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www.wondersofweston.org

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INTRODUCTION

Wonders of Weston is a programme of remarkable and memorable artworks, part of the national Sea Change initiative (2008–2010), which aimed to support the revitalisation of British seaside towns. Launching on 29 October 2010, Wonders of Weston features artworks by artists Ruth Claxton, Tim Etchells, Lara Favaretto, Tania Kovats in association with landscape architects Grant Associates, architects raumlaborberlin and artist collective Wrights & Sites.

Each of the artists or collectives has responded to the specific characteristics of Weston-super-Mare, often drawn to existing architectural structures or gathering points such as the former Model Yacht Pond, Weston Market, the Railway Station and Town Quarry. The resulting programme features sculptures which transform viewing points out to sea, a kaleidoscopic temporary structure and a night-time luminescent phenomenon, which play on the carnival wonderment of the seaside, as well as a number of texts, illuminated, cast and etched, which encourage us to consider the seaside as a place of childhood memories, contemplation and anticipation.

The programme was accompanied by public nominations for the Seventh Wonder of Weston which included a hill fort, a mystic path, a theatre organ and Weston brass band. Nominations can be viewed at Wonders of Weston website (→ www.wondersofweston.org) along with video interviews with the artists and full information on visiting Weston-super-Mare.

Wonders of Weston has been produced by Situations, a public art commissioning and research programme at the University of the West of England, Bristol (→ www.situations.org.uk), in association with Field Art Projects, an arts consultancy operating in the public realm (→ www.fieldartprojects.com). The programme has been developed as part of the national Sea Change initiative (2008–2010), managed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE (1999–2011)) on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and is managed by North Somerset Council.

MAP OF WESTON-SUPER-MARE

TANIA KOVATS HOLM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
GRANT ASSOCIATES

Set within the re-designed landscaped gardens of Madeira Cove, the distinctive landmass of Steep Holm is created in miniature, drawing the viewer's attention to the encounter with landscape and scale.

LARA FAVARETTO

Without earth under foot

A remarkable night-time occurrence appears on the Marine Lake causeway which dissects the sea from this artificial lake.

TIM ETCHELLS

Shelter Piece

A text in fragmentary scenes, witnessed by the artist during a 24-hour period in Weston, is set here against the expansive view out to the Bristol Channel.

RUTH CLAXTON

And My Eyes Danced

A sculptural installation emerging from the former Model Yacht Pond shifts in appearance with the changing light and tide.

WRIGHTS & SITES

Everything you need to build a town is here

A constellation of signs throughout Weston. Start here to view the keystone sign or download a map of all signs at www.wondersofweston.org.

TIM ETCHELLS

Winter Piece

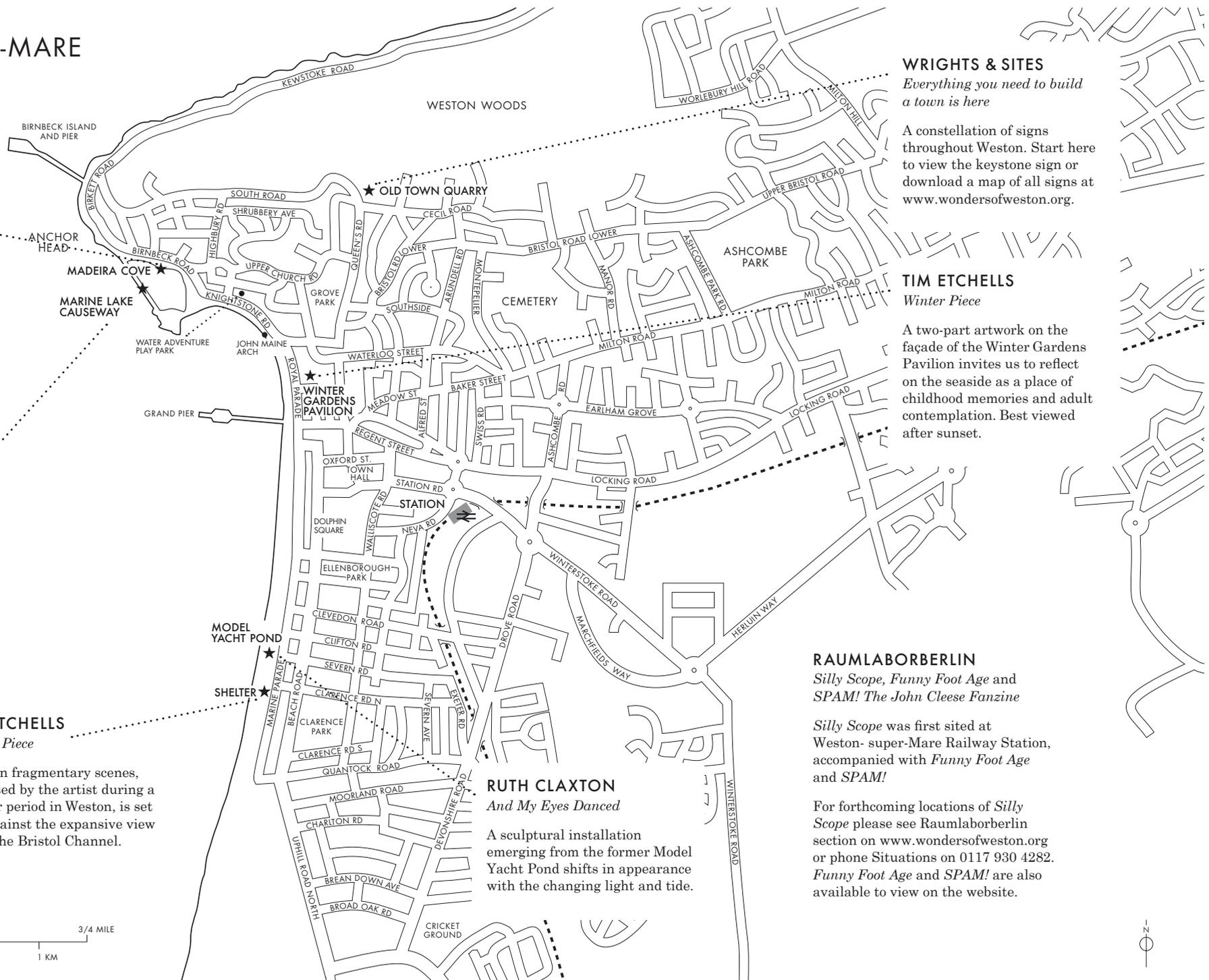
A two-part artwork on the façade of the Winter Gardens Pavilion invites us to reflect on the seaside as a place of childhood memories and adult contemplation. Best viewed after sunset.

RAUMLABORBERLIN

Silly Scope, Funny Foot Age and SPAM! The John Cleese Fanzine

Silly Scope was first sited at Weston- super-Mare Railway Station, accompanied with *Funny Foot Age* and *SPAM!*

For forthcoming locations of *Silly Scope* please see Raumlaborberlin section on www.wondersofweston.org or phone Situations on 0117 930 4282. *Funny Foot Age* and *SPAM!* are also available to view on the website.



SEEKING THE WONDERS OF WESTON

A curatorial perspective

Weston-super-Mare has been undergoing a process of regeneration for over 150 years. Brunel's Bristol & Exeter Railway reached the small settlement in 1841, transforming the townscape from a lone hotel and a couple of inns into a seaside resort for thousands of workers from the Midlands and south west England. The Improvement and Market Act of 1842 allowed for the first of a series of visionary redevelopment schemes which have fashioned the town ever since. It is this continuous process of dreaming a future Weston-super-Mare to which Wonders of Weston contributes.



Marine Lake Causeway under construction in 1920s

The opportunity to commission a permanent programme of public artworks as part of a broader regeneration programme is not one to be taken lightly. Some of the most ambitious and groundbreaking art projects of recent years have arguably taken considerable time to develop, allowing for commissioned artists to get under the skin of a place and to take their ideas for a walk – if necessary down a series of dead-ends – and for stakeholders, participants and residents to become a part of that process of imagining – all of which need a certain kind of slow burn process to develop. We had just 15 months.

Situations has focused in recent years on exploring exemplary models of public art commissioning ranging from projects which have been developed by a curator or artist who is embedded in specific places over long periods of time to 24-hour sculptures which capture the imagination of the public through unannounced interventions. Field Art Projects have always valued the importance of building good working relationships with clients and stakeholders by developing their knowledge of good practice in order that they can better respond to the commissioning process as well as recognising the value of temporary and more ephemeral commissions as part of an advocacy process. In all cases, the most groundbreaking and arresting works of art result from an understanding that places are not simply produced through hard landscaping or computer generated environments but through social interactions. From the beginning, we recognised from this research and our combined experience of producing art projects, that public artworks which respond to the layers of personal histories in existence and gather around them a new set of constituencies, whether short- or long-term, have the potential to make a more long-lasting contribution to the identity of a place rather than to remake place as if nothing existed prior to their arrival.

'The Dreaming City and the Power of Mass Imagination' was an initial impetus for our curatorial approach to Sea Change in Weston-super-Mare. This 2007 Demos report identified how the resurgence of cities and towns has become formulaic, suggesting, 'places need to open up to the mass imagination of their citizens', rather than subscribe to a 'cultural arms race', in which cities subscribe to generic, iconic buildings and centres to compete with other cities to attract inward investment and tourism. How could a public art programme open up that process of mass imagination in Weston-super-Mare? How could we move beyond a formulaic regeneration scheme to contribute something far more surprising and locally embedded?

Our brief was to 'connect and promote many of the town's existing cultural assets and activities', to encourage visitors to 'explore further, stay longer and return again by enticing them to places previously undiscovered' and, by association, to contribute to inward economic investment. Sea Change was committed to changing the

public perception of Weston-super-Mare in the long term. Our initial proposal to combine a cumulative series of temporary events with the gradual launch of longer-term artworks was adapted, given the specific parameters of the capital programme, so that the participatory and engagement ideas which we had developed in previous temporary projects could here be embedded within a longer-term, permanent programme for the town. But where to begin? What might be a suitably inspirational kicking off point for the commissioned artists beyond the aspirations of regeneration?



‘Weston-super-Mud’, as it is colloquially known, has a tidal rise second only in the world to the Canadian Bay of Fundy. The retreating sea exposes mud flats and a wide expanse of beach which can be treacherous to unsuspecting visitors. Though a thriving Victorian seaside resort, the town suffered from the decline in the seaside holiday in the late 20th century. There is a tendency in public art commissioning to indulge in the historical narratives of particular places to the detriment of its contemporary stories. In Weston, this was particularly tempting. In our initial research we fell upon the sepia-toned postcards of by-gone lazy days, replete with bandstands, bathing tents, the outdoor lido at the Tropicana and boating on the Marine Lake and Dezo Hoffman’s photographs of The Beatles in long bathing suits on Weston beach in 1963, with enthusiasm.

It was equally tempting to indulge in the kiss-me-quick cliché of the seaside resort. Weston will never be, nor would want to be, quaint. There are no Cath Kidston tea towels on sale here; no boutique hotels

nor jaunty beach huts. As recently celebrated in the Media, Weston-super-Mare is rather a living example of Britain’s glorious seaside kitsch which has been experiencing a popular revival. There are of course fish and chips, tattoo parlours, candy floss, a Grand Pier and a big wheel. But anyone who assumes Weston-super-Mare is to be understood ironically as a pastiche of seaside kitsch, misses the point.



We were intrigued by the potential of exploring Weston-super-Mare as a place of escape and wonder – with the word ‘Wonderland’ as the spark for our initial conversations. The town turns on the glitz and sparkle for the summer, and becomes dark and intriguing as the autumn storms roll across the front. It wears its best out ‘front’, whilst its inner town centre is rarely visited by day-trippers, masking some of its most intriguing qualities: buildings designed by master architect Hans Price are separated from their source of limestone – the Old Town Quarry – by just a few streets; North Somerset Museum nestling in a backstreet boasts a revolving display of individual’s personal collections and artifacts from the Grand Pier fire of 2008 including a cash register replete with melted money and a small door under a municipal car park leads to Weston Market – the town’s souk – Weston’s community of local traders.

Our selection of seven artists and architectural practices reflected a desire for the programme to encompass a broad range of creative approaches – from sculptural to performative, architectural to conceptual or text-based. In some cases, such as the invitation to Tania Kovats to work with landscape architects Grant Associates at

Madeira Cove, or the architectural competition to transform the Tourist Information Centre, those commissioned were invited to work at a specific location due to particular parameters of the funding offer. In other cases, such as the brief to raumlaborberlin to produce a mobile pavilion with partner Find Your Talent, there was a greater emphasis on the potential for the resulting work to engage with potential users.

Of course, as with any commissioning programme and particularly within a fragile economic climate, the development of the programme over the past year was beset by a number of challenges. The architectural competition for the Tourist Information Centre, which had resulted in three remarkable proposals in 2009, was cancelled, and Find Your Talent's funding was withdrawn just three months prior to the completion of raumlaborberlin's *Silly Scope*. Yet despite such challenges, the process, which involved considerable leaps of faith from the funders and commissioners, has resulted in a series of works which attest to the potential for a small town to boast artworks of international significance, but crucially which are locally-inspired.



Photo: John Arnold

Certainly one of the most inspirational aspects of the town for the artists has been the expansive view out onto Weston Bay. Tania Kovats, Tim Etchells and Ruth Claxton have all remarked on the awe-inspiring sense of quiet contemplation induced by this wide expanse of sea. Furthermore, it is the conjunction of that contemplation with the brassy reverie that accompanies the pier and entertainments that seems to give Weston the quality of wonder – as if being on the edge of the sea,

the edge of the coast and the land, gives the town, its residents and visitors permission to behave differently, to come in search of something outside the everyday.



Raumlaborberlin have caught this desire for escaping the mundane in their tribute to John Cleese through their production of *Silly Scope*, a Pythonesque version of the seaside hall of mirrors and *SPAM! The John Cleese fanzine*. The group mischievously weave a tenuous personal history around Cleese's brief connection to the town as a kind of decoy for their exploration of British humour. Their celebration of the Silly Walk and Hell's Grannies are, within the context of *Sea Change*, less a re-enactment of Python's Flying Circus than an inducement to be silly, to misbehave, to escape the rigidity of everyday life – perhaps what a trip to the seaside has always been about.

Similarly, Wrights & Sites describe their constellation of signs as prompts to action, rather than the final outcome in themselves. One imagines small and extraordinary actions happening in the coming years induced by the signs scattered across the town – from children constructing architectures with their food, to dens appearing in Weston Woods, and guests insisting on the particular room at the Grand Atlantic which affords the view of the hotel's shadow on the sand.

It was notable the extent to which almost every artist commissioned voiced a concern to avoid producing a monument. This concurs with our appreciation that just as places are not static, fixable things, public art is now understood as a variety of forms and approaches that engage with

the sites and situations of the public realm beyond the commemorative, static monument as exemplified in Rosalind Krauss' infamous description of public sculpture, in which she suggests, 'the logic of sculpture... [is] inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic, a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place.' The consideration of these works as wonders, as opposed to monuments or public sculptures, allowed the artists to propose the unexpected and might in turn, provide us with a new language for talking about how these works operate within a touristic context.



Steep Holm island as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, along with a number of remarkable existing landmarks, was proposed by residents as an existing Seventh Wonder of Weston through the public nominations on the project website. Described by Tania Kovats as an eye-catcher which punctuates the horizon, Steep Holm was an inspirational landmark for not only Kovats, but also for Ruth Claxton and the architects Studio Weave who based their 'Happy' design on a fictional tale of unrequited love between the island and the Tourist Information Centre! Claxton and Favaretto were also drawn to existing landmarks – the 1930s Model Yacht Pond and Marine Causeway respectively – which have been transformed through their sculptural interventions.

Whilst these works operate as destination points, Wrights & Sites' 41 signs disperse forming an entire work which operates virally through multiple 'nodes'. Each sign speaks of a moment in time in the past in which something extraordinary occurred to activate a new action in the present. Tim Etchells' *Shelter Piece* commemorates and articulates the desires, frustrations and silent gestures that accumulate to form a day in the life of Weston, whilst his neon work *Winter Piece* acts as a direct call to Weston resident and Weston tourist – from the beach ranger to the tea dancer – to consider the unremarkable as remarkable.

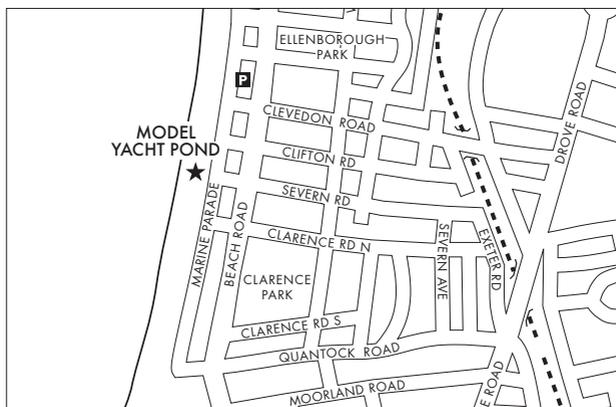
Wonders of Weston is launched intentionally off-season at the end of British Summer Time supporting our view, and that of the artists, that Weston will slowly reveal itself to those who chose to seek out its 'wonders'. Our intention has been to support those initial encounters through a celebratory launch, which involves some of the initial performative encounters proposed as Wonderland in 2009, a permanent website which will continue to host video interviews with the artists, a Wonder Hunt guide for young people and this extended guide along with responses from the Weston Wonderers – a group formed by Sophie Hope to offer independent responses to the programme over the coming months. *The Annotated Guide to the Wonders of Weston* will be published in 2011 by Book Works seeking to capture in more detail the process by which the artworks developed and most importantly, the responses and stories which they have generated. In our view, a public art programme which truly contributes to the ongoing redevelopment of a town must begin as the start of a conversation which celebrates the rich, often conflicting identities of a place, whilst also proposing something which might never have been imagined, had it not been for the involvement of artists.

- 1 Charlie Tims, Gerry Hassan, Melissa Mean, *The Dreaming City and the Power of Mass Imagination*, (Demos, 2007) also available to download at <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/thedreamingcity>.
- 2 See <http://www.norwegianwood.org/beatles/english/weston.html>
- 3 Find Your Talent was the Government's pilot cultural programme for all children and young people. Funding was withdrawn with immediate effect from this programme in summer 2010.
- 4 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, vol. 8 (MIT Press, Spring 1979), p. 33

RUTH CLAXTON
And My Eyes Danced



Model Yacht Pond, Marine Parade



Having been brought up near Morecambe Bay in north west England, artist Ruth Claxton first responded to the invitation to create a new work for Weston-Super-Mare by reflecting on the divergent characteristics of the seaside town. 'It is a space for fantasy where everything is slightly heightened and unreal,' she suggests, 'but only for a few months of the year. In season, the whole town seems to turn on and perform for the visitor and then settles back to being something slightly different when the tourists go home.'

In her gallery-based artworks, Claxton creates environments from clusters of coloured and mirrored surfaces encased in circular hoops which the audience may walk amongst. Repeated, framed glimpses of the viewer and reflections of the surrounding architecture create a mesmerising and disorientating experience.

In Weston, Claxton was drawn to the oval concrete form of the Model Yacht Pond, built in 1934, which lies on the southwest expanse of beach, near to the derelict Tropicana lido. At one remove from the frenetic activity surrounding Pier Square, the Weston Wheel and the Grand Pier, the Model Yacht Pond was originally one of two ponds on either side of the Grand Pier, which were designed to be filled naturally by the sea at high tide and used for sailing model boats.

Claxton's sculptural installation *And My Eyes Danced*, her first permanent public artwork, uses the Model Yacht Pond as a frame and comprises a dynamic series of overlapping rings in three formations with circular glass panels inserted into different sections. The materials used were specially selected by the artist to utilise the changing light, weather and water level and to withstand the harsh conditions of a marine environment.

Claxton worked with Marine Engineer, James Khreibani, and fabricator, Richard Cresswell, to develop this complex sculptural form. By laminating the glass discs with a dichroic interlayer Claxton has created a work which, despite its scale, resists becoming fixed – 'a slippery shapeshifter of a sculpture', she describes, 'which on different days will appear to rise above, float on and or sit beneath the surface of the water. Depending on your viewpoint and the prevailing conditions, the glass panels will shift in colour and surface, appearing

as a reflective, synthetic sunset; yellow one moment and offering a transparent, turquoise view through to the watery depths of the pond the next.'

Ruth Claxton was born in the UK in 1971 and lives and works in Birmingham, UK. Her most recent exhibitions include Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2010), John Hansard Gallery, Southampton (2010), Spike Island, Bristol (2009), Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2008), Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh (2008), Faye Fleming and Partner, Geneva (2009) and Gallery Loop, Seoul, Korea (2009).

→ www.ruthclaxton.com

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TIM ETHELLS

Winter Piece



Winter Gardens Pavilion, Royal Parade



Tim Etchells is fascinated by the ways in which language is constructed; how any text – from a few words to a seemingly endless story – follows rules and invokes associations. In each of his projects, whether a performance, gallery installation or neon work, there is an encounter or an event unfolds, and through his use of language, narratives are revealed, new stories constructed as others recede. The first of Etchells' public artworks for Weston-super-Mare is a two-part neon light work produced for the Winter Gardens Pavilion. Two statements 'The Things You Can't Remember' and 'The Things You Can't Forget' are illuminated in blue neon on the façade of the pavilion. The Winter Gardens and Pavilion on this site, formerly Roger's Field, was opened on 14th July 1927 and has acted as a venue for tea dances, competitions and weddings ever since, with the more recent addition of contemporary conference facilities.

Etchells' works in neon often take a narrative form or conceptual proposition and operate by placing unresolvable ideas or language propositions into public space. 'The work seems to make sense at first glance,' the artist suggests, 'but there's often something in its apparent simplicity which creates an undertow. These neon works are concerned with opening space for the viewer, with the emphasis on the addressee, rather than on the speaking subject implied by the work itself.'

With an eye to the town of Weston-super-Mare and acting as a sign over the Winter Gardens, *Winter Piece* points to these locations as places in which momentous and ordinary events collide. Etchells was also interested in the seaside as a space of contemplation. 'I was thinking about the strange state of contemplation, reflection and reverie that the sea invites for many people. In the context of daytrips or holidays, there is something about the desire to visit this huge, expansive natural thing, which becomes a cypher for all kinds of mental processes – memory, the ebb and flow of time and the possibilities of the future.'

The sign directly addresses the passer-by, you and I, as we make our way along the seafront, inviting us to consider the question of what stays with us from the past and what is forgotten over time. The things we can't remember and the things we can't forget embody experience. By situating each phrase aside the portico of the pavilion, the artist emphasises the binary division between these aspects of experience.

As the artist suggests though, 'the work gives a kind of impossible physical dimension or materiality to the complex, entangled processes of memory.' Presenting the viewer with a provocative artistic 'as if', the work, he suggests, 'both raises and questions the idea of a solid division between what is remembered and what is forgotten'.

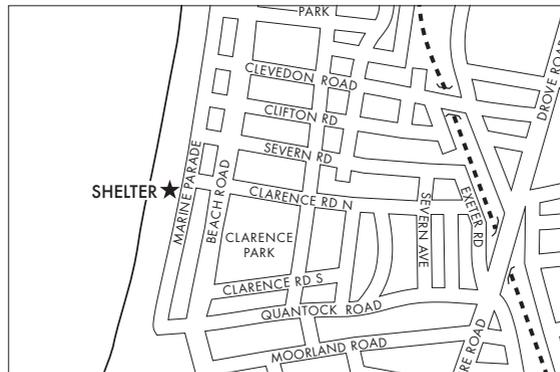
With thanks to:
The staff at the Winter Gardens

TIM ETHELLS

Shelter Piece



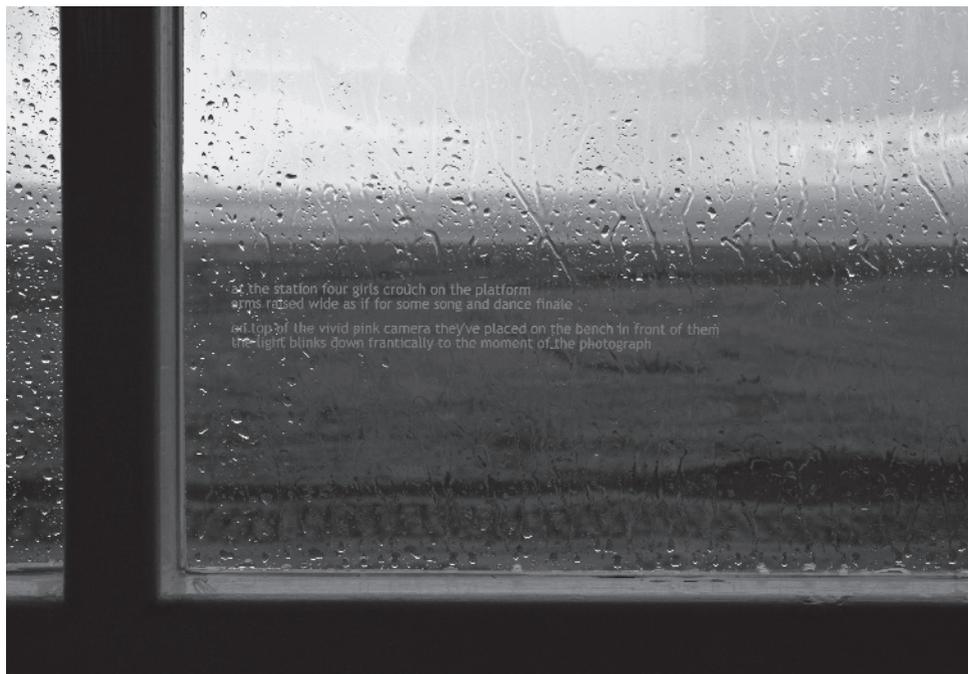
Shelter, Marine Parade



Etchells' second work for Weston-super-Mare is sited in a shelter on Marine Parade. The shelter was constructed in the early part of the 20th Century and differs substantially from the ornate series of shelters along Marine Parade which are Grade II listed. Etchells was particularly drawn to the formal grid structure of the windows on all three sides of the shelter and the simplicity of the architectural construction which faces onto an uninterrupted view of the expanse of Weston Bay. Etched into the glass windows of this shelter are a series of short text fragments, written by Etchells, which detail the scenes he observed on a summer's day spent in Weston-super-Mare in July 2010. The artist offers us glimpses of the seaside town which accumulate according to the viewer's movement around the interior of the shelter, rather than being read as a linear, narrative text.

Through his characteristically absorbing mode of description, Etchells indexes the everyday as it unfolded in one particular period of 24 hours – the convergence of frazzled exclamations, physical exertions and intimate exchanges, interruptions and heroic gestures – which together go some way to capture the conflictual qualities of the seaside. By choosing to draw in the viewer to read fragments of this text against the blank horizon of Weston Bay, Etchells creates a tension between our own visualisations of these characters and scenes and the landscape before us. In the depths of winter, sheltering from the driving snow on Weston's beachfront, for example, a viewer may be transported back to an imaginary summer's day, whilst during the summer, Etchells' *Shelter Piece* serves to heighten our sense of awareness to the multiple stories which are being played out across the town behind us as we sit in the heat or rain contemplating the wide expanse of sea.

Tim Etchells was born in the UK in 1962. He lives and works in Sheffield, UK. Etchells is perhaps best known as the artistic director of Forced Entertainment, a performance group founded in 1984, with whom he has directed, written, and occasionally performed in many critically acclaimed performance works at major festivals and theatres around the world. As an artist, Etchells has recently exhibited at Gasworks, London (2010), Goteborg International Biennale, Sweden



(2009), Bloomberg Space, London (2008), Art Sheffield, Sheffield (2008) and Manifesta 7, Rovereto, Italy (2008). He was also co-curator of Performing Sculpture, a section of the Tate Liverpool collection display DLA Piper Series: This is Sculpture, Liverpool (2009).

→ www.timetchells.com

With thanks to:

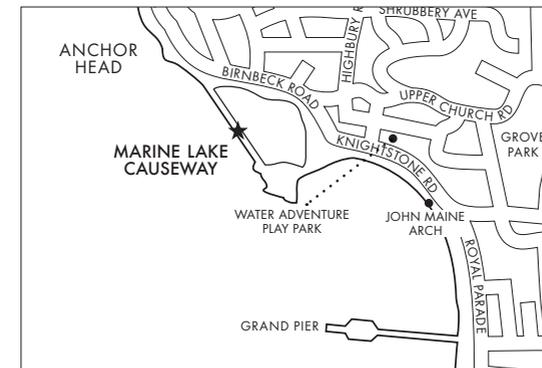
The Green Team, North Somerset Council
Ian Williams Ltd.

LARA FAVARETTO

Without earth under foot



Marine Lake Causeway



Whether firing confetti from a canon over an unsuspecting audience, suspending a Romany caravan in mid-air, or programming a small platoon of air compressors to blow party whistles, Lara Favaretto produces works that have a sense of surprise or mystery, often with a underlying sense of unease.

For Weston-super-Mare, Favaretto has worked with Studio di Architettura Alessandro Tosetti to produce a remarkable and distinct new sight for the Marine Lake. The Marine Lake Causeway was completed in 1929 along with the artificial lake here, by the 1930s this area boasted a bandstand, diving stage, slides, bathing tents and boating. Today, the causeway is a prominent feature which dissects the sea from the artificial lake at the northern end of the town close to the location of Tania Kovats' *HOLM* at Madeira Cove.

The artist has created a constellation of phosphorescent material along the causeway which dissects the sea from the Marine Lake. Phosphorescence is a process, often naturally occurring, through which energy is absorbed by a substance and slowly released over time in the form of a luminescent glow. Playing with the duration of a permanent artwork, Favaretto intervenes within the existing landscape of Marine Lake to produce an artwork which generates its own internal day and night; the scattering of phosphorescent material creating a sense of a constellation or 'milky way' as if the night sky is reflected along the causeway itself.

The artwork practically disappears by day and emerges as an extraordinary, temporary phenomenon by night. Inspired by Weston's dramatic tidal range, the artist has created a work which is also subject to the awesome force of the tidal range on this coastline which may often render the work itself invisible.

Favaretto has developed her artwork with Alessandro Tosetti of Architettura Alessandro Tosetti, an architecture practice based in Turin, Italy. Architettura Alessandro Tosetti have specialised in the research and development of this particular phosphorescent material. Their projects often merge technology and artistic processes to create designs which are both highly innovative and publicly engaging.

Lara Favaretto was born in Italy in 1973 and lives and works in Turin, Italy. Her recent exhibitions include 53rd Venice Biennial, Italy (2009), 9th Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE (2009), Tramway, Glasgow (2009), Torino Triennial-T2, Turin, Italy (2008), 16th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2008), Frieze Projects, London (2007), Une seconde, une année (One Second, One Year), Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2006) and Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin, Italy (2005).

→ www.franconoero.com

→ www.studiotosetti.it

With thanks to:

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Ambient Glow Technology

Luca Beltrame, Lucadentro

Mario Catella

Paul Knight, Royal Haskoning

Peter Randall, Nigel Holpin, Luke Holyoak, Tarmac

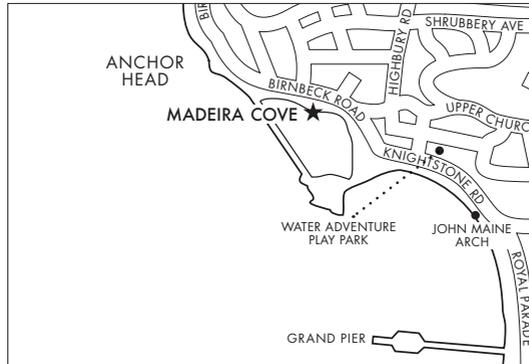
TANIA KOVATS

HOLM

In association with landscape architects Grant Associates



Madeira Cove



Tania Kovats' practice is focused on landscape, its geological formations and the cultural significance of places such as coastlines, islands and mountains. Kovats was invited to create a work specifically as part of the re-landscaping of Madeira Cove gardens, a place in which the view out to sea provides an expansive and contemplative setting and which has historically hosted a number of entertainments including the Rozel Bandstand and a small theatre.

One of the principal features of the view from Madeira Cove is Steep Holm island, a remote nature reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest in the Bristol Channel. It is this island which was the inspiration for *HOLM*, a sculpture cast in pale concrete which replicates the distinctive landmass of Steep Holm in miniature. 'My response to Madeira Cove,' the artist suggests, 'comes from how the distinctive landmass of Steep Holm punctuates the horizon. It is a poetic eye catcher, mysterious and utopian. Although close to densely populated land and in a busy shipping channel, it exists remotely as a protected wilderness.'

For *HOLM*, the artist considered the rockery gardens as one landscape within another: Madeira Cove as a smaller bay within the vast sweep of the bay of Weston-super-Mare. Kovats' proposals for the gardens' renewal took inspiration from the distinctive characteristics and native plants of Steep Holm. Landscape architects Grant Associates developed these proposals and designed a new viewing platform for horizon-gazing at Madeira Cove, opening up views across the bay, with the sculpture *HOLM* at its centre. Native planting has also been re-introduced into the gardens and Steep Holm's distinctive combination of layering rock formations and man-made concrete interventions have inspired the contemporary treatment of the site.

HOLM is a mirroring object of sorts, drawing the viewer's attention to the illusion of scale brought on by the wide expanse of sea. In her consideration of the miniature, the gigantic and the souvenir, Professor Susan Stewart has suggested that, 'there are no miniatures in nature; the miniature is a cultural product, the product of an eye performing certain operations, manipulating, and attending in certain ways to, the physical world...' The miniature, Stewart argues, operates out of

time, linked as it is to toys and childhood games, and, ‘once we attend to the miniature world, the outside world stops and is lost to us.’¹

Kovats has long had an obsession with islands – drawing and mapping them, creating bodies of work around both imaginary and existing islands. In *Driften* (1994), she worked with the British Geological Survey to produce a geological map of her imaginary island, and more recently, was awarded the chance to travel to the Galapagos Islands to develop new island works. In one large series of drawings she mapped *All the Islands of All the Oceans* (2005). Kovats also works sculpturally, often in response to what she refers to as ‘geologically explicit landscapes’ where the narrative evidence of processes such as erosion, shifting, eruption, compression and subsidence can be clearly seen.

Kovats has worked extensively in the public realm, including her major commission for the Natural History Museum for the Darwin bi-centenary with her work *TREE* (2009). But it is the coastal landscape that her work frequently returns to, ever since early works such as *Vera*, based on the iconic White Cliffs of Dover. ‘The coast is the edge of the landmass, and as an island nation it defines our boundaries,’ she suggests. ‘It’s also where you can see what the landmass is physically made of, as well as it being the viewing platform for the horizon.’

Tania Kovats was born in the UK, 1966 and lives and works in south west England. Her recent solo exhibitions include *TREE*, Natural History Museum, London (2009), *Catch This*, Longside Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2008), *Museum of the White Horse*, a nationally touring horsebox museum, and *Small Finds*, Peer, London (2007). Recent group shows include *Edge of the World*, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh (2010), *Earthscapes*, Sherbourne House Arts (2010), *A Duck For Mr. Darwin*, *BALTIC*, Gateshead (2009), and *You’ll Never Know*. *Drawing and Random Interference*, Hayward Gallery, London (2006).

Grant Associates specialise in ecologically-based design, creating distinctive projects which combine useful and sustainable landscapes with contemporary character. Their work is characterised by a desire to encourage connections between people and nature; engaging us through carefully articulated and poetic designs that combine an understanding of science and the natural world as well as a sense of playfulness and human enjoyment.

¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing Narratives of the Miniature the Gigantic the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1993), p.67

→ www.grant-associates.uk.com

With thanks to:

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RAUMLABORBERLIN

Silly Scope



Silly Scope was first sited at Weston-super-Mare Railway Station, accompanied with *Funny Foot Age* and *SPAM!* For forthcoming locations of *Silly Scope* please see Raumlaborberlin section of the website www.wondersofweston.org or phone Situations on 0117 930 4282. *Funny Foot Age* and *SPAM!* are also available to view on the website.



Raumlaborberlin is a group of architects who combine experimental and participatory working methods with striking designs. They subvert our expectations of what architecture should do and be. In contrast to a conventional approach to regeneration, raumlaborberlin sought out the overlooked spaces of Weston-super-Mare, drawn to Weston Market by what they called its very 'British' character and by the sense of timelessness once inside. The market offered a potential live set, or source of props and objects, through which to explore the idea of British humour, so closely identified with seaside towns. Raumlaborberlin developed *Silly Scope*, a temporary structure combining some of the features of a kaleidoscope, a pavilion and an absurd, out of place object, along with the associated project The John Cleese Academy workshops from which *SPAM! The John Cleese Fanzine* and the video *Funny Foot Age*, on display temporarily in the station waiting room, were produced in collaboration with a group of young participants. These explore possible connections between Cleese's childhood in Weston and the comedy and writing he later developed. Online versions of the film and fanzine can be found in the Raumlaborberlin section of the Wonders of Weston website.

Silly Scope is a structure which manifests the Pythonesque mode of seeing the world askew. Resembling a collapsed geodesic dome, the interior surfaces of this structure are reflective creating an effect similar to a mirrored funhouse or hall of mirrors. The structure is designed to be seen for short periods, popping up in different configurations in different sites around the town. Crucially *Silly Scope* is likely to appear where least expected and has been developed to encourage active participation by its users.

Weston Market provided the site in which raumlaborberlin worked with local young people and market stall holders filming sketches based on the life and humour of John Cleese and Monty Python. In the same manner in which Monty Python's *Flying Circus* combined animation, performative interruption, anarchic or unexplained characters, raumlaborberlin and the workshop participants worked together over ten days to play out a series of ideas. They produced graphic elements which transformed the bare walls of the market stalls and worked

together to produce sculptural objects or props from scenes in Fawlty Towers and Monty Python sketches such as the Moosehead in the hotel lobby, a rat in a biscuit tin and, of course, a dead parrot.

Raumlaborberlin formed in Germany, 1999. The group consists of eight architects and in Weston-super-Mare, Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius and Axel Timm developed the project. They also involved theatre director Sabine Zahn, stage and set designer Nicole Timm, filmmaker Florian Riegel and graphic designer Gonzague Lacombe. Raumlaborberlin's recent projects include the generator, Venice Architecture Biennial, Italy (2010), Futures Exchange, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany (2010), Rosy (the ballerina) for UP Projects, London (2010), Spacebuster, Storefront for Art & Architecture, New York, USA (2009), and the Promising Land, Liverpool Biennial (2008).

→ www.raumlabor-berlin.de

The raumlaborberlin team for Wonders of Weston were:

Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius, Lukas Fink, Axel Timm, Nicole Timm, Sabine Zahn with Florian Riegel and graphic designer Gonzague Lacombe.

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Kyle Embury

Sam Lambert

Ellie-May Long

Imi Matthews

Jacob Matthews

Natalie Ross

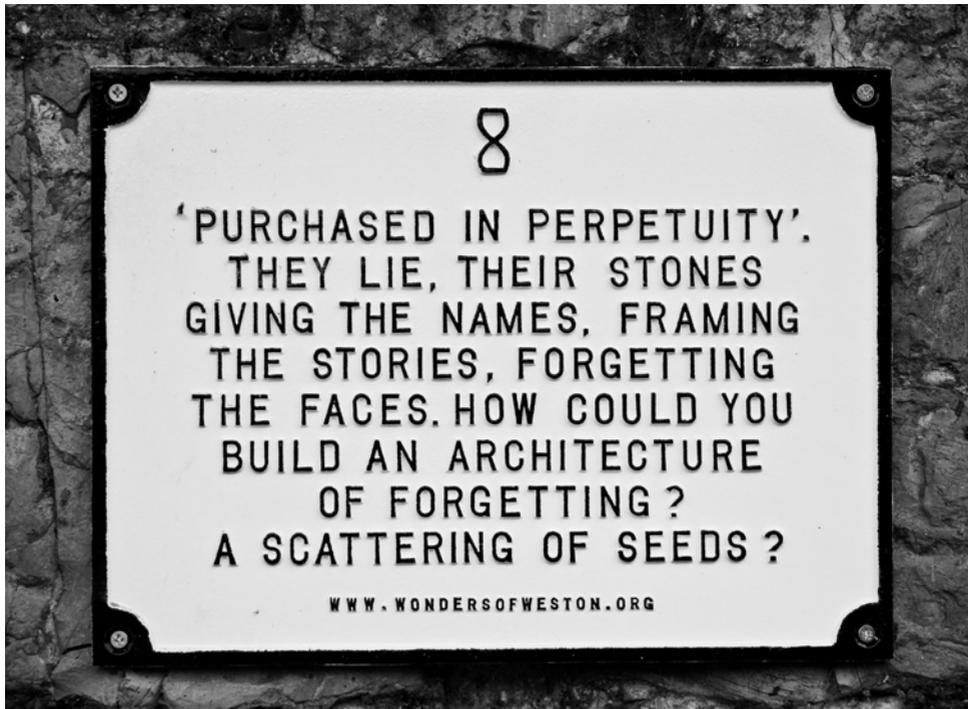
Ella Sayce

Liam Smith-Jones

WRIGHTS & SITES
*Everything you need to build
a town is here*



Multiple locations across Weston-super-Mare (and Cardiff Bay!)



Wrights & Sites is a group of artists whose research is focused on their relationships to places, cities, landscape and walking. *‘Everything you need to build a town is here* was not conceived in an artist’s studio,’ suggest the artists, ‘but only really emerged after several months of reconnaissance walking – not only in the obvious places, like the seafront and the town centre – but also in the industrial, post-industrial, residential and edgelands of Weston.’ Through this extensive site research, Wrights & Sites have developed a constellation of 41 signs that each engage with their immediate vicinity and are dispersed across Weston-super-Mare.

Each of the signs refers to aspects of architecture in Weston-super-Mare – whether grand, municipal, amateur, accidental, forgotten, part-demolished or imagined – and contains a carefully worded instruction, observation or comment, designed to encourage the reader to think again about its specific location, to conduct an action or thought experiment.

The signs have been organised into eight interconnecting layers – The Panoptic, Foundations, The Great Architect, The Amateur Builder, The Botanical, Light, Time, Ands – each of which is indicated by a symbol incorporated into the signs. The locations are widely scattered from public gardens, to the museum, car parks, restaurants and allotments. The design of the signs has been influenced by an existing sign found in Uphill village, at the southern edge of Weston-super-Mare, and almost all will appear in a location without interpretation or explanation. The artists describe how the Old Town Quarry operates as a keystone site for the series, at the entrance to which visitors are able to locate a map and description of the project in its entirety.

The content of the signs contrasts markedly with the functional design of a conventional proclamation or historical blue plaque in that it may draw your attention to the overlooked, the unremarkable or hint at an action which would divert the reader from their everyday activity.

At the public library, you are instructed to ‘... SEEK OUT MASTER PLANS THAT NEVER MADE IT PAST THE DRAWING BOARD.’

At The Cliffs Tea Rooms, children will delight in being asked to ‘PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD. CONSTRUCT ARCHITECTURES INSPIRED BY THE SEA’S APPETITE FOR THE LAND.’

At the Cardiff Bay Barrage, 'PERHAPS YOU CAN SEE WESTON-SUPER-MARE TEN MILES TO THE SOUTH-EAST. A CENTURY AGO YOU COULD HAVE CAUGHT A WHITE FUNNEL FLEET STEAMER TO WESTON'S BIRNBECK PIER TO VISIT THE THEATRE OF WONDERS, THE FLYING MACHINE OR THE BIOSCOPE. FORGET PLANS FOR THE CARDIFF-WESTON BARRAGE. WALK ON WATER INSTEAD.'

Everything you need to build a town is here challenges the assertion of regeneration to improve upon or to replace what is already in existence. Wrights & Sites lead the visitor and resident to unexpected places and indicate through modest means the layering of historical and contemporary stories and associations around us, from Weston's famed architect Hans Price to the shadow sandcastle formed by the Grand Atlantic Hotel on the beach at dawn.. The signs accumulate through their dispersal to form a highly ambitious call to public imagination which may entirely remake our vision of Weston-super-Mare.

Wrights & Sites are Stephen Hodge, Simon Persighetti, Phil Smith and Cathy Turner. Formed in the UK in 1997, they live and work in Exeter, UK. They explore and celebrate space and place through site-based practices. These include Mis-Guided tours and Mis-Guide books, public presentations and articles, and 'drifts', which can best be described as exploratory, undirected wanderings that function as a kind of fieldwork in their practice. Through their extensive research, which often involves walking and talking with residents, their work taps into different layers or strata of a place, peeling back the surface to reveal hidden or obscured aspects of a location or situation.

→ www.mis-guide.com

With thanks to:

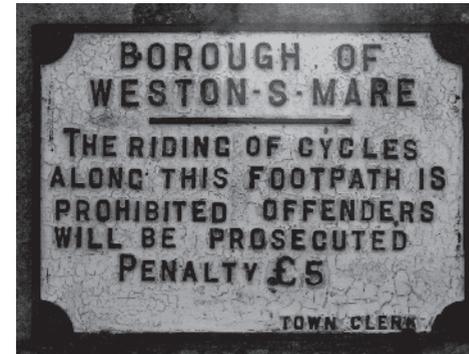
Chris Baker, The Civic Society
Oliver Bliss, Weston-super-Mare Football Club
G.M. Board, The Old Kings Head
Zeha Canniford
Devon & Exeter Institution
Joanne Green, Walliscote Primary School
Nick Goff, North Somerset Museum
Rebecca Ireland, The Church Conservation Trust
Graham Isaac, The Corner House
The Reverend Mr Everton Mc Leod, Uphill Church
Mohammed Miah, Delhi Lounge
Lee Mills, The Helicopter Museum
Andy Morris, DM Foundry
Clare Morris, Coco Browns
North Somerset Studies Library
Polimekanos
Martin Saunders, The Cliffs Tearooms
Martin Taylor, The Civic Society
Roger Thorne, Cardiff City Council (Cardiff Bay Barrage)
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Signs

The following pages are provided by Wrights & Sites as associated material to *Everything you need to build a town is here*.

It began with two ideas of the sign. The first was a sign on a wall in Uphill, made of cast iron, in crackled white paint, with slightly irregular black letters and black corners. It prohibited cycling.

The second was a concept of a sign, derived from Per Mollerup's break-down of its possible functions: identification; direction; description; regulation. Mollerup suggests that it is important to understand the function of a sign, the difference between categories and 'what a message is and is not'.



We loved the aesthetics of the former and we were intrigued by the latter. We wondered about signs that crammed all four functions into their small space and we wondered about signs that don't function at all.

Our previous work had involved subverting the guidebook (we made 'Mis-Guides'). Now we wondered how we could make a sign that somehow eluded that peremptory, regulatory or factual statement. Our signs have the permanence of metal, of black and white letters and the sanction of official permission and courteous goodwill. But they hope to introduce a space of uncertainty and possibility into that fixed rectangle, to provoke the unpredictable, to unfix things a little.

Neither the signs you will see on the streets nor the map you may soon hold in your hand are guides for any one journey or to any single destination. They are not even the markers of trails through the town. Rather, they are the almost random points where different strata emerge for a moment at the surface of Weston-super-Mare. They are a hint of the many layers that form this place; layers of ideas, of plans, of architectural designs, of chance, of genius, of improvisation and catastrophe that cut through the town like geological strata. Use the signs and the map to find the folds and faults of these strata, and as inspiration for seeking out new layers.

Keystone

Like an architectural keystone that ties the physical elements of an arch together, the Old Town Quarry is a 'keystone' location where the conceptual elements that underpin *Everything you need to build a town is here* are bound together. So many of Weston's buildings were fashioned with stone from this quarry, a site where the exposed geological strata echo the folded and faulted layers of signs that span the town. All eight of our highlighted layers are exposed at this location, and are represented on the 'keystone' sign, which can be found on the outside of the quarry wall.



The Panoptic

What is Weston-super-Mare? And how can you best experience it? From the street? From above? With your eyes open? Or with them shut? Looking towards it from afar? Or facing outwards from within it? From behind the bank of municipal CCTV monitors, wherever they may be? Through an internet browser? Watch Alfred Hitchcock's 'Rear Window'. Read Michel de Certeau on 'Walking in the City'. The signs in The Panoptic layer offer a number of fresh viewpoints from which to reflect on Weston and the act of viewing itself.



Foundations

There is nothing consistent about foundations. Fixity is an illusion subject to erosion and disruption, but at different speeds. Solid foundations directly built into hard rock are dependent on what surrounds and supports its geology. The most impressive of buildings above ground may hide weak or tainted foundations. When the foundations of the Winter Gardens at Weston were dug from thick clay a veteran of the First World War said that conditions were worse than those in the trenches. Imagine if Weston suffered from the architectural version of gum disease and all buildings and structures were exposed to, say, three metres beneath ground level. What patterns might emerge? How differently might we judge certain areas or constructions? What connections might we make between the base skeletons of the town and its nervous systems of fibre-optics and wires?



The Great Architect

'Doyen of the local architectural profession' (Weston Mercury obituary, November 1912) and architect to the Somerset County Council Board of Education... Member of Weston Town Commissioners and the Somerset chess team... Architect behind the town hall, museum, library, dispensary, sanatorium, gaslight company buildings, newspaper offices, numerous schools and churches, and the Masonic Lodge of St. Kew... It is difficult to over-estimate the impact that Hans Fowler Price (1835–1912) had on the fabric of Weston, and his life and work lie at the heart of The Great Architect layer. The signs in this layer invite you to imagine Weston afresh – to consider master plans – those realised, those imagined but never built, and those never thought of before.



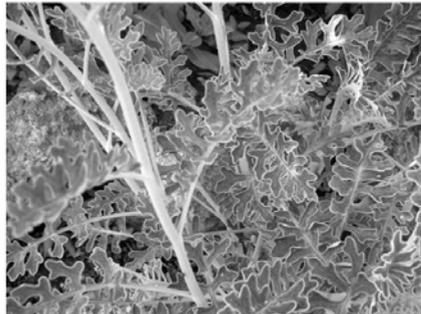
The Amateur Builder

At the other end of the scale to The Great Architect lies The Amateur Builder. A layer of naivety, of playfulness, of naughtiness and of function over form. Of unconventional and unapproved building extensions. Of DIY and cobbled-togetherness. Alfred 'Juicy' Payne, local lifeboatsman for 51 years, cut up old doors to make a sand sled – you can see it in the North Somerset Museum. Which door in Weston would you most like to cut up and peer behind?



The Botanical

'It is the delight of the exploring botanist, to increase his practical knowledge by visiting spots known to him by the name of privileged localities. In such places numerous uncommon plants abound, and he feels sure that the toils of a careful search will be amply rewarded...' (Gustavus St. Brody, 'Flora of Weston', Weston-super-Mare, September 1856). This publication sponsored by the 19th Century privileged of the locality begins with a list of their names such as, Miss D. M. Baker, who we discover, lived at Oriel Terrace, Lower Church Road. The book continues with a glossary of terms describing the structure of plants: Anther, Bifid, Campanulate, Deltoid, Elliptical... The Botanical plaques do not follow a logical nature trail but they suggest the collision of organic forms with the built patterns of the town. Perhaps they lead to an exposition of interconnections and layers between roots and tendrils and the architectural strata of Weston. The naming of plants, the naming of people, the naming of streets, the naming of past, the naming of present, the multi-sensing of place.



Light

In a town like Weston, the changes created by light are particularly extreme, from the hot sun that makes the sandcastles rise like loaves, to the carnival's illuminated worlds or the stillness of a frosty promenade. We began to notice the way that we inhabit sunlit spaces, or hide out in darker ones. The artificial lights that define and signpost the town. The way the real world is overlapped by fictional spaces projected onto screens or lit up on television. The devastating changes that fire makes, as though it is itself an out-of-hand, obsessive architect with a deconstructionist style and a taste for blackened edges. This layer wonders about the ways in which we collaborate with light, this erratic and transient maker of spaces. And similarly, the dark, which encloses and hides, which folds the streets into itself and falls away into the sea.



Time

Architecture might not change as quickly as the human body, but it changes all the same. In this layer, we think about the town as something that has its own journey, its own performance. A speeded-up perception where we see it growing its houses, its villas, its sea wall, its car parks. Where we see it aging, softening, growing moss, flaking, cracking, blurring its stone faces and melting its stone flowers. Where sometimes it's restored with a lick of paint or a new wall. Where a landmark flowers for a moment and then fades (like the Atlantic Cable buoy that once bloomed on the surface of the sea). Where we see people as part of the architecture, moving in and out, making it their own, pulling down and putting up, rearranging and mis-using. This layer wants to acknowledge that the things the signs point to might not be there by the time you reach them. But something else will be, and what might you make of it? This layer wants to say that time makes all the difference.



Ands

It is in the connections between things. It is in their relations. It is through the gaps across which influence, love, transport, fragrances and signals move. It is in glances. It is in chance meetings and missed appointments. It is in the voids that appear unexpectedly, unplanned, or as the unintended effect of two contradictory plans. The town is constructed far more by space, gap, void, pause, opportunity, hesitation, offer, communication, commerce, solidarity and imitation than it is by solid things. For these are the 'ands' of a town. Generally, they are regarded as accidental or inevitable, as far less accessible than things or buildings or shapes. But what if you were to imagine yourself as a town planner designing only from these 'ands', shaping commerces and connections and relationships – then what kind of space, what kind of shapes, would be left for the architecture?

And, sometimes in the distance between A and B, things go a little awry. The stories that are told about a place, the rumours, the lies, and the 'mis-takes' recorded by one historian and passed on by another are all part of the rich mix of 'mythogeography'. And so, we acknowledge here the tangle of cables present in the Ands layer – the retelling of the mis-recorded emergence of Weston's Atlantic Cable in Newfoundland, which in actuality surfaced in the New World in Nova Scotia after a brief stop off in Ireland.



Find Your Own Layers

The plaques we have created for this project are just a hint of the many, many layers of meaning that can be excavated, felt or imagined in Weston-super-Mare. We made them not as a definitive list or even as a representative sample, but as a clue to what is buried and what is hovering through the town.

Among the many layers we found but had no space to include was the layer of Faces – those carved stone ornaments by the window tops of the Barcode non-alcoholic bar that look like the Sea Devils from an old Dr Who episode, or the faces on Shakespeare Cottages in Alma Road (is that Hamlet?). There are layers of Shapes – blobs like those on Fella’s crazy golf course, or the UFO shapes in the brickwork behind a wall on Alfred Street near the junction with Burlington Street, the honeycomb erosion on the sea wall or the diamond-shaped Masonic peephole in the Constitutional Club.

We found layers of Mountainous Landscapes, Strange Geometries, Wheels (including a tyre forest), Inserts, Mottos (‘Eat More Sweets – Live Longer’ in an old photo in the window of a sweet shop in Regent Street, ‘AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER’ in the door of a house next to the Spiritualist National Church), Ghosts, Ironies, Trails (like that of the WW2 bombs traceable today as a vein of modern buildings in the centre), Things Swallowed, Things Turning Into Ideas, Grottos, Twin Pillars, Tabula Rasa...

Maybe you’ll begin to see these too. But more importantly, you may begin to find your own layers or strata or planes slicing through the town or settling gently over its rooftops and playing fields. Why not make your own map? Or put up your own signs?

Wrights & Sites



Production credits

Wonders of Weston has been developed as part of the nationally acclaimed Sea Change programme (2008–2010), managed by Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE 1999–2011) on behalf of DCMS. Situations and Field Art Projects were selected by North Somerset Council to co-curate a series of commissions for the town. Sea Change was a capital grants programme that operated over three years awarding funding to local authorities. It aimed to use culture to make a difference to seaside resorts, contributing to sustainable, social and economic regeneration. → www.cabe.org.uk/seachange

North Somerset Council used the Sea Change grant to fund a number of cultural initiatives throughout the town and seafront. To find out more about the other initiatives benefitting from North Somerset Council's Sea Change programme, please visit → www.n-somerset.gov.uk

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Situations is a public art commissioning and research programme based at the University of the West of England, Bristol, experienced in commissioning innovative artists' projects outside conventional gallery or museum contexts, and developing curatorial research, public events, talks and seminars and publications. → www.situations.org.uk

Situations team on Wonders of Weston
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Claire Doherty, Director
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Field Art Projects is an art consultancy that operates in the public realm. Field Art Projects believes that art and design can play an invaluable role in enhancing our enjoyment of the urban and rural environment. It has a decade of experience commissioning visual artists, designers and performers to create permanent and temporary public artworks.

Theresa Bergne, Field Art Projects Director
→ www.fieldartprojects.com

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www.wondersofweston.org