

**ARTISTS
MAKE
PUB SIGNS**

FOREWORD

Artists Make Pub Signs features over 20 artists, who have made pub signs based on the name of a pub of their choice. These original works, featuring famous, wonderful and bizarre names, are exhibited here at the Londonewcastle Project Space until 13th December. All of them donated, they are available to buy via silent auction, with money raised in support of Space In Between's ongoing programme, focused on commissioning and exhibiting work by artists at an important stage in the development of their careers.

Space In Between (SIB) started out in 2009 as a platform for emerging artists and has since developed an exciting programme and a reputation for exhibiting critically engaging artwork. This programme needs funding and as a small-scale commissioning organisation we have to find new and inventive ways to raise those funds.

All the artists who have donated work to ARTISTS MAKE PUB SIGNS openly acknowledge the value of organisations that nurture the careers of emerging artists. Their support of 'nursery' organisations like Space In Between is highly valued and hugely generous.

SIB would also like to acknowledge the contributions by historian and author Dr Paul Jennings and Eastside Project's Elinor Morgan. Their texts on both the history of the pub and the funding cuts to arts organisations firmly place ARTISTS MAKE PUB SIGNS in a context and make clear its purpose.

SIB are awesome!

SIB open permanent gallery space
on Andrews Road, E8

SIB awarded Arts Council
development funding

THE ENGLISH PUB

Paul Jennings

The English pub is often portrayed as a unique institution, not least to foreign visitors by the tourism industry, but like many institutions it has in fact been viewed in different ways and has a rather more complex history than any idea of the timeless pub might suggest. In this short essay, I will try to outline at least something both of that history and the way it has been portrayed and how it has played a vital role in the lives of English people.

The public house evolved from three institutions: the inn, the tavern and the alehouse. The inn catered to travellers and has been much romanticised, notably by Dickens with his depiction of the fire blazing brightly and its welcome, an image which has contributed greatly to all later evocations of the pub. The tavern originally specialised in the sale of wine, as we find Samuel Pepys, for example, enjoying 'Ho Bryan' at the *Royal Oak Tavern* in Lombard Street. It was an urban drinking place, one which, like the coffee houses, was a site of business and of the literary and artistic life, as in eighteenth century London we encounter Boswell, Johnson, Goldsmith or Sir Joshua Reynolds in taverns like the *Mitre* in Fleet Street or the *Crown and Anchor* in the Strand. The alehouse was the basic everyday drinking place of the great mass of working people, although the better off, like Pepys, did sometimes frequent them, as did artists like George Morland, who portrayed them on canvas and painted their signs and made the *Plough* at Kensal Green one of his locals. Painting signs were commissions which artists often undertook, notably Hogarth for the *Man Loaded with Mischief* in Oxford Street. Over the course of the eighteenth century the term public house came to be applied to all three places, as the distinctions between them became blurred. In the nineteenth century the coaching inn was made redundant by the development of the railways, although

a few splendid examples survive, like the *George* in Southwark or another *George* at Stamford, Lincolnshire. The tavern became indistinguishable from the generality of public houses, although the word has been retained and also contributes to the evocation of the pub as a historic institution. More generally, the pub now became a more purely working-class drinking place, a process helped along by the establishment from 1830 of beer houses, pubs permitted by law just to sell beer. Many of these places were small, back-street premises in towns or villages. But the Victorian 'pub', as it was now coming to be called from around the middle of the century, was to become synonymous with the so called gin-palace style, typified by shining woodwork, polished tiles, huge mirrors, decorated glass and gaslight. As with the inn, a few fine examples have survived, like the *Princess Louise* in Holborn or the *Argyll*, just off Oxford Circus. For some, like George Orwell, famously creating his favourite pub, the *Moon Under Water*, or architectural historian Mark Girouard, the pub was Victorian. Although to many Victorians themselves, it was an anathema, from the thousands of supporters of temperance who waged unrelenting war on the evils of drink to devotees of the old inns and the coaching days, who similarly saw in the flaring gin palace only drunkenness and degradation. Certainly pubs have had, and indeed still have, their negative aspects, although to a much lesser extent than their Victorian forebears.

THE HUNGRY HALLS

But they have meant so much more than that. They have been vibrant social centres, providing a venue for such as debating clubs, friendly societies and trades unions; sites for musical entertainment of all kinds from the 'free and easies' of amateur and professional talent to fledgling music halls; places for all kinds of games, from the familiar darts and dominoes to the now less well-known skittles or quoits; and the headquarters of sporting clubs for everything from cricket and football to cycling and angling.

Much of this kind of activity has indeed declined over the course of the twentieth century, as has the institution as a whole, not least in numbers, falling as they have been since as far back as 1869, when those beer houses were returned to the control of licensing magistrates. This is a decline with many causes, rooted in changes in standards of housing and living, which led to a more home-centred lifestyle but where too an ever-widening range of leisure pursuits, from organised sport to music hall and the cinema, competed with the pub. But it is in the twentieth century that the pub came to be idealised by some as a good and peculiarly English thing. This drew alike on the evocations both of the inn and tavern and of the gin palace. The latter had become much more acceptable now that levels of drinking and drunkenness had fallen so much from their Victorian and earlier excess. It is significant that the terms 'local' and 'regular', conveying the idea of the pub as a community centre or hub, to use a more recent phrase, came into general use during the inter-war years. This ideal was fixed by the experience of the Second World War. Whereas in the First,

drink and the pub had been viewed as a grave threat to the war effort, in the Second they came to be seen as good for morale, and the pub in particular the one place where, in the words of one friend to the pub in parliament: "after dark the collective heart of the nation could be seen and felt, beating resolute and strong."

It is this image of the local pub as a friendly, inclusive place, which has survived into modern times, despite continuing decline, which in recent years has seen an almost unprecedented number of pubs close, and contemporary concerns over binge drinking and public health. But it is an image that also no longer includes some of those former negative aspects, notably its functioning as a mostly male social centre at the expense of, and often excluding, women. Not that women were absent from the pub in former times, but they were always in a minority there and for many it had associations that were simply not respectable. Now women are much more a part of the pub world. And it is a world which, despite the undoubted long-term decline and continuing difficulties, from the recent recession to the preference for drinking (more cheaply) at home, continues to have life in it. Pubs still put on live music and host games, even if they are on a big screen; they have become much more important than formerly as somewhere to have a meal; in many you can sit with a drink and read the papers just like customers in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries; and they remain, in the end, as they have always been, places simply to meet other people and talk.

Elinor Morgan

OF 2030

Since 2010 cuts at all levels, to education and public funding for the arts have threatened – and in some cases closed – arts organisations, put pressure on galleries to deliver more for less, given more power to the market and made it harder to be an artist. This Autumn I asked a group of cultural figures and commentators to join me in a discussion concerning the importance of small-scale galleries and the commissioning of new work. The following text is a short excerpt from our conversation.

Elinor Morgan: Cuts to arts funding over the past three years have led many to question how highly culture is valued in the UK. Do we face a situation where politicians don't value the arts?

Stuart Hall: That is finished, finished . . . There's no respect for that. Cultural life is not an area of serious investment over a long period of time.

Melvin Bragg: It's really odd. You never see politicians at the theatre or in art galleries. I have been trying to get a debate going in parliament about the recent local government cuts to arts funding. Cities are suffering because they have been building themselves around the arts – Glasgow and Liverpool both did. It's a massive issue.

Dave Beech: In education what is noteworthy about the second neoliberal attack on public funding is its asymmetry. Funding for arts and humanities courses is affected a great deal more than that for science, technology, engineering and maths degrees.

EM: Could anyone contextualise the recent cuts within a broader political agenda?

Patricia Bickers: There is a tendency to think that the cuts happened in a shambolic way – that the arts are a sort of add-on to all of Tory economic policy, or government economic policy. But, as Dave recently pointed out, this has been a long-term agenda that has finally been fulfilled with the unexpected help of Tony Blair, a New Labour Prime Minister, but that was originally laid down by Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher who didn't quite have the guts to go through with it.

SH: Britain is drawing the horns in more and more around little England and this is not just about the arts; there will be a period of increasing racism, because this is not a climate which encourages openness to new experience. It's a very defensive climate which sees any kind of difference as a fundamental threat to the whole history of British culture.

EM: What will the impact of these cuts be?

Elizabeth Price: Arts and humanities will become the subjects of the privileged. Individual talent or ambition will be unfulfilled

and we'll end up with a national artistic voice that is homogenous in terms of class and social background – an incredibly depressing prospect .

EM: Maria Miller has been fiercely criticised for – in her words – 'demanding that the arts promote their economic value'. One of the problems that culture has faced is how to demonstrate value (which itself is a contested term) and the visual arts seem to particularly struggle to articulate their importance. Perhaps this is because it is an art form that is often about experience and non-linguistic communication? David, is it possible to make a case for supporting the arts without thinking about their economic impact?

Dr Dave O'Brien: Well, the cultural sector faces the conundrum of proving its value in a way that can be understood by decision-makers in a cooler economic climate. It is now not enough for arts and culture to resort to claiming to be a special case compared with other government sectors. Since the 1980s the value of the cultural sector has been demonstrated through the lens of 'impact', whether economic or social. However, in recent years there has been recognition, both within central government and in parts of the publically funded cultural sector, of the need to more clearly articulate the value of culture using methods which fit in with central government's decision-making. Thus the cultural sector will need to use the tools and concepts of economics to fully state their benefits in the prevailing language of policy appraisal and evaluation.

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt: The Common Practice group I worked with in 2012 discussed the inherent disadvantage faced by the small-scale sector in a system where metrics (centred on attendance figures and shifting definitions of external income) that are more appropriate to large organisations are used to assess the operation of all arts organisations.

EM: Maybe we should talk more about the problems faced by smaller organisations? It seems to me that Tate will be fine – it has such a strong 'brand' and relationships with corporate supporters and individuals – it is the small and medium-sized galleries and commissioning bodies that will start to disappear. Nick, did you

want to say something about this?

Sir Nicholas Serrota: Yes, Tate relies on being part of a network of organisations. My concern is that the nurseries that nurture the artists that we work with will disappear, with long-term consequences for culture in the UK and our reputation abroad.

EM: I have been surprised to hear recently of organisations that I consider leaders within the sector having to ask the artists they are working with to apply for funding to complete projects. Really, are we talking about all organisations that are not (to coin Hito Steyerl's term) the 'flagship stores' of culture facing hard times?

RGB: There is a problematic perception that small arts organisations form a natural and fitting part of a continuum of development for artists and artworks. This implies a linear progression up the rungs of a ladder – the unidirectional nature of which not only construes bigger as better but, arguably, also precludes more established artists from working with smaller organisations 'lower' down the scale. The people I work with do not think this perception is useful or that it rings true.

EM: So why are these smaller organisations so important? Are we talking about the role of commissioning organisations here too? You seem to be saying Nick, and I agree, that there is a question about what will feed our art behemoths in the future?

SNS: Yes, I think there is. From my perspective the last few years have been worrying.

RGB: The strength of small visual arts organisations lies in their diversity and risk-taking, while their particularity could be seen to reside in the depth of, and commitment to, practices extending over longer periods of time. Viewed in these terms, their value manifests itself in a long-term contribution to the sector, without which larger-scale organisations could not thrive. Perhaps recognition of this dynamic connection could be encouraged among all of those who benefit from the work of smaller organisations.

EP: I haven't had many big shows. If you look at my CV, just about everything I have done has come through a publicly funded institution; it is a career entirely built on that sort of support. I would never have been able to develop my work to the same point without the generous opportunities I've had through education and public funding.

EM: My fear is that with a poorer public sector the market will become more powerful. Of course the borders between public and commercial are blurry and the visual arts in the UK have for a long time been backed by a mixed economy. The danger now, though, with commercial galleries filling the void of public funding, is that only those artists who are commercially viable will be able to find the resources to develop large scale works for public spaces and institutions. What we need then, are new models. The question is: what will they be?

A large, bold, white number '21' is centered on a solid black background. The '2' is on the left and the '1' is on the right, both rendered in a clean, sans-serif font.