

In Their Footsteps

By Jack Trow

Jubilee was founded by my parents and their friends. It is in my DNA. The Jubilee Archive might as well be a family album for me. There are images of friends. There are images of family. There are images of places I know well. There are images of family history before my time. Search some of the images closely enough and there are even images of me!



Searching through the images I found myself thinking about how I have been influenced by the events and people depicted in them and how that influence reaches many other people in the Black Country and beyond. So many photos reminded me of people I once knew, of people I still know and of people I never knew but with whom I share a Jubilee connection. Some photos were taken before I was born, but depict occasions and work that have since become part of the family legend. My Dad's retelling of the opening scene from the Mummers play being performed to a bemused audience of 2 (standing slightly too far away to hear it) in Wednesbury Market in 1975, for example is a well-worn anecdote at the Christmas dinner table.

At almost every turn of my rifling through the archive I could see activities, games and practises I have used in my own work throughout my

career as an artist and theatre maker. So the apple doesn't fall far from the tree! Of course I knew this already, but scrolling through the photos really brought home quite how many trees had been in the orchard that this particular apple had come from - I was following in so many people's footsteps... on a more fundamental level than I had previously understood.

So what if I literally followed in their footsteps? What if I set about finding the exact locations shown in the archive photos? And what if there was more art to be made, inspired by the ghosts I would find in the space in between the archive images and the corresponding physical locations as they are today?

I trawled the image library of the archive and identified around 50 photos I thought I stood a chance of pinpointing the location of. Most of them had identifiable backgrounds to make the task easier. Some I knew exactly where they were from personal experience, some could be found with a bit of interrogation of people who were there at the time and others just gave me a hunch that I'd recognise the place when I got there. I scoured maps. I scrolled through google street view. I followed the clues and put 50(ish) rough locations in the sat nav and set sail.

I knew I wouldn't find them all. It had been almost 50 years since some of them had been taken, so I knew that some places would have been redeveloped and potentially unrecognisable. But it was a thrill to think that some of these places might have held on to their previous lives and, while time changes everything, sometimes nothing really changes that much at all.

I decided that when (and if) I found a location I would try and line up the original archive image with the background and take a photo of the photo in its modern context. I would also record the exact coordinates by using the What3Words website. (What3Words has divided the entire planet into 3 metre squares and assigned a unique 3-word 'address' to each and every square. The centre spot on the Hawthorns pitch is at bucket.hush.follow for example).

It was the Mural projects that first got my attention. Community interventions to beautify the surroundings of what was often crumbling housing stock and neglected council estates. A coming together of communities to lay claim to the agency of their own environments - put

their stamp on their place and rectify the failures of town planners. For better or worse, those same environments have since been subject to modern town planning policies - regeneration, gentrification, improved living standards, renovation, etc. It was impossible to expect any of the murals still existed, but what was now in their place? Was the mural somehow present in its absence in any of the locations where they once stood. I added as many mural images as I could to my list.

I'd been commissioned to make an artistic response to the archive that could itself be added to the archive. I didn't really know what form that would take in the final reckoning, but it felt like mapping the photos would be a good place to start and maybe inspiration would hit me while I was out in the field. I began to have lofty ideas about writing a little play for each location I found. Perhaps some sort of downloadable audio guide to listen to in-situ. But the deeper I went into the quest of finding locations, the more I realised it was a game I was playing. It was a treasure hunt. A murder mystery without the murder. A archaeological dig. Some sort of analog, real-life version of Pokemon Go. I was following that instinct to play - to find the game in something - that was at the heart of so much of Jubilee's work. So many of the images in this archive are of play, plays and playing. The game was the art and, although I was playing it on my own for now, its potential in the archive was for others to play it too - to follow in my footsteps and to fill in the blanks I missed.



The first stop on my sat nav was at Bury Hill park in Tividale. I'd never been up there before. I had no idea it would be such good starting point. I got to the park and the as I walked up a path cutting through some trees,

the landscape expanded out in front of me. From here I could see almost every square inch of the Black Country (and some Birmingham City Centre spoiling the view in the distance to the East). Somewhere out there were all the locations of every photo I had in my pocket. I took a photo of the view and went home - job done!

Not really! I was even more into the game than I already was now. On the edge of the park was my first location: `most.report.ridge`



I was intrigued to see the word 'ridge' in the `what3words` coordinates. `What3words` is supposedly a random system, but Bury Hill is arguably a ridge. I shrugged it off as a coincidence, but as I found other locations, I found weirdly apposite words were in the various coordinates. A photo taken outside foremost toothbrush vendors, Boots The Chemist in the Kings shopping Centre in West Bromwich had the coordinates of `that.tooth.broom` for example.



The next stop was Farley Park Lodge in Great Bridge. The image I was searching for was of the Jubilee bus team posing for a press photo heads poked through the rungs of a ladder looking fun and zany with the bus in the back ground.



The what3words was grab.hoot.rail. That seemed like a good title for the image. These people are grabbing the rail (ladder) to have a hoot (fun). It was a bit of a stretch. But not so much of a stretch that it's wasn't slightly spooky. I kept an eye out for similar coincidences. By the time I got to Victoria Park in Smethwick I was imagining the what3words coordinates as titles for stories to accompany the image. New imagined narratives for what was being depicted.

asking.wizard.serves



The Asking Wizard serves

Upon his throne repose.

He says what he observes

And tells you what he knows.

Your questions he will answer

At his castle made of wood.

Be you artist, sage or dancer

*His words are all for good.
So when with him you meet
you need to steel your nerves,
And bow down at his feet
For the Asking Wizard serves.*

Back on the mural hunt I went to the Windmill Lane Estate in Smethwick in search of what the residents called the ‘Chinese Playground.’



Standing in the shadow of the remaining tower blocks, I triangulated the likely position of the murals based on the archive photos and historic maps. It seems the murals came down with the rest of the Chinese playground when the dual carriageway was built along one side of the estate. I spent some time exploring the estate finding a couple of other photo locations and couldn't help feeling like the dual carriageway had reduced the estate to a through-route. A new mural might make it something of a destination once more. But it was nearly 45 years since the

mural was painted so it was unlikely to still be there even if it wasn't for the dual carriageway.

Most of the images I used were outside locations. There was one indoor image. It made it onto my search list because it featured my dad and my grandparents. It's a pub theatre show and Dad is to one side of the stage and Nanny and Grandad are in the audience just to Dad's left. Dad remembers it being in the main room at the Limerick pub in Great Bridge. According to the Great Bridge business listings, there is no Limerick pub nowadays. After a bit of digging I discovered that The Limerick is now known as The Lounge. I went to the Lounge and asked the landlord if he minded if I took a photo. He was happy for me to do that. But my activity caught the attention of a few of the regulars.



“Put your teeth in Audrey, he’s come to take our picture!”, said one of them.

“Don’t worry,” I said, “I’m only interested in photographing that fire exit really. I’ve got this photo of my Dad standing there nearly 50 years ago”

The photo got passed around. There was great interest in it.

“Ooh look. That’s what’s his name... used be in here all the time.”

“With the hat?”

“No... the one with the combover... John... no Jeff.”

“Alan”

“That’s him... I’d know him anywhere.”

[*pointing at the male actor in the dress*] “That’s your ex-missus ay it?”

“Gerroff! Her weren’t that pretty!”

I have a confession to make. One of the locations I have included in this project is knowingly wrong. I have no idea where this picture of the bus was taken.



What I do know is that was frequently parked outside my first home as a child. So with a bit of self-indulgent artistic licence I have listed it as being at arts.payer.itself, just outside my old house. Go there today and it’s hard enough to find parking for a small hatchback. Back in the early 80s mom would park it up with room to spare. In those days the bus could be driven on a standard driving licence as long as there were no passengers. I think that arguably makes me a likely candidate for being the first passenger of the bus during its Jubilee ownership. Summer 1981 I went along for the ride (albeit in utero) as mom manoeuvred the bus from playscheme to

playscheme in her last summer on the buss team at Jubilee and her last summer before becoming a mom.

Next stop on the mural mission was the one at Bermuda Mansions on the Yew Tree estate.



I knew Bermuda Mansions had long been demolished, but I could see from street view that some of the surrounding buildings from back then still existed. Notably there was a row of houses on the estate with dutch-style roofs. If they were still around I could probably line up where the mural used to be. When I got there, the distinctively roofed houses were there, but I couldn't get the angle I needed for a successful find.



Where once there was a playground and mural now stood a small cul-de-sac of 80s/90s built houses. I would have had to stand in someone's back garden to get the angle I need to line this one up and I wasn't 100% sure which house I'd need to go to to be in the right garden, so I wasn't going to start knocking. I was able to have decent guess at locating where an outbuilding next to the mural (and presumably painted at the same time) used to be. But still the mural loomed large in it's absence.



Ivor Morgan went on hunger strike outside West Bromwich town hall in 1990(?) in protest against the council's funding of Jubilee. Sadly, when I went to find the location, the town hall was being renovated and it had a fence all around it which made it difficult to line things up perfectly. I did give it a go, but it doesn't make for the most interesting photo.



I plotted the location at mild.discouraged.lime.

Ivor: There's no way I'm eating lunch until we give the arts the punch! From now on I'm skipping dinner! The arts is just a money spinner! There's no way I'm having breakfast, unless... the council... erm... ooh... what rhymes with breakfast?

Artist: Alright mate?

Ivor: Not now mate! Can't you tell I'm protesting?

Artist: I can see that.

Ivor: I'm on hunger strike.

Artist: That's a bit extreme. What are you protesting about?

Ivor: The arts. The council are frittering away money on frivolous things like art.

Artist: I'm an artist.

Ivor: Oh well...! This is all your doing!

Artist: It's ok. I'm not here for a fight. I'm just interested to hear your point of view.

Ivor: Well it's people like you who give this town a bad name. The council are giving a hundred and forty thousand pounds to Jubilee arts. Apparently they're a community arts group, but hardly anyone has heard of them.

Artist: That is quite a lot of money. But compared to some things the council fund it's not that much.

Ivor: What about the RSC? Everybody has heard of the RSC! The council would be better off spending the money bringing them to town.

Artists: The RSC wouldn't work with as many people as Jubilee do. They'd do one show and bugger off back to Stratford. Jubilee has been in Sandwell as long as Sandwell has existed. And I think they do better work than the RSC.

Ivor: So why has no one heard of them?

Artist: That's not necessarily the measure of good art or value for money.

Ivor: Yeah, well it's money better spent elsewhere and I'm not eating until I get answers from the council leadership.

Artist: What would you rather spend the money on?

Ivor: Well the Sandwell Show for one. That's been scrapped! What have artists ever done for us?

Artist: Well actually the Sandwell Show was set up by artists in the first place.

Ivor: Was it? I didn't know that.

Artist: In fact Jubilee have been involved since the very first one.

Ivor: Yeah but apart from that, what have artists ever done for us?

Artist: Perhaps I can help you with your campaign slogans?

Ivor: Eh?

Artist: You needed something to rhyme with 'breakfast'.

Ivor: Yeah that's a tricky one. Poetry is not my strong point.

Artist: How about, 'There's no way I'm having breakfast while the council's writing cheques fast'?

Ivor: That's actually quite good.

Artist: You can have it.

Ivor: But don't think that means I've changed my mind!

Artist: Not even a little bit?

Ivor: Look...just leave me alone will you? I haven't got time to talk to you.

Artist: Sorry. I thought you were here for the long-haul.

Ivor: I am! But I've got to get home. The wife will kill me if I'm not home by 6.

Artist: Why?

Ivor: My tea'll be ruined! My life won't be worth living!

Artist: But you're not eating dinner.

Ivor: Eh?

Artist: Aren't you on hunger strike?

Ivor: Only while I'm here at the Town Hall! I do 10 till 12. Home for lunch. 1 till 2:30. Nip back for a slice of cake. Then 3-5:30 and tea is on the table at 6. Must go it's Faggots and peas in front of the telly tonight - The Joy Of Painting's on. Then I've got to make a new protest banner.

Artist: [calling after Ivor as he hurries away] Protest banner? We can help you with that. We've got all the screen printing gear. Protest banners are our speciality. Drop in any time!

Some of the places I found were best guesses. Others I just couldn't track down at all (these 2 for example)





Others still were inaccessible. There were a couple of images from work done at Alfred Gunn House in Langley, including one of my elusive murals. When I got there Alfred Gunn House was surrounded with fencing and cordoned off for building work. The whole building is being modernised and refurbished. Without a hardhat and forklift licence I wasn't getting anywhere near the site of the old mural or any of the other associated photos. I can't imagine the redevelopment work includes anything as bespoke or personal to the community as the mural that was painted that summer in 1979.



My last locations to find were all on and around Oval Road in Tipton. Most were easy enough to find. There was one last mural however. I'd studied the google map of the area and found what I thought must have been the footpath (in a gap between 2 houses). Lined on one side by a concrete plank fence and in the right area I thought I'd cracked this one before I even left home. When I got there the path was there, the concrete fence was there, but as with all the others this was yet another lost mural. But something didn't quite add up. The angles were wrong somehow. The width and incline of the path was off. It was just possible this was the wrong footpath. I was fairly sure from my study of the map that there was no other footpath nearby, but I gave myself 20 minutes or so to explore a bit and see if the maps were misleading.



After a little while I turned a corner into a shady, seemingly unmarked footpath. Trees and bushes hung over the tops of the fences either side of the path - nothing like the photo. I thought nothing of it until I caught sight of a pattern on the fence on the right. I caught myself thinking how similar the pattern was to the mural. After too long marvelling at how similar it was, the penny finally dropped - this WAS the mural I was looking for! It was STILL there! Faded a bit and with some additional graffiti in places, but it was unmistakably preserved like a faded Roman fresco. I was amazed. It felt like I'd found the

Holy Grail. 42 years after it had been painted this mural was so valued by it's community that it remained in place. It was in need of a touch up, but it was there as a relic of civic action and pride in the community. In that moment it was a symbol of hope that work like Jubilee's lives well beyond the end of 'the project.' Proof that when people, place and creativity combine to create something together it can have lasting impact.





I went back up to Bury Hill Park after I'd found all the places I could. I took in that view of the Black Country in it's entirety. Pretty much every location of every activity ever done by Jubilee in one vista. It struck me that the things in these pictures weren't just the work of Jubilee. This was the scene of a manifestation of the culture a community - a people. These photos were merely documentation of a tiny slice of the history of Black Country culture. The RSC? No thanks! Just as in Scotland they play bagpipes, in Brazil they do carnivals and in Stoke on Trent they make pots; so in Sandwell and the Black Country we paint murals; play games; screen-print protest banners; perform community plays, street theatre and mummings plays; go on lantern parades; and develop our photographs in the back of an old double decker bus. We've always done it - made things our way, to tell our stories. We just follow in each other's footsteps. So why stop now?

How To Play

It's a treasure hunt. A puzzle. An archaeological dig. A heritage trail. This is how to play..

Step 1

Choose an image on the archive.

Step 2

Look for clues in the image and from other parts of the archive to try and identify a rough location. You may want to use maps and google street view to help narrow it down even further.

Step 3

Go the place you think the image was taken. When you think you're in the right place take a new photo of the location today. You might want to try and recreate the original image somehow. Or line up the original image with the background in the new photo you take.

Step 4

Use the What3Words app to record the exact location.

Step 5

Be creative. Write a poem, song or a short story about your image. Maybe the what3words words give you a starting point. Maybe the original image needs a caption or accompanying legend. Maybe it's true, maybe it's fiction. Maybe the activities depicted in the image inspire you to do the same activities. You could do a performance in your local pub. You could paint a mural on your garden wall. You could make shadow puppets, do a lantern parade or make a film starring you and your neighbours.

Step 6

Share your work. Put your new images on social media along any other things you've been inspired to make. Make sure you tag Jubilee Archive (instagram: 'jubilee_arts_archive' and Facebook: 'Jubilee Arts Archive') into what you share, so we can see it too!

Dos and don'ts

Don't go anywhere that isn't publicly accessible.

Do get permission if you go to private properties.

Don't put yourself in danger.

Do get creative.