**The Hatters**

*Luton Town Football Club was founded in 1885 and nicknamed* The Hatters *because of Luton’s historic connection with the hat making trade, prominent in the town since the 17th century. The club’s nickname was originally* The Straw Plaiters *but was replaced by The Hatters when straw plaiting as an occupation declined.*

**Our lead artist for this project was Valerie Corona. Valerie is an artisan hat maker and milliner, based in Luton and working from her studio in one of the oldest hat factories left in the UK.**

Working with a range of community groups affiliated with the club, Valerie held the project workshops at her studio in the Walter Wright Ltd Hat Factory in Luton. To gain a sense of place, proprietor Philip Wright gave a talk about the history of the hat making trade, followed by a tour of the factory, demonstrating the different stages of modern hat construction and giving a personal insight into how the family hat company is linked to the football club through Philip’s grandfather, who was for a time the Chairman.

Participants took part in straw boater making workshops with Valerie where, after choosing their straw, they watched their hat being made in front of them on an aluminium block in the blocking room. Back in the studio, they worked on their own hat, sewing in a ribbon head fitting, a wire and finishing the edge of the brim before starting to decorate their hat. During the project, two of Luton Town’s football first team players came to the hat factory for a tour and to discuss the project and its links with the local club. The project has been a unique opportunity to pass on the Luton heritage of hat making to the local community.

Valerie’s commission combines traditional Luton hat making with inspirations from Luton Town Football Club. She has used the facilities of the traditional hat making machinery within the Walter Wright Ltd Victorian Hat Factory to create a piece from traditional sewn straw plait. The shape chosen was crafted partly using a block and then by hand to form a modern slant on a “boater”. The final hat uses ombré colours to represent the ever changing fortunes of the football industry combined with 11 white jewels with green centres to represent the 11 players on the pitch, with a blue peacock feather as part of the trim.
The Glaziers

Crystal Palace Football Club, originally nicknamed The Glaziers, was founded in 1905 at the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition building.

Our lead artist for this project was Michelle Dawson. A glass artist with many years of professional experience, Michelle has carried out many commissions for cathedrals, churches, hospitals and private houses.

This project took place at the Crystal Palace Study Centre, supported by CEO Susan Jackson. Working with club supporters, season ticket holders and people from the local community, Michelle explained the processes used in stained glass and worked with the participating groups in a series of workshops to create souvenir panels. Art assistant Leila Hill supported Michelle in running the workshops. To get the ideas flowing Ian King, Crystal Palace club historian, presented a history of the club and its local links to craft through a talk on The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition of 1851. Ian’s display of historical artefacts and literature provided a rich visual source for the group to be inspired by.

The participants selected their imagery from the club’s artefacts and photographs and worked on collages and montage designs. From here the participants began the process of turning their paper designs into glass. Following demonstrations they were able to start translating their designs using technical drawings, selection of glass, cutting glass, plating imagery, leading up, soldering and finally cementing. They learnt about traditional and modern tools and processes and worked alongside each other to make a collection of unique and personal panels.

Michelle’s commissioned piece celebrates the unique identity of Crystal Palace Football Club and the connection between the club, its members and the craft of stained glass. She has used photographs to explore memory and visual history, combined with traditional techniques of making. Through visual research and speaking to supporters Michelle learnt about the players who were at one time ‘Glaziers’. She chose to work with photographs of Archie Needham (1881-1950), Johnny Byrne (1939 - 1999) and an image of the Great Exhibition of 1851. She worked in The Glaziers former colours of claret and pale blue whilst also incorporating the current club colours of red and blue and The Eagles, the club’s nickname since 1973. The final design was translated into glass using a mix of traditional and contemporary techniques including silkscreen printing and kiln firing while the coloured glass was cut and leaded up using medieval processes and tools.
Souvenirs from Home

A close relationship between football and crafts could be seen as implausible. The most popular sporting game in the world and activities such as textiles, pottery and stained glass are questionable companions. Nonetheless, they are firm, historic and formative companions as the football clubs evolved through traditional industries and employment particular to place, with these largely defined by the natural resources of the area and the accrued skills of the residents.

A good example of this relationship is Stoke City Football Club with their nickname The Potters. Stoke-on-Trent is closely associated with the ceramics industry as it became a notable centre of production in pre and post-industrial Britain and the wider world. The industry, and associated craft skills, grew in a location built literally on top of rich and accessible deposits of clay and coal, clay to make the wares and coal to fire it.

The wider audience development project Home Ground, which this exhibition celebrates, explores this relationship by connecting six clubs with six contemporary artists, club supporters and the community through craft participation projects closely related to the history and skills which made these places, products and football teams famous.

Home Ground has been three years in the making, with artist-led workshops and events taking place in art centres, museums and football clubs in the home towns of The Blades, The Potters, The Silkmen, The Saddlers, The Hatters and The Glaziers. Over 700 club supporters and members of the community, both young and old, have taken part in 50 arts participation workshops where, through creative activities, they have explored their towns’ heritage and history.

Souvenirs from Home celebrates the connection between tradition, contemporary craft and our six chosen football clubs. Our artists have used the story of the towns’ historic craft industries to connect people and places and build an understanding of the importance of craft in creating a distinctive sense of place, which in turn strengthens communities. The exhibition brings together the work realised by the project participants alongside specially commissioned pieces by each artist.

Devon Guild of Craftsmen would like to thank the clubs, artists, funders, partners, supporters and, especially, the participants without whom this project would not have been a success.

For more information about this project and its associated events please visit www.homegroundcraft.com
Participation