

Conversations Over a Brew

Season 2, Episode 1 – Andy & Scarlett

Transcript

Recorded Friday 9th July 2021 in a primary school in St Helens

AA – Amina Atiq

A – Andy Field

S – Scarlett

26:30

[INTRO MUSIC]

Amina Atiq - Hello and welcome to Conversations over a Brew. I'm Amina Atiq from Heart of Glass and we are an Arts Organisation based in St Helens, Merseyside. And broadly speaking we support artists and communities to go on creative journeys together and make art. Conversations over a Brew is a series of intimate recorded conversations exploring the stories of the people we make art with. So much goes into the making of new artwork that you might not ever get to see or experience. So these conversations are a window into the process of making art. Behind any great artwork, and no matter the artform, there always exists a network of relationships between people, and typically lots of tea! This podcast is about the power of listening and conversation, and how making art can bring us together and create change.

In this episode, we hear from Andy Field and Scarlett. Andy is an artist who works with young people on projects that start conversations between children and adults. Andy and his partner Beckie Darlington recently teamed up with 146 primary school children from across St Helens to create a guide book about the town, from the perspectives of its young people. Scarlett was one of these school children and kindly agreed to join Andy in conversation to discuss the making of this guide book, which they've called The Book Of St Helens. So sit back, relax and enjoy the conversation.

[THE SOUND OF A KETTLE BOILING FADES IN, THE CLICK OF THE SWITCH INDICATING IT IS BOILED, WATER BEING POURED AND THE CLINK OF A TEASPOON STIRRING TEA IN A CUP]

Andy Field - Well, when and how did we first meet?

Scarlett - We first met when you came into year five, into our school and was talking about how we can make changes in St Helens.

A - Yeah. Yeah that was good wasn't it? It was a really weird time though because we got to have what? I can't remember. Was it maybe two or two or three sessions? But we were supposed to have like two weeks, but then it was the moment where suddenly everything closed. What, what can you remember of that? That was such a weird time. What do you remember of that time?

S - I just remember being really confused about why we were just being inside all the time. And luckily, I got to have a birthday party right before everything closed down.

A - Phew. Yeah, that's good. You know, Beckie and I were doing a project, like just before I was doing a project with you, we were doing a project in New Zealand. So we actually, we flew back and the coronavirus was already happening and we had to fly through Hong Kong where it was, like, quite bad and everyone was in masks already. And I remember

thinking at the time “This is so strange. Like everyone's wearing masks, they're taking our temperatures.” And then over the next 12 months, that all became stuff that was happening here as well. And so it became normal, normalised. Yeah. What like, what do you remember? Why don't you tell me what you remember of that project and then I'll maybe talk about what I remember of it.

S - I remember just being really excited because I was one of the people who were chose for it. And I remember just talking about what we think we could do to St Helens to make it a better place and to see it from our point of view rather than just, like, an adult.

A - Yeah, yeah. That's really nice to hear you say, because that was really the, that was really the idea of that project. It was like, it was about, like, what's special. Like, how is being, like, ten or eleven or however old, how can that be like a superpower when it comes to sort of making change in a place? Like rather than thinking about what you can't do because you're nine or ten, it's like “What can you do that adults can't actually do?” That, that was the thing that we did that we were really trying to think about. So like, where are the places where people might not notice you or suspect that you're, you know, doing something or what places can you get into that adults can't get into? That kind of thing. Yeah, that was the aim of that. And I thought you did a good job. We at least managed to, like, make some little interventions in the school, didn't we? Can you remember any of those?

S - Um, yeah. I remember we was all sat in this room and you showed us this like St Helens journal, and it had loads of things in it that we could like do to help St Helens.

A - Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah that was good. And then, so that's when we first met. And then we did another project together, which was like, which we've just finished haven't we? Could you talk a bit about that?

S - Yeah. Well, so obviously we were on a Teams call and you were asking us questions about, like, where's the best place you could read this guidebook? How can you use it? And what type of like, a nice message could you send to people to read this guidebook and thanking them for reading the guidebook.

A - Yeah. Yeah. Because we were making a guidebook weren't we? So the idea with that project was that we were sort of trying to make a guidebook to St Helens, which I suppose was just sort of in some ways similar to what we were doing before, which is like, again, looking at like the town through your eyes and through like other children in your class. And actually children in other schools as well. And we made that guidebook together, which, which was fun. What was your, what was your favourite part of that process?

S - My favourite part was probably going on a Zoom call, like every couple of days and one of my favourite things was when we got to say, like, a nice message for the people and thanking them for reading the guidebook.

A - Yeah, that was really good. Your message was, your message was really good. I can't remember what it was, but I remember thinking yeah that's good, Scarlett's good - she's got it sorted. I also, you know, what I really loved as well, was just listening to you and Jessica and Ryan just like, just reading bits from the guidebook. Because the, if you remember the way we put the guidebook together was that Beckie and I sent activity packs out to the different schools and to your class. And then you did a bunch of writing and drawing and all these things and then it sort of, we got sent, Beckie and I got sent a big box full of all this stuff that you'd written and that you'd made. And then we had to try and assemble that into a sort of a shape of a guidebook. But it wasn't until, it really wasn't until, yeah, I was able to sort of sit down on the Zoom call, on the Microsoft Teams call. I hate Microsoft Teams. And listen to you and Jessica and Ryan like reading the sections of things that you'd written. That's when it really came to life for me. And that's where, yeah, it was really nice. Also because you're all quite good. You're all pretty good readers. And you've all got really lovely reading voices which always helps. Yeah - what did you like or find interesting about the projects?

S - I found that we got to do basically anything we wanted on that project, like, when we got to make, like, a model of whatever we thought was really important in St Helens. And I made The Dream. Because it's really big and you can see it from quite far away in St Helens.

A - You know, I'd never seen the Dream, even though we did the project and we talked about it loads and we saw all of your amazing sculptures of the Dream but it was only a couple of days ago that we went and we took Sausage the dog for a walk around The Dream, and it is massive. It's amazing. When was the last time that you were there? Can you remember?

S - I think like two weeks ago.

A - Really? That recently? Yeah. It's quite amazing, isn't it? I was also thinking about when I was there, I was thinking about the mines and the collieries because that was something else that you guys talked a lot, when we were making a project about, like, this being such an important part of St Helens history. And I was trying, like, it felt really hard to imagine what that place looked like back, because it can't have been that long ago, right, when it was all, when it was still like a mine underneath all there. But, you know, now it's all just grass and trees and The Dream looks really different. What inspires or excites you about doing things like this?

S - I like it because I get to see other people's point of views on St Helens and I get to interpret all my things that I love about St Helens or that I like about St Helens. So I get my perspective in there.

A - And what is your like, what do you think about St Helens?

S - I think it's a really nice town, but there can be some parts of which, like, is a bit scary or a bit like, makes you uncomfortable.

A - Yeah.

S - But, apart from that it is a nice little town.

A - Yeah. It is a nice little town. It's interesting, this week for a different project which unfortunately you can't be involved in because you will have graduated and gone on to high school. We, Beckie and I've been meeting lots of people in St Helens and especially in Parr and hearing what they think. And yeah, the one thing - I don't know if you agree with this - but the one thing that everybody has said is everybody knows everybody else, like, you know everybody on your street. And it feels sort of safe for that reason because it's like, you just feel like you belong there. Do you think, do you think you always want to live in St Helens?

S - No.

A - Where would you, where do you imagine going to in the future?

S - I really want to go to America.

A - Really? Ah, yeah. When I was your age I wanted the exact same thing. I recently found, I recently found, I don't know if you still have to do this kind of thing, but we got, I remember that we had to make this book when I was in like year 6 that was like all about you and we had to like make the cover out of cardboard and paint it and put like, tape on to make the binding and all that. And I recently found it and it's like the first thing it says is something like "My name is Andrew" which is what I was called then "My name is Andrew and I, I love America and I'm going to live in New York when I'm older. And my favourite food is burgers and pizza and watermelon" weirdly. Whereabouts in America do you think you'll end up living?

S - Florida.

A - In Florida? That's where my nan lives. It's very hot in Florida - have you ever been?

S - No.

A - Oh, maybe one day. My nan is always WhatsApping my Dad. So my Dad has taught my nan. She's 90, she's 92 years old. So she's really old. But my Dad has taught her how to, like, use WhatsApp video. So she's constantly, she's constantly WhatsApp videoing my Dad, like video calling my Dad and then just like showing him how sunny it is, like as if to really, like, rub it, rub his nose in the fact that it's so cold here. She'll be like, "Michael - look." Yeah, it's cruel. What do you imagine that you'll be like - what would you like to do in the future?

S - Uh, I really want to be a professional dancer.

A - Really? Yeah. What kind of dance?

S - All styles.

A - Really? Wow. Professional dancer in Florida. Sounds good.

MUSIC BREAK

A - How have the projects that we did, changed the way you think about St Helens, if at all?

S - It's changed my perspective a bit because lots of people have said different things about St Helens. And that's made me think more about the things in St Helens. And if that is good or if it is bad.

A - Is there, like, is there any one thing that you can really point to and think like that, that you remember someone saying that you were like "Oh, that's interesting" Or that "That's different?"

S - Because people are saying sometimes the Dream can be scary. Because obviously, like if it's dark, then people can be out there and things like that.

A - Yeah, one thing that you said when we were making the project that ended up in the guidebook that I thought was really, really interesting was when we were, when we were like writing that list of things that we, like, wanted adults to realise about being ten years old or eleven years old, and the thing that you said was that the adults don't realise, like don't really understand about social media. Can you remember that?

S - Yeah.

A - Can you talk about that bit?

S - Because I think when they were maybe younger, they didn't really have social media. But now, like, people can get mean texts from people and then people can just be really mean for no reason.

A - Yeah. Do you think overall, like social media is a good thing or a bad thing?

S - It can be good because you can talk to your friends on there, but it can also be bad because other people can be mean, or other people can see stuff that you post even though, like, you don't want them to.

A - Yeah. Yeah, I know exactly what you mean. You know, I often think that, like, I often think that, I'm really grateful that I grew up in a time before social media. Because I know what you mean, like it is nice to like, I can use it to be connected to people that I wouldn't otherwise speak to. But I think, I imagine definitely like especially being young, like I think maybe just because I didn't, I didn't particularly enjoy, I loved primary school, I didn't particularly enjoy being at secondary school and just, you know, not being able to, when I was growing up, you could be like when you left school, you could just disconnect and then you're just back in your own safe world. But it's not, it's not, yeah, it's not so much the same anymore, which I think is a really good point that maybe parents don't, adults don't realise. Do you have any questions for me? I realise I've been dominating all of the question asking. But, like do you have any questions for me about the projects that we've made or about what I do or anything?

S - What was one of your favourite projects that you've ever done?

A - That's a good question. I think probably my favourite project I've ever done is actually the project that we're going to come and do in St Helens in like next year, which is a project called Lookout. So this was a project that I first made, maybe six years ago or something like 2015. And it's about the future and it's about asking people like, roughly your age, what they think the future is going to be like. And then that becomes a performance where the children that we work with have conversations, like one to one conversations like this, with adults so basically the performance involves a group of children standing somewhere really high up where they can get, like, a view out across the whole of like, the town or city where they live. And each of them will then have a conversation with, like an adult where between the two of them, they're sort of talking about the town and its future and what they think it's going to be like. And it's just really, like to me, it's just really nice. To me that's the essence of the kind of work that Beckie and I try and make. Is about just making those conversations. And that's it. That's really it in its simplest form, because really all the show is, is just a conversation between like a young person and an older person and just bringing those people together and having those

conversations. And we've been lucky enough to do versions of that project all over the world, so we've met children in like Shanghai and in Cairo and in Vancouver, never in America, unfortunately. That's still what I want. That's my dream. But yeah. And that's, that's a project that I really love.

S - What was the first ever project that you ever did?

A - That's a good question. Um. Probably the first project I ever did, like when I. So after I left university, so like after I'd left, like once I was in the real world of, you know, adult life. The first project I ever did was a project called **Exposures**. And it was really simple. It was like, do you know like disposable cameras? You know. If you were someone who was, it was a bit like a game. If you were someone that turned up to come and do this project, you would get given a disposable camera with like, which has 24 pictures on it, and you'd get given a list of 24 things that we wanted you to take, I wanted you to take pictures of. And actually, it's interesting - do you remember in, do you remember in the guidebook project there was an exercise that your whole class did together, that was where I, Beckie and I gave you a big map and you had to like, say where the best place to hide a tiger was or that kind of thing.

S - Yeah.

A - So that was based on this very first project I ever made, which is basically the same thing. So I gave you a list of questions like where is, where is the best place to hide a dead body, was one of the questions I remember. Where would be the best place to tell somebody that you loved them? Where would be the best place to bury treasure? Or where would be a good place to take a walk on the wild side? Like all these questions. And you as the audience member, would have to take your disposable camera and go and take photos of each of those places. And then we made that, and then I developed all the pictures and it became like a sort of photo exhibition. So the idea was very, like it's really interesting actually, I hadn't really thought of this before, but that project is that was really influential, is a real influence on the guidebook project because it was trying to do the same thing, which was to say what's a different way of looking at a place, a place, a way of looking at it through ordinary people's eyes rather than, you know. Rather than just going to the tourists or the places that tourists already know. And, and actually you'd have all these little pictures of kind of secret places and hidden places and interesting places. And the guide book was basically exactly the same thing, but very specifically looking at it through your eyes and your class's eyes. And so that was the, yeah, that was the first project. So it hadn't occurred to me before now, but yeah, that very much was like, I think the inspiration, that first project for the guidebook project, even though that was two thousand and, 2007. So what's that - before you were born probably. 14, 14 years ago. Yeah. This work that we've done together, has that like, what do you think that you've got out of it?

S - I think that I've understood other people's perspectives more.

A - Yeah.

S - Because normally I would just go with what I think. But I really understood what other people think of things and kind of like, seen their perspective of it and kind of included that in my perspective.

A - Yeah. Oh that's really interesting. Yeah. So it's sort of the way of, like even though the projects were sort of asking, The Book of St Helens project was asking, was trying to see the, the town through like your eyes or for adults to see the town through children's eyes. For you, it's also been helpful because it's allowed you to see it through other people's eyes as well. I just hope that it allows adults to sort of, just see the town from a slightly different perspective and that in doing so, they might have a bit more empathy for what it is like to be young and to, you know, to what that very different experience of being in St Helens and also just being alive is I suppose. I think all of the projects that me and Beckie make, at their heart, they're really about empathy. Which is nice to hear you say that the thing that you got out of it is that it's allowed you to see, you know, not just your own perspective, but other people's perspectives. Because I think that at heart, that's what all the projects that Beckie and I try and do are. They're about empathy that are about like, wanting us to understand each other better. Adults to understand children, children to understand adults, but also children from different places and from different backgrounds to understand each other, adults from different places and different backgrounds to understand each other. That's the aim. So I'm glad it had that effect.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

AA - Thanks for listening to this episode. But check out the shownotes if you'd like more information on some of the topics discussed by Andy and Scarlett. If you would like a copy of The Book of St Helens, you can download a free, digital version by visiting our website at heartofglass.org.uk. We'll be back again soon with another Conversation Over a Brew.

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