

Research Framework Document

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Summary Sentence or Research Question:

Making with Common Clay: Exploring clay as a medium through which to engage with local people, histories and land.

Summary Statement:

The commons are the resources that we collectively own. This includes natural resources such as air, water and green spaces. Social creations, cultural institutions and public spaces can also be considered resources within our shared wealth. From material provenance to subject matter, Made in Common Clay considers this space, distinct from individual ownership.

I have been meeting with groups of local people that come together around things held in common; Brighton and Hove Archaeology society and Brighton museum, around a common local history; the Save Whitehawk Hill campaign, around locally cherished common land; and the Horse Hill Protection group, around care for the environmental safety of our collective future. Made in Common Clay includes work made both collaboratively with these groups and myself, drawing inspiration from my involvement.

Clay, formed through the weathering and erosion of rocks, is underfoot in most places we go. It is a common material in multiple senses of the word. I have been collecting it from river and stream banks in Sussex and Surrey. The story told by objects made in this material is therefore of the commons from origin to outcome.

Made in Common Clay considers clay as a medium through which to reflect on our collective human story, to cherish what we hold jointly in the present and to express what we want to actively protect for the common good of the future. Each of the outcomes considers the value of place through lived experience. It is when we prospect our collective resources for economic gain that we frack the land and sell parts of a cherished nature reserve for high rise development. As a continuum Made in Common Clay links an archaeology society, uncovering marks made in the land by past inhabitants, with the opposition to irrevocable human marks made through acidization, oil drilling and climate change.

Individual statements:

Brighton and Hove Archaeology society

Brighton and Hove Archaeology society has been excavating Rocky clump in Stanmer park since the 1990s, uncovering the story of an iron age settlement. My workshop with the society explored how working with clay in an archeological context, can connect us to makers and making of the past through haptic experience.

I made a collection of badges for the society in local clay, featuring the 'Sussex loop', a form of bronze age jewellery only found in Sussex. This gift to the society marked their sense of collective purpose and community.

Brighton Museum

I was invited by Brighton museum to lead clay sessions with young people from Whitehawk, inspired by their new archaeology gallery. Together we explored how working with clay could bring us closer to makers and making of the past through haptic experience. We experimented with mark making, as seen on objects in the gallery, and made 'artefacts' from our own lives.

The young participants experience the whole ceramic process from raw clay through a series of firings. This gave an understanding of how ceramic objects come to be in a museum. They were invited to come into the university to decorate their pieces. The project gave participants the space to be makers as well as receivers of material culture and their final objects will be displayed at the museum.

Whitehawk Hill

Whitehawk Hill Nature Reserve is an ancient grass land that overlooks Brighton. The nature reserve has been common land since before enclosure in 1882, after which it became a recreational common, 'for the inhabitants of Brighton'. This year local people were successful in stopping Brighton and Hove council's proposed high rise development on the hill. Inspired by the boundary stones around Whitehawk Hill I made a land marker in local clay. Made from 40 kg of local clay it's weight and presence marks the successful campaign and continuing communal legacy of the hill.

Horse Hill

Horse Hill in Horley, Surrey is a 10 acre patch of land on which UK Oil and Gas is seeking permission for twelve years of shale oil extraction. There are activists living in a collectively made camp, monitoring equipment being moved from the site. As a result of meeting these members of the Horse Hill protection group, I ran a workshop exploring

whether the clay itself could be a tool to raise awareness of this place and the threat it is under.

Participants were invited to make with clay dug next to the drilling site at Horse Hill. By placing what they had made onto a map of the area, with its clay deserts, rivers and streams, each person contributed to a collective contemplation of Horse Hill.

Key Words:

Community, collective making, common land, common resources, local clay, material provenance, local history, collective protest.

Research Methods:

My research consisted of local site visits and meeting different groups of people. This involved going on excavations with the local archaeology society as well as attending finds processing and lectures. Information about Horse Hill was gathered from online research, as well as speaking to people involved in the Protect Horse Hill campaign. This involved a number of visits to the protection camp.

Research into common land rights was gathered through literature, as well as attending talks and public meetings. This was also how I found information about the history of Whitehawk Hill and its current threats. Visits to Brighton museum led to inspiration for archaeology themed making. Meeting the young people involved in the project beforehand was also important to develop my plans for the workshops. Experimentation with found local materials was informed through reading.

Medium for Research:

Visual material from site visits was gathered through photography. I also recorded my responses through writing.

Research into local geology and public access areas were compiled into a series of maps. Information about local land, history and geology were recorded through writing.

Workshops were documented through photography, and through retrospective feedback from participants.

Material and Technical Investigation:

I learnt how to find, dig and refine local clay. Clay from each location was tested through a number of firings. This was developed in the making of the large boundary stone, through which I tested the limit of this local material. I incorporated found materials into the clay, including plants, rocks, earth and archeological finds.

I explored ways of combining writing and clay, including carving, sandblasting and inlay.

I developed my facilitation skills through teaching basic making techniques to different groups of people. Through experimentation I devised approachable and enjoyable ways of inviting groups of people to make with clay.

Key References Used:

Julia Rowntree and Duncan Hooson, *Clay in Common*. Axminster: Triarchy Press, 2018.

Digimaps (Ordnance survey and geological maps), <https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/>.

David Bollier: news and perspectives on the commons, <http://www.bollier.org/>.

David Bangs, *The Land of the Brighton Line: A Field Guide to the Middle Sussex and Southeast Surrey Weald*, 2018.

Miranda Forrest, *Natural Glazes: collecting and making*, 2013.

Timescale of work across the year:

First Term

- Site visits to different local areas with the intention of collecting clay
- Excavations with the archeology society
- Experimented with local clays and found materials
- Researched the history of Whitehawk Hill and met with the Save Whitehawk Hill Campaign
- Multiple visits to Horse hill

Second Term

- Workshop with Brighton and Hove Archaeology society
- Planned and completed paper work for project with Brighton museum
- First workshop with young people at Brighton museum
- Dug clay for final projects
- Workshop at Grand Parade with clay dug from Horse Hill
- Digging trip to Horse Hill with people met through first workshop
- Made badges for Brighton and Hove Archeology society.

Third Term

- Second workshop with young people from the museum project at Grand Parade (over the holiday)
- Dug and refined clay for the boundary stone (over the holiday)
- Made and remade the boundary stone (after cracks)

- Resolved supporting materials for display in the show

Identify potential professional contexts for your work:

As part of my project I was employed and paid by Brighton Museum as a freelance ceramic artist and have a written reference from the youth engagement worker at the museum. I intend to do more creative engagement work along these lines.

My mapping exercise with Friends of Whitehawk Hill was very well received and I have been asked to participate in a local community exhibition. As part of this I will be running another community mapping session. I am currently planning another workshop with clay from Horse Hill with a PHD student at Brighton University. In the future I intend to seek funding to facilitate socially engaged participatory making.

3D Outcomes:

Collection of Badges for Brighton and Hove archaeology society made from local clay

Fired pieces made by members of the archeology society

Boundary stone to mark Whitehawk Hill made from local clay

Map made by Friends of Whitehawk Hill

Collection of objects made by young participants as part of the archeology project with Brighton museum

Collection of objects made by participants in 'Making with common clay: Protecting Horse Hill'

Presentation & Display:

My final show will be organised into four different projects, each with a brief statement.

The badges will be displayed alongside portraits of members of the archeology society. Photographs from my workshop with the society will be displayed alongside a pot made by BHAS member John Skelton.

The boundary stone will be displayed alongside the map of Whitehawk Hill that was made in collaboration with Friends of Whitehawk Hill.

Objects made as part of 'Making with Common Clay: Protecting Horse Hill' will be displayed on a fabric map of the area, as they were in the workshop. There will be photographs of the workshop and site photos from Horse Hill.

At the final table visitors to the show will be invited to make with local clay. The table will be covered in a printed map of Brighton, onto which they will be invited to place their objects.

Ethical considerations

Will you be asking anyone questions (interviews and or questionnaires)?

I received written responses from staff at Brighton museum, evaluating my role in the project. Young people involved were asked by the museum for brief written feedback, of which I have copies.

I also received written feedback from my workshop with the Archeology society.

I invited members of the Save Whitehawk Hill campaign to add their memories and stories to a map of Whitehawk.

Will you ask people to test or physically evaluate your work for you?

No

Do you intend to run a workshop that involves a group of people?

I ran two workshops with young people as part of my project with Brighton museum, one at the museum and one at the University of Brighton. Risk assessments were completed for both of these sessions and given to the museum and university.

I ran a drop- in clay workshop at Grand Parade campus as part of a series of public events organised by the gallery.

Do you intend photographing, videoing or sound recording anyone?

I received signed consent to photograph young people as part of my workshops with the museum (these were signed by parents if they were under 18).

I received written consent to include photographs of members of the archeology society in my show display

Does your work involve children?

Young people, aged thirteen to eighteen, participated in my project with Brighton museum.

BA(hons) Dissertation Title / MDes Essay Titles:

'The museum as a site for contemporary making: how the act of making can engage museum visitors'.