

The Lanes – Home

Celebrating, Conserving and Renewing Ilfracombe's Community Mosaic Heritage



The 'Parish Map' Triptych

Introduction

In 1993, hundreds of local people came together to transform The Lanes through creativity. Working alongside artists from Free Form Arts Trust, they created mosaics, ceramics and sculptural features that celebrated Ilfracombe's history, character and imagination. What emerged was far more than a public art project. It was a community-led act of regeneration that invited people to rediscover the town through stories, heritage and shared creativity.

More than thirty years later, many of those artworks remain. Some have weathered remarkably well, while others are showing signs of age. More importantly, the stories behind them are beginning to fade.

The recent rediscovery of the original project archive by Ilfracombe Museum has revealed just how ambitious and visionary the original programme was. The archive documents a partnership between local organisations, artists and hundreds of residents, creating twenty-seven ceramic and mosaic features that invited people to explore The Lanes in new ways and, in the words of the original guide, **"recall to life The Lanes from their long slumber."**

The Lanes – Home proposes the next chapter of that story.

Rather than recreating the original project, it seeks to celebrate its achievements, conserve its legacy and invite today's communities to contribute their own stories for future generations.

Why Now?

Ilfracombe's Town of Culture journey presents a unique opportunity to reconnect people with one of the town's most significant examples of community-led public art.

The ambitions of the original project resonate strongly with today's cultural priorities.

In 1993 the project brought together heritage, creativity, participation and regeneration.

Today those same ideas remain central to our Town of Culture.

This proposal offers an opportunity to build on an existing cultural legacy rather than starting from scratch, creating a programme that is rooted in place, shaped by community and capable of leaving a lasting legacy.

Exert from the original leaflet to accompany The Lanes 1993

THE LANES

Ilfracombe

"If, dear readers, in the still of a hot afternoon or in the twilight of evening you should chance to walk these paths, who knows what shades may accompany you. Pause for a while. Do you half hear the mocking laugh of a woman these four centuries dead? Did you just glimpse down a passage leading to the sea the sails of a pirate vessel whose very name chilled the hearts of Devon folk in the time of Queen Anne? But most of all, was that the cry of a herring gull, or was it, borne on the winds of time, the ululation of the barbary corsairs as they surged up from the harbour leaving no living soul in their wake?"

Extract from 'A 1920 's history of The Lanes'.

The Lanes are a very different way of getting around Ilfracombe, in fact probably the oldest way.

This network of pedestrian passages, date from the earliest development of the port and still provide an unexpected and fascinating alternative route around the town.

By the 1980's however, The Lanes were little known and had, in places, become untidy, unkempt, and rather threatening. In 1988 Ilfracombe Civic Society set up a project which was to 'recall to life' The Lanes from their long slumber. Partnerships were established with a whole range of organisations which lead to an important section of the network being transformed into an enjoyable sculpture trail.

This guide concentrates on the sculpture trail but also hopes to entice visitors to explore other sections of the network, which, although little visited are never far from the town's more usual attractions.

The 1920's history from which the above quotation is taken has only partly survived. A reprint of the remaining section is available from the Tourist Information office.



The Vision

The theme of the programme is **Home**.

Home is not simply where we live.

It is memory.

Belonging.

Family.

Identity.

Landscape.

Community.

Stories passed between generations.

Through conservation, creativity and participation, *The Lanes – Home* will invite residents and visitors to explore what home means in Ilfracombe today while celebrating the remarkable community achievement that began in 1993.

Guiding Principles

Inspired by the original vision of bringing The Lanes back to life through a true partnership of local people, the programme will be guided by five principles.

Celebrate

Celebrate the creativity, ambition and generosity of everyone who contributed to the original project.

Conserve

Protect and conserve the surviving mosaics and ceramic artworks wherever possible, respecting their heritage value.

Remember

Collect memories, photographs, oral histories and stories connected with The Lanes before they are lost.

Renew

Create opportunities for new generations to contribute through contemporary community participation, artist commissions and creative activities.

Leave a Legacy

Create something future generations can inherit, enjoy and continue to build upon.

Supporting Ilfracombe Town of Culture

The proposal contributes directly to the ambitions of the Town of Culture programme by:

- celebrating Ilfracombe's distinctive heritage
- strengthening pride of place and belonging
- encouraging participation across generations
- creating opportunities for artists and makers
- connecting culture with the everyday experience of the town
- supporting creative tourism
- leaving a lasting cultural legacy beyond the Town of Culture year.

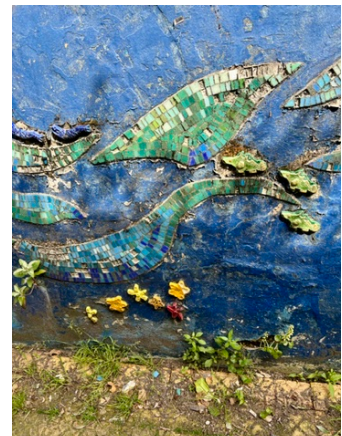
Rather than being a standalone project, *The Lanes – Home* could become one of the flagship community heritage programmes within the wider Town of Culture programme.

Partnership

The strength of this proposal lies in partnership.

Potential partners include Ilfracombe Museum, Ilfracombe Town Council, Ilfracombe Civic Society, the Ilfracombe Art Trail, local schools, community organisations, artists, businesses, residents and the original contributors wherever possible.

The rediscovered archive provides an exciting opportunity to reconnect many of those original participants with a new generation.



Project Team

Helen Weedon

Helen Weedon is an Ilfracombe-born creative producer, mosaic artist and arts and humanities research leader whose career has combined cultural leadership, community engagement and creative practice.

Her professional background includes arts education, local government cultural development and national research investment, leading major collaborative programmes and partnerships across the creative industries.

Alongside developing her HellieM Mosaics practice, Helen has recently been appointed by Ilfracombe Town Council to conserve and restore the town's historic mosaic crest, bringing practical experience of mosaic conservation as well as strategic cultural leadership.

Having returned to live in Ilfracombe, Helen is committed to contributing her experience voluntarily to help shape the town's cultural future, including supporting the development of the Town of Culture programme.

Fee Bates

Fee is an established ceramic artist, gallery owner and long-standing member of Ilfracombe's creative community.

Through her ceramic practice, previous involvement with the Ilfracombe Art Trail and extensive local networks, she brings valuable expertise in community engagement, ceramics, artist collaboration and creative place-making.

Together, Helen and Fee bring complementary skills across creative production, mosaic and ceramic practice, heritage, partnership working and community participation.

Looking Ahead

The original project invited local people to rediscover The Lanes.

This proposal invites a new generation to continue that journey.

The Lanes are not simply a collection of mosaics.

They are a living record of Ilfracombe's creativity, generosity and community spirit.

By celebrating the past, conserving what survives and creating new opportunities for participation, *The Lanes – Home* can once again help bring The Lanes to life—creating new stories of home, belonging and place for the next thirty years.