal with University Centre Folkestone for their performing arts students to use the venue as a training ground when it would otherwise lie empty.

As Robert Green puts it: *“It’s an absolutely fantastic thing we’ve done. I can’t pretend there haven’t been problems. Building it was a massive challenge which began on day one. It was good fun selecting the architect, and in fact Alison Brooks was the only team who said we stood a chance of building it for the money. Technically it was a very difficult challenge. We gave it to an architect who had never built a building on that scale and to contractors - D J Ellis - for whom it was the largest single building they had undertaken. There were plenty of arguments and disagreements along the way: electrical cables in the wrong place; problems with archaeology; problems with the construction process, but despite that we’re all very proud of what we’ve achieved. We spent four and a half million pounds building something that everyone told us should have cost seven million. They said it couldn’t be built for that sort of money, but we did it.”*



Alison Brooks

Above: Demolition in progress: the Creative Foundation team in front of the Quarterhouse site
© centralphotography.com

In fact the project ran over its original budget of £4.15 million by some 10 per cent. We were very fortunate that Shepway District Council was able to provide us with an additional £250,000 of capital funding at a critical stage, which was an enormous help in filling the gap.

For Alison Brooks, Quarterhouse was a very significant project in her practice's trajectory: "At Alison Brooks Architects we try to draw on local context and to avoid the clichés of iconic architecture. When you have the responsibility to transform the image of a place you have to be careful not to be flippant. We strive to be timeless – it's about finding and intensifying the essence of a place; amplifying and communicating it. Quarterhouse is an example of this approach. The form of the building is very modest. We didn't try to produce an extravagant, athletic, super-complex shape. There was a rhythm and ordering to the facades along the street, then the scale suddenly disintegrated as you got to the site. When the starting point is to complete a late-Victorian Georgian-style terrace with a modest form then it's all about the skin and the scale and proportion of the openings.

"The principle of an acoustically sealed box within a box applies to almost all theatres and Quarterhouse was no exception. There's also the issue of the shop front. The ground floor space is on a completely different scale to the other shops in the street but we liked the idea it could be treated as just another shop. We've avoided a big grand opening and foyer. The main entrance door is just a standard size and people can come in and out and move around easily. We wanted to create a big first floor living room for Folkestone – a piano nobile to say "we're here" in a welcoming, unintimidating way. So the grand gesture is on the first floor; an inversion of what you'd normally expect, but a response to the site.

"From the word go, we thought it should be a beacon – that the building itself should be luminous. It was designed to lift the whole of the surrounding area. At night you feel it's an island of warmth and light – and I always hoped it would spawn offspring along the street, which has now begun to happen. There are other examples in Europe of luminous facades, but this was an opportunity to do it in a new way. It was also a chance to bring in the story of Folkestone as a seaside town, with its heritage of fishermen and seashells.

We really were inspired by scallop shells and by a shell-encrusted trinket box we found in a nearby souvenir shop. We thought it would be interesting to translate the translucency and luminosity of seashells into the facade of a building. The scallop shell was the first point of reference, which became analogous to the folds of a curtain and, of course, waves – the exterior takes on all sorts of associations at different scales. Then we were faced with the challenge of making this

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Above: Quarterhouse by day
© Ed Thompson

Above right: Quarterhouse at night
© centralphotography.com

Right: Quarterhouse Bar
and Restaurant



luminous, fragile thing very robust. At the competition stage it was intended to be polycarbonate, but we had to rethink it because of the urban context of Tontine Street and we came up with this paradox of a very tough but translucent result. It's a kind of trick we've managed to play. That was the great thing about the project: there were opportunities and there was a client who was open to new ideas. We played with the rhythm of the flutes to create a sense of movement. The idea is that it's an animated, living thing that moves as you do. I try to do that with all our facades: breaking down the static quality of architecture has always been one of my ambitions. The way the facade of Quarterhouse expresses the energy and creativity of the performers and users of the building is particularly successful. I also really like the fact there's a business centre on the roof – it's about the democratisation of a cultural building; a "super-mixed" use."

The project was not without its stresses and strains. As Alain de Botton puts it in his book *The Architecture of Happiness*: "Buildings are coyly silent about the bankruptcies, the delays, the fear and the dust they impose". What does Brooks have to say about the challenges of the Quarterhouse project?

"It's a bit like giving birth; the human brain tends to purge painful memories. You build on positive results and then you do it again. Producing architecture and making buildings is such a slow, tortuous and complex process that at the end you have to celebrate it. And you have to push the boundaries – to experiment and attempt to achieve the extraordinary, otherwise it's just not worth it. Inevitably you also learn tons. With every building you almost have to start from scratch – everything changes all the time: regulations; standards; the criteria of a project – every site, every city, every client is different. The Chief Planner at the time at the local Shepway council objected to our design: he said he thought the cladding was only appropriate for an industrial shed in the suburbs. He told us it would be built "over his dead body", as he put it, and he recommended it for refusal. But thankfully the planning committee, which was made up of local councillors, overruled him and said they thought it was fantastic."

Robert Green again: "Getting Quarterhouse open and co-ordinating everything that had to be done for the launch was made much easier because it was the same team that had worked on the Triennial. But for the six months before the launch, eighty per cent of our time and effort was taken up with the build up. It was unbelievably frustrating that the

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Shell Encrusted Trinket Box



handover and the opening kept getting put back. The first night we opened, with BBC Radio Kent Introducing rising bands night, I was very nervous. But to see five hundred people thronging into the building was amazing. I got very tired and emotional and went around kissing everyone. It's really brilliant for Folkestone to have somewhere like Quarterhouse putting on top comedians and bands. I had enormous fun working on it – a lot of pain and grief and anguish too, but it's been worth it."

Ultimately the purpose of constructing a venue like Quarterhouse is to allow the quantity and quality of live events on offer for local people to be improved.

On my arrival at the Metropole in 2001, I had inherited responsibility for running the Folkestone Literature Festival. In previous years, this long-lived but rather moribund festival had involved a series of sometimes lacklustre events in a variety of mostly unsuitable locations. Fortunately I was able to call on the support of a very active Friends of the Festival grouping, led by Nick Spurrier, and we began to rebuild support. Then, in 2002, De Haan appointed Emma Soames as Editor of *Saga Magazine*. Coming from a background which included the editorship of the *Literary Review*, Soames generously threw her expertise and contacts into developing the Festival. The Festival blossomed under *Saga's* wing, particularly with the

Right: Jo Brand at Folkestone Book Festival

launch of the Saga Prize for Wit, a £20,000 annual award which ran concurrently with the Festival. Many Festival events took place at the spectacular Saga Pavilion – we started to draw capacity audiences for events with writers such as Bill Deedes, Alan Bennett, Beryl Bainbridge, William Hague, PD James, Vic Reeves and Jacqueline Wilson. But once De Haan sold Saga, corporate support for the festival dried up, so we commissioned Hay Festival Director Peter Florence to review the festival and give us a forward plan. Florence agreed to provide us with a sprinkling of star names for the festival programme, and this arrangement continued for several years with Florence in the role of “Festival Godfather”. The lack of suitable venues in the town continued to hold it back from achieving its full potential though: audiences tended to be wary of poor acoustics, a lack of refreshments, uncomfortable seats and inadequate sightlines in some of the venues we were obliged to use.

In 2009 the Festival finally found a permanent home in Quarterhouse; audiences have grown tenfold in a decade, publishers now approach us with suggestions for events, and it has become one of the few festivals of its type to generate a financial surplus.

Attendances for stand-up comedy, music, film, children’s shows and other events throughout the year have shown similar healthy growth patterns in the period since Quarterhouse opened. It was a coup for us to get Michael McIntyre to headline our new comedy festival just a couple of months after opening. He was doing a handful of warm up gigs in small venues prior to a stadium tour, and his appearance at Quarterhouse – which sold out virtually as soon as the tickets went on sale – helped to put the venue firmly on the map for audiences and promoters. Quarterhouse may not be able to match the capacity of larger venues, but it’s appropriate for Folkestone and it’s a stunning looking building which has been brilliantly designed and equipped for live performances. If it can offer top notch levels of care to performers – a friendly and co-operative welcome; cosy dressing rooms; great sandwiches; devoted technical support; engaged audiences – it can continue to earn a name for itself as a venue that bands, touring theatre companies and stand-up comedy stars want to visit.

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The auditorium at Quarterhouse

Right: Michael McIntyre live at Quarterhouse



Arts and Health

One project more than any other turned me on to the power of the arts to change people's lives. Before I came to Folkestone, I ran Exeter Phoenix, a successful arts and media centre in the heart of Devon's county town. At the time, I was passionate about promoting and commissioning the best of music, drama, film, literature and art, and I believed strongly in the importance of extending opportunities for education in the arts to all. But I was fairly ignorant about the potential of the arts to improve people's health and well being.

Each day I would drive the thirty minutes into work in Exeter from deepest Mid Devon, where my wife Sarah and I lived in rural isolation, down half a mile of steep, deeply-rutted track, in an old thatched cob farmhouse north west of Crediton. In this sparsely populated area our neighbours were far-flung but close-knit. One of them was the local GP, Dr Peter Twomey. One evening in 1998, over a glass of wine, we got talking about his work. Twomey was a worried man.

In his practice, he told me, he saw a great deal of avoidable suffering. A number of his patients didn't really need medical services. In particular, the elderly encountered all sorts of problems - retirement, bereavement, distance from family and friends, lack of finance, withdrawal of services, lack of transport. All too often these issues led to elderly people becoming isolated and lonely. And this was associated with anxiety and depression, which itself is linked to increased physical ill health. Twomey felt sure that the key was to intervene early enough - to act "upstream" of the onset of grave health problems - in order to break the spiral of decline before the patient became seriously ill. If something could be done to engage these people socially, mentally and physically, he was confident it would lead to improvements in overall health and well being.

And so Upstream Health Living Centre was born. National Lottery funding for new models of preventative healthcare delivery had recently been opened up, and over the course of the next two years, working unpaid, mainly



Lower Furzeland Farm



in the evenings and at weekends, Twomey and I pushed through a successful bid for funding for a new charity to provide arts and health services in Mid Devon. Upstream set out to test the hypothesis that engaging vulnerable people in stimulating creative, leisure, learning and social activities would measurably improve their well-being and their health. Upstream was conceived as a centre "without walls": in a dispersed rural community, where transport was such a major challenge, it was important for the service to be delivered as near to people's homes as possible.

I remained a trustee of the charity until 2005, long enough to see our brilliant director Simon Goodenough and highly efficient administrator Claire Whewell steer the first five years of the project to a conclusion, and to witness the positive outcome of research carried out by Dr Colin Greaves and his colleagues at the Peninsula Medical School. The research report concluded:

"Taking the qualitative and quantitative findings together, the results suggest that engaging socially isolated elderly people in social and creative activities, using an individually tailored, mentoring approach, which focuses on building efficacy /confidence and self-determination can enhance their overall health-related quality of life, with a particular impact on depression, as well as increasing perceived social

Above: Rural isolation is a serious issue for many elderly people

© Russell Burden

support. Additional physical health benefits may be possible, particularly in the longer term if activities are sustained. The extent of the possible health gains is clinically meaningful in terms of the average changes in outcome scores reported. Furthermore, a substantial number of individuals were reported to experience quite radical transformations, including enhanced psychological well-being and lifestyle changes, as well as physical health benefits.”

The testimonies of participants are just as compelling as the research evidence:

- ‘Two months ago I didn’t have the confidence to answer the phone. Now I’ve been starting to do some work as a volunteer. People don’t have the confidence to do a lot of things, it wanes. What I’m doing now, it’s nearly like it’s a strange world.’
- ‘Well, if people are enjoying their life a bit better they are more inclined to stay in their own home longer. So prevention is better than cure. My argument would be that the sort of thing Upstream are doing is something that needs to be expanded.’
- ‘Well I’m not old, no, it’s only other people that get old. They say, “You’re 88”, well, what’s 88? It’s only a number isn’t it?’

When I came to Folkestone in early 2001, I was keen to see what could be done with arts and health in Kent. I knew that both Roger De Haan and Saga as a company were interested in the well-being of older people and there seemed to be an obvious link waiting to be made. What I didn’t know at the time was that Sidney De Haan, who died in February 2002, had been suffering from dementia for some time.

I met Grenville Hancox very soon after taking up the post of Director. Tall and lean, with a mop of silver hair and Alistair Darling’s black eyebrows, marathon runner, accomplished musician and inspirational teacher, Professor Hancox had been Head of Music at Canterbury Christ Church since 1982.

Hancox was to play an important role in many aspects of our regeneration project. As he puts it: *“The attraction of Folkestone for me was that it fulfilled a long held desire I’d had throughout my teaching career to be engaged in music in the community. First, here was a chance to set up a series of music events: we established the Metropole Post-*

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graduate Scholarship – the Metropole provided an annual £1000 bursary to an outstanding post-graduate music student, and, in return, the student gave a concert in Folkestone. On the back of this arrangement, I organised a series of concert seasons by students and professional musicians, first in the Metropole, and then, when the council threw us out because of complaints from the neighbours, in Holy Trinity Church, before we arrived at the wonderful St Eanswythe’s Church on the edge of the Creative Quarter.

“At the same time, Stephen Clift [Professor of Health Education at Canterbury Christ Church University] and I had been working on a choral singing research project since 1999. We’d had research published in 2000 and in 2001 on the impact on people’s well-being of singing in a choir, and we wanted to develop a stronger base to see if we could replicate our results on a larger scale. We went to see Roger De Haan, and he gave us a pump-priming grant of £25,000. This allowed us to set up the germ of a Research Centre in the Old High Street in Folkestone.”

Dr. Trish Vella-Burrows, a musician and music teacher with a strong background in elderly care, was the ideal person to run it.



Grenville Hancox

Above: St Eanswythe’s Church

Another strand of the centre's work was exploring the impact of music on dementia. Hancox continues: "Roger De Haan had found that music had a calming, beneficial impact on his father; it seemed to push back his dementia. He noticed that Sidney would often be completely lucid after attending a music concert, although he'd slip back into confusion a few hours later. In dementia the brain is degenerating to a chaotic state. I remember Paul Robertson, the leader of the Medici Quartet [and now Visiting Professor in Music and Medicine at the Peninsula Medical School in Devon] de-tuning two strings on his violin to demonstrate the sense of dislocation you suffer in dementia. The notion of chaos becomes all-pervading: you don't recognise people you've known all your life. It indicates a structural problem in the brain. But music seems to be one of the last things to go, and taking part in music offers a sense of release. We are all hard-wired for music in evolutionary terms – we can be emotionally touched by music when almost everything else has gone."

"Given our changing demography and the increasing older population, we saw the need to establish an organisation that would give people release from their medical conditions through singing. We put forward a business plan to the Roger De Haan Charitable Trust, and they agreed funding for a fully fledged Arts and Health Research Centre to the tune of £650,000 over five years. We named the research centre for Sidney De Haan.

"Stephen Clift and I became co-directors of the Sidney De Haan Research Centre alongside our mainstream university work and we brought in a small team of administrative staff. We've since won funding from the NHS for research into patient benefit, and we think we've now secured support from another foundation to take us through to 2016.

"In order to test our theories, we developed a model based on volunteers from choral societies working in old people's homes. We found we could establish what we christened Silver Song Clubs quickly and effectively, and involve large number of people in regular singing activities. The funding for this work was kept distinct from the research funding and in 2005 we separated the two sides of the organisation by setting up a new charitable company, Sing For Your Life.

"We undertook the largest international research project in singing, based on 1,300 people in the UK, Germany and

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Australia. Using World Health Organisation Quality of Life instruments, it showed a consistent picture of health benefits from regular singing. Another departure has been to look at the impact of singing on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease – emphysema and other long term breathing problems. Personally I've become very interested in singing and Parkinson's. The most recent neurological research by people like Professor Lawrence Parsons suggests that when you sing the brain is fully engaged – flooded with blood – more so than with other activities, and it's very difficult to do anything else at the same time.

"And we've just carried out the first ever randomised control trial of singing. It took place in Thanet and Folkestone, and involved eight groups of twenty to thirty volunteers, who'd never sung together before, meeting to sing over a twelve week period. There was also a control group who signed up but then weren't allowed to sing. Of course, they were livid when they found out – we've now had to let them sing too! The results seem to replicate our original findings: measurable, statistically significant improvements in people's well-being, based on a range of qualitative and quantitative measures."

But what about people who can't sing? Hancox is clear: "That's a social construct. Generations of music teachers promoted the idea that some people can't sing. Often

Above: Grenville Hancox leads a training session for facilitators

this was based on their reluctance to teach anyone who didn't fit their own model of 'musician' - filtering out the majority in order for a minority to succeed. Of course this was contrary to the nineteenth century mass-singing movement and the association of singing with working class communities such as coal miners. The social misconstruction was based on class division. Luckily we have seen the light these days. Of course not everyone wants to sing; but then not everyone wants to play football.

"We're at a very interesting point in the long term goal of the Research Centre to get singing on prescription. Now with all the cuts and the Big Society there's a recognition that things are going to have to be done differently. There's an awareness of huge and growing demand on the NHS with bed-blocking and ever-increasing pressure for GP visits; if GP-commissioners see the potential for singing groups to be an important port of call for a whole raft of issues (particularly for mental health concerns, which involve 28% of patients) then this could be the ideal time for a realisation of the enormous potential for singing to improve health."

As a GP, Dr Twomey takes a more generalist approach: *"I am of the belief that any intervention, if delivered professionally and sensitively, can be just as good as singing. When you sing you can't think at the same time except in between songs; otherwise I think one activity is much the same as another, as long as it is stimulating and creative within a social context. Once a person is engaged then I think confidence returns and the virtual reciprocative spiral takes off."*

"But sadly I think the likelihood of GP-commissioners purchasing singing or any other lifestyle intervention is very low. There just isn't the money out there. That is not to say it is not important - it is. The vehicle for delivering such activity may either have to be through the newly formed health and well-being boards or via charitable community-based organisations that link in with the wider primary health care teams."

Hancox is clear that the Research Centre's groundbreaking work in arts and health could not have flourished as it has without De Haan's support: *"Roger's an amazingly open, generous, humane man. He's anxious to support ideas, especially those that could impact on society in its widest sense. I'm so impressed by*

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his determination to make sure his personal fortune has a positive effect on the people of Folkestone. Our project chimed with his ambition just at the right time. People don't always know of the impact of his generosity - for example, as a result of his support, I was able to develop a module for music undergraduates at Christ Church called Music, Arts and Health, which was possibly unique in the UK when we started it in 2003. As a result, seven cohorts of students have now had the experience of working with local people; many of them are now working in community settings and a whole new arm of applied music practice has been launched; there's another rationale to study music and a career path that's helping to change the world for the better."

*Above: Upstream Felt, 2006
Created by more than 50
participants throughout Mid-Devon
© Paul Cartwright*

REFLECTIONS

Looking back on the first decade of the Folkestone project, how have things gone so far?

From the outset local people were fascinated by the prospect of one of the UK's wealthiest businessmen rolling up his sleeves and getting immersed in what was, to a large extent, a social project. Many people, who might otherwise have been dubious about the potential of the arts to impact significantly on a community with such severe challenges, fell in behind the flag because of the flag-bearer.

Robert Bliss, Leader of the District Council, is unequivocal: *“Part of the town had died and needed revitalising; we gave the Creative Quarter project our full support once we could see things starting to work. Now the arts are becoming a major feature for the town. There’s no question that the project has helped Folkestone economically: it’s improved our profile; boosted tourism; given us international connections and brought new blood into the town.”*

Sally Abbott, Director of Arts Council England’s south east region, watched the project unfold over a number of years, helping us at key points with advice, encouragement and financial support.

“The transformation of Folkestone has been an inspiration to the Arts Council and to towns and cities across the world,” she says, “Folkestone’s cultural profile has been raised beyond anything I could have imagined. The arts should be at the heart of what society is about. For the Arts Council,



Sally Abbott

© Philippa Gedge Photography

Right: Mark Wallinger's innovative kite flying technique © Martin Wills



the Creative Foundation has been a resourceful, dynamic and innovative organisation that contributes to debates about the arts – debates which have inspired people in other parts of the world to think more creatively about how they make regeneration happen in some of the places that need it most.

“There was a unique set of circumstances in Folkestone; a small collection of people, a real mix of interesting thinkers and risk-takers. That’s what has made what happened in Folkestone of international interest. Quite often, people say the Folkestone project wouldn’t have happened if it didn’t have a philanthropist at the heart but I don’t think that’s strictly true. I wasn’t in the south east region when things got started in Folkestone – I moved here eight or nine years ago – but you could hear the vibrations way beyond the south east. It took a while before what it was really about became widely known. At first, from a distance, it seemed to be mostly about economic development; it was only later that it became clear that it was about putting artists and their ability to live, work and play in Folkestone at the heart of it – and that is so unique.

“Like many people, at first I was a bit suspicious of Roger De Haan’s motives – I kept thinking “here’s a wealthy, successful businessman – what’s in it for him?” And, yes, it was calculated, but only in the most positive sense: a calculation made on the conditions of the day and the expectation that those conditions would remain for a long time. It was difficult to predict that those conditions would shift so much.”

Indeed, De Haan built his fortune through his skill in meeting consumers’ needs and is a brilliant marketer. For a handful of locals, the consistent, muted question remained “*What’s he getting out it?*” We had to give constant reassurance that De Haan was not seeking any financial reward and that the project was a charitable one. But even this was never quite enough to assuage the doubters, a few of whom seem to remain convinced that De Haan has, so far, given away in excess of £50 million to charitable projects in Folkestone in a cunning, but, as yet, mysterious plan to enrich himself further.

Abbott continues: “*I remember on one tour I took round the Creative Quarter, we came across someone in a top floor flat that hadn’t been redeveloped having an altercation with a new tenant in a refurbished shop. A big challenge for the project is getting the balance right between existing tenants living in poor circumstances and incoming artists who have a*

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*Right: The Tattoo Shop,
The Old High Street
© Foster Gearing*



different way of making a living. How do you get the balance right? My hope is that in the future, no matter what street you're in, there should always be ordinary people in corner shops who don't make their living from art but have an equally important role to play in a creative quarter. You need that balance to make any artists' community make sense and feel a real connection with the world. My other aspiration is that the bridge between the Creative Quarter and the rest of the community in Folkestone is strengthened – otherwise I don't think it will work in the long term.

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“Good communities are not about sanitising relationships between groups. Artists are fantastic at bringing a sense of disruption, and sometimes it takes disruption to make change and raise aspirations, but the question for the Creative Foundation is: how do you manage the change? And how do you help people to appreciate that there are other ways to create a sense of place? Non-artists and artists alike need to be included; they all need to be involved in civic issues and the life of their community. Personally, as a baby of the new town model, I know that constructing a new society is not an easy thing to do. You have to allow for demonstrations and dissent - see it as a positive process and not be rocked by it.”

For Abbott: *“The key question is legacy – what is the permanent footprint of the project going to be? What are the values that are permeating out to the rest of Folkestone from the Creative Quarter? How do these values improve things like the planning system, public health policy and education? It all takes time. The ten years it has taken so far is just a drop in the ocean in terms of the time it'll take Folkestone to lift itself out of the very difficult place it has been. And the signs are very positive.”*

During my time at the Creative Foundation, the core values that I tried to instil in the heart of the Folkestone project are also the hallmarks of many successful twenty-first century places:

- A focus on developing people's creative potential;
- Encouragement of a spirit of enterprise and self-reliance;
- A commitment to mutual respect, understanding and tolerance.



Above: Midwinter lantern procession enters the Old Town © Strange Cargo

In my view, we've been very successful in delivering the first two of these values: Folkestone is both a hugely more creative and a far more enterprising place than it was ten years ago.

But it's harder to judge the extent to which Folkestone has become a more accepting and open society; old social attitudes die hard and it can be tough for a settled community to accept incomers bringing fresh ideas from outside.

De Haan's own view is equally nuanced: *“There's no doubt that some aspects have already been successful. The University Centre is showing all the signs of being successful, and with the changes to fees there is likely to be more growth in demand for local higher education centres. At the Academy, the behaviour is great, academic performance is good and it's becoming much more the norm for children to go to university. There's still a long way to go and we still have challenges, but we've now secured the funding for a new school building for the Primary Academy and that will make a huge difference. The programming at Quarterhouse is maturing; the Book Festival is thoroughly well organised and well received and we have major comedians, bands and celebrities appearing regularly in Folkestone.*

“The big challenge is whether the physical regeneration of the Old Town will work. There’s still a lot of building work to be done, with over a dozen projects that need to be completed. Footfall is a challenge and as long as the Old Town’s a building site it’ll be difficult to attract shoppers. But I’m confident that it will work. A lot of the new businesses are inexperienced and we’ve had quite a bit of business failure, but the solution is time. Tontine Street is still dominated by traffic, though, and we need to make it a much friendlier place to walk.

And what could have been done differently? What lessons does De Haan think have been learnt?

“We came up with our grand strategy early on; if we’ve made mistakes it’s been when we’ve diverted from the plan. We had help from the Arts Council and Kent County Council, but some of the agencies thought that things would happen in Folkestone with or without their assistance. In fact, we put enormous effort into wooing some partners with no real effect. In that sense, my involvement has been negative in getting the public sector fully engaged. They were happy to celebrate the so-called “public / private partnership” very loudly, but they held back with their funds. We’d have been more successful more quickly if there hadn’t been a perception that “De Haan will fix it”. We got a lot less help than we deserved.

“In the early days we didn’t have the support of Shepway the local district council, and their regeneration team who sometimes seemed to see us as a threat. We have great support from Shepway Council now, although they’ve had very little money for regeneration over the years. We’re working very closely now, particularly on sports development.

“At the beginning, we probably didn’t do enough to bring along with us local organisations and community groups. Being as impatient as I am is both a strength and a weakness. I felt we couldn’t always afford to wait and work through the normal channels. Maybe when we started, we didn’t always bring people along as we should. We quickly learnt our lesson though.

“The harbour and seafront are the final piece of the jigsaw. It has taken so long to progress because we’ve been in a deep housing recession for a couple of years and there are serious barriers to the instant development of that area. There are challenges such as flood defences and highways to sort out

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before there’s any green light, but I’m sure it will happen. The development of the harbour and seafront will bring Folkestone’s connection to the sea into sharper focus. At the moment the area is a bit of a barrier between the town and the sea; when it’s built it will make the town flow better. I’m sure it will be successful. There was a danger a few years ago that something would be built there that we all felt was wrong. Whatever is built on the foreshore is going to be there for a very long time; the important thing is that it is of a very high quality, to match the excellence of so much of Folkestone’s architecture.”

De Haan took on the massive project of finding a new future for the 40 acre harbour and the seafront site in a private capacity, partly because of the sheer scale of the endeavour and partly because it would have been impossible to expose a charitable enterprise to the level of risk that it entailed. And it certainly has proved to be a costly project, with six years of hard work and considerable expense for De Haan having so far brought about only minimal tangible changes across the site. On a positive note, a new fish restaurant, Rocksalt, beautifully designed by Guy Holloway Architects, opened in June 2011 on a dramatic site overhanging the harbour. Kent born Michelin-starred chef Mark Sargeant’s first solo project, this venture is surely a sign of good things to come.



Above: Rocksalt – Mark Sargeant’s new fish restaurant in Folkestone Harbour

Above: Jeremy Hunt MP and Damian Collins MP with Shane Record in his gallery © Kentish Express/Paul Amos

Lord Radnor reflects: *“If you’re very rich, giving money away is the easy part – it’s getting deeply involved, like Roger has done, that demands more. Roger’s involvement in Folkestone has come about due to a unique set of circumstances which took time to gather momentum.*

“In times of recession, the arts are not top of the list for preserving from cutbacks. With the current climate, if philanthropy doesn’t expand, it looks like the arts are going to be very hard hit. Once funding is cut it tends to stay cut. But art is a force for good. It makes people feel better; it provides reflection, enjoyment and education – all of which are very important in the pressurised world in which we live.

“What is remarkable about the broader project of the Creative Foundation is that it is geared to become self-sustaining after a period of time. So many regeneration projects around the country haven’t had all the strands working together in the way it’s been done in Folkestone and some have collapsed in spectacular fashion. It’s important that we’ve been improving education at the same time as regenerating a very run-down part of the town, in conjunction with the Triennial and a very full festivals programme at Quarterhouse: this is what we hope will make it sustainable in the long term.

“People nowadays demand instant gratification but it does take time. In Folkestone now it’s really building up a head of steam. Over the next five to ten years we’ll see the rewards of a lot of hard work and the joined-up vision will prove to be the correct model.”

Expert arts consultant David Powell has closely observed the Folkestone project since I first asked him to give the trustees of the Metropole and the Creative Foundation advice on governance in 2003. He became the lead adviser for our organisational development project, known as “Thrive”, which the Arts Council funded from 2006 onwards, and he helped us with our successful bid to run a Find Your Talent pilot in 2008.

I spoke to him over coffee in the cafe of the British Library, near his base at King’s Cross. Powell says: *“This is the story of a small group of people who made something exceptional happen. It wasn’t an ordinary process and the story is punctuated by the tensions between the key characters.*

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Cornelia Parker sculpting the Folkestone Mermaid for the 2011 Triennial
© Yvette Illsley

Right: Salvation - Artwork used for Club Shepway Bathing Beauties competition © Matt Rowe



“From the outset of my involvement, the scale of the enterprise and the challenge was clear, but it was being talked about in a very modest way. I liked the cut of their jib – there seemed to be a rich working relationship. The Folkestone project always had different opportunities and a different level of resources available to it, which allowed it to go off in other directions from more conventional public sector regeneration projects in places like Hastings and Margate. It had a very different potential, even at a very early stage.”

“One of the key tensions was how you run a not-for-profit operation in a business-like way. I’m constantly surprised when I talk to people in the private sector how lightly configured they are: they just don’t want to engage with how government thinks they should behave. So within the Creative Foundation there was a strong desire to remain free, whilst insisting the public sector was its partner.”

“Roger De Haan is chairman and chief funder in what is, to an extent, a company town. It’s an unusual circumstance to have such a tight connection between important structural funding investment and the governance and direction of a foundation working in a particular place. All the elements circle back to one man. It’s miraculous that this group of people was able to hold it together over such a sustained period. Actually, it’s not miraculous: it’s the product of commitment, hard work and huge skill.”

“One of the things that’s completely admirable and very unusual is that, over the course of the decade, you could see this as cultural activity and investment informing and leading the way in which a town transforms itself. Or you could read it as a very serious socially-minded but commercially-driven regeneration project. What’s remarkable is that it’s the same organisation that’s achieving both, and the tension between the two aspects is what holds it together.”

“I can’t think of another place where it’s done on the same scale and so successfully. It’s extraordinary: no wonder government ministers have been all over it. If anything demonstrates the value of towns doing it for themselves, it’s Folkestone. And it wasn’t happening in a vacuum; part of what the Creative Foundation managed to do was to trade intelligently with the public sector.”

“There are lessons to be had in the example of philanthropy and social investment in a particular place. Perhaps one of the

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things you learn is that you need to have investment across the board – that’s why art galleries on their own will never save bugged seaside towns! Of course, everyone knows that - but there seems to be an unwillingness on the part of the public sector and the cultural sector to properly join things up, as in the Folkestone model: culture; education; major signature events; a big dent in years of neglect and sustainable job creation – all adding up to the re-imagining of a place.”

I left the Creative Foundation in summer 2010 to pursue projects in other parts of the country. For me, it has been a decade of enormous excitement, occasional frustration and extraordinary learning. Perhaps the best advice I’ve ever received comes from De Haan himself: “*Nick,*” he said to me recently, “*Never buy a harbour.*”



Roger De Haan with Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council, at the site of Quarterhouse

Above: Barbara Follett Arts Minister cutting the ribbon at the opening of Quarterhouse

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