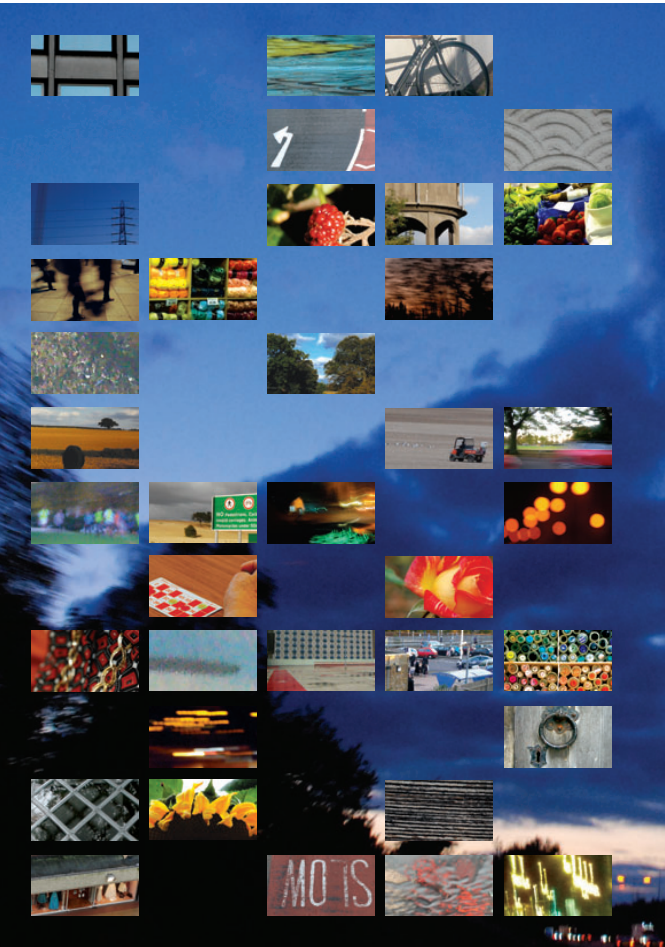


Alice Angus and Orlagh Woods



With Our Ears to the Ground

In mid 2009 we (arts organisation Proboscis) travelled around Hertfordshire meeting over 280 people from Watford, Stevenage, North Hertfordshire and Broxbourne. We set out on an autumn day to drive up through Cheshunt, Broxbourne and Hoddesdon, over to Ware and Stevenage then Letchworth, up to Ashwell, down to Pilton, Hitchin across to Watford and back to London. It was a journey through old and new; market towns, new towns, agricultural land and urban centres. In the weeks that followed we put our ears to the ground and got to know Hertfordshire and its communities through the stories of its people. We researched urban centres, towns and villages and travelled through the county in cars, trains, by cycle and on foot, on narrow lanes and motorways.

We talked to people in groups, individually, inside, outside, in pubs, cafes, community centres, libraries, at home and at work. We gathered their opinions and experiences of their communities, what it's like living in their neighbourhoods and what gives them a sense of belonging. These experiences, whilst locally specific, are relevant to Hertfordshire as a whole. We met people between the ages of 5 and 94, from many cultures and backgrounds, from small organisations, schools, community groups, urban centres and rural villages. We captured their views through informal conversations on the street, hosting a stall at the local market and visiting community groups. We ran a creative workshop with a youth group and collected stories through other activities and events. From this research emerged the six themes of Transport, Movement, Listening, Community, Getting Involved and Perceptions, which now form the basis for the project publications.

Thanks

The text in this book is quoted or paraphrased from conversations with people in Hertfordshire between August and November 2009. We would like to thank all those who participated in With Our Ears to the Ground especially to the people of Hertfordshire who were so welcoming and gave their time so generously. Thank you to all on this list, to anyone not included here and to the people we spoke to informally along the way.

Peppina Albanese, Age Concern Hertfordshire; Broxbourne Station commuters; Council for Voluntary Service Broxbourne and East Herts; Chells Manor Youth Club; Douglas Drive Day Centre; Great Ashby Community Centre; residents of Halfhide Lane Caravan Park (A Hertfordshire County Council Gypsy site); Kevin Harris; Hertfordshire Music Service; Rickyard Community Bar; North Herts College Supported Learners Group; Hoddesdon Rotary Club; Kimpton Branch Working Party; Leavesden Green Community Group; North Herts Community Development Officers and Wendy Tooker; North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum; people outside Stevenage Job Centre; Pilton Joycar; The Priory School Hitchin; Suzanne Rider; Sophie Rosson; Michael Siewniak and the Polish Community; Stevenage Community Development Officers; Stevenage In-town Training; Kristy Thakur; Watford Market; Watford Muslim Women's Organisation; Watford Skate Park; Bowes Lyon Young Parents To Be Group. We'd also like to thank National Express at Broxbourne Station and Tony Beckwith, Adriana Marques and Ali Winstanley of Haring Woods Studio for their support.

To find out more or share your thoughts about your community see:
<http://withourearstothe-ground.wordpress.com>
Tel: Hertfordshire County Council Strategic Partnerships Unit: 01992 556709
For information on volunteering in Hertfordshire see www.volunteeringherts.org

Credits

With Our Ears to the Ground was created and published by Proboscis 2009
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The photographs in this book are of Hertfordshire during 2009.
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With Our Ears to the Ground is a Perception Area project facilitated by Green Heart Partnership in collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council. With Our Ears to the Ground was supported by a partnership of representatives from Hertfordshire County Council, Watford Borough Council, North Hertfordshire District Council, Stevenage Borough Council and Broxbourne Council. Green Heart Partnership is an Arts Council England. East sponsored Arts Generate project funded by its partners: the eleven local authorities in Hertfordshire and Arts Council England. East. GHP is a strategic partnership project managed by Haring Woods Studio that aims to achieve growth and capacity across the arts and environment sectors to creatively and collaboratively address government priorities. www.greenheartpartnership.org

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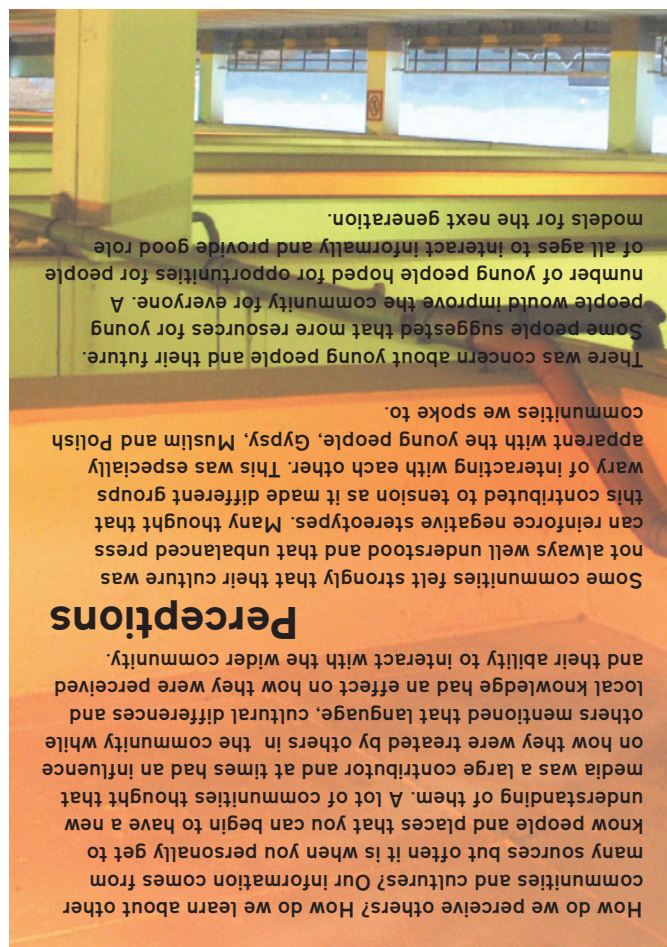
There is a point where you have to say, "No you are behaving unreasonable, the kids are behaving themselves. Yes, you may not like what they are doing but that's not a reason for stopping them."

employer knows this address.

The young people have problems getting a job if the size, they're frightened to say where they're from. Why should we move?... When children grow up on a gypsy Why should they be putting one race of people down? supposed to be one of the richest countries in the world. then but laws have changed now. This is England. It's supposed to be one of the richest countries in the world.

This is 2009, 60 years ago, lots of people were put down then but laws have changed now. This is England. It's supposed to be one of the richest countries in the world. Why should they be putting one race of people down? Why should we move?... When children grow up on a gypsy site, they're frightened to say where they're from. The young people have problems getting a job if the employer knows this address.

Perceptions



There was concern about young people and their future. Some people suggested that more resources for young people would improve the community for everyone. A number of young people hoped for opportunities for people of all ages to interact informally and provide good role models for the next generation.

Some communities felt strongly that their culture was not always well understood and that unbalanced press can reinforce negative stereotypes. Many thought that this contributed to tension as it made different groups wary of interacting with each other. This was especially apparent with the young people, Gypsy, Muslim and Polish communities we spoke to.

Perceptions

How do we perceive others? How do we learn about other communities and cultures? Our information comes from many sources but often it is when you personally get to know people and places that you can begin to have a new understanding of them. A lot of communities thought that media was a large contributor and at times had an influence on how they were treated by others in the community while others mentioned that language, cultural differences and local knowledge had an effect on how they were perceived and their ability to interact with the wider community.

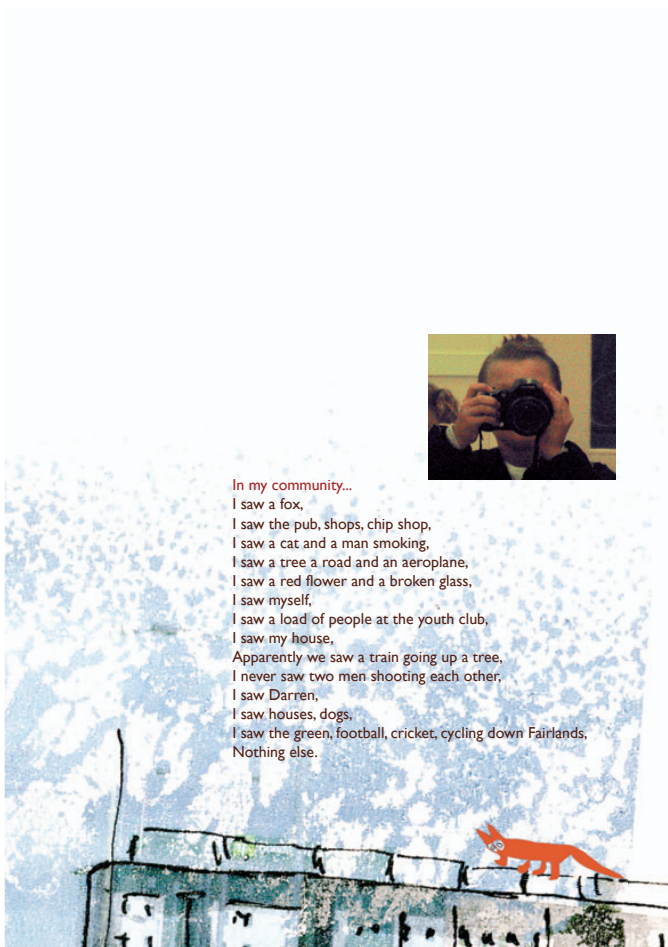
In all this we've taken Proboscis' anarchoeology approach, to informally and creatively excavate layers of meaning and understanding to get beneath the surface of some of Hertfordshire's communities.

Our enduring experience of this journey has been of the generosity of the people, the ambition of their ideas and the determination and commitment they devote to building their communities.

This book is one of 6 that are based on the limited edition publication printed to accompany the project. It draws together the multiple layers of ideas and experiences we found across different communities and it is designed to reflect those ideas and voices.

Alice Angus and Orlagh Woods, Proboscis 2009

With Our Ears to the Ground is a project by arts organisation Proboscis. It was commissioned by Green Heart Partnership with Hertfordshire County Council. It builds upon previous consultations, by Hertfordshire County Council, that used traditional surveys to find out how well people from different backgrounds get on with each other. This publication and the project research will be presented to the community, Council Members and Project Team to inform the Hertfordshire Forward Community Cohesion Strategy, equalities planning across the county, and to support the partners to build stronger communities where people feel valued, get along well together and feel they belong.



In my community...

I saw a fox,
I saw the pub, shops, chip shop,
I saw a cat and a man smoking,
I saw a tree a road and an aeroplane,
I saw a red flower and a broken glass,
I saw myself,
I saw a load of people at the youth club,
I saw my house,
Apparently we saw a train going up a tree,
I never saw two men shooting each other,
I saw Darren,
I saw houses, dogs,
I saw the green, football, cricket, cycling down Fairlands.
Nothing else.

