



Press release

Using Museums and Heritage to improve wellbeing

‘HOLLYTREES’ IN THE COMMUNITY’ is an exhibition of art in response to the museums of Colchester.

All the work in this exhibition has been created by members of ‘Art in the Community’; a Colchester-based arts in mental health group which has been meeting regularly at Hollytrees Museum, Colchester and using the education room there for the past year.

The group is open to all people experiencing mental health problems; it is facilitated by Lloyd Armstrong, from NEPFT (North Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust) and Clive Wakeford who is the Lead Artist.

Clive Wakeford (Lead Artist) said, “As lead artist this project has made the logistics of running the group far easier. We have realised the aspiration to run our workshops in a community environment and in partnership with an established organisation. The museum service has provided a welcoming and comfortable environment for the group which has provided stability and resulted in very good attendance.”

In recent years there has been an increase in the outreach and access work that museums support with communities. This aims to help break down the barriers that prevent people visiting and using museums.

The group have worked with John Pollard, Colchester and Ipswich Museums Mental Health Project Officer. John has worked in mental health day centres for 15 years and believes that this project has proved that regularly meeting in a mainstream community setting, enriched with our local heritage, can impact positively on wellbeing and be a liberating step forward from meeting in a traditional mental health environment.

There has also been some additional support from museum curators, Cat Newley and Sophie Stevens, by providing information and access to a range of fascinating museum collections to inspire the groups work.

Cllr. Nick Barlow Colchester Borough Council - Economic Development and Sustainability Portfolio Holder said “The council welcomes the use of our spaces to help break down barriers to accessing our services. The ‘Hollytrees

in the Community' exhibition shows the importance of mainstream organisations reaching out to community groups that experience exclusion. It also shows how engaging deeply with local heritage in a creative way can impact positively on mental wellbeing."

The exhibition is multimedia and includes drawings, paintings, prints, sculpture, and even some hand-made holly leaf paper. There are also quotes from participants which give the visitor an idea of the positive impact working in the museums service has had on people.

The work covers all of our three museums in Colchester. There are drawings by one artist, including one of a squirrel skeleton, which was the result of his particular interest in bodily structures and was inspired by a guided tour around our Natural History stores.

Another piece of work ('Family and Legacy') relates to the artist's personal history and was inspired by a number of displays in the museum.

Another artist looked into the myths behind the Dagenham Idol which materialise in his painting 'Between Thought and Memory'.

'Hester Loved the Rivalry of the Game' is a painting of one of the portraits in the museum, brought up to date with the sitter wearing a Colchester United football shirt. This came about through conversations with one of our curators and some individual research into the history of the person in the portrait.

Two untitled mono prints were inspired by a talk and tour on the subject of James Parnell, the Quaker martyr, who died in Colchester Castle.

The exhibition at Hollytrees runs until Sunday 15th April.
Open Tuesday to Saturday 10am -5pm, Sunday 11am to 5pm

Admission free