

Bunhill Heritage – Project Overview

The following document outlines the aims and intentions of a new community heritage project by Islington Heritage Service.

Using the history of the ward of Bunhill and the focal point of Bunhill Fields Burial Ground, Islington Council wishes to create three works of public art over three years. The work will be created by an artist-educator-in-residence at the St Luke's Centre, who will lead 12 art workshops with the local community. The outcomes of these workshops will help inform the creation of a work of public art.

Islington Heritage Service recognises the ownership and management of Bunhill Fields by the City of London, that it is Grade I listed on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens and is a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation. Bunhill Fields is located within the Bunhill Fields / Finsbury Square Conservation Area.

Subject to all site requirements and in keeping with the historic nature of location, we ask in principle that the completed work of public art be temporarily installed in Bunhill Fields for the duration of one year, beginning January 2023.

Background

Bunhill Fields is a historic burial ground for religious non-conformists, dissenters and intellectuals. Located in Islington, the site is owned and managed by the City of London.

The name Bunhill is a derivation of 'Bone Hill', indicating the site's use as a depository for dried human bones from the charnel house in St Paul's Cathedral in the 16th century. In 1665, the City of London prepared the field as a burial ground for plague victims but it was never consecrated nor used for this purpose. It subsequently became the main burial ground for non-conformists in London.

The ward of Bunhill is located in the southernmost part of the London Borough of Islington, bordering Hackney and the City of London. It is an area with a unique history, where nestled amongst new high-rise developments are historic buildings, cultural community hubs and a significant amount of private and social housing.

The burial ground was in use from 1665 – 1854, at which point it became a public garden. It is the resting place for over 120,000 people, including many radical and dissenting figures such as artist William Blake, writer Daniel Defoe, writer and preacher John Bunyan, sculptor and businesswoman Eleanor Coade, and many others such as Susanna Wesley, known for being the 'Mother of Methodism.'

Following WWII, the site was redesigned as a modern park, with the surviving tombstones protected behind high railings. Behind the railings the grass has been allowed to grow naturally, creating an area of biodiversity. Bunhill Fields is one of only a few large green spaces in the ward, but is underused by its residents.

Bunhill (the ward) is now a densely populated area of South Islington. Within the ward is a large number of new developments, stretching into the City. At one point in Bunhill's history, prior to WWII, it was the most densely populated area anywhere in the UK, along with neighbouring Clerkenwell. While the population has increased significantly in the last decades, it remains less populated than it was at other points in its history.

Project Aims

Bunhill Heritage is a community development project. Islington Heritage Service works to support the lives of residents, creating opportunities for inclusion and development, while improving wellbeing and reducing social isolation. We work with key demographics such as families and under-5s, young people and over-55s, as well as the many diverse communities in Islington.

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have brought home the need for the local authority to help residents safely access community services and outdoor green spaces.

Using the history of Bunhill Fields as an anchor, Islington Heritage Service's new heritage project encompasses the history of the whole ward of Bunhill. We will do this in part by partnering with the St Luke's Community Centre, Central Street.

Community Engagement – Artist-Educator-in-Residence

Islington Heritage Service wish to engage **3 local artist-educators over 3 years** to work with the community in order to create 3 works of public art, exploring the radical history of Bunhill as the inspiration for the artwork.

Each contracted artist-educator will be experienced in community art projects and leading workshops. The outcomes of those creative workshops will help inspire the creation of a work of public art. The art will draw on the history of Bunhill, the ward and the burial ground, with focus on some of the notable figures interred at Bunhill Fields, for example, the life and work of William Blake.

There will be three artist residencies during the project. Each residency will last 1 year.

- Residency 1: January 2022 – January 2023
- Residency 2: January 2023 – January 2024
- Residency 3: January 2024 – January 2025

At the time of writing, the form and structure of the completed artwork is not known. It is possible that the work may be in the form of images on posters or canvasses, a single structure, along the railings or at a designated location in the site. A proposed location is the Garden Area in the northern part of the site, where there is ample space for public art and will not impede any walkways.

Islington Heritage Service wishes to work constructively with the City of London to permit the formal exhibition of the completed work in Bunhill Fields. Although not essential that Bunhill Fields be the primary location of the artwork, it is our belief that this collaborative work of art, if located in

Bunhill Fields, will allow residents of Bunhill and the City of London to better enjoy their public spaces and feel part of their community.

Islington Heritage Service will be the primary overseer of the project, but the installation of any artwork in Bunhill Fields can only take place with the assistance of the City's officers in the Environment Department, and approval from its Members.

The completed artwork will sit within the framework of the Bunhill Conservation Management Plan, such as interpreting Bunhill Fields' role as the pre-eminent historic non-conformist burial ground in England, while balancing and enhancing its significance within the community.

Benefit to the Community

Islington Heritage Service has a proven track record of supporting communities as well as preserving and celebrating objects of historical interest. Community heritage projects work to improve the lives of residents through inclusion and participation. They instil a sense of pride of place and enable residents to feel more involved in what their community has to offer. They also serve to reduce social isolation and promote wellbeing.

Our projects focus on key groups in the community:

- Families and under-5s: Providing free and high quality activities focussed on early-intervention which benefit children's wellbeing and development. We do these through walks and story activities, arts and crafts workshops and library initiatives. We provide support for parents/cares and stimulating activities for children.
- Over-55s: Residents who may be at greater risk of social isolation. Free talks and events such as walks, story-sharing, exhibitions, workshops, tea and coffee mornings and local history groups.

In this project, the artist-educator will lead between 10-12 workshops at the St Luke's Centre, with arts and heritage as the focus. Residents who participate will learn about the heritage of their community, develop artistic skills and create works that will inspire the final work, as well as creating their own work that be incorporated into an exhibition following the completion of the project.

Our aim is that local residents feel they have been consulted and involved in the creation of the work of public art. They will feel better able to access arts and heritage organisations, develop knowledge and feel a sense of public ownership.

Local residents of Bunhill will be encouraged to take part, and need not exclusively be service users of the St Luke's Centre. Moreover, if the final work is to be exhibited in Bunhill Fields, we recommend the participation of nearby residents of the City of London.

Throughout the duration of this project, a programme of year-round engagement activities will support the project. These activities are aimed at our key target groups and exist separately to the workshops. Though intended for local residents, they can be attended by anyone.

Governance Structure

Project lead:	Seán McGovern, Bunhill Heritage Project Manager
Reporting to:	Cheryl Smith, Head of Heritage
Reporting to:	Bunhill Ward Cllrs Troy Gallagher, Phil Graham, Valerie Bossman-Quarshie

If the City of London agrees in principle to allow the completed work of art to be displayed, the Heritage Project Manager and Artist-in-Residence will produce an interpretation of the work by September 2022. This interpretation will inform City Members that the work is in keeping with the nature of the site as well as indicating that all site requirements have been met.

Islington Heritage Service will liaise with officers of the City's Environment Department to insure these site requirements are known and implemented.

Project Steering Group

A steering group will advise on progress of the project throughout its development.

The group will be comprised of officers of Islington Heritage Service, officers of St Luke's Charitable Trust, service users of St Luke's, a local councillor, a local historian and a member of Friends of City Gardens. We recommend that an officer of the City of London's Environment Department joins the steering group, representing the views and interests of the City of London.

Planning and Conservation

Rachel Godden, Islington Planning Officer, is advising on matters relating to planning and conservation and has previously worked for Historic England.

Public Liability Assessment

Any proposed structures will be properly maintained by Islington Council and assessed by a structural engineer. All necessary precautions will be undertaken as the artwork is completed.

For more information on the project, please contact:

Seán McGovern, Bunhill Heritage Project Manager, sean.mcgovern@islington.gov.uk



About the Artist-Educator-in-Residence

Georgie Fay

Georgie Fay is a participatory artist and printmaker based in London. At the core of her artistic vision is a search for place and connections, in landscape and history. She explores critical themes like the mounting tensions between humankind and nature, and the importance of memory and place. Her work captures a visceral energy and stitches together the sometimes ephemeral. Fay's areas of investigation derive from her personal experiences whether that be the mundane city pavements, migrating flight patterns or journeys undertaken; she engages in the everyday, and seeks to connect with others through these observations and journeys.

Georgie says:

"I feel so honoured and excited to be part of the Bunhill Heritage Project. To have the opportunity to make work with the local community in response to such an exciting and inspiring place is going to push my practice and help me to move forward as a participatory artist and printmaker. I cannot wait to spend time exploring the burial ground, researching the archives, finding more out about the people who live in this historically rich area and then making art in response to all these incredible stimuli."



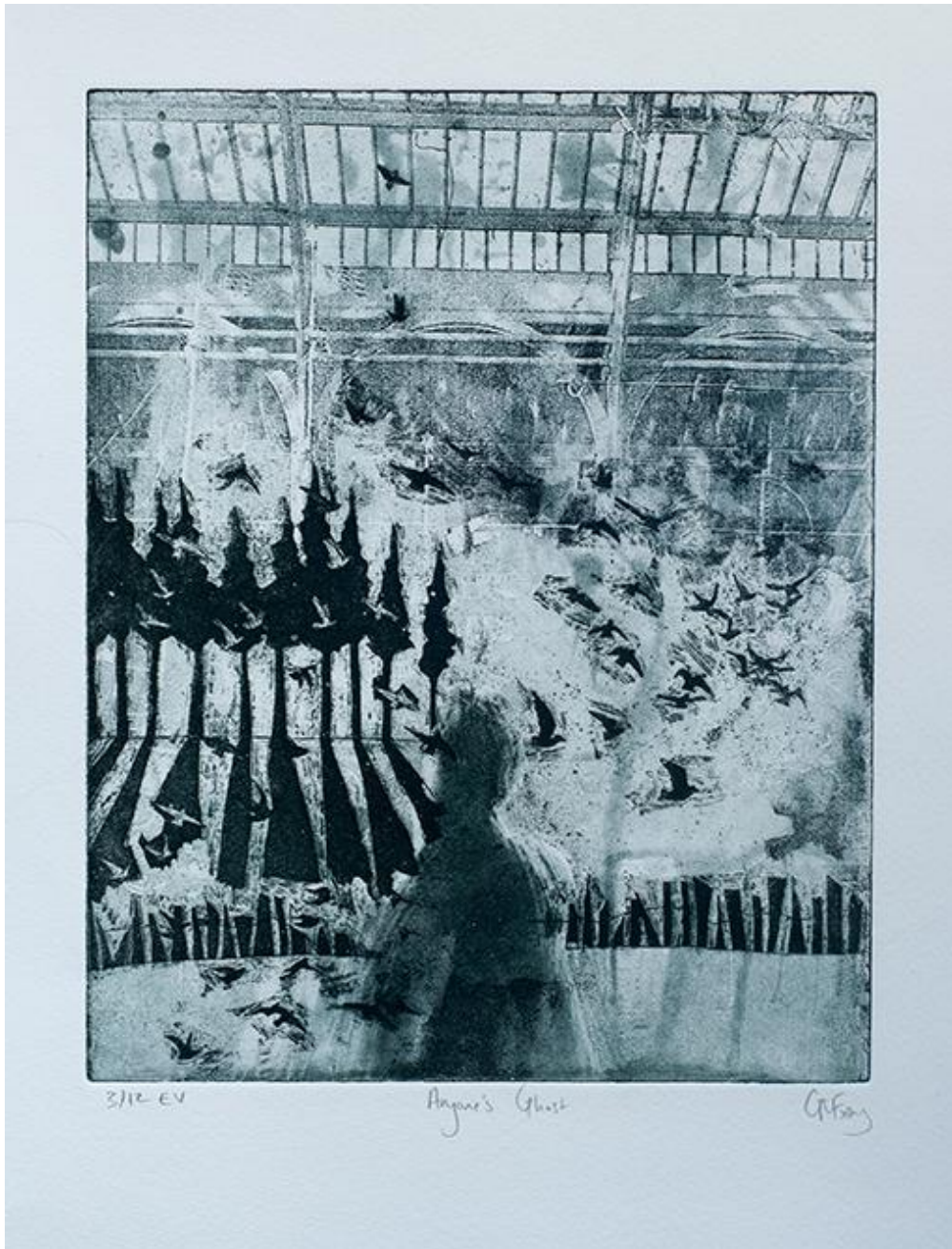
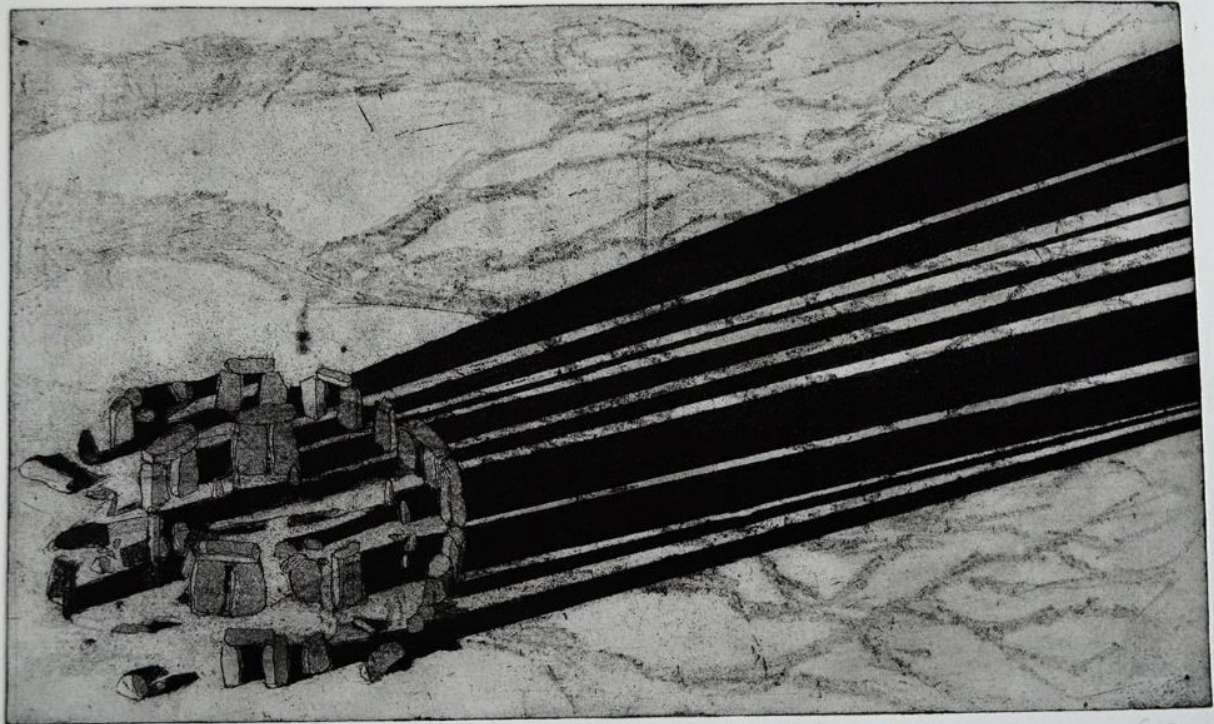


Figure 1 Anyone's Ghost, G. Fay



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Only their shadows remained

G. Fay

Figure 2 Only Their Shadows Remained, G. Fay