



LIT 2020 and Festive Activities FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

A summary of the activity delivered – what was achieved, set against our aims.

Our overarching ambition for LIT was to create a festival of stories and art that avoided being a traditional literature festival, bringing instead a different creative perspective using ‘personal, regional and diverse stories, and the town of Macclesfield’, as starting points to create impactful and excellent work.

We hadn’t expected to deliver LIT in 2020, during one of the most challenging times for the cultural sector in living memory. Our aim for a second festival in a ‘normal’ year would have been to develop and grow LIT, building on our successes in 2019. Central to this was an ambition to partner with Macclesfield Town Council and the festive *Switch On* weekend to create an amalgamated programme of events and commissions.

We were however, successful in a small bid to the Arts Council, Macclesfield Town Council and Cheshire East Council to deliver a scaled-down version of LIT for 2020 and to partner with Macclesfield Town Council on a similarly pared-back festive programme.

ONLINE STORY EVENTS

Over the LIT weekend of 20th – 22nd November, LIT hosted nine online events and workshops:

- *Sounds of our Stories (x 2 workshops)* – families worked with world-renowned storyteller Jan Blake to create a soundscape to accompany her storytelling performance.
- *Taking folk tales/making stories with Liz Garner* – A workshop looking at how to take traditional folk tales and turn them into stories for today’s world.
- *My Self-publishing Journey with Janey de Nordwall* – a live streamed Q&A (via YouTube) on Janey’s experience of self publishing. Janey attended a workshop at last year’s LIT attending – a How to Write a Memoir, after which she published her first book.
- *Sounds of Our Stories (x 2 performances)* – Jan Blake telling the stories created in her workshops, accompanied by a soundscape created by participating families.
- *Objects Tell Stories* – live stream of writer Liz Garner and archaeologist Dr Tim Campbell in conversation. A fascinating evening of readings, discussion and demonstrations. Elizabeth and Tim unpacked ‘caches’ of ritual objects discovered in the boundary places of chimneys and doorways and matched these to the tales of the characters who dwell there.
- *Fantasy Adventure Stories and Me* – An online chat and Q&A with three Harper Collins childrens’ authors of fantasy fiction for 9+ year olds: Francesca Gibbons, Anna James & Dominique Valente.
- *Winter Songs and Stories with Nick Hennessey* – An online performance from acclaimed storyteller and harpist Nick Hennessey.

1000 households tuned into this LIT online programme over the weekend.



LIGHT COMMISSIONS

Tangles

LIT commissioned internationally-renowned lighting designer and Macclesfield resident Lucy Carter to create a new artwork for the festival. There were restrictions on what could be delivered due to COVID and funding challenges, however the final artwork responded to the pandemic, and delivered an uplifting animated lightwork, exhibited in a pub closed due to the restrictions.

“strength” “love” “travel” “positivity” “life” “unity” “friends”

These are just some of the words that local people said came to mind when thinking of the future, or what the future might hold. Using these words, Lucy created a work that reflected our hopes for the future, inspiring reflection and positivity. Imagine that moment when you pull your Christmas fairy lights out of the box only to find they’ve become a tangled mess, and the joy they bring when they’re finally up and twinkling on the tree.

A vinyl artwork of the words we were unable to include in the final artwork, is being shown by the Snowgoose pub in their window.

Lucy has had a long and successful career in live performance and events which has included working with, and for, many of the best dance, ballet, opera and theatre companies in the world, including The National Theatre and The Royal Ballet in London, The MET Opera in New York and La Scala, Milan. Current credits include lighting design for *Everybody’s Talking About Jamie* at the Apollo Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue. Her lighting installations and light artworks embody a sense of both theatricality and unfolding kinetic narratives.

This artwork has helped Lucy develop her practice as a light artist, and has led to introductions and work with Lumen in Crewe, Quays Culture and a three-year residency with LIT (restrictions permitting).

Advent Windows

Macclesfield’s communities came together from all quarters to celebrate the season with gorgeous shop window designs revealed throughout December.

Twenty-four shops, bars, restaurants, community organisations, cafés, churches and other businesses either created their own displays or worked with local schools and Macclesfield artists Jacki Clark and Ralph McGaul to create a magical trail of window displays on the theme of ‘stories’. Each afternoon throughout December windows were revealed, viewable from 4-8pm.

Six local schools participated: Park Royal Community School, Pussbank Primary School and Nursery, Dean Valley Community Primary School, Broken Cross Primary School, Hurdsfield Primary School and Tytherington High School.

Advent Windows feedback



Pussbank School:

I've just seen the video. It looks fabulous, Jacki and Ralph have done a super job of putting it together and we just hope the Monocle Deli enjoy it too. Thanks for letting us be part of it, a great way to celebrate advent in the town.

From the school newsletter:

On Sunday 6th December, the advent window display that the children worked on was unveiled at the Monocle Deli. It is stunning and the children should be rightly proud of themselves. Jacki and Ralph, the artists we worked with, completed the display with a snowflake projection which really helps to bring the magic of the snowman to life and when I saw it, it really took my breath away. Thank you for doing such a great job. I'm told too that Mel, the owner, has also displayed some of the smaller pieces inside the deli so it is well worth a look! The opening hours are Wednesday-Saturday, 10-4 and also the same hours on Sunday 20th December. Why not download the trail and go and find them all? Visit LITmacclesfield.org for the map and further information.

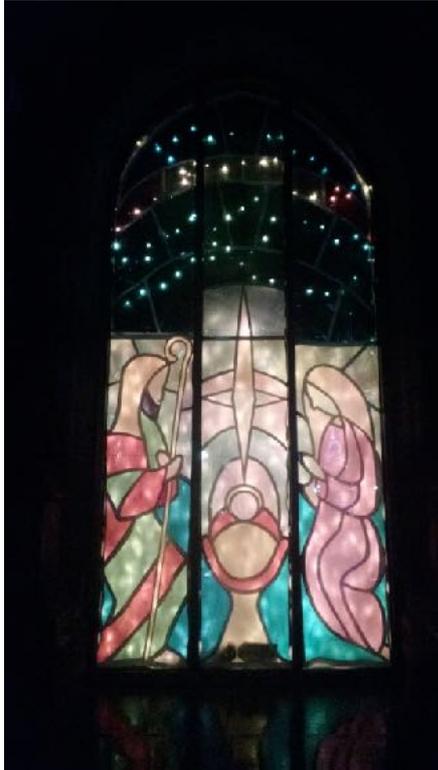


Button Warehouse:

Thanks so much for letting us be a part of this project. I'm thrilled to be involved and can't thank you enough. Especially in these really scary times for businesses it means the world to me.

Hope Centre:

We have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the window display and we have had lots of people come and see it. Tytherington High School has been absolutely amazing and a major part in the Window.



St Michael's Church:

Thank you so much for organising this and giving us the impetus to make it. Church folk who saw us putting the first sections in place said how good it was, and wondered why we hadn't done something like this sooner.

I hope it does spark some ideas for the future. As a building St Michael's looks so dark and foreboding – apart from when the main doors are open. Having this window decorated and lit like this does something to counter that. So thank you to you and Mandy for doing the foundational leg-work on the trail.

Facebook and Instagram comments:

*It looks amazing, well done, Oh it looks beautiful! Stunning!!!!❤️
Gorgeous, hoping to get round the windows next week... x
St Michael's, Macclesfield Thank you for the mention. It is beautiful isn't it?!*

We would love to be considered to take part next year Rolph & Co Photography

This is such a lovely idea!

We did part of the trail this afternoon - its lovely! Well done everyone

Beautiful work! Well done!

That is amazing!

Another belter

Wow, that is stunning

A really moving piece encapsulating #Autism #awareness #disconnected #inclusivity

Just spotted #Macclesfield advent window trail. Lovely idea

About Tangles - It is a stunning piece and will be missed.

love this piece - where is it going now??

It's hard to quantify how many people engaged with the trail. However, 35,000+ people engaged with the posts about the trail through the LIT Facebook account (this doesn't include engagement through Town Council accounts) and a number of businesses requested to be a part of the advent trail in 2021, which Macclesfield Town Council subsequently took over.

We created an online and printed map for the trail which was available through social media, the LIT website and participating shops. It was distributed at the Treacle Market before Christmas.

Tree of Light

To help us mark a milestone year, we worked with Macclesfield Town Council to deliver a new approach to the Christmas tree decoration by calling out for an artist/designer to respond to the significance of the tree, creating a new design that was specific to Macclesfield, incorporating the opportunity to leave virtual (as well as physical) 'Tree of Light' messages.

Message in Lights devised and created by IDST!, a group of Macclesfield-based makers, artists, technicians and experimenters working together to make community artworks was selected from a public call-out.

In previous years, the people of Macclesfield have been invited to write messages to loved ones on paper stars which are hung on the Christmas tree in Market Place. This year, because of continuing restrictions around the pandemic, the tree displayed messages on the tree's lights in the form of Morse code.

When people sent a text message to a special phone number, their message was turned into Morse code and flashed on a light bulb in their chosen colour. Messages were transmitted to the world via the same light until the tree came down in January.

Every time people texted #show to the phone number, all the other lights on the tree disappeared and their light blinked their message alone. The work was accompanied by a newly-created piece of music by local musician Charles Ormrod - <https://www.patreon.com/posts/44154311>

There were complications with the artwork possibly due to the fact that this was an overly ambitious proposal from Macclesfield-based IDST! The technology behind the work was impressive but complex. Installation was delayed and there were complications with poor communication with the tree and light installers. The lights themselves were individual computers, but the wires connecting them were unattractive. Lessons learnt for IDST! are to take more care over the final aesthetic of an artwork and not to over promise on content/outputs. We are always keen to support local creatives as a part of a broader strategy with Cheshire East Council, but quality control must be of paramount importance.



Magic Lanterns Nocturnal Fauna – outdoor projection trail

LIT and Macclesfield Town Council commissioned eight beautiful and intriguing mini-projections which were hidden in the nooks and crannies of Macclesfield town centre, waiting to be found. Audiences explored in their bubbles, enjoying this outdoor family treat.

Magic Lanterns was created for LIT by Fabric Lenny, who was part of the team that created *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in West Park in 2019 –and artists Urban Projections, creators of some of the most awe-inspiring projection work in the country. Music was written for each projection by musician Nick Lewis. Each piece was hosted on a Soundcloud file which audiences could download from QR codes on the projectors. Nick also produced an educational video for local schools which showed children how to create their own music to accompany the projections using ‘found’ items in their homes.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-HQicL5KtuOW1H9bEz6j-LRgQ1bApCGf/view?usp=sharing>



Magic Lanterns was postponed from November 2020 to January 2021 and then again to December 2021 due to COVID restrictions. The event finally took place over the weekend of Friday 4th and Saturday 5th of December 2021. Local bakery Flour Water Salt provided refreshments and hosted the meet-up point and box office.

In December 2021, we were still restricted on attendance numbers, due to Cheshire East Council COVID guidance. Audiences were limited to six people per group with timed slots at 5pm, 6pm and 7pm, with a max of 16 groups, leading to potentially 96 people per timed slot.

Below is a summary of numbers for Magic Lanterns. Numbers on the second evening were affected by severe weather. Figures show actual attendance.

Friday night was a sell-out, but as always with a free event and with COVID anxiety in the mix, not everyone turned up.

| | Friday 3rd | Sat 4th |
|-------|------------|---------|
| 5pm | 45 | 42 |
| 6pm | 61 | 15 |
| 7pm | 61 | 28 |
| TOTAL | 167 | 85 |
| | | |
| TOTAL | 252 | |

Magic Lanterns evaluation

A very short survey to be completed both on the night and digitally via social media and Eventbrite using Survey Monkey, was created for the event for evaluation purposes,. The form was kept purposely short to encourage completion. Thirty-two representatives of the groups attending completed the form (13%), which is a relatively good sample to garner learnings from. We were also pleasantly surprised by the high return of digital forms completed following the event.



Our Audiences

Our audiences were predominately young families, this is anecdotal from our experiences in the box office on both nights. Forms were completed primarily by female carers, with some grandparents in the mix too. There were, however, pockets of adult only groups who came to experience the trail. The majority of our audiences were from Macclesfield, however we did attract a small number from Manchester.

Their experiences

We asked our audiences to rate their experience of the event. All but one of our respondents rated the experience as either very good or good (the one other was neither good nor poor). The text based responses available at the end of the survey provided more insight into our visitor experiences.

Below is a word cloud to represent those responses. The top 4 words in terms of importance and mention were: event, enjoyed, well, lovely, music, fun.



Some quotes that also demonstrate this include the following:

"Thank you it was a lot of fun and well organised."

"Adults and kids really enjoyed it."

"Great event. Thank you for organising."

"Wonderful for the children and us."

"Lovely community event. Very friendly and committed volunteers to be out in the rain. Our children thoroughly enjoyed it. Well done!"

Key points mentioned in the respondents comments on their experiences include:



QR Codes: QR codes were used as a brass plaque on the back of each magic lantern. Once it got dark it was difficult for cameras to pick up the QR code. This proved more difficult on the first night when the problem was first encountered. However, the problem was easily rectified by downloading the full soundcloud file or lighting the QR codes. On the second night we provided the QR code at the start of the trail for everyone to access the Soundcloud playlist.

"It was a shame the QR codes didn't work on the night without shining torches onto them but actually it got people talking to each other and sharing lights, how to get onto SoundCloud etc which they might not have done if they'd worked perfectly!"

Exploring Macclesfield

Our audiences enjoyed exploring the town at night-time; the nooks and crannies and places, perhaps not seen before (this was definitely the case at King Edward St Chapel - most audiences had never visited the chapel!). Our audiences felt safe in the town centre during the evening and felt that the event was well organised.



"Really enjoyed hunting down the little ginnels and nooks and crannies, music was brilliant too - we brought a mini speaker with us and danced all the way home with the kids, just lovely."

"I saw the Town centre in a completely different light, discovering parts I'd never noticed before and some parts I'd never even seen."

"The event was engaging for children and a nice way to enjoy a nocturnal walk around the town (despite the weather!)"

"It felt well patrolled and safe and was very enjoyable. It encouraged me to explore parts of Macclesfield I didn't know."

Timing of the event (time of year and time of day)...

Audiences commented on December being a busy time, with other events going on in the town and that perhaps an event in the New Year/January would be better.

“Really enjoyed it, thanks for doing it. I think it would be good in Jan/Feb - Nov/Dec are so full of Xmas activities & we need something fun in the dark evenings later in Winter. Just a thought!”

“Loved the event but I felt there was a lot else going on at the same time - maybe nice to plan something for January?”

“The 6 year old and the 3.5 yr old enjoyed it thoroughly. The 6pm time slot was good for them, not too late.”

Impact of events like this...

We asked three questions focused around how cultural events can affect perceptions of our high street and town, helping us and our partners understand how cultural events like LIT, can support the reopening and recovery of our town centre.

Our questions were:

Activities and events like this...(how much do you agree)

- Are what makes living in Macclesfield good
- Make me more proud of the high street
- Make me think of the high street as a place I can experience culture and arts

Our respondents either strongly agreed (66%) or agreed (34%) that events like LIT's *Magic Lanterns*, are what makes living in Macclesfield good. This was a strong and positive response, reflecting a sense that local people find events such as this one enriching.

Three quarters of our respondents either strongly agreed (29%) or agreed (45%) that events like LIT's *Magic Lanterns*, makes them more proud of the high street. 26% neither agreed nor disagreed. This was a more equivocal response; perhaps respondents were less able to connect the event to a sense of pride in the high street.

Our respondents either strongly agreed (53%) or agreed (38%) that events like LIT's *Magic Lanterns*, make them think of the high street as a place they can experience culture and the arts. The responses to this question demonstrate that local people are open to their High Street offering more than retail and hospitality showing that there is an argument for programming more arts and cultural activities in the town centre to draw people in.

What have we've learnt...

In conclusion, the Magic Lantern trail event was really well received, in particular by families and offered an opportunity for them to 'reclaim' the town centre on a Friday and Saturday night. Our audiences enjoy discovering new places and experiencing culture as a purpose to visit the town centre. Regular events such as LIT, enrich our audiences experience of living in Macclesfield and give another reason for visiting the town centre - which can support the reopening and recovery of Macclesfield, at a time when we know footfall is down.

When planning for 2022/23, we will consider holding events of this nature in the quieter winter months (perhaps Jan/Feb), to avoid cannibalising other town centre activities. However, whenever outdoor events are being considered, the weather will always remain a factor to take into consideration.

CONCLUSION

LIT 2020 was delivered under unprecedented circumstances, against the backdrop of a global pandemic which shut down the country's arts and cultural activities and the livelihoods of those affected. All plans were curtailed and usual funding streams ended. Nevertheless, we were able to deliver a scaled-down programme via online streaming platforms of workshops and performances which reached more than 1,000 people in Macclesfield, in different parts of the country and from further afield. In 2020, online delivery was a hitherto under-used method of delivering arts and culture and we had to learn fast; however, our programme was professionally delivered and popular.

Lockdown restrictions meant that we were unable to develop LIT in the way we would have liked, building on the successes of 2019. We were also unable to evaluate in detail the effect of the online delivery; methods of online evaluation being much harder to disseminate. We hope that arts and culture returns to a more stable footing in 2022, and we're able to plan ahead with confidence. We also hope that funders will be there to support this move back to an ambitious programme of stories and light works.

Despite being postponed for more than 12 months, *Magic Lanterns* was delivered under Cheshire East COVID audience restrictions, which made a bigger event impossible. The weather on the second night also affected audience figures. However, feedback from audiences was demonstrably positive and we can build on this for 2022.

We always endeavour to work with local artists to help develop and support their practice, whilst raising their ambition and their profile. We can depend on local creatives with a national profile and track record of excellence to deliver outstanding work; however, with less experienced local creatives, more time is needed to nurture and oversee in order that their work is of the standard we, our partners and our audiences would expect. In 2019, partnering Fabric Lenny with local artists to develop their practice worked well. In 2020 local artists left to deliver without this support worked less well. In any future programme we will therefore identify experienced artists to work alongside those with less experience to help create and deliver work of the highest standard.

We hope that LIT brought some light to Macclesfield in 2020, despite the challenging circumstances.