

Creative
Royston

ANNUAL REPORT 2015



Royston Arts Festival & Events

Premier Partner: Johnson Matthey

Annual Report 2015

ROYSTON ARTS FESTIVAL & EVENTS

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Management Committee 2015

Gerard Artindale, Treasurer

Les Baker, Press Officer

Sarah Dingley, Town Council Representative

Carl Filby, Secretary & Website Administrator

Tina Filby, Volunteer Coordinator

Kirsten Grimmer, Marketing

Pamela Morton, Community Liaison

Sue Pettitt, Vice-Chair & Health & Safety

Claire Somerville, Chairperson

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Chairperson's statement

Firstly I have to start with a huge thank you to the Creative Royston Management Committee (CRMC) for supporting me through this first year as Chairperson. Graham Palmer had done such a sterling job of chairing the committee and steering the Royston Arts Festival ship, so it was a daunting prospect when I took the reins. I hope our achievements as a team this year have proved what a hard-working, capable and imaginative group we are and I look forward to working with the committee again in 2016 to deliver another vibrant and exciting festival.

The theme this year really captured our imagination (and it would seem the imaginations of other events organisations too, with over 70% choosing to run events linking with the theme). The Tree of Light is a particular highlight for me. Coordinating the workshops with Lorna Carmen McNeill in each of the schools and then assembling the wonderful willow tree with all its 300+ willow lanterns was such a great achievement. I'm grateful to Royston Library who were very accommodating in enabling us to take-over the children's section of the library to display the installation and I really enjoyed watching all the children and their families coming to see their illuminated art work as the sun went down, before going along to the Town Band's Dusk Concert in Priory Gardens.

As some people will know I had even grander plans for a 'Light Night' across the town where special buildings would be illuminated by light art works and everyone would be invited to participate in a lantern parade. The event would have been in partnership with *e-Luminate Cambridge*, who run the light festival in Cambridge each year. Sadly, the grant application submitted to Arts Council England was not successful, but we received positive feedback on the application and thankfully we were able to use other grant income to support the Tree of Light project.

It was great to see us reaching more under 24 year-olds than in previous years and this is largely down to Royston MusicFest'15 event we ran at The Old Bull with help from Royston Folk Club. As you'll see on page 10 we received lots of positive feedback and the committee plan to build on this idea for a larger MusicFest'16!

Another highlight was the wonderful Poetry Joe Show, by award winning children's poet Joseph Coelho. I watched both performances and in each case the children (and their parents) were spellbound by his fluent poetry and light 'magic'. It's a pleasure to bring such talented people to the town and I hope we'll be bringing other professional artists to join those we already have in the town in 2016.

Finally, thanks to the hard work of Carl Filby the CRMC Secretary, we have a new, more appealing and easy to navigate website. We'll be posting more information about events and activities planned for 2016, so I hope you'll check it regularly to see what's going on.

Claire Somerville

Chairperson (2015)

Volunteers and Contributors

Creative Royston events could not happen without the hard work of our volunteers, this year the following people kindly gave their time to support our events:

Angus Batey, Matt Bowmer, Jane Dottridge, Neil and Annette Guttridge, Sheila Harding, Sue and Terry Hartga, Ashley Hawkins, Diane Jackson, Chris Lee, Debra Manning, Harry Partridge, Kate Pennock, Emma Porteous, Joan Price, Philip and Audrey Scott.

Tina Filby is our volunteer coordinator and is always keen to hear from people who would like to help out at events. If you're interested or would just like to know more please email Tina on volunteers@creativeroyston.org.

Groups who participated in the 2015 festival include Blue Skies Band, British Science Association, Corvus Amateur Dramatic Society, Dance Matters, Friends of Tannery Drift School, Glazed Creations, GStars (dance), Meridian School musicians and choir, Parish Church Flower Arrangers, Royston Arts Society, Royston Cave (Royston & District History Society), Royston & District Churches Together, Royston Folk Club, Royston Methodist Church (Royston Fringe Events), Icknield Walk First School, Roman Way First School, Studlands Rise First School, Tannery Drift First School, Greneway Middle School, Roysia Middle School and Meridian Upper School, Royston & District Museum and Art Gallery, Royston Music Centre (Hertfordshire Music Service), Royston Photographic Society, Royston Picture Palace, Royston Town Band, Royston Youth Choir, Stevenage Wind Band.

Individuals who participated in the 2015 festival include Helen Allen (floristry workshop), Elaine Baigent (watercolour workshop), Lorna Carmen-McNeill (light art installation artist), Joseph Coelho (Poetry Joe Show), Jill Fordham (mosaic glass tile making), Henry Fynn (musician), Sue and Terry Hartga (photographers), Marian Keyes (author), Tom Ryder (singer-songwriter), Sandra Scott (mixed media workshop), David Sheringham (Finale Soloist), Professor Anthony Slinn (artist/lecturer), Tracey Stressing (craft workshops), F. John Smith (Historian), Jackie Smith (quilter), Chris Wall (Sound Technician), Naomi Wallen (dance).

Businesses, local authorities and charities who contributed in 2015 include Brian Leslie Racher Trust, Curwen's Solicitors, Hertfordshire County Council (locality budget), Johnson Matthey plc, The Listing, North Hertfordshire District Council, Royston First, Royston Town Council, The Stationery Cupboard.

Venues used in 2015 include Curwens, Glazed Creations, Greneway Middle School. Marketplace, Masonic Hall, Meridian Upper School, The Old Bull Inn, Royston Parish Church, Royston Library, Royston Parish Church, Royston Cave, Royston Methodist Church, Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery, Royston Town Hall, Tannery Drift First School.

Heroes & Villains Family Activity Day

In April 2015 Creative Royston worked in partnership with the Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery to run an activity day. Its main aim was to raise awareness of the Heroes & Villains' tile trail which had been installed in September 2014.

Creative Royston brought in David Tonge the 'Yarnsmith of Norwich' to do three story-telling sessions throughout the day, an indoor version of the tile trail was set up around the Museum with prizes supplied by Tesco and Glazed Creations and the Museum organised craft and colouring activities along the theme of 'Heroes and Villains'.



© Terry Hartga

150 people attended, the largest number of visitors (at the time) to an activity day at the museum. Members of Creative Royston were on-hand to talk about the tile trail and give out the updated leaflet.

The success of the day, has led to further discussions between the Museum and Creative Royston and there are plans to hold further activity days together in 2016.

The Tile Trail

The tile trail remains a part of Creative Royston's work. In 2015 some of the tiles were damaged and have been re-painted by young people from Royston Museum and regular attendees at Glazed Creations. These will replace the damaged tiles where needed in early 2016. Further stocks of flyers will also be distributed to Royston Library and the Museum as needed.

CRMC are particularly grateful to Pippa and Christina at Glazed Creations who continue to support the trail and provide their time and replacement tiles in kind.

Voluntary Arts Week 2015

In 2014 Creative Royston coordinated a celebration of the voluntary arts taking place in the town during the national Voluntary Arts Week. Whilst attendance figures were not high, CRMC felt it important to continue with the event in 2015, since it focuses on promoting the creative and artistic opportunities that exist already in Royston, something at the heart of Creative Royston's objectives.

Voluntary Arts Week 2015 took place between 15th and 24th May. Eight community groups/organisations got involved running free, open access events including knitting groups, an evening photo walk and band open rehearsals

Creative Royston produced an A5 flyer, designed by Matt Bowmer which was distributed throughout Royston and the surrounding villages, via schools, libraries and other outlets. The activities were also promoted on the Creative Royston website and through social media.



There was also coverage in The Listing and the spotlight on the community arts groups and organisations, was a welcome part of the work Creative Royston has done this year.

Royston Arts Festival in numbers



Approximately 3900 visits



44 events, exhibitions and workshops



96% good/excellent ratings



Over 350 local school children involved

Royston Arts Festival 2015 Attendance & Feedback

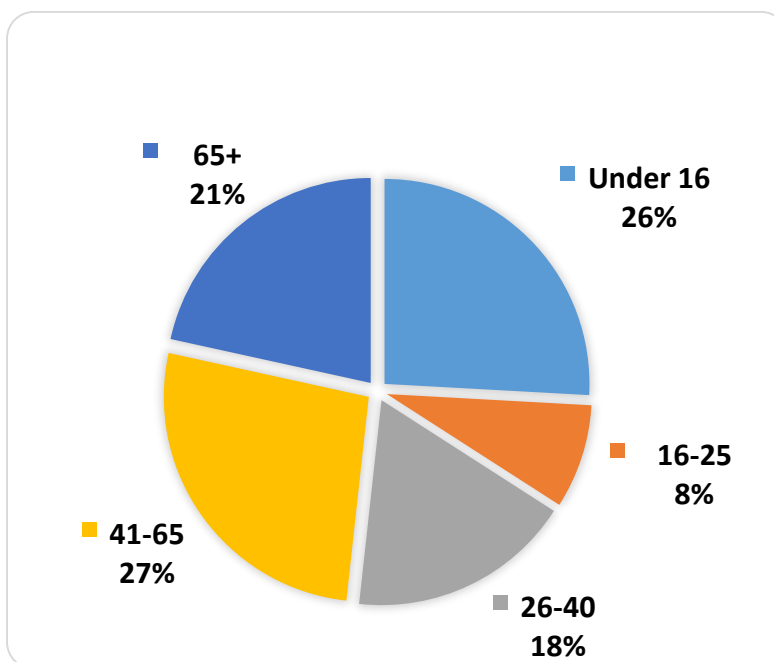
As with previous years Creative Royston aimed to get at least 60% capacity on all core events and workshops, which were managed directly by the committee. The Finale Concert continued to be the top attraction with 84% attendance and excellent feedback:

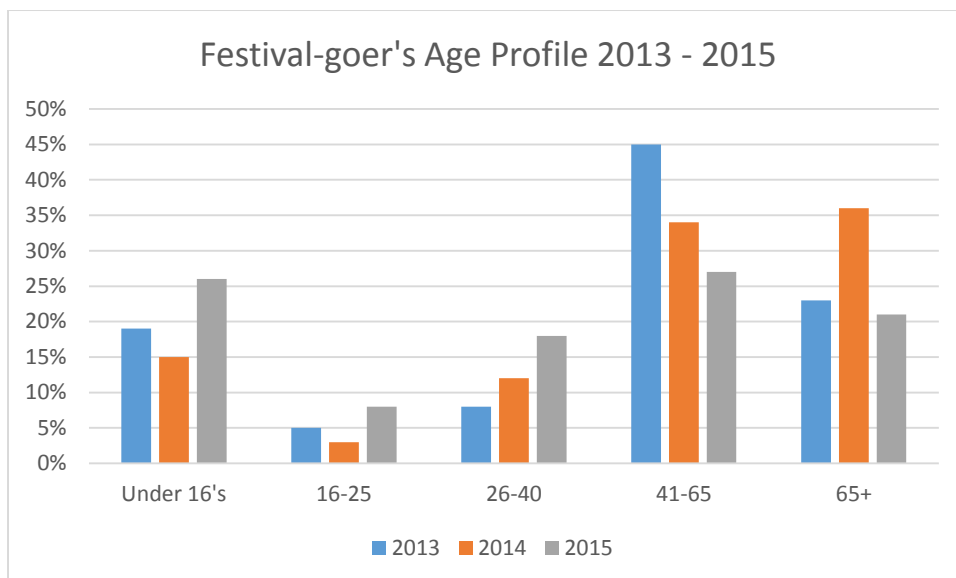
“Thoroughly enjoyed it – and so early in the term. Very high standard.” Attendee

This was followed by the new MusicFest’15 at 68% capacity, which aimed at reaching the under 24 year olds, the Poetry Joe Show at 64% capacity and the workshops (as a whole) at 51% capacity. It should be noted that whilst some of the workshops did not prove as popular as expected (watercolour painting and bouquet making), others were relatively well attended such as the djembe drumming and glass mosaic tile making workshops. It could be argued that the more unusual workshops proved more popular as it was a ‘one-off’ opportunity to have a go at something.

CRMC discussed the issue of holding workshops away from the town centre, where people have to make a special effort to attend and the chance of ‘walk-up’ interest is low to non-existent. With this in mind the committee is considering what type of workshops it would hold in 2016 and where in the town centre they could take place.

Festival-goer’s age profile





To provide some context for the age ranges seen at the festival this chart shows the percentage attendance by age at the festivals in 2013, 2014 and 2015. One might expect people over the age of 40 to be the main attendee at community arts events so the graph is not surprising. It is interesting to see that we did attract a high percentage of under 40's in 2015, in all three age brackets. One of the aims for 2015 in particular was to increase the number of 16-25 year olds as this age group has always been the least prevalent. Due to MusicFest'15 we did achieve this aim. Inevitably as one percentage goes up another will come down, so there were relative decreases in the 40+ age brackets and the committee will continue to try to provide a range of events that attract all ages.

Feedback is collected via paper questionnaires given out at events (all events run by community groups and Creative Royston) and available in the library for two weeks following the festival. There is also an online form available on the Creative Royston website. Carl Filby, Creative Royston Secretary collected and collated the 191 responses from completed questionnaires and a summary of the findings are outlined below.

96% of people who responded to the survey rated the festival as either good or excellent. Slightly lower than last year, but still very positive. The committee will be looking at what events scored lower to see where improvements can be made.

Comments from the festival attendees

Workshops at Greneway School:

- "A fantastic morning with my daughter learning a new skill and being creative"
- "The tutor was well-organised and able to help individually"
- "Hands hurt!"
- "The art workshop was excellent – thank you!"

Poetry Joe Show at Greneway School:

- "This was brilliant, thank you so much for bringing Poetry Joe to Royston, he would easily sell out the Polka or Unicorn. Rare treat."
- "I love Royston Arts Festival! My kids absolutely loved Poetry Joe."
- "A really good show, children were captivated, thank you."

MusicFest'15 at The Old Bull Inn:

- “Superb evening – great music”
- “Fab evening – such talent!”
- “Great to see an event which attracted a good number of under 20’s”
- “Book Kendrick next year + the Interval Act!”
- “Great idea & a good selection of music....If the local act had headlined you'd have got people staying to the end.”

Finale Concert at The Parish Church:

- “Thank you for such a fantastic evening, thoroughly enjoyed by the whole family. We look forward to coming again next year.”
- “The Finale Concert is brilliant.”
- “Thoroughly enjoyed it – and so early in the term. Very high standard.”
- “More adverts needed in the town itself and reminders of the 'big' events in the Festival Programme. Continuity would help cover the disturbance in changing performers.”

Events managed by other groups and organisations as part of Royston Arts Festival:

- “Most enjoyable – beautiful works from talented people – inspiring.” (Priory Quilter’s Exhibition)
- “Very polite, all have a good time, great activities.” (Royston Museum Activity Day)
- “Brilliant creative evening in relaxing atmosphere.” (Glazed Creations Pottery Evening)
- “Just gets better each year. Brilliant.” (Photographic Exhibition)
- “Good, very accessible talk on his top 25, not sure about the anecdotes at some points, quite engaging.” (Anthony Slinn Talk)
- “Fantastic performance from CADS. Light entertainment in second half was varied and imaginative.” (CADs – Black Comedy & Light Entertainment)
- “Very memorable for our age group.” (Blue Skies Band at Methodist Church)
- “Excellent evening’s entertainment” (Blue Skies Band at Methodist Church)

General comments:

- “The festival seemed flat this year. I think spreading it out over two weeks dilutes the atmosphere, and , as we didn't realise it was so spread out, and poor advertising, we missed events not realising they were only on the first week.”
- “It's great to see the town looking so good! Thank you.”
- “The whole festival well organised. Congratulations to everyone involved.”
- “We had such a lovely time, thank you!”
- “Festival? Very quiet! No publicity. No atmosphere. Photo and Art Exhib excellent.”
- “Well done Royston!!”

Marketing and Promotion

Marketing for Royston Arts Festival 2015 comprised of three focus areas: Programme distribution, banners/ posters and flyers, social media (Facebook and twitter). The former was distributed by The Listing to its full distribution list of 16,500 homes in Royston and 31 surrounding villages in South Cambridgeshire and North Hertfordshire.

Vinyl banners were displayed at Tesco roundabout, Folknoll roundabout on Old North Road, Royston Train Station, Tannery Drift First School, Royston Fire Station and Greneway Middle School. These included specially produced banners promoting The Poetry Joe Show and one specific to the Family Day Creative Royston ran at Tannery Drift First School. Posters were also put up across the town, including a double sided shop display on the High Street opposite Costa. Promotional posters and flyers were also placed on the roadsides at Arrington roundabout and A1198/ A505 roundabout. Finally, flyers promoting The Poetry Joe Show were included in book bags at the four first schools in Royston and St Mary's Primary School for pupils in reception and Year 1.

Social media played an increasingly important role in our marketing activity this year as we worked to attract a younger audience.

Twitter:

This involved posting almost 70 tweets across the festival (including run-up and post-festival). Across a 15 day period (14 Sept – 28 Sept) we saw 13,400 impressions as the result of 68 tweets, with an average of 4 link clicks per day, 8 re-tweets per day and 5 favourites per day.

We have 681¹ followers on Twitter compared to 474 as reported in the Annual report for 2014, so up 43% on last year.

Facebook:

We have used Facebook to create events for Creative Royston workshops and shows in order to not only improve awareness but also provide an additional route to ticket sales. In addition, across the same 15 day period as measured for twitter we made 34 posts, this does not include comments made to other user posts or shared posts. By the end of the festival this year we have 223 likes on the Creative Royston page, which compares to just 155 at the close of the 2014 festival. Across the duration of the festival this year we have seen 9 new likes to the page. On average, every post reached 110 people with the most successful reaching more than 250.

Facebook reach at the start of the festival was 397, versus just 74 at the start of the 2014 festival. The total number of people liking the Creative Royston Facebook page is 274 compared to 156 last year, up by an enormous 75%.

E-newsletter:

The e-newsletter goes to 353 recipients. In the run-up to the festival this year we produced three e-newsletters between August and the start of the festival. The most opened newsletter was the August issue which announced the programme, with 178 opens (50.1% vs the industry average of just 24%).

¹ As at 10th January 2016

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Finally, we are working hard to create more frequent and open communications with the schools in Royston and the surrounding villages. We have consistently shared details of age-appropriate events with the schools via email and when resources have allowed we have provided flyers to go to all pupils, for example the Heroes & Villains Day we ran during the Easter holidays with Royston Museum and The Poetry Joe Show as part of the Arts Festival.

Website

In 2015 we relaunched the website in order to better showcase the work of Creative Royston in a more accessible and colourful way than we felt able to with the old website. This was made possible by many hours of labour put in by our Secretary, Carl Filby, using free software on WordPress.

We have used the website to enable visitors to more intelligently navigate festival information according to type and maintain a Creative Royston news feed on the homepage to highlight key updates.

Overall Analysis

As happens each year we receive a mixed response to the promotion of the festival and this year we have received a range of comments from those which are positive and those where people felt it was poorly advertised, interestingly though these people still attended events, so they did hear about the festival in some way.

The feedback forms and the consultation evening we held in October, did raise some questions about whether everyone does receive the programme. Several people living in Royston claim not to have received it, although it was distributed with The Listing at the start of September to every household. It may be that people didn't notice it inside the larger Listing Magazine. This is something the Creative Royston committee will look into further.

The decision was taken not to distribute the programmes via the schools, as well as the household drop, so as not to bombard people with several copies. We have had feedback in the past from people with more than one child in school that they end up with 3 or 4 copies, which is not a good use of our resources. Sets of approximately 40 programmes were delivered to all the schools to put out in racks on in reception, but it's accepted that these will only be noticed by a small number of people.

Anecdotally the bunting in the town, kindly provided by Royston First, combined with the 'Yarn Bomb' produced by Mandy and her team of knitters, helped to create a better festival atmosphere. This bunting is re-useable and will be displayed again for the festival in 2016.

Some of the vinyl banner sites are now no longer available to us, so more do need to be found to help display events throughout the town.

There have been several suggestions that more event specific leaflets should be created to target specific audiences for events. E.g. "I really enjoyed the workshop and it was a shame there weren't more people. Getting the word out more would help. Maybe feature different events in different advertisements."

Making some event specific flyers, combined with the full programme could help raise awareness and should be something considered for 2016.

Online booking for Creative Royston Events is done through Ticket Source. This relatively easy to use system enables us to sell tickets/places for events and workshops with a small fee going back

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to Ticket Source for each transaction. The booker does not currently pay a booking fee, it is absorbed by Creative Royston. However, some people don't find the online booking easy to use especially if buying tickets for more than one event e.g. "[online booking system] needs a basket facility for ticket checkout." This is something we'll need to assess to see whether there are better online systems available.

Duration of the festival

One of the main outcomes from the consultation evening, the feedback we've received and the committee's own experience is that the ten day event is hard to sustain both in terms of 'manpower' and momentum. The general public don't always realise when it starts and that it runs across two weekends and since the second weekend was quieter in terms of what Creative Royston was able to deliver in the town, the festival felt low-key and lack lustre to many who only attended on the second weekend.

On the first weekend there were more positive comments about the good 'festival feel' with the busking in the market place, the Tree of Light in the Library, Music Fest '15 and the Town Band's Concert at Dusk in Priory Gardens; combined these events helped to create a buzz and attract people into the town centre.

In light of this the committee has decided to condense the festival into one main weekend (23-25 September 2016), with more events planned in the town centre on both the Saturday and Sunday. CMRC will also include suitable events that take place from 16th to 22nd September in the festival programme, to enable activity which cannot fit within the main weekend, or has restricted dates, to be promoted.

The dates of the festival were also extensively discussed at the consultation evening and separately with key event organisers, as the festival being so close to the start of term can pose problems for the schools involved and getting the word out after the summer holiday. However it was agreed for 2016 to stick to the last weekend in September and not move it into October, as there is a slightly better chance of good weather and it coincides with long-standing plans of many event organisers.

Theme

The theme of 'Illumination' was generally considered to be a very strong and engaging theme. It enabled a diverse range of activities to be planned and around 76% of the events linked to the theme in some way which is higher than in recent years.

The theme enabled a great way in to work with the schools in Royston. Even though there had been a much grander ambition to light up the town, the Tree of Light project, involved 350 children and young people, brought an artist into schools, enabled the children to work with materials they had never used before and created a fabulous and inspiring display for the first weekend of the festival.

Financial Statement to 31st December 2015

As with previous festivals, the Creative Royston Management Committee (CRMC) has to commit to major expenditure before we know what our income will be. We are fortunate that Johnson Matthey plc have been our core sponsor for the past three years and this funding as provided us with security to make plans and apply for other grants where match-funding is required.

Despite spending more on publicity and the school's projects, the end of year balance is a healthy one and this is due to:

- Ongoing sponsorship from Johnson Matthey plc and support from Curwens
- Prudent budgeting
- The grants we have received from NHDC, Brian Leslie Racher Trust, Royston First and Hertfordshire County Council Locality Budget
- Income we've received from ticket and refreshment sales

Another major factor was having to halt plans for a Royston Light Night when the required grant application to Arts Council England was unsuccessful. CMRC had set-aside some of the reserves to match-fund this project and since it didn't go ahead, some of these funds remained unspent for this year.

CMRC are now in the position to use our increased reserves to plan a larger community event in 2016 linked to the carnival theme and invest in improving the promotional signage used by the committee and event organisers for 2016 and years to come.

CMRC will continue to offer Seed Funding to event organisers running activities as part of the festival and will also use its core budget to support occasional events and the Voluntary Arts Week in 2016, without the need to apply for further grants.

CMRC still wish to retain unrestricted reserves of around £14,000, which is equivalent to 12 months running costs where a festival is delivered.

Looking Ahead

2016 will mark the tenth consecutive year in which Royston Arts Festival has run since it was re-launched in 2006. It's therefore an excellent opportunity to celebrate some of the best moments from the past nine years and we hope to bring together people and organisations who have been involved in previous years to take part in the festival once more.

The theme for the festival will be 'Carnival' which both encapsulates this celebratory feel and also the 2016 Olympics which will be taking place in the carnival capital Rio!

The committee will be working hard to bring together new and exciting events for Royston Arts Festival 2016 which link to the theme and will need lots of support from groups, societies and organisations in and around the town to help make it happen.

The committee's priorities for the year are to:

- Ensure the festival is promoted to its fullest within the resources available.
- Continue to attract the under 24's, whilst ensuring there is a full range of activities for all ages.
- Increase the size of the committee to ensure good representation from the town and continuity planning.