



THE ARTS



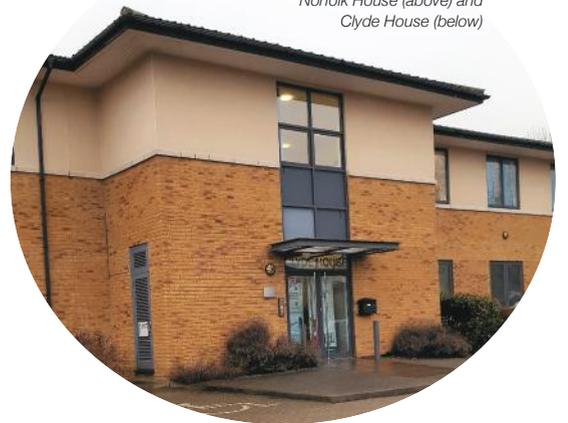
Review of 2016

JOHN BEST, CHAIR, ARTS GATEWAY MK

Our two homes throughout 2016:
Norfolk House (above) and
Clyde House (below)

I have written about a wide range of creative things during the year, about amazing people in MK, or about places that have something special to offer. Nearly all are outside my own organisation, **Arts Gateway MK**, so it's a privilege when I get to blow our own trumpet a bit in January, looking back over the year just finished. We may be successful, but we're also precarious and need to look ahead to what might happen next.

We've had a great year. We're not sure how old we are, but we think we're about 35, having started as **MK Arts Association** when Milton Keynes – 50 this year! – was just a teenager. We have no external funding safety-net, so must live by our wits, and our ability to offer something people appreciate. Over the last year we've started to build up our creative programme to sit alongside our **Arts Central** creative hubs. This is the next chapter in the heroic tale of a small and imperfectly formed charity, eager to make some noise. And like so many charities, we're almost entirely dependent on volunteers and helpers who choose to get involved. Keeps you young and keeps you happy.



Our creative hubs

For four years we've done very well by finding empty office buildings, converting them into creative workplaces and building up a community of artists and creatives, sparking off each other and collaborating. So far we've had five **Arts Central** spaces, and are currently in our third and fifth. At the beginning of 2016 we had just moved from a huge space above CMK station where we'd perched for two years, into one a third the size. And it was our only space, which was also unsettling. But we're still in Norfolk House one year

on and look like being there for a while yet. Last January we had an unexpected offer to take another two small buildings on the edge of Central MK and we needed no encouragement. One we knew we'd have for only a few weeks; the other, Clyde House, we still occupy 12 months on. But we suspect for not much longer...

Nourishing the family

Across our two creative hubs we have a community of over 60 artists and creatives, from a very wide spectrum of activity: we have painters

and artists, musicians, writers and actors, a couple of dressmakers and designers, any number of graphic designers and photographers, crafters, a man with a 3d printer, several people involved in film and video making, illustrators and several not-for-profit organisations busy making the world a better place. And they all get on, give or take the occasional creative outburst...

Our object with **Arts Central** has from the start been to design a creative hub where the unexpected might happen: designers would design, artists would art, musicians would make



Catering for vintage tastes at Norfolk House



Jumpin' jive while we had No 20





Just add creatives: the barn awaits

music, actors and singers would act and sing, crafters would craft and film-makers would film-make. Moreover they'd do stuff together, make new friends, tweet and social mediate about us. And that's pretty much what happens. Our spaces have a mix of workspace and performance space so we'll often put on our own events, or bring others in to do that. Norfolk House has a 120-seat cinema/theatre, and both spaces have a dance floor and meeting rooms. And we think every town should have one – or several – creative hubs. So, too, does the *Arts Council of England* who last year funded our project to bring similar outfits together across MK, Northampton, Bedford, Aylesbury and Luton, Wellingborough and Woburn, Buckingham and Bicester. *The Creative Workspace Network*, of which I have written in past Pulses, was one of our flagship projects for the year.

Our busiest year yet

Here's an illustrated snapshot of 2016: A quick tally suggests almost 4,000 people attended over 400 creative events at *Arts Central* premises. There were over 30 distinct types of activity, from theatre, cinema and performance, through six types of dance workshops, to training and video games. Here are some of the highlights. We really do try to offer something for everyone.

In January we moved into 20 Milburn Avenue and Clyde House, our fourth and fifth premises. *MK Community Learning* started regular watercolour workshops with us and we partnered with *Bedford Creative Arts* to deliver *Culture Challenge* to schools.

In February Dianna Moylan and company presented *A Little Night Music* at Arts Central Theatre, and MK Video Gaming Society started fortnightly sessions.

In March Anthony Lucas Smith, a founding trustee on his retirement, gave a valedictory lecture on complexity in art. We held our first Networking showcase of the year, at Norfolk House. Scott Dorwood started fortnightly *Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Writing* workshops.



Belal Al Asali family performed

In September in place of the quarterly Mingle we presented the third annual *Festival of Nations*, moved to be the opening event of *Milton Keynes Arts Week 2016*. Highlight was a thank-you

In April we launched the Arts Council funded sub-regional *Creative Workplace Network*, at the Hat Factory in Luton, after six months work led by Amy Waruszynski at Arts Central.

In May The Play's the Thing presented a very successful *Festival Of One-Act Plays* at Arts Central Theatre. Culture Challenge started offering paid vouchers for school arts projects. And we bade a sad farewell to Trustee David Flowers, after an extended illness.

In June we left 20 Milburn Avenue with a bang and a Mingle. Volunteer Joss Whittle single-handedly delivered an impressive mezzanine platform in Horncastle barn.

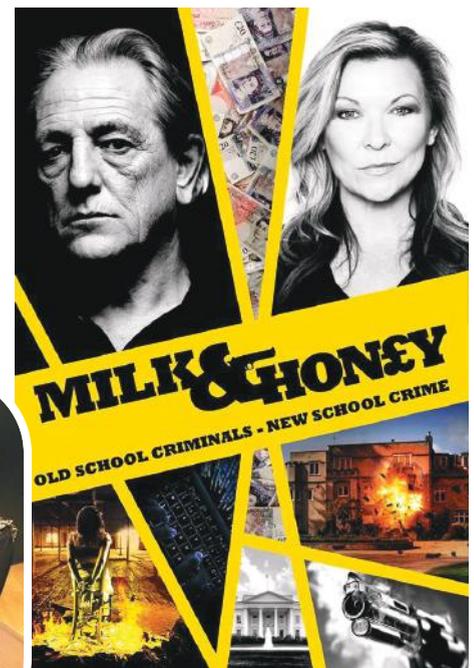
In July, MK's Festival month, *Môtus* delivered an amazing dance festival; *MK International Festival* returned for the fourth time. **Arts Central** was well represented in *MK Festival Fringe*. We trialled two MKAW events, *Art in Motion* and *Bodies as One*; as well as *Pandora Inclusive Arts* performing *That Was the Month That Was* at Arts Central Theatre; and *Mix3d Stitch*, led by Jane Charles, exhibiting at AC at Cornerstone.

In August filming started at Clyde House on Linda Dunscombe's feature film, *Milk & Honey*. Rachel Barnett, MK's writer in residence, delivered a creative writing workshop at Norfolk House.

performance by newly arrived Syrian refugee family, the Al Asalis. *MK Arts Week* featured over one hundred exhibiting artists and a dozen performances and events. Not bad for a first go.

In October *MK Arts Week* concluded, with an exhibition private view and our second successful *Art in Motion* performance. AC Book Club and AC Film Club both started up at Norfolk House, and we submitted our *Omnibus* project for creative use of the former CMK Bus Station (see below).

In November *Milk & Honey* completed their UK shooting schedule at Clyde House. We put on *Art with a Point of View*, an exhibition of pencil artist Leroy Phipps' work at *stadiummk*, including presentation by the artist of a portrait of Pete Winkelman. *Nanowrimo*, the National Novel Writing Month, held an MK launch event at Norfolk House.



Milk & Honey done shootin'

In December we closed the year with our December Networking Showcase and Annual Public Meeting, a rash of seasonal celebrations and exhibitions in place at Norfolk House (Louise Thomas) and AC at Cornerstone (Julia Roach) galleries.





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Even artworks need facebook



Concentration in Bodies as One

the station, using light art to present a strong cultural image. The building itself will gravitate around a cultural venue in the café, and a permanent space for exhibiting aspects of MK's exciting future. Upstairs will be a co-working space for creative entrepreneurs. The wide over-hanging roof will shelter a new outdoor event space, with a year-round programme of activity. Our most ambitious proposal is a village of converted shipping containers to provide independent retail outlets on the ground floor, and artist studios and workspace at first floor. The whole will provide a semi-enclosed new 'village' where the café and workers will spill out whenever events and weather called for it. We await the owner's final response but, at the time of writing, the signs are discouraging.

And finally...

2016 had been a really stimulating year for us, allowing us to settle down after a turbulent 2015. In 2017 we will continue to pursue ongoing projects around *Mótus*, *MK Arts Week*, *AC at Cornerstone*, *Culture Challenge*, *Creative Workspace Network* and no doubt a big premises project or two. We aim to develop a significant role within MK's creative infrastructure, as the city delivers its plans for MK's 50th birthday celebrations and – who knows – a possible walk-on part in the *European Capital of Culture 2023*.

And we can find ourselves on our very own AC Cute Maps, thanks to Sheree Willis at www.cutemaps.co.uk

For those who *really* want to know where we are, you can sign up on www.artsgatewaymk.org.uk, email me at john.best@artsgatewaymk.org.uk or call the office on 01908 241122. We'd like to hear from you, wherever you're based. ■

A year of exhibitions

Visual artists are the most numerous creative group within **Arts Central**; our major creative project, *MK Arts Week*, is directly designed to support and connect visual arts; and we have a vigorous programme of presenting exhibitions of art.

Each month I have highlighted the resident exhibitions presented at Arts Central gallery at Norfolk House: Life Drawing in March; Wendy Elliott in May; MK Arts Week in September; Josh Whittle in October; and Louise Thomas in December. We have also had a great year-round programme at AC at Cornerstone, our collaboration with Cornerstone Church. We have presented 11 separate exhibitions there, including those coinciding with *Bucks Open Studios*, *MK Festival Fringe* and *MK Arts Week*. Several have had a focus on textiles, beading and craft work, reflecting curator Jane Charles' own background as a textile artist.

Body Painting

A visual art genre newly on our radar, body painting has around a dozen artists in and around MK working nationally or internationally, and a network of models, designers and promoters with an interest in seeing more recognition in MK. We presented face-painting and body art at a 2014 event in Station House but this year have delivered

three body art events, all featuring artists Sophia Tyler Ghory and Alison Bessant: our networking showcase in June, *Bodies as One* in July and again in September. The group plan to develop more events in 2017.

Proposals for the former CMK Bus Station

In October, after four months of planning and discussion, we submitted our proposals at the former bus station, close to our last premises at Station House, CMK. Our aim is for a major cultural flagship that will transform the cluttered arrival at



Cute Maps, above left: Clyde House, above right: Norfolk House, www.cutemaps.co.uk

