

# Paradise is Here

Building Community Around  
Things That Matter



"Nothing short of  
inspirational... a model  
for all people, everywhere."

Fiona Reynolds, author of *The Fight for Beauty*

Ruth Nutter

**“This book is nothing short of inspirational. John Ruskin wanted to do something remarkable for Sheffield, and the work described here is remarkable too: and steeped in his values. This wonderfully engaging range of activities energised curiosity, life and joy among communities across Sheffield, and provide a model for all people, everywhere.**

**To coin the most common response from participants:  
this is just lovely!”**

*Fiona Reynolds, author of *The Fight for Beauty**

**“This is a wonderful record of an inspired and inspiring project. But it is above all a generous and practical how-to guide, in the spirit of John Ruskin. Anyone with the seed of an idea for change should use this book to help bring that idea to life in their own community.”**

*Andrew Hill, columnist, Financial Times; author of *Ruskinland: How John Ruskin Shapes Our World**

**“An essential read for all those seeking to release the potential of civic heritage in service of the social and environmental justice issues of today. Combining case studies, principles and practical guidance it draws on Ruskin and his historic context to tell a vivid and inspiring story of community connection and creativity in the Sheffield of today.”**

*Hilary Jennings, Director, Happy Museum*

Front cover image: *The Pop-Up Ruskin Museum*, Sheffield, 2015  
Winner of Best Community Project at the Association for Heritage Interpretation Awards, 2017

*Photo: Ruth Levene*

# Paradise is Here

## Building community around things that matter

Ruth Nutter

Published in the UK by the  
Guild of St George, 2020

Designed by Paul Boardman

Printed by Northend

ISBN: 978-1-9162882-4-9

© Ruth Nutter 2020

The author has asserted her moral right in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior consent in writing of the publishers.

## Contents

Preface	1
Foreword	2
Introduction	4
Stories of Change	6
Case Studies	24
Guiding Principles	41
The Practice	49
Some Handy Techniques	67
Ruskin in Sheffield at-a-Glance	73
Useful Links & Resources	75
About the Author	76
The Guild of St George	77

## Preface

John Ruskin was a Victorian celebrity and cultural influencer. He was famous as a thinker, writer and public speaker on topics ranging from art to zoology. He became a philanthropist.

In 1871, he looked at the cultural and economic poverty around him and declared “For my own part, I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer.” He founded the Guild of St George to offer an active response: a group of individuals known as Companions coming together to make lives better through art, craft, nature, education and meaningful work. This handbook documents a vibrant renewal of this activist approach in the twenty-first century, focused in a community that Ruskin himself chose as a prototype, Sheffield.

The Guild was fortunate to find Ruth Nutter. As the Producer of *Ruskin in Sheffield*, she combined Ruskin’s ideas with her expertise in arts and community engagement to help reconnect and re-imagine Ruskinian ‘wealth’ in Sheffield. Here, she shares her experience of guiding this transformative project, co-created with a network of partners, and offers advice to inspire other groups and communities to find their own path of positive change.

Rachel Dickinson,  
*Master of the Guild of St George*

## Foreword

They say that places remember events.

What may Walkley, Meersbrook, Manor & Castle, Totley – and Sheffield itself – remember of the tapestry of Ruskin-inspired events recorded here? What conditions created for beautiful, peaceful, fruitful local futures to grow?

My bet is they recall the warmth of interaction and invitation, suffused with people’s chatter of making creatively together: drawing nature, painting murals, sewing, walking, carving wood, building models of Utopia, garden artworks and pop-up museums – people opening to possibility and change, seeing things in everyday life differently.

This book distils that warmth like nectar from humming bees: embodied knowledge; a grounded, social intelligence, as friendly as it is profound, rehearsing how we learn to be together differently on this Earth, able to navigate difficult times ahead.

In an era of climate and ecological emergency, when parts of the Earth are becoming uninhabitable and many communities and ecosystems are threatened, how do we overcome fragmentation and division to create and maintain the conditions for flourishing life?

You can rely on the book you hold in your hands. Lean into it. Trust it. Go with it. It describes an aesthetics of care for people, place and planet practiced in the real world by 25,000 people.

The book swivels in the middle: from what was done in the places of Sheffield to what you, the reader could do. Ruskin’s experimental and instinctive spirit lives on. I hope you feel a flash of fiery agency to build community around things that matter, deepening connections and celebrating what matters where you live yourself.

*Paradise is Here* is the story of restoration our world needs: extending our imagination, collective courage and knowledge we’re part of a larger whole. If we can paint a community street mural together what else are we capable of? That’s a serious question.

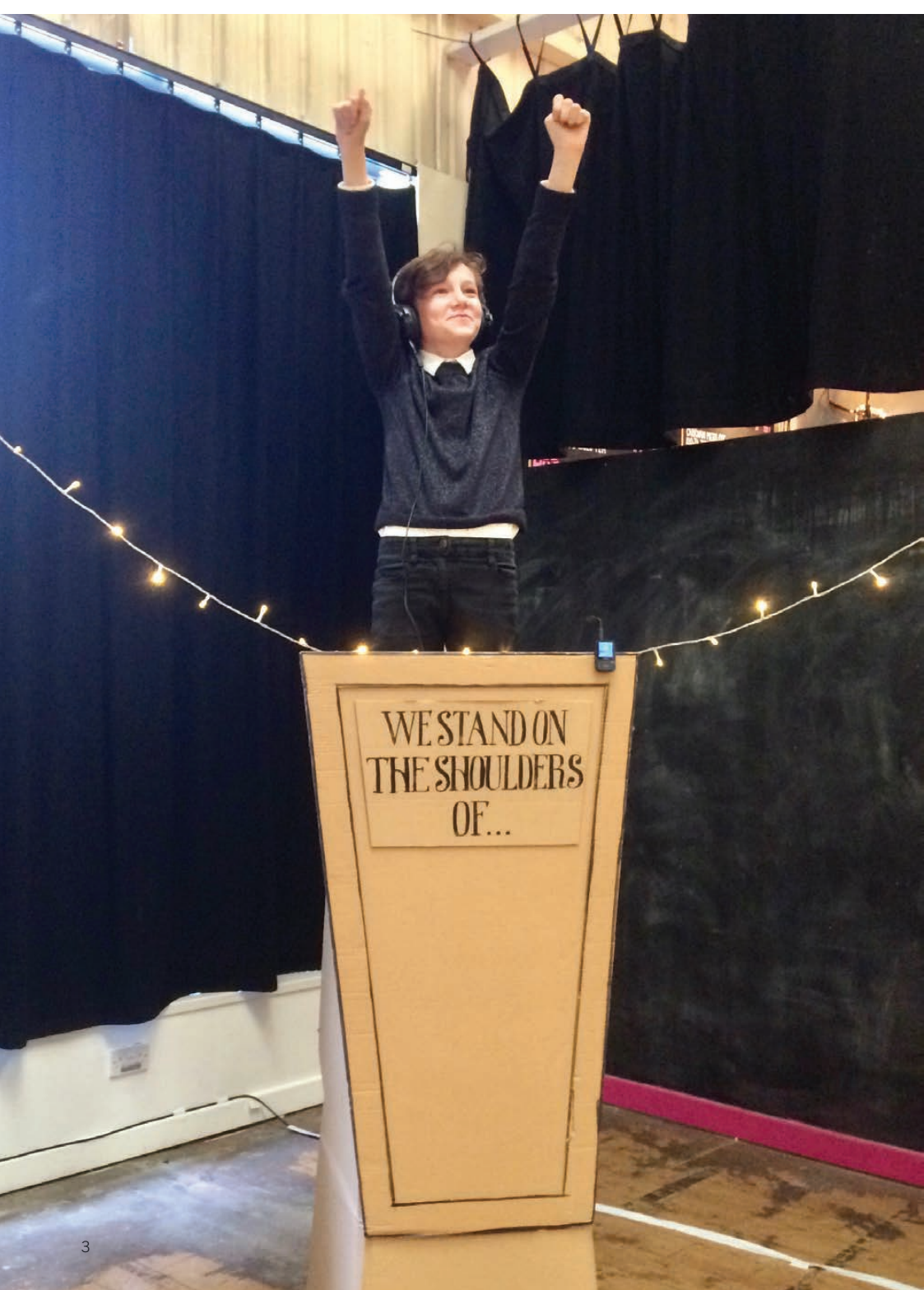
We make the world and can make it differently together.

*Paradise is Here* puts that possibility in your hands. Hold its generous practice of building communities around things that matter tight. Not for present use alone. The future is collaborative and collective.

Worth remembering.

Lucy Neal

September 2020



## Introduction

This is a handbook for anyone who is interested in working with people in local communities to create or strengthen connections with each other and where they live.

It offers stories to inspire, case studies to learn from, some key principles and guidance on social engagement practice, and hands-on creative techniques to try.

The book is for arts and heritage organisations and practitioners, community activists and development workers, and anyone interested in building meaningful connections with local communities.

It's based on the impact and approach of a community-led programme of events and activities entitled *Ruskin in Sheffield* (2014-2019), inspired by John Ruskin's ideas about making Britain a happier place to live in. In 1875, Ruskin established a remarkable collection of nature-focused artworks, dazzling minerals and paintings and drawings of beautiful buildings for the enjoyment of Sheffield's metal workers, in a museum in a neighbourhood in Sheffield.

The *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme echoed the original aim of the Ruskin Collection to bring beauty, creativity, meaning and people together where they live. The programme was initiated by the Guild of St George (formed by John Ruskin in 1871), who own and support the Collection, working with Museums Sheffield, who display and care for it at the Millennium Gallery.

### **Why is the story of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme relevant beyond Sheffield?**

John Ruskin was a far-seeing and challenging Victorian thinker, artist and social critic. He recognised the need for living *in connection* for our own wellbeing and for the wider benefit of society. Today, more than ever, we need to live in connection with place, nature, our collective heritage, our own creativity and each other to respond effectively and justly to pressing social and environmental challenges.

These ideas of connection were embedded in the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme. Its distinctive blend of outbursts of neighbourhood collective creativity, forays into urban nature, small moments of making, dynamic discussion and gentle exchange, offers engagement methods to sample and re-mix anywhere.

The book is built on the voices of more than 100 community and culture partners, artists, heritage practitioners and volunteers who took part, and feedback from hundreds of the 25,000 adults and children who attended or took part.

In an era which calls for compassion, creativity and collectivity, reconnecting with the things that matter lays the foundations for change, and inspires us to act.

Ruth Nutter  
*Producer, Ruskin in Sheffield 2014-2019*

Left – *The People's Palace of Possibility*, Theatre Deli, 2019

# Stories of Change

**The Story of Ruskin  
in Sheffield**

**Reviving Identity  
in Walkley**

**A New Vision  
at Meersbrook**

**Growing Park Centre  
Community Garden**

**Ruskin Re-imagined  
in the City**

**Revitalising the Guild  
of St George & the  
Ruskin Collection**



Left – Street quote bearing John Ruskin's maxim *There is no wealth but life*. The street quote appeared on the building next to Walkley Carnegie Library in Summer 2019, bearing Extinction Rebellion's symbol. *Photo: Jenny Owen*

# The Story of Ruskin in Sheffield

“*Ruskin in Sheffield* has brought together people from diverse communities in Sheffield in remarkable ways and celebrated the creativity in each and every one of us.”

Audience member

The overall story of *Ruskin in Sheffield* is one of bridging connections across local communities, deepening connections with where people live and involving them in their local futures. It's a story rooted in collaboration and co-creation, re-awakening creativity, and widening access to nature. It's about opening eyes to the value and relevance of past ideas, sparking and strengthening commitment to making better futures, and laying the foundations for change.

The programme revived identity, vision, and a commitment to making better futures in local communities in Sheffield; revealed a more radical, global perspective of Ruskin in the city; liberated the role of the Ruskin Collection; and increased, diversified and empowered the Guild of St George's local network of Companions (members), extending its impact and reach.

The story of *Ruskin in Sheffield* began in 2013 with the Guild of St George desiring to revitalise the connection between the Ruskin Collection and the people of Sheffield in ways that matter today. At the time, there was a re-emergence of interest in Ruskin's ideas. His concerns about the environment, mass consumerism, loss of creative and craft skills, and a growing wealth divide, resonate strongly today – nationally and globally.

In Ruskin's experimental, instinctive spirit, the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme set out to make a difference to the local communities it engaged according to four of Ruskin's principle ideas:

## No Wealth but Life

– Fair and equal enjoyment of the world around us

## The Rural Economy

– Craft, good livelihoods and care of land

## Not for Present Use Alone

– Create and conserve for future generations

## Go to Nature

– Nature as a primary source of beauty, inspiration, education and artistic practice

The response was a six-year community-led creative programme of events which invited people to draw in nature, discuss the wealth that matters, perform the past, protest and make policies for better futures, walk together, make together, and gather at twilight to catch themselves in films projected outdoors in local parks and urban spaces.

The programme was rooted in socially engaged practice, underpinned by four key events. These are detailed in case studies later in the book: *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum*; *Ruskin Museum Makeover*; *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour*, and *The People's Palace of Possibility*.



Above – *Study of a Peacock's Breast Feather* by John Ruskin

Ruskin Collection, Collection of the Guild of St George, courtesy of Museums Sheffield

Above Right – *Big Draw on the Manor*, 2017

Photo: Chris Senior

“*Ruskin in Sheffield* shed light on the richness in local communities and their places that is often overlooked. It surprised me how making these connections very often led to radical possibilities.”

University of Sheffield,  
School of Architecture



The programme was co-created with participating local communities in response to meetings with 60 community and culture groups and individuals throughout 2014. Events wove their way through parks, rivers, community centres, libraries, markets, galleries and streets in the Sheffield neighbourhoods of Walkley, Meersbrook, Totley, Manor & Castle, and the City Centre, including the Millennium Gallery, home to the Ruskin Collection.

The themes of the Ruskin Collection were freely and responsively married together with each community's interests and needs, working closely with a wide range of 30 community and culture organisations across the city who became project partners.

A total of 76 mainly free events were delivered between 2014 and 2019, involving 150 professional artists and volunteers, and engaging 25,000 audiences and participants. The programme cost £193,000, funded in part by the Guild of St George, with £149,000 raised from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and a range of local funders (see page 73 for a full list of partners and funders).

## Reviving Identity in Walkley

“The time of the Pop-Up Museum and other parts of the Ruskin in Walkley programme were, for me, a time of excitement and exhilaration... I have always believed that art and creativity are essential parts of my and our lives, and everything that Ruskin wrote and that *Ruskin in Sheffield* has stood for confirm that belief.”

Friends of Walkley Cemetery



Visitors making and chatting in the Pop-Up Ruskin Museum, 2015

Right – Street murals created by Charlotte Turton and Jago Wheeler as part of *Seeing Beauty, Inspiring Minds*, Walkley, 2019

Photo: Grace Foster

The first thing you notice when you've climbed up one of the steep hills to Walkley is how remote it feels from the city centre although it's only a walk away. Along its main street, South Road, glimpses of hills are offered through alleyways between rows of terraced housing. Its elevated position is one of the reasons Ruskin chose Walkley as the neighbourhood in which to create St George's Museum (1875–1890) to house his collection for the working people of Sheffield, away from the pollution of the industrial city.

At the start of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme in 2015, a wide range of local arts and heritage groups and professional artists offered talks, workshops and activities and the number of local independent businesses was slowly growing. They mainly worked separately, collaborating annually around the Walkley Festival. Walkley Carnegie Library had just been taken over by volunteers, under threat of closure from Sheffield City Council, and was in need of refurbishment and development. Walkley Community Centre was also starting to consider plans for development. Scarce, small patches of public green space were looked after by volunteers.

At the heart of the programme in Walkley was the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* (see page 25), transformed from an empty shop into a community hub for 6 months by volunteers, offering local heritage displays and creative activities. Street performances, walking trails, heritage talks, new commemorative plaques, a *Big Draw Festival*, events during Walkley Festival, street displays of murals and sculptures created by local teenagers, drawing in the nearby Rivelin Valley, and a Ruskin beard competition, involved 8,000 people in researching, creating and taking part in events and activities across Walkley between 2015 and 2019.





**“Lots of new connections! Because the performance took place across a range of locations in Walkley, we connected with a range of residents and groups. They wanted to know why we were building a cardboard Basilica San Marco outside their houses!”**

Cabaret Boom Boom, producers of *Desperately Seeking Ruskin* street performance



*Ruskin Rivelin Honey* made by Phil Khorassandjian during *Ruskin in Sheffield*, 2015



*Mr Ruskin's Brown Bread* launched during *Ruskin in Sheffield*, 2015  
Photos – Ruth Levene

By the end of the programme in 2019, eight local community partners had developed diverse and lasting connections and relationships, reached new audiences, and connected more deeply with their local community. Many expressed a reinforced commitment to improving local lives, and pushed themselves beyond their comfort zones to learn socially engaged creative techniques which they have gone to adopt beyond the programme. Local non-arts groups, including Rivelin Valley Conservation Group, now regularly use creative activities to engage a wider range of people with local nature.

The revival of a local Ruskinian identity caught the imagination of a local bee-keeper, who created a *Ruskin Rivelin Honey*, and a local bakery, which launched *Mr Ruskin's Brown Bread*.

Since the programme, a Walkley Vision has been created by the University of Sheffield in collaboration with the community, and Walkley Carnegie Library's future plans are underpinned by arts, culture, and nature activity.

**“We originally flinched at the idea of spray paints in the library and hanging paintings and sculptures in and on a listed building, but people learn to be creative from each other when facing difficult tasks.”**

Walkley Carnegie Library

**“Our commitment to supporting our community, including other local groups and businesses has been strengthened... Our involvement in *Ruskin in Sheffield* highlighted the amazing number of talented artists and craftspeople locally. This is something we have incorporated into our plans for a proposed refurbishment of our building.”**

Walkley Community Centre

## A New Vision at Meersbrook

**“The Collaboration between the Guild of St George, Friends of Meersbrook Hall, Heeley Trust and University of Sheffield Architecture Live Project produced a huge body of work; plans, vision, consultation and evidence together – this has been adopted as the vision for the future – a building filled with life and making, learning and community.”**

Heeley Trust



Bandstand weaving at *Big Draw* at Meersbrook, 2017

Meersbrook Hall is a Grade II Listed building in the corner of well-used Meersbrook Park, in a neighbourhood less than two miles south of Sheffield city centre.

The Hall had been used as offices for Sheffield City Council for over 30 years until, in 2014, plans were announced sell it. A community group, Friends of Meersbrook Hall, was formed to prevent its sale in the hope of turning it into a community hub. The group joined forces with Heeley Trust, a charity which has been working for over 20 years to improve local public spaces, secure buildings and other local assets for the wellbeing of the people who live there. By 2016, Heeley Trust was running adult education classes from the Hall but had limited capacity to engage more widely with the local community.

Friends of Meersbrook Hall discovered that the Hall had been the Ruskin Museum from 1890–1953, when it had been an important source of local learning and civic pride. When members of the Friends group came to the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* in Walkley in 2015 they saw immediately how the Hall's heritage could become the core inspiration for its revival. *Ruskin in Sheffield* collaborated with the Friends group and Heeley Trust at Meersbrook Hall for the next four years and beyond.

In 2016, our first joint venture was to throw open the Hall's doors to the public with an event entitled *Celebrating Meersbrook Hall*. Local artists displayed contemporary crafts, offered hands-on carving and mosaic-making, alongside guided tours of the Hall to signal a new era of welcome, creativity and possibility for the Hall. The following year a *Big Draw at Meersbrook* event drew audiences further out across the park. Then in 2018, an ambitious plan to engage the local community more deeply with the Hall and neighbourhood's future was fuelled by inviting the University of Sheffield to join in a *Ruskin Museum Makeover* (see page 29).

**“*Ruskin in Sheffield...* really enriched our appreciation of the diversity and beauty of the natural things to be found right on our doorsteps. It helped us to focus on nature activities in our work with children, for example, and to ensure that community groups could find a space to encourage nature-appreciation in the community.”**

Heeley Trust



Illustration from *Making Meersbrook* vision document by University of Sheffield Live Project, 2018



Above – Carfield Primary School students on a visit to Meersbrook Hall and park as part of *Ruskin in Sheffield*  
Right – *Celebrating Meersbrook Hall*, 2016

*Ruskin in Sheffield* brought key social arts practice skills to Meersbrook to engage the local community creatively with their heritage, the local nature in the park, and with ideas for their local future. It also brought skilled volunteers who had worked on the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* in Walkley.

By 2019, Heeley Trust had significantly widened and deepened relationships with its local community, developed new connections with local artists, and co-created a shared vision for the Hall and wider community aimed at enhancing wellbeing, learning, inclusivity, play and socialising. 3,400 local residents and people across the city engaged in the Meersbrook programme. Many had deepened their connection with nature through the creative activities in the park, and over 200 local residents had offered ideas for the Hall and park’s future.

The longevity of *Ruskin in Sheffield’s* partnership in Meersbrook raised the bar for what the role of socially engaged practice could look like when focussing around one community asset. It facilitated a level of long-term community and local council engagement that meant a meaningful, co-owned vision for the future of Meersbrook Hall could be created.

Post Covid-19, how the Hall itself is inhabited and engaged with will continue to evolve. By 2020, the momentum built around the Hall had already re-energised Heeley Trust’s wider vision for the neighbourhood and its partnership with the Guild of St George was shifting focus to respond to local need.

**“I love how *Ruskin in Sheffield* celebrated kindness and creativity in our community.”**

Meersbrook participant



# Growing Park Centre Community Garden

“Enjoyed every minute of it. Go as far as you can, go further than you can.”

Ruskin at Park Centre Community Garden participant



Park Centre Community Garden shed, 2017



Above – Ruskin at Park Centre Community Garden participant creating a metal squirrel, 2018

Far right – Ruskin at Park Centre Community Garden participants, standing in front of their artworks, 2018

Photo – Jason Turpin-Thomson

“There’s somewhere I want to show you” said Diane Cairns, development manager for Manor & Castle Development Trust, as we were clearing up after the *Big Draw on the Manor* in 2017. The event had been a collaboration between the Trust, *Ruskin in Sheffield*, and social enterprise Green Estate, who had co-managed the transformation of Manor Fields Park from landfill site to a beautifully landscaped park just over a mile east of the city centre. It was the first *Ruskin in Sheffield* event that took place in a local community with no heritage connections with the Ruskin Collection, and the approach of engaging park visitors with the landscape entirely through arts and crafts that day made a strong impression on our partners.

A few weeks later, Diane invited me to a harvest celebration in a community garden she and local residents had started to create two years earlier at Park Centre (a community centre and library). A group of ten volunteers had transformed an area of rubble and waste along one side of the building into flourishing flower beds, fruit and vegetable patches and a rockery. A creative spirit was evident from the re-use of barrels and old patio stones, to fairy-like toadstools peeping out from under bushes and huge sunflowers painted on the wall.

What could we possibly add to this thriving community space, open to anyone who wanted to drop in and help or just sit and enjoy it? Just off a major road in the most deprived ward in Sheffield (according to 2015 government indices of Multiple Deprivation) it was an evolving, democratic and welcoming community space. Diane suggested we could add art, or rather, a professional artist, to explore how the volunteers could expand their own creativity and wellbeing, and deepen their connection with this small green space. This marked the start of the *Ruskin at Park Centre Community Garden* project.

“Participation in *Ruskin in Sheffield* emphasised the power of artistic participation to engage audiences from very different backgrounds for individual and social benefit.”

Green Estate



**“Amazing and good working with Jason [artist] and the other garden gang.”**

*Ruskin at Park Centre Community Garden participant*

**“New members of the local community joined the Park Centre community group because of the artist in residence. It was appealing and new to local people looking at nature and creating their interpretation of what they saw. About a third of the group was increased at the sessions.”**

*Manor & Castle Development Trust*

Choosing the right artist to work in a community setting, especially when they are in residence for a few weeks, as in this case, is vital. Their approach needs to be enabling, responsive, and willing to learn as well as teach, as a community will build around them as much as the process of the artistic activity.

During six morning-long sessions in the community garden, artist Jason Turpin-Thomson listened and tried out different drawing and carving techniques with garden volunteers. Then they chose to focus on hammering out some large scale metal animals inspired by garden insects and artworks in the Ruskin Collection, which they visited together. During this time, the artistic activity drew new visitors and attracted new volunteers to the garden. A celebration of the final artworks helped to raise the profile and deepen the roots of this community space.

The project could have happily ended here, and without the Ruskin Collection connection, it would have. The bonus of having this civic cultural asset in the city meant that some of the artworks were displayed temporarily in the Collection. Some of the garden volunteers spoke at a lunchtime talk at the Millennium Gallery, where the Collection is displayed, building new bridges between city centre arts and culture and this local community.

Since the project, Manor & Castle Development Trust have continued to expand the use of arts and creativity in their wellbeing courses and events because of their confidence-building and social benefits. We ended up working with a small group, a few miles away from our original collaboration in this local community, thanks to ongoing listening and relationship-building with people who know their neighbourhood best.

The Ruskin at Park Centre Community Garden project cost £5,000, covering artist fees, creative materials, transport and celebration refreshments. A total of 20 people took part as volunteer gardeners, participants and voluntary co-ordinators. The project was funded by the Guild of St George.



Celebration launch of artworks created by garden volunteers, 2018

## Ruskin Re-imagined in the City

**“Our organisation is very active in culture, arts and politics in Sheffield and learning about Ruskin feels a bit like discovering an inheritance you didn't know you had. Working for systemic change sometimes feels like shouting into a void, so turning round and tracing the footsteps of those who have come before, unravelling the beginnings of ideas we now take for granted and reading about words and deeds and knowing that they still have an impact today is a great way of keeping the faith!”**

*Opus Independents*



Netherthorpe Primary School pupils in front of their contributions to the *Making Masterpieces in Sheffield & Venice* street mural, 2019

This section is a story of civic rather than local community building. It tells how perceptions of the value of a civic cultural asset – the Ruskin Collection – were transformed from it being seen as a heritage collection to the source of ideas about environmental and social justice which are useful today. If you work with a civic heritage asset that embodies values or ideas which resonate today, this section offers ways to creatively release its potential to remain an active and useful part of a town or city's life.

Sheffield has a long tradition of grassroots campaigning for better futures. In 2014, before the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme, active use of Ruskin's ideas had not featured in campaigns. The only cultural organisations which had a deep knowledge of Ruskin's environmental and social justice ideas and the Ruskin Collection were Museums Sheffield and Sheffield Archives. It was these more radical, future-facing ideas of Ruskin, especially around utopias and activism, that attracted many of our 12 city centre partners to take part.

Our city centre events – beyond the Ruskin Collection and Millennium Gallery – began and ended with eye-catching outdoor projections. The first, in 2014, showed images of the Ruskin Collection alongside community and professional contemporary art on the façade of the 18th Century Upper Chapel. The last, in 2019, showed images of participants in Sheffield and Venice taking part in *Making Masterpieces in Sheffield & Venice*, alongside images of both cities and the Ruskin Collection.

Between these events came *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour*, a participatory hub to engage people with craft activities and conversation, outside the Moor Market (see page 33); and *Make Good Livelihoods*, a weekend of displays, talks and participatory activity across different venues: the Millennium Gallery, Sheffield Hallam University, Access Space and Portland Works. During 2019, the momentum culminated in the city centre. Events included *Encounters with Ruskin* presented by Sheffield Central Library, a three-month season of talks and displays; *A Future Fantastic*, a three-week festival of performance, protest and policy-making at Theatre Deli; and *Making Masterpieces in Sheffield & Venice*, a day of simultaneous drawing and making with local communities to celebrate connections between the two cities.

**“We should do this all over Sheffield. It breaks down barriers. Brilliant!”**

*Making Masterpieces in Sheffield & Venice participant*

**“The idea of a growing, participatory installation – which brings together ideas of utopia, environmentalism and democracy is rooted in Ruskin’s work, and is also exactly the kind of work we want to be making right now.”**

The Bare Project



Above – High Storrs Secondary School student Edie Elliot talks to Councillor Lewis Dagnall after taking part in *A Green New Deal* panel event during *A Future Fantastic* festival, Theatre Deli, 2019

Right – Outdoor projection onto Yorkshire Artspace Exchange Place Studios, Exchange St, at the close of *Making Masterpieces in Sheffield*, 2019

Photo: Felix Hodgson

By the end of the city centre programme in 2019, *Ruskin in Sheffield* had offered a more activist spur for some of our cultural partners’ work. It had helped them reflect on their own practice and values, and explore their role in creating fair and equal enjoyment of the world. It helped them engage with more diverse local audiences, shone a different light on specific areas of the city centre and created new international connections. 9,000 people engaged in some way with Ruskin’s ideas in the city centre, including a new generation who had engaged with his ideas on utopia and environment. Titles like ‘Ruskin’s inspiration for the fantastic future we need’ and ‘Celebrations of Ruskin’s enduring legacy to the city’ in the *Sheffield Telegraph* in 2019 evidenced a contemporary role for Ruskinian heritage in the city’s narrative.

The impact of six years of investment by the Guild of St George in the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme cannot be underestimated. Evolving from low-level city-wide awareness to active use of locally and globally resonant heritage like Ruskin’s ideas takes time as well as sound process. Without the programme, it’s unlikely that in 2019 a street mural depicting Ruskin’s maxim ‘There is no wealth but life’ bearing an Extinction Rebellion symbol would have appeared on a billboard in the neighbourhood of Walkley.

**“As I consider our engagement programmes in the library since *Ruskin in Sheffield*, I can see there is a more socially aware and questioning aspect to them. Sometimes this is obvious, sometimes a little more hidden.”**

Sheffield Central Library

**“It was good to have an international connection between Venice & Castlegate. It added a bit of glamour! And extended perspective beyond the local. It was also good to explore global environmental issues within a local context. I think overall this helped ‘raise up’ and shine a light on the Castlegate area.”**

Yorkshire Artspace



## Revitalising the Guild of St George & the Ruskin Collection

“I think there has been a huge change from where we started – the Collection was very much something that was preserved as heritage...now there has been a freeing of that.”

Museums Sheffield



Above – Participant in a copper relief workshop in the Ruskin Collection, 2019

Right – Participant Fin Dalton with the dragon head sculpture he made during *Seeing Beauty, Inspiring Minds* workshops at Walkley Carnegie Library. It was displayed in the Ruskin Collection in 2019

This section is a story about how modernising the interpretation of and engagement with the Ruskin Collection helped to build the Guild of St George's own community of Companions (members) and network of partners.

Prior to the programme, the display of the Ruskin Collection (owned by the Guild of St George) was changed twice a year at the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield, where it is cared for by Museums Sheffield and seen by over 100,000 visitors a year. Engagement activities with the Collection were mainly academic research, talks by the Curator, self-guided activity sheets in the gallery and 'behind the scenes' tours led by the Curator. Two workshop packages were available for primary schools, and occasional tailored projects took place to inspire schools or adults to create new artworks in response to the Collection. At this point, two new Ruskin-inspired exhibitions had taken place at the Millennium Gallery themed around sustainability and nature, with a major new exhibition in the pipeline to mark Ruskin's bicentenary in 2019 at Two Temple Place in London and the Millennium Gallery.

In 2014, the Guild of St George's members, called Companions, amounted to 164, including six in Sheffield. They were mostly academics, historians and Ruskin Scholars, above the age of 40. The Guild's cultural programme consisted of symposia, lectures and publications, and a range of community initiatives on its land in the Wyre Forest, Ruskin Land, near Bewdley in Worcestershire. Companions mainly engaged with each other and the Guild via an annual Companions' Day and the AGM.

The *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme at the Millennium Gallery transformed how audiences could be invited to engage with Ruskin's ideas today. The first event, *Wealthy Weekend*, was a day of nature-based participatory activity, strategic and grassroots talks and architectural and social justice displays across different gallery spaces and the Ruskin Collection. It was followed by city centre walking events, panel discussions about wealthy cities, a weekend of professional contemporary craft demonstrations, activities and talks, and a *Big Draw at the Millennium Gallery*. *The People's Palace of Possibility*, rooted in Ruskin's ideas on utopia and environmentalism, premiered here (see page 37). There were Ruskin author talks, and the programme was rounded off with a community-focused display in the Ruskin Collection coupled with drop-in creative workshops.

“The Collection and the space [gallery] has such potential to become a more questioning, activist, engaged space for communities.”

Guild of St George





Training session for hosts at the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* in Walkley, 2015. Almost all became Companions of the Guild of St George



Companions of the Guild of St George researching the history of the Ruskin Museum at Meersbrook in the Ruskin Study at the Millennium Gallery, 2018



*Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* artefacts on display in the Ruskin Collection, 2019

By the end of 2019, 4,000 audiences and participants had engaged with *Ruskin in Sheffield* events at the Millennium Gallery. Widening the scope of how audiences could engage with Ruskin's ideas at the Millennium Gallery, and diversifying who engaged with them, was a fundamental impact of the programme. Community groups and more local artists were accessing the Collection for research and there were new ways for primary schools to engage with the Collection.

The programme transformed the Guild's cultural programming through community-led events and activities. It offered Companions the opportunity to volunteer in their local communities, learn social engagement techniques, undertake new local research, offer participatory creative activity, give talks and write their own publications. Often, this was done together with other Companions. Participating Companions said they felt more strongly connected to the Guild, and most had a stronger sense of agency to work with Ruskin's ideas for wider social benefit. By the end of 2019, 47 new Companions had joined the Guild from Sheffield, representing a more diverse range of ages, occupations, backgrounds and interests. Fuelled by the programme and other Guild activities over the same period, the total number of Companions had increased to 320, almost doubling in five years.

Since the programme, plans to re-invigorate how visitors engage with the Ruskin Collection in the gallery have begun. The Guild has harnessed momentum in the Companionship, using digital gatherings to build national and international relationships, and investing in Companions through small grants to maintain and extend its revived activist identity.

**"It has reinforced my commitment to promote the value of access to nature, companionship and creativity as a health and wellbeing issue."**

Companion of the Guild of St George

**"This programme has made me think a lot more about collectivity and sustainability and how to make sure these ideas are embedded in my personal and professional life."**

Companion of the Guild of St George

**"I think a lot of the staff team have personally connected to *Ruskin in Sheffield*, whether it's volunteering or engaging in events and that's helped individuals in the team reflect on what's important to them."**

Museums Sheffield

# Case Studies

Pop-Up Ruskin Museum

Ruskin Museum Makeover

Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour

The People's Palace of Possibility

# Pop-Up Ruskin Museum

## Walkley

“Fun! We only went out for some milk but ended up staying for over an hour.”

*Pop-Up Ruskin Museum visitor*



Above – Visitors drawing  
Right – *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum*,  
South Road, Walkley, 2015  
Photo: Ruth Levene

It wasn't unusual for visitors to stick their heads into the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* in Walkley out of curiosity and find themselves an hour later engrossed in painting, sewing, reading, sculpting or conversation. Throughout the six months of the Museum's life, we saw some of the same faces return week after week, to see how their Seeds of Hope had grown, bring friends or family in to see a picture on display that they'd painted here, finish exploring the History Cabinet, see what new creative activity was on offer, or just to chat to one of the friendly museum hosts.

The widespread appeal and incentives to return were carefully curated throughout the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum's* layout, content, and activities. It was a place for people to actively learn about their local heritage, reconnect with their own creativity, and think and act on a better future for Walkley.

From the outset, community ownership was built into the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum*. Once an empty shop had been secured from a sympathetic local landlord who owned the take-away next door, we displayed posters locally advertising for voluntary Museum Hosts. A core of 10 volunteers were involved in everything from sourcing furniture and objects, and creating displays, welcoming visitors and facilitating activities, to initiating their own activities and events. By creating it together and spending a session learning about social practice methods of engagement, we worked out collectively how to host the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* invitingly, accessibly and responsively.





## Walkley Wunderkammer



What do you collect?  
What do you treasure?

Bring a small exhibit for display in this 'Cabinet of Wonders'. On a card, write down its name, your name, and why it's special to you.

## Mr Ruskin's Pick & Mix



Help yourself to a 'sweet' quote on the important things in life from our fine selection.

To add a quote that's significant to you, write it on a piece of card, wrap it up and pop it in a jar.

## Small is Beautiful



Do you think you can't draw?  
Most people think they can't.  
Have a go.

Draw one of the natural objects in the museum or take a short walk to draw a local scene.

## What do you want to grow?



Choose a seed from the basket and plant it in a small pot.

Write on a stick what you'd like to grow for the future. Write your name on the back of the stick and put it in your seedpot.

"The Pop-Up Museum felt very exciting and attractive – it had a real buzz and made me feel excited about Walkley and about what might happen in it."

Pop-Up Ruskin  
Museum visitor

"This is a great place to come and learn. We have had lots of fun too – today we did dough art [supplied by a local bakery]."

Pop-Up Ruskin  
Museum visitor

"It has given me an opportunity to learn new skills and confidence helping to host creative and community events which I have fed back into my local area. I now help organise the local festival and am trying to work with my local forum to build a more resilient community, creating better connections between the various community assets in the area."

Pop-Up Ruskin  
Museum Host

Left – A sample of engagement activities in the Pop-Up Ruskin Museum, 2015

The success of the approach was reflected in the range of people who came into the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum*: friends, families and strangers were often making and chatting around the table together. A high proportion of visitors ventured in on their own. Memorable moments include a Chinese student familiarising herself on her first day in the country; the head of City Regeneration in Sheffield bringing in one of his own sculptures to display; and a pocket-knife maker, former steel works manager and local historian who'd never met getting drawn into a long conversation about rural cutlery.

Local residents soon realised this was a place for them to initiate their own projects. Over the six months, we responded to requests to exhibit local artists' work, host an artist in residence, poetry salons and readings, and photography and writing workshops.

The *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* won an Association for Heritage Interpretation 'Discover Heritage Award' for the best community project in Britain and Ireland in 2017. There were 2,600 engagements from around 2,000 visitors. It cost £7,000 to set up and run, including all creative materials, insurance, rent, rates and utilities and volunteer expenses, plus £4,500 for a part-time *Pop-Up Museum* manager. It was funded by National Heritage Lottery Fund.

After the *Pop-Up Museum* closed and the loaned exhibits and donated items had been returned or recycled, we put out just two bin bags of rubbish to go to landfill. A celebratory closing curry with the museum hosts was just the starting point for some who went on to support and co-create future *Ruskin in Sheffield* projects or increase their own local community activism. The shop hasn't been empty since – first a record shop, then a hairdresser.

# Ruskin Museum Makeover

## Meersbrook Hall

“Loved the screening of the images and music last Saturday. Very moving. I liked the chance to add to the ideas map and share ideas for improving the park.”

*Ruskin Museum Makeover visitor*



Above – Visitors modelling from wire in a Makeover room created by Carfield Primary School

Right – *Ruskin Museum Makeover* outdoor projection launch event, 2018

*Photo: Steve Pool*

In 2014, Meersbrook Hall was almost invisible to local residents in its role as council offices. It was a place they walked past on the way to the busier main area of Meersbrook Park.

In 2016, the council had vacated the Hall, and Heeley Trust and Friends of Meersbrook Hall were working to transform it into a local community wellbeing hub when *Ruskin in Sheffield* joined forces with them. It takes time and eye-catching efforts to turn people’s heads and signal that a building’s purpose and personality is changing. *The Ruskin Museum Makeover* at Meersbrook Hall in 2018 was our third eye-catching effort to amplify the message that the Hall’s future belonged to the local community.

The week-long *Ruskin Museum Makeover* was the culmination of six months of collective digging into the Hall’s and Park’s past to capture people’s imagination about their possible futures. The idea was to engage the local community more deeply with ideas that had been evolving over the previous two years, in order to co-create a vision built on collective local voices and passion. We invited another partner on board to help achieve that: a ‘Live Project’ team of Masters in Architecture students from the University of Sheffield.

The depth and breadth of the build-up to the *Ruskin Museum Makeover* embedded a level of ownership and quality that were key factors in its success. Six months before the Makeover, the history of the former Ruskin Museum at Meersbrook Hall was researched by volunteers through documents, letters and photographs held at Museums Sheffield. The research revealed the untold story of the Museum’s female curator, Genevieve Pilley, who was a remarkable artist in her own right. Her determined spirit and love of beauty infused the aesthetic of the Makeover and a volunteer was inspired to write a book about her.

“Fabulous display of community art and local history. Hands on use of quality materials was a real sensory experience. Please pop up again!”

*Ruskin Museum Makeover visitor*





Engaging visitors with local nature – drawing, going outdoors, sharing ideas for the future

“It’s led on to a new approach for us. We’re collaborating quite a lot more and actually the scale of what we need to change, none of us can do it on our own. We have to collaborate.”

Heeley Trust

In contrast to the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* in Walkley, the *Ruskin Museum Makeover* at Meersbrook welcomed visitors to wander round rooms already filled with traces of its past alongside new artworks and displays created by local volunteers and artists. Images of beautifully detailed nature lecture slides and pages of a nature journal were scaled up and strung up around the rooms. A local junior school’s art displays inspired by the cultural and natural history of Meersbrook filled a room.

In every room, visitors were invited to draw or sculpt with wire, inspired by nature, or chat and share local memories with voluntary Museum Hosts who were on standby to welcome, encourage and listen. The more future-facing community engagement was carried out by the ‘Live Project’ university students. Their laser-cut birds hidden around the park drew visitors to the Makeover as they returned found birds, which provided a hook for deeper engagement (for more details on the bird engagement activity see page 71).

On the opening night, images of the Hall’s past and recent community activity were projected onto its façade. 200 people were drawn to the light, to be moved by the clear message that this was a place in transition to – in the words of John Ruskin – a more ‘beautiful, peaceful, fruitful’ future for everyone. Change felt possible.

During the Makeover week, 1,800 adults and children visited the Hall. Over 30 volunteers were involved in research, co-creation and hosting. The six-month project cost £15,450 including professional artist fees, materials, publicity, and volunteer expenses, plus £6,750 for a part-time Community Co-ordinator. It was funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Guild of St George.

A month later, the participating university students had created a compelling vision of Meersbrook Hall as a place which could be redeveloped in stages to house local businesses, a café, outdoor play, and space for learning and making, which was presented to local stakeholders at a community meeting at the Hall soon afterwards. As local priorities and plans shift in light of Covid-19, the vision remains an important beacon of the values and aspirations for the local area as much as the Hall.

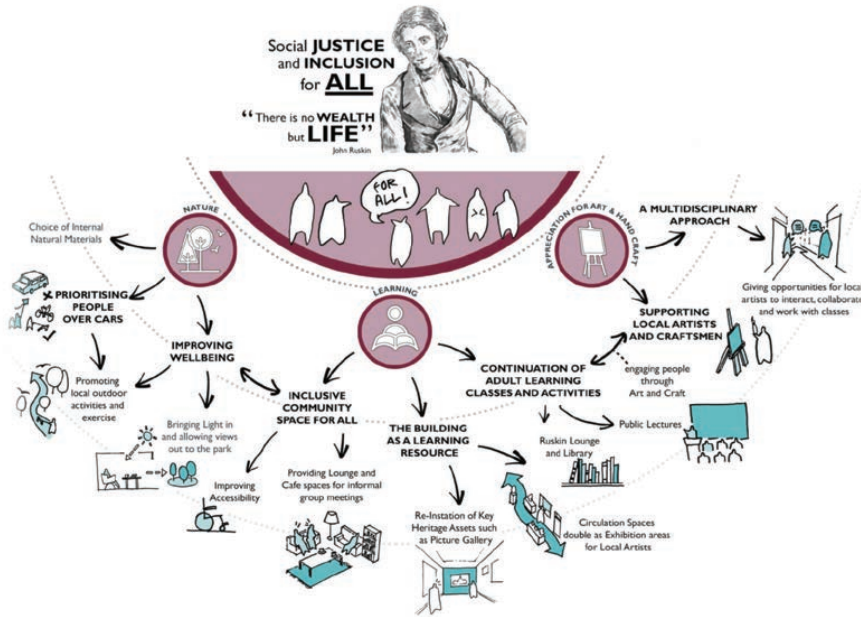


Illustration of the future potential for Meersbrook Hall, from the *Making Meersbrook* vision document by University of Sheffield Live Project, 2018

# Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour

## The Moor, City Centre

“This project was a valuable opportunity for us to test how art and architecture can come together and propose how the high street can move beyond retail and be transformed through new creative spaces.”

University of Sheffield, School of Architecture 'Live Works'

It took just one rainy summer's day in 2016 to install *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour* on The Moor, one of Sheffield city centre's main pedestrianised shopping streets. Nestled between Atkinson's department store and Game video shop, the custom-made mobile structure created by University of Sheffield architecture graduates had its first public outing as a community engagement space.

As part of Sheffield's Year of Making, we created the parlour to engage shoppers with high quality craft, enable them to try activities with professional craftspeople, and reveal their own craft skills and passions. Welcomed by Parlour Hosts, visitors could hammer out small metal bowls, weave small fabric bowls, carve wood or create mini-mosaic sculptures. As visitors crafted, they chatted to artists, hosts, and other visitors. Children and young adults enjoyed a rare opportunity to make something with their hands, and older visitors were keen to share their passion for their life-long domestic and industrial making skills.

The centre-piece of the parlour was a new sculpture by Henk Littlewood and Mir Jansen which had first been shown in the *In the Making: Ruskin, Creativity and Craftsmanship* exhibition at the Millennium Gallery earlier that year. Designed to be a socially engaged artwork in its own right, it could seat up three people inside. Whilst inside, visitors filled out cards asking what they did or made, where they were from, and who they knew who had helped them, which created a constant stream of chatting with Parlour Hosts. The sculpture was almost completely covered up by the cards after two weeks.



Above and left – *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour*, The Moor, 2016  
Right – Writing and chatting in the sculpture





We spent the first couple of days working with the challenges of the new mobile structure which struggled initially against strong winds and rain, but was adjusted to cope. It was the structure, though, that proved to be one of the keys to the success of the Parlour. Its huge side openings, easy access for wheelchairs and prams, and visible interior, made it an easy and safe place for people drop in and out. We were often at our full capacity of 10 people.

The location brought together the most diverse range of visitors of any of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* projects. Because of its handy location, we had to be careful that adults didn't leave their children when they went shopping as this is a safeguarding issue (one which is presented by all pop-up spaces).

The Moor Management had already developed a programme of outdoor family-friendly activities in response to the opening of the Moor Market in 2013 but *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour* was the first socially engaged art residency. It created a sense that The Moor could also be a place for creative activity and conversation about things that matter to people. Making, as well as buying, had quickly become a normal part of that corner of the city centre's life – an important revelation in an era when the high street urgently needs re-imagining.

In the two weeks of the parlour's residency, over 1,800 people had filled it with their creations. A celebratory closing event with a ukulele band playing in the sculpture attracted people to drop in and witness the creativity that had taken place. The project involved six professional artists and four paid hosts to facilitate creative activity. It cost £15,600, covering artist and project management fees, creative materials, décor design, structure hire and transport, security and insurance. It was funded by Arts Council England and Sheffield Year of Making.



Above and left – Crafting in *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour*

## The People's Palace of Possibility

Millennium  
Gallery &  
Theatre Deli,  
City Centre

“Awesome,  
hopeful vibe.”

Palace citizen  
(audience member)

“Thanks – great  
way to have  
a chance to  
talk about real  
issues – I worry  
about boring or  
upsetting friends  
and family.”

Palace citizen

‘Without you there would be no palace’ and ‘Disagreement is useful’ were just two of the Palace guidelines written on the entrance sign of this curious cardboard palace. This was a place which would be built on the thoughts and ideas of its citizens (audience members). Everything in it was designed to provoke reflection, ideas, conversation and action.

Reassuringly, you didn't enter alone. Performers playing the roles of two siblings just starting to create their utopian palace welcomed audiences inside to begin their journey. First stop was to write down one word that reflected how you thought the world would look in 30 years' time. Next stop was writing and voting for policies on things that mattered, with proposals ranging from everyone getting a bike from the government to reforming the prison system.

Sounds intense? The thinking the audience did was heartfelt but the atmosphere was playful. After policy writing, the focus shifted from heads to hands as audiences were invited to mould something from clay to add to an ever-growing model of utopia. Then onwards to take a gamble on a utopian tombola to see which utopian location it churned out for you. Quieter moments of reflection took place in listening booths, where the ideas of social, economic and environmental activists and pioneers from the past and present were played through headphones. A final act before leaving the palace was to sow a Seed of Resistance to grow amongst the shoots planted by previous audiences.



Above – Discussing street policies in *The People's Palace of Possibility*, 2019

Photo: Dora Damian

Right – Palace rules at the entrance to *The People's Palace of Possibility*, 2019

## A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO THE PEOPLE'S PALACE OF POSSIBILITY

-Take your time and  
give your time

-Roam freely

-Disagreement is useful

-Listen to friends  
and strangers

-Without you there  
would be no palace...



**“This project made me consider a lot more the underpinnings and origins of activism and political discussion and debate. Looking at the past has deepened my understanding of specific issues and how change has been achieved over time.”**

Opus Independents

**“A beautiful space that opens people to consider other possibles.”**

Palace citizen

**“I really liked it there and how people are taking action on climate change.”**

Palace citizen

Mingling and chatting during and between activities reinforced a sense of relaxed connection between people. The theatrical dimension created the feeling of being in another world, freeing up imaginations and opening receptivity to others’ ideas. While the fairy lights twinkled on top of the palace’s cardboard turrets, the audience below was doing some high-speed community building to take away a sense of new possibilities and collective power.

It can be harder to attract a wide range of audiences to this kind of theatrical socially engaged event at an arts venue than to drop-in spaces on the streets or other public spaces. Audiences had to book in advance and cross the threshold of an arts venue. The advantage was that when a secondary school wanted to find a way to use the palace for some students to creatively explore environmental activism, we had the space and resources to respond.

*The People’s Palace of Possibility* was created by The Bare Project, a professional theatre and interactive arts company. It was part of a wider festival of protest, performance and utopia-building entitled *A Future Fantastic* at Theatre Deli in July 2019, led by The Bare Project. It cost £7,500 including artist fees, creative materials, technical and transport costs, and was funded by the Guild of St George. It’s possible to commission this kind of event to take place in local communities, outdoors or in community venues.

Since its first outing at this festival in 2019, *The People’s Palace of Possibility* has been adapted and performed at Warwick Arts Centre and Lancaster Arts, and there are plans to tour it nationally and internationally from 2021. There is also a part digital, part mail-art version adapted for Covid-19 safety restrictions.



Left – Engagement activities at *The People’s Palace of Possibility*, 2019

*The People’s Palace of Possibility*, Theatre Deli, 2019

This section outlines the guiding principles of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme which can be widely applied to planning community engagement projects.

The guiding principles were inspired as much by John Ruskin's inter-connected worldview as his specific ideas about making lives better.

He recognised the complex and contradictory nature of the world, and the need to love it in order to care for it, and this is very useful when working with communities.

Building community is an open-ended process. It's not about imposing ideas or change on people, or trying to reach a specific endpoint. It's about being amongst people, listening, enabling, being curious, being active together, reflecting, retracing steps, changing track, being in a better place than when you started.

# Guiding Principles

**Purpose from Passion**

**Go Polymath**

**Protest to Prosper**

**Preserve & Pioneer**

**Paradise is Here**



# Purpose from Passion

## Act on what you care about

The starting point for connecting with or building any local community must be rooted in your own or your organisation's genuine passion to connect and learn.

If you want to engage with a particular local community, ask yourself what it is you care about and how might this benefit the community? What do they care about or need? Connect around what you're jointly passionate about.

In the case of *Ruskin in Sheffield*, for example, Walkley had a number of community groups which were looking for new ways forward and wanted to expand their appeal and diversify their reach. In Meersbrook, Heeley Trust was passionate about increasing wellbeing more widely locally by bringing nature and creativity more strongly into their offer. At Park Centre Community Garden, Manor & Castle Development Trust recognised the artistic skills of some of the volunteer gardeners and wanted them to flourish further.

These were all passions we shared.

**“The programme...was about going somewhere to work with the richness of that area and to reveal the richness and celebrate what's already there. Coming along with a humbleness of spirit and saying how can we help, how we can join in, how we can we support if you need support?”**

University of Sheffield, School of Architecture

# Go Polymath

## Connect widely & unexpectedly

A polymath is someone who knows a lot about many subjects. John Ruskin was famously one. You don't have to be a polymath to build community successfully but you do need to offer a wide range of ways for people to come together and join in activities.

In a socially engaged space like *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour*, it was the mix of geology and nature displays, hands-on wood carving, a stunning sculpture and Instamatic photography that attracted a wide range of visitors. People need to see a way in for themselves.

This polymathic approach is about 'stretch' too. If people join a socially engaged event or activity for one reason, and there are other areas of activity to participate in which they wouldn't normally engage, it's an opportunity to stretch themselves. This stretch is vital for joining up aspects of the world to help us know and see more, and build confidence to act differently.

Places and communities are complex. Working across disciplines is the only way local communities can face existing issues and explore new futures together. When you work in this multi-disciplinary way in a community, people develop a broader view of themselves and where they live. It creates a sense that change and other futures are possible.

The more widely you connect across a community, the stronger the resilience of its networks. Diverse voices and experiences are vital for co-imagining what a collective future might look like.

**“We have to find new ways of doing things if we're going to tackle the issues we face as a civil society.”**

Heeley Trust

# Protest to Prosper

## Speak out to make things better

Strike 4 Climate. Black Lives Matter. If we don't speak out, things don't change.

It takes courage to speak out. Being together in safe spaces in our local communities helps to build the habit of discussing what matters with people we don't necessarily know or agree with.

The openness and rigour of how a socially engaged space is framed will determine the diversity of the people who visit and join in. Diverse engagement is key to laying the foundations for meaningful change.

From gentle exchanges between strangers in the *Pop-Up Ruskin Museum* to more deeply felt debates inside *The People's Palace of Possibility*, our socially engaged spaces offered activities and provocations which invited people to discuss or creatively express things they felt strongly about, from climate change to how we spend our money wisely.

**“My conversations with strangers were mega optimistic and therefore quite inspiring. Questions about what we were doing with dosh. Curious about each others' ideas.”**

*A Future Fantastic audience member*

# Preserve & Pioneer

## Take care, take risks

Heritage matters. Local heritage matters. The built, natural, cultural and social heritage in local communities offers a sense of connection, identity and belonging. It can be a powerful driver for shaping the future. But it can also be a barrier to change if past stories are told by only a few voices.

*Ruskin in Sheffield* helped local communities draw out the heritage that was important for them to preserve. In the case of the redevelopment of Walkley Carnegie Library, they wanted to recapture a creative spirit that they felt was rooted in the former St George's Museum, which had housed the Ruskin Collection over 130 years ago. Through working with a group of teenagers on Ruskin's ideas of engaging people with art and nature, the library's reputation as a beacon of creativity was hugely enhanced when the library and local streets were transformed by street murals and sculptures.

At Meersbrook Hall, there was a strong synergy between Ruskin's commitment to making lives better for working people and Heeley Trust's own aims. This alignment reinforced aspirations to maintain the beauty of Meersbrook Hall whilst uncompromisingly developing an educational and cultural programme to address the local wellbeing imbalance.

**“Finding out more about the history of the Hall... has strengthened the notion that we are caretakers of the Hall for the future, and that it is vital that it provides services and activities which are relevant to the local community.”**

*Friends of Meersbrook Hall*

# Paradise is Here

## See possibilities & make them happen here

We live in a culture where paradise is a place we escape to, somewhere else. What if we focused our efforts on making it where we live?

*Ruskin in Sheffield* worked in local communities to help people appreciate where they live and see it in a new light. Park Centre Community Garden was already becoming a local public oasis of natural beauty when *Ruskin in Sheffield* partnered with them. Bringing in a professional artist to work with the garden volunteers generated an intensity of artistic activity that made artwork creation as much a part of the garden as planting and growing.

Socially engaged spaces popping up in neighbourhoods or city centres can help model the change we want to see, just by existing and inviting people to be together engaging in meaningful conversation and creative activity. They demonstrate that we can change how our public or community spaces can be used, which can be a first step to making wider changes.

### “Full of reflection and utopia building!”

*The People's Palace of Possibility* citizen (audience member)

“THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE.

Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration.

That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest numbers of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.”

John Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, 1862

This section is about the *how*. It shares the socially engaged practice we used to engage with local communities throughout the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme. It is not a definitive guide to the practice. There are many exemplary socially engaged practitioners and organisations in the UK (for further reference see page 75).

One of the reasons socially engaged practice is so powerful for building community is that everyone's input is valued equally within a framework, so the framework has to be strong and feel safe. The creative 'whole' is what holds a socially engaged space, and the people in it, together. It's about the look and feel of it, how it's curated, how people are gently encouraged to take part, to the materials for people to get their hands on, and how creative responses are captured and displayed.

This definition taken from the Tate's website sums up the practice of *Ruskin in Sheffield*:

*"Socially engaged practice, also referred to as social practice or socially engaged art, can include any artform which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction. The participatory element of socially engaged practice is key, with artworks created often holding equal or less importance to the collaborative act of creating them."*

This section offers guidance to help think through and plan socially engaged projects. If you're already a practitioner, you might find helpful reinforcement of or new perspectives on what you already know. If you're new to this, the guidance will cover key aspects to consider, but it is always valuable to work with a professional practitioner to make sure the 'whole' stands up and you are working safely and with all legal obligations in place. The approach and methods offered can be applied and adapted from neighbourhood streets to city centres to rural villages.

# The Practice

**Our Place**

**Very Public Places**

**Pop-Up**

**Plenty of Paper**

**Putting it Simply**

**In Partnership**

**Personal with People**

**Plan Patiently**



Meersbrook & Heeley  
engagement map, *Ruskin  
Museum Makeover*, 2018

## Our Place

### Start with where you live

You need to build community with people where they live. It sounds obvious, but place is important. Where we live is where we spend a lot of our daily lives, increasingly where we work from, where we go from and come back to. It's where local community building needs to happen to have a chance of lasting.

Conversations, connections and ideas that happen in local communities are rooted there and strengthen the possibilities for action and change. If people can walk from where they live to events and activities, it's one less barrier to taking part.

Socially engaged events and activities don't have to happen in spaces where local events normally happen, in fact it widens inclusion if they don't.

The built and natural environment of a place, and the make-up and concerns of the people who live there, will all shape what kind of socially engaged event or activity you might co-create. Find out what's missing, what would be welcome, what would attract the widest range of people in the area?



From top –  
*Big Draw at Meersbrook, 2017*  
 Photo: Kate Souper  
*Big Draw on the Manor, Manor Fields Park, 2017*  
 Photo: Chris Senior  
 Launch of *Seeing Beauty, Inspiring Minds* street mural display, 2019

## Very Public Places

### Be visible in daily life

Being visible and located on people's daily routes is important, whether it's on a neighbourhood street, city centre high street, or in a park.

Putting yourself in a public place signals that everyone is welcome and makes people feel safe to come in and take part. It's a fine balance though as people can also feel self-conscious taking part in an activity in public, so looking interesting but not too alternative is important if you want a wide range of people to engage.

Putting yourself in people's path means that people who don't generally go to cultural events or gatherings will come across you as well as people who seek you out. Being outdoors helps for increasing access and breaking down barriers for people to join in.

High visibility is important to enable passers-by to witness other people engaging with each other, chatting and being creative. It normalises the idea of communities being together in meaningful ways.



*Making Masterpieces in Sheffield & Venice, Exchange St, 2019*  
 Photo: Felix Hodgson



Before



Popped-Up



Before



Popped-Up

## Pop-Up

### Permission to think & do differently

Popping up, especially in unexpected or public places, is a powerful way to engage with communities.

Temporary social arts spaces generate curiosity and give people permission to think or act differently when they take part in them. Pop-up spaces invite exploration; people enter them expecting something different. They have the attraction of being time-limited, so a sense of novelty draws people in.

Design is important. To attract widely, creating a distinct yet approachable look is vital. Design, as much location, will dictate who crosses the threshold.

As the instigator of a pop-up space, you can explore or pilot ideas but should also conjure up a sense of possibility for visitors which encourages them to initiate events or activities too.

Whilst a pop-up space may be short-lived, creative responses left by visitors leave a legacy reflecting their feelings and ideas in relation to the space's themes. Inviting local stakeholders to a closing event is an important way of sharing and discussing what's mattered to visitors.

Popping up and down should be a high social impact and low environmental impact activity. You can explore taking over empty shops or other empty buildings with visible frontage, or creating or customising a portable structure (to public event safety standards) that can be used in different locations.



Range of creative materials and activities at Ruskin in Sheffield events

## Plenty of Paper

### Creativity at the heart of things

At the heart of socially engaged practice is creativity.

Creativity draws people to cross the threshold to take part in events and activities. It's what's offered to people to try hands-on. It helps people think about what's important to them. It engages people differently with nature and each other. It encourages conversation between people they know or don't know, often while making something on their own or together. It connects things differently and in unexpected ways.

A wide range of creative activities, methods and materials are important to invite a wide range of people into the mix.

The essential creative materials you use for socially engaged events and activities don't have to be specialist or unusual but they do need to be good enough quality to be enjoyable and effective to use. The more functional and widely recognisable they are to people the better. Rolls of lining wallpaper, corrugated cardboard, stiff cream card (a change from white), black card (easy to chalk on), mini card and canvasses (less daunting to have a go with) and air-drying modelling clay all work well.

A good choice of drawing materials, kept clearly apart and in different pots, is more important than quantity. A range of black pens from chunky to fine, pencils of varying tone, charcoal, chalk, colouring pencils, and small boxes of watercolour paint have all been indispensable for us. Plenty of twine and bulldog clips are very handy too for stringing up what people have drawn or written, wherever you are.

Working with professional artists to lead specialist activities with specialist materials is vital. Volunteer facilitators or hosts can be brilliant at encouraging people to take part in drawing, painting or making activities. Professional artists can focus on enhancing a specific theme, offer opportunities for people to try more specialist artistic activity, and ensure high quality, safe participation.





## Putting it Simply

### Invite openly, instruct clearly

This is about the role of written information in your space to support wider engagement. It's about welcome, striking a personal tone, and clear instruction.

Although facilitators or Hosts do much of the welcome and encourage hands-on engagement with activities, some people prefer to be left alone, in which case what's written around the place must do the inviting. Keeping wording brief and clear for activity instructions is important for children and adults for whom English is not their first language or who prefer written to oral instruction.

Strike the tone of the place. Steer clear of jargon.  
Keep sentences short.

It's helpful to layer the level of instruction you give, with a brief headline instruction, then spell it out in more detail. We use white chalk pen on a black card or black pen on light brown cardboard. It's easy to read and conveys an unfussy style which is more appealing to a wide range of people than a more decorative style. Often people don't read the signs, they watch and follow what other people are doing, but the signs provide a safety net. They stop people leaving as soon as they enter if it's hard to see what's going on.



A selection of *Ruskin in Sheffield* invitations to engage people



Some of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* partners and collaborators at Meersbrook.

From top –  
 Friends of Meersbrook Hall, Heeley Trust & the Guild of St George outside Meersbrook Hall, 2017  
 University of Sheffield Live Project team  
 Volunteers preparing for the *Ruskin Museum Makeover*



## In Partnership

### Working with

Collaboration, co-ownership, co-creation, co-production: different ways of saying we need to imagine, plan, make and do things together. Community-building and socially engaged practice are rooted in partnership.

How initial partnerships arise with or within a community will dictate their success. Common values and shared aims are key. We don't all need to be trying to achieve exactly the same things across our work, but a joint aim to build connections and create new possibilities for a local community is a pre-requisite.

In socially engaged practice, partnership in its broadest sense extends to everyone involved in an event or activity: practitioners, volunteers, participants and audiences. Everyone has specialisms to offer, so it's important to get to know all your partners well, whether organisations or individuals. Learning, enabling and empowering are what to strive for in your partnerships.



Hosts and artists engaging with audiences and participants at *Ruskin in Sheffield* events



## Personal with People

### Connect with care

The most common word fed back from audiences, participants and artists about *Ruskin in Sheffield* was *lovely*. Lovely (pleasant / enjoyable / beautiful) is an important quality to aspire to with socially engaged practice. It doesn't mean that experiences for people engaging can't be challenging or controversial; in fact, the more 'lovely' the environment, the more likely people are to open themselves up to discussion in fractured and polarised times.

To draw people out of themselves so they connect more widely with the world, they must feel that somebody cares. Your starting point with community building must be that you care, and all the socially engaged events and activities you initiate must take care of everyone involved.

Visibly taking care models a key aspiration for the character of a local community. Nothing happens or changes if we don't care. It's especially important to take time in the build-up to socially engaged events to ensure that practitioners, volunteers and artists taking part are given training or guidance, if needed, on how to ensure audiences and participants feel welcome, safe, and cared for (see guidance on page 67). *Ruskin in Sheffield* events where we didn't take time to do this properly became more activity than connectivity focused.



## Big Draw on the Manor

15th July 2017 11am - 4pm

Explore the 1.5 mile red dotted trail yourself, or join a guided walk from York House (starts 11.30am) to Manor Oaks Farm. Or from Rhubarb Shed Cafe at Manor Oaks Farm, to York House (starts 2pm).

## Plan Patiently

### Take time, time, time

Before we launched the first *Ruskin in Sheffield* event, we spent six months listening to local community groups, venues and individuals to get a sense of their needs and aspirations and how we could add value to their community. During that time, we fed our own ideas of possible events and activities into community meetings to get a sense of what would be welcome and workable.

We identified the local communities we wanted to work with initially as ones which had a heritage connection with John Ruskin. After two years, we became confident about the universal value of his ideas for making lives better and extended our scoping to communities which didn't have a heritage connection but had shared community building aspirations. Whatever you have to offer, it's an iterative, exploratory process to find where and with whom you can most fruitfully connect.

After six months we had identified key partners and possible projects and submitted a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (now National Lottery Heritage Fund). This is just an example of how much development time you might need in the lead up to a community-based programme. There's no blueprint for how to scope and co-develop ideas, but beginning with people or groups where you feel a genuine sense of shared values and purpose is a good starting point, then follow your nose from there. Walking the streets and other public spaces to gain a sense of daily local life is vital, and joining in advertised community meetings is a good way in.

Every time we connected with a new local community or realigned our journey with existing collaborators, we allowed a few months to imagine and prepare for the next project. There wasn't necessarily a gap in activity, more a conscious process of learning from on-going activity all the time so that we were live to what would be a useful next step.

Left - Planning with local community groups started almost a year before the *Big Draw on the Manor* event. Map designed by Jodie Southwood.

10

View Top (behind Discovery Centre) - Capture the panoramic views of the city from this viewpoint with our artist by pressing natural materials into clay.

11

Manor Oaks Farm - Meet the animals, go on a butterfly trail or even go on a donkey ride. Try drawing scenes of animals and flowers with a mixture of materials, or stop and put your feet up at Rhubarb Shed Cafe.



1 York House & Main Entrance - Take part in craft activities and watch a new mural being painted on the side of York House. Or make and decorate your own kite with our artists at 11am, 1pm & 2.30pm (Book in person upon arrival or in advance via 07951 578208 or ruskininsheffield@gmail.com)



2 Look out for a variety of wildlife at the ponds, such as Kingfishers, Moorhens and Ducklings.

65

9 Manor Lodge Discovery Centre - Go on Turret House tours (11:30am, 1pm & 2:30pm) and enjoy the Wildlife Safari (11am - 12:30pm)

8 Manor Lodge Ruins - Explore the ruins of this Tudor manor house where Mary Queen of Scots was once imprisoned. Take in the scent of the lavender gardens. You can make clay flowers here with our artist.



7 Manor Park Crescent Entrance - Help make a huge artwork from flowers and greenery collected from across the park.

6 Our wildflower meadows and streams attract a variety of wildlife, you might spot dragonflies, orange tip butterflies and even fish. In the past you might have seen hares and skylarks in the fields.

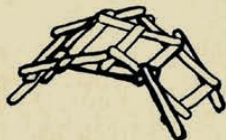


5 Middle of the Park - Look out for three giant leaf sculptures and try your hand at carving and drawing with wood.

4 The park is a hotspot for birds migrating from the East. Look and listen out for our famous pair of Grasshopper Warblers who come here every summer - the clue to how they sound is in their name...



3 Cary Grove Entrance - Help build a self-supporting bridge, inspired by a design by Leonardo da Vinci!



Approx. 100m

This section offers some hands-on creative engagement techniques which have proved successful across a range of *Ruskin in Sheffield* community engagement projects.

The success of the following techniques is rooted in the quality of how they are hosted. Hosting is about taking active care of visitors and finding ways to encourage everyone to take part. Here's a checklist for hosting well.

#### **Welcome everyone through the door**

This may mean a small movement to step aside for them, a warm glance, or a fuller invitation to enter. The key is to indicate clearly that you recognise someone may want to come in and that they are welcome.

#### **Explore alongside visitors**

Chatting and making alongside visitors signals that you want to be with the visitor and are interested in them. Be aware to give people space too as they often want to watch for a bit before they join in. Exploring alongside is key to opening up conversations with visitors and gently making space for them to talk to other people who they may not know.

#### **Know your ground rules**

Brief hosts on the ground rules of what kind of behaviour is acceptable from visitors to your space, and how this should be enforced. You don't need behaviour rules written up around the space, just clear briefing for the hosts. Ensuring no-one is saying, writing or making something that could be offensive to others is key.

#### **Safety first**

The safety of hosts and visitors is paramount. Make sure the space you're working in and any activities you're offering are properly risk assessed. There should always be someone on duty whom hosts can notify if they feel unsafe or think visitors might be open to harm. Vulnerable adults and children are likely to come into your space, so find out whether hosts need relevant Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks as situations vary.

# Some Handy Techniques

**Drawing Nature**

**Sowing Seeds**

**Please Return Me**

**Instamatic!**

## Drawing Nature

### Why?

Drawing nature is a great ice-breaker and settler in any setting, outdoors or in. People of all ages recognise nature as something that's either part of their lives, or something that may not be but holds an attraction. We all have an instinctive connection with nature. Even in the most built up areas, weeds, seeds and feathers find a place and can be collected for drawing.

### How?

Many people feel they can't draw, so encouraging them to sit down and try is often a way to put them at ease by chatting about why they think they can't, and also the things they can do. It gives people time to pause, sit and reflect while they look at and handle beautiful things.

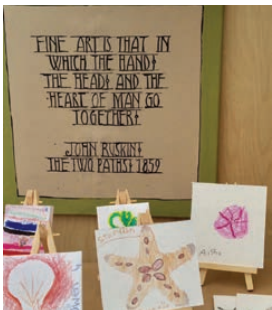
Drawing small things on small pieces of card looks do-able. Where there isn't much nature thriving, or even where there is, having a range of natural objects laid out in a tray or on a table attracts curiosity. Minerals especially are a big draw. Having magnifying glasses available for closer looking is helpful. Making all engagement activities look attractive and ready to do is essential, and nature does much of the work for you.

It's important not to use white A4 copier paper if possible as it has a strong association with school or work. Thick cream, white, brown or black card cut up into the size of the palm of your hand works well. You can buy mini-canvases mounted on self-standing frames. These help boost confidence and pride and the sense of everyone being an artist. They look good for other visitors to see too. Provide a range of good quality sketching and colour pencils, and low price basic palettes of watercolour paint and fine brushes.

Ideally you want all participants to leave their artworks for display as it's the collective traces of art, ideas and conversations that builds a sense of community.



Visitors drawing nature outside Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour



Nature drawings by visitors on display inside Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour

## Sowing Seeds

### Why?

Sowing seeds is an appealing, easy-to-do, future-facing engagement activity. It's a way of consciously inviting people to think about the future and own their ideas by writing their name (first name only is fine) on one side of a wooden seed label stick, and their hopes for the future on the other. Visitors enjoy looking at each other's ideas and the collective responses begin to give shape to shared hopes for local futures.

### How?

Sowing seeds is a positive, fruitful act, giving time for people to connect with nature, and reflect and chat as they do it. Growing plants in a pop-up space also attracts visitors to return to see how their plant has grown, creating further opportunities for exchange and participation. Seeing that someone else has been taking care of your plant and seeing it grow in a public place brings optimism and a sense of connection with where it was planted. Planting out flowers also inherently brings beauty to a place – something socially engaged activity ideally has built in.

You'll need plant pots (which you can re-use for many projects), a couple of small trowels or spoons, a bucket of compost, some wooden seed label sticks (or lollipop or craft sticks), a couple of permanent fine black marker pens, and seeds. Planting is best from Spring through to Summer for most seeds. Reliable seeds which make a strong impact are sunflowers, cornflowers and nasturtium (also edible).

You also need an outdoor planter to plant the seedlings on outside. You may have to ask permission to use the outdoor space on the pavement – if in doubt, check with your local council. You can usually put out a call on local social media networks or word of mouth to find a planter. The only challenge of getting them in place is usually their weight!



Pop-Up Ruskin Museum host showing visitors how to do the Seeds of Hope planting activity



Seeds of Hope, planted by visitors, flourishing on the street outside the Pop-Up Ruskin Museum

## Please Return Me

### Why?

Hiding objects in public places to be returned to a socially engaged space reaches people who may not otherwise cross the threshold. The objects contain a message of invitation to return them to you so that you can engage the people who return them in conversation about what you're doing, and invite them to take part in other activities. It's unexpected and fun to take part in, raises curiosity and is an act of trust which in itself is appealing.

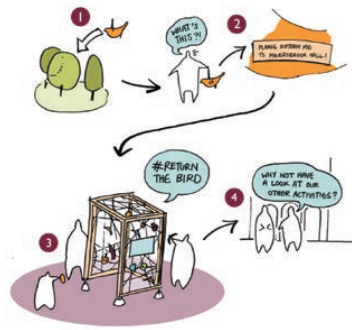
The act of taking part engenders a sense of responsibility and a sense of connection with other people who have returned their object, as displays of the returned objects grow over time.

### How?

Use an object to hide which is eye-catching, meaningful locally and to your project, and that you can reproduce or buy sustainably. Hide them within easy walking distance of your socially engaged space, no more than 5 minutes walk away. The object must be safe to be picked up by children or discovered by dogs or wildlife.

For one of our projects (see diagram below), we hid laser-cut birds around a park as we wanted to build connections between the local community, the park, its nature, Meersbrook Hall, and its future. During our *Ruskin Museum Makeover* week, we hid over 200 birds in a range of bright colours around the park. Almost all of them were returned to the Hall where the people returning them could discover the history of the Hall and share plans for its future.

You can promote the hidden object activity online or with local posters, but the idea is to hide your objects so that they can fairly easily be found!



Process of hiding laser-cut birds around Meersbrook Park to be returned by visitors to the *Ruskin Museum Makeover* at Meersbrook Hall, where other engagement activity took place.

## Instamatic!

### Why?

Capturing and printing instant photos of something people have just achieved in a socially engaged space is a powerful way to mark the achievement and display it publicly for others to see. It engenders a sense of pride and belonging to where it took place.

Building up a temporary 'gallery' of people who've been to your space helps passers-by see that many people have taken part which helps to normalise the act of meaningful engagement in public spaces. It encourages return visits from the people photographed to show their photo to friends and family, leading to new engagement. It's also useful documentation of the range of people who took part.

### How?

You'll need to buy a camera which prints instant photos. The main cost lies in the print cartridges and photo paper rather than the initial camera purchase.

Wait until the person has finished making their creation to ask if they'd like a photo of themselves pinned up in the space. People are generally fairly willing to do this because they can see the photo before it's pinned up and they're generally upbeat images! Sometimes people ask to take the photo away. Although the idea is to pin up as many as possible to build the sense of collective activity, it's fine to let someone take their photo away if it looks as though it will genuinely be of more value to them to keep it.

As with all photography of people at events or in public places, you must secure permission from the people you're taking a photo of and explain how the photo will be used. If you want to take photos of child participants, you must ask parents for permission. If children are unaccompanied, do not take photos.



Instamatic snaps of visitors and their creations made at *Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour*

## Ruskin in Sheffield Programme at a Glance 2014 - 2019

### Walkley 2015 - 2019

#### Pop-Up Ruskin Museum

(six months)  
Community-led heritage, social, creative hub of events and activities in an empty shop.

#### Desperately Seeking Ruskin

Street performances

#### Crafting the Land

Biodynamic growing & craftsmanship open days

#### Artist's Colony-for-a-Day

Drawing in the Rivelin Valley

Plus:

- Self-guided heritage trails
- Guided heritage art walks
- Commemorative plaques
- Heritage talks
- Rivelin River interpretation
- Events at Walkley Festival
- Mr Ruskin's brown loaf invented
- Ruskin Rivelin Honey created

#### Big Draw in Walkley & Rivelin Valley

Neighbourhood drawing & making festival

#### Seeing Beauty, Inspiring Minds

Teen sculptures, comic books and street mural workshops and displays

**Walkley Partners:** Beeches of Walkley, Cabaret Boom Boom, Freeman College, Friends of Ruskin Park, Friends of Walkley Cemetery, Walkley Carnegie Library, Gerry's Bakery, Rivelin Valley Conservation Group, St Mary's Church, The Big Draw, Walkley Community Centre, Walkley Festival

**Walkley Funders:** Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Guild of St George, Off The Shelf

### Meersbrook 2016 - 2019

#### Celebrating Meersbrook Hall

Day of heritage displays, tours, contemporary craft fair & creative activities

#### Carfield 'Collection'

Annual primary school Ruskin-inspired collection displayed at Meersbrook Hall

#### Big Draw at Meersbrook

Day of heritage talks, displays & creative activities across the Hall, Park and Walled Garden

#### Ruskin Museum Makeover

(one week)  
Community-led week of heritage, local arts and nature events and activities at Meersbrook Hall

**Meersbrook Partners:** Heeley Trust, Friends of Meersbrook Hall, The Big Draw, University of Sheffield **Meersbrook Funders:** National Lottery Heritage Fund, Guild of St George

### Totley 2015

#### Boots, Fresh Air & Ginger Beer

Community-led outdoor performance, film and talk

#### Ruskin, Totley & St George's Farm

Heritage talk

**Totley Partners:** Totley Library, Totley History Group **Totley Funders:** National Lottery Heritage Fund, Guild of St George

### Manor & Castle 2017 - 2019

#### Big Draw at Manor Fields Park

Day of creative activities across Manor Fields Park & Manor Lodge

#### Ruskin at Park Centre Community Garden

Metalwork workshops for local volunteers to create new artworks for the garden

**Manor & Castle Partners:** Manor & Castle Development Trust, Green Estate, The Big Draw **Manor & Castle Funders:** Guild of St George

### City Centre 2014 - 2019

#### Millennium Gallery

#### Wealthy Weekend

Panel discussions, creative activities and displays, nearby outdoor projections

#### Wealthy City Walks

Guided walks

#### Ruskin Re-Viewed

Exhibition of Ruskin in Sheffield community projects

#### The Ruskin Museum: A Journey through Sheffield

Talk

#### In the Making: Ruskin, Creativity & Craftsmanship

Exhibition by Museums Sheffield (inspiration for Ruskin in Sheffield events)

#### Big Draw at the Millennium Gallery

Day of participatory activity

#### John Ruskin: Art & Wonder

Exhibition by Museums Sheffield (inspiration for Ruskin in Sheffield events)

#### Heritage & Legacy of the Ruskin Collection

Final display of Ruskin in Sheffield artworks

Plus:

- Creative workshops
- Ruskin author talks

#### Across the City Centre

#### Ruskin's Use & Beauty Parlour

(three weeks)  
Pop-up community hub for craft, creativity and chat on The Moor

#### Make Good Livelihoods

Weekend of demonstrations, talks and creative activities across four venues

#### A Future Fantastic

Two-week festival of performance, protest and utopia building

#### Encounters with Ruskin

Three-month season of talks & creative activities

#### Making Masterpieces in Sheffield & Venice

Community mural-making and painting

#### John Ruskin's Legacy: Nature, Craft, Ecology

Exhibition

#### The People's Palace of Possibility

(two weeks)  
Installation of performance, protest and policy-making at Theatre Deli

**City Centre Partners:** Museums Sheffield, Access Space, Freeman College, Off The Shelf, Opus Independents, Portland Works, Poly-Technic, Sheffield Archive, Library & Information, Sheffield City Council, Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Sheffield Hallam University, Theatre Deli, The Bare Project, The Big Draw, The Moor Management, University of Sheffield, Yorkshire Artspace. **City Centre Funders:** Arts Council England, Being Human Festival of Humanities, Catalyst Festival of Creativity (Sheffield Hallam University), Church Burgesses Educational Foundation, Guild of St George, Mount Pleasant Educational Foundation, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Sheffield Grammar School Exhibition Foundation, Sheffield Year of Making, University of Sheffield



## Useful Links & Resources

### The Guild of St George

Founded by John Ruskin in 1871 to make Britain a happier place to live in. Initiators of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* community engagement programme. The *Ruskin in Sheffield* evaluation report is available on the website.

[www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk](http://www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk)

### The Ruskin Collection at the Millennium Gallery, Sheffield

Collection of the Guild of St George, cared for by Museums Sheffield.

[www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/museums/millennium-gallery/exhibitions/ruskin-collection](http://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/museums/millennium-gallery/exhibitions/ruskin-collection)

### The Civic Role of Arts Organisations

Building a movement of change-makers with impact in their local communities, UK and internationally. A Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation initiative.

[www.gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/our-work/the-civic-role-of-arts-organisations](http://www.gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/our-work/the-civic-role-of-arts-organisations)

### Participatory City Project

Building a culture of participation into the fabric of everyday life in local neighbourhoods in Barking and Dagenham. An initiative of the Participatory City Foundation.

[www.participatorycity.org](http://www.participatorycity.org)

### Community Lover's Guide

Open source platform sharing local projects across the globe which transform neighbourhoods.

[www.communityloversguide.org](http://www.communityloversguide.org)

### Urban Rooms Network

A network of Urban Rooms across the country to share practice, offer support and work together to promote the value of urban rooms to others.

<https://urbanroomsnetwork.wordpress.com>

### Our Museum

Communities and museums as active partners. A Paul Hamlyn Foundation programme.

[www.ourmuseum.org.uk](http://www.ourmuseum.org.uk)

### The Happy Museum Project

Research, networking and training to support institutional and community wellbeing and resilience in the face of global challenges. An Arts Council England initiative.

[www.happymuseumproject.org](http://www.happymuseumproject.org)

### Playing for Time: Art as if the World Mattered

Handbook by Lucy Neal for artists, community activists and anyone wishing to harness their creativity to make change in the world.

[www.bloomsbury.com/uk/playing-for-time-9781783191864](http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/playing-for-time-9781783191864)

### Encounters

Archive website of projects from these specialists in designing participatory arts projects that inspire creativity, dialogue and exchange between people of all ages and cultures.

[www.encountersarts.wixsite.com/legacy](http://www.encountersarts.wixsite.com/legacy)

### The Bare Project

Theatre and interactive arts company, specialising in co-creating work with local communities in a range of indoor and outdoor spaces.

[www.thebareproject.co.uk](http://www.thebareproject.co.uk)

### Artsadmin

Enables artists to create without boundaries, producing bold, interdisciplinary work to share with local, national and international audiences.

[www.artsadmin.co.uk](http://www.artsadmin.co.uk)

### Creative People and Places

People taking the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in brilliant art experiences in the places where they live. An Arts Council England initiative.

[www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk)

### Social Art Network

A UK-based community of artists committed to building agency for the field of art and social practice.

[www.socialartnetwork.org](http://www.socialartnetwork.org)

## About the author

Ruth Nutter was producer of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme initiated by the Guild of St George from 2014 to 2019. She is a freelance Creative Producer. Ruth developed her socially engaged practice as a Creative Associate of Encounters, co-designing the transformation of empty shops as community engagement hubs, and independently running creative nature engagement workshops outdoors. Her early career in theatre marketing and producing nurtured a clear understanding of the galvanising role of the arts in people's lives. Her work is underpinned by a long-term commitment to social and environmental justice and sustainability. In 2001, with Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE, she co-founded Push, an award-winning company dedicated to promoting the work of black British artists and discussion about race in the arts at mainstream venues in London. She is a contributing author of *Playing for Time: Making Art as if the World Mattered* by Lucy Neal. She has been a recipient of an Arts Council England bursary and a NESTA Fellowship award.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all directors and staff of the Guild of St George for supporting my leadership of the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme over six years, and commissioning this book. Thanks especially to Clive Wilmer (former Master of the Guild of St George), Janet Barnes, Sian Brown, Carolyn Butterworth, Stuart Eagles, Martin Green, Kirstie Hamilton, Peter Miller, Louise Pullen, Simon Seligman, Kim Streets and Jacqueline Yallop for involvement in the programme Steering Group at various times. Thanks to Carolyn Butterworth, Rachel Dickinson, Peter Miller and Simon Seligman for feedback on drafts of the book. Thanks to all the volunteers and Companions of the Guild of St George who collaborated to make the *Ruskin in Sheffield* programme happen: to all the partners who put their faith into it, and the funders who supported it (see pages 73 and 74 for the full list of partners and funders). Thank you to Lucy Neal for developing my confidence to write about things that matter.

# The Guild of St George

The Guild of St George was founded by John Ruskin in 1871 to make Britain a happier place to live in.

John Ruskin (1819 – 1900) was a writer, artist and philanthropist who commanded international respect, attracting praise from figures as varied as Leo Tolstoy, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), Marcel Proust, Charlotte Brontë, Le Corbusier, William Morris and Mahatma Gandhi. He was cited as an influence by Clement Attlee and the founders of the National Trust, among others.

His concern for the impact of industrial society on people and their environment, and his passionate advocacy of a sustainable relationship between people, craft and nature, led him to establish the Guild of St George.

The Guild is now a registered charity which puts Ruskin's ideas into practice in the modern world. It has two major cultural assets: the Ruskin Collection and Ruskin Land. Its vital asset is the international network of more than 300 Companions (members) through which it engages diverse audiences with Ruskin's ideas today.

The Ruskin Collection at the Millennium Gallery is cared for by Museums Sheffield. Curated by Ruskin for the education and enjoyment of the workers of Sheffield in 1875, this collection of artworks, minerals, illustrated books and architectural casts provided the inspiration for the *Ruskin in Sheffield* community engagement programme.



GUILD of St GEORGE

Website: [guildofstgeorge.org.uk](http://guildofstgeorge.org.uk)

Facebook: [guildofstgeorge](https://www.facebook.com/guildofstgeorge)

Twitter: [@ruskintoday](https://twitter.com/ruskintoday)

Instagram: [ruskintoday](https://www.instagram.com/ruskintoday)

Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest in Worcestershire is an area of orchards, meadows and woodland which are managed sustainably for the long-term improvement of timber quality and biodiversity, in close collaboration with the Wyre Community Land Trust. We share Ruskin-inspired goals of restoring, conserving and managing the landscape and promoting rural skills and craftsmanship, and host a diverse programme of events and activity.

The Guild works with a growing number and range of local, national and international partners including community anchor organisations in Sheffield mentioned in this handbook, Studio in the Woods (which was held at Ruskin Land in 2018 and 2019) and The Big Draw, which the Guild founded in 2000 as the Campaign for Drawing.

We also create forums for discussion of Ruskinian ideas and practices in modern contexts and have an active publishing programme. A range of booklets on subjects relating to Ruskin and the Guild are available via our online bookshop.

**Do you want to engage meaningfully with your local community?  
Help people reconnect with each other, build confidence to act  
and make positive change where they live?**

**Based on a cultural programme of events and activities that took  
place in Sheffield from 2014 to 2019 inspired by John Ruskin's  
ideas on making lives better, this book will equip you with  
insights and tools to embark on your own process, anywhere,  
of building community around things that matter.**

**If you're an arts or heritage practitioner, community  
development worker or activist, this book offers inspiration  
and guidance on how to connect communities with their own  
creativity, their local environment and nature, their local  
heritage and future – and each other.**

**"A generous and practical how-to guide, in the  
spirit of John Ruskin. Anyone with the seed of  
an idea for change should use this book to help  
bring that idea to life in their own community."**

Andrew Hill, columnist, Financial Times; author of  
*Ruskinland: How John Ruskin Shapes Our World*

**"An essential read for all those seeking to release  
the potential of civic heritage in service of the  
social and environmental justice issues of today."**

Hilary Jennings, Director, Happy Museum

£8.00



GUILD of St GEORGE

ISBN 978-1-9162882-4-9



9 781916 288249 >

