



Stowmarket Community Art Project



Introduction

Stowmarket Town Council offers a collection of paintings to local community groups and schools.

The collection comprises a series of exceptional compositions reflecting the community, environment and heritage of Stowmarket, developed to start a conversation about the place where we live and to appreciate what we have on our doorstep.

The project has been led, researched and coordinated by local resident, Judith Thompson. The paintings have been produced by local artist, Lois Cordelia.

The original paintings are displayed at various venues around the town. Printed copies of the paintings are held by the Town Council which are available for short-term loan, the Town Council can arrange their supply, display and return – all free of charge.

Stowmarket Landmarks painting has been donated by Nurture Together to Stowmarket Town Council and is on display in Mid Suffolk Citizens Advise, Milton House.

To enquire about short term loan of the collection please contact;

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Stowmarket Town Awards



Stowmarket Community Showcase

East Anglian Storytelling Festival



Stow Stories to Tinkler's Quest (SSTQ)

In 2018 Stow Stories project was established following a campaign objecting to two speculative building proposals on a small field in Stowmarket, historically called Tinkler's Meadow. In 2023 eighteen paintings were designed through a creative collaboration between Judith Thompson and Loïs Cordelia. Each paintings celebrates known and unfamiliar town events, places, people, and nature with connections to the wider world. They have layers of magical images to trigger memories, spark conversation and inspire people of all ages to connect to and protect nature. A Tinkler's Quest art trail is now established across nine town venues in Stowmarket.

Original Painting Locations

Pushing Boundaries - Earth Champions - Cafe on the Rec

A Greener Future - Bonitas

Round and About - John Peel Centre

Settlement - St Peter & St Mary's Church

Home in the Universe - Stowmarket Library

Reflect and Hope - Fox Yard Gallery

Life Goes On - Regal

Web of Lifelines - Red Gables

River and Land - Food Museum

"Creating the Tinkler's Quest series of paintings has been an extraordinary challenge, a journey through time and space, and one of the biggest projects I've ever attempted.

"Collaborating closely with researcher Judith Thompson throughout, I sought to condense a wealth of Stowmarket related references, imagery and anecdotes into a series of artworks that were meaningful, layered and full of intrigue.

"I hope that my paintings will inspire conversations, more research, and discoveries – as you join us on Tinkler's Quest, we walk in the footsteps of time as guardians of this place."

Loïs Cordelia

Tinkler's Quest Storytelling Sprites

Each venue chose an image, important to them as a basis for these specific location inspired paintings.

Concept:

Create something new for Stowmarket which connects each of the nine venues to their paintings and establish a contrast to the large paintings by including images that are enchanting, engaging, and have a magical quality with wide appeal.

Inspiration - Judith as Researcher:

The definition of 'Sprite' in The Collins English Dictionary grabbed my attention - 'In fairy stories and legends, a sprite is a small, magical creature which lives near water'. To a birdwatcher, sprites are goldcrests and firecrests, tiny warblers which are the smallest birds in the British Isles, and they nest in conifers next to Tinkler's Meadow. This information inspired the series.

Content:

Each small venue image includes sprites representing staff, volunteers and clients coming together to support and enjoy each venue. Sprites are helpful and kind to each other; they are magical creatures who share stories, fly, read, sing, dance, and play. One Sprite is very sad. Perhaps visitors will give them names, draw more sprites having fun or make up a story about their activities at each venue.

"Throughout my professional life I have been involved in education in many different guises, including strategic and teaching management. I have always shared my love of supporting others – young and older, of all abilities – to believe in themselves and to discover their strengths and talents. For the last 28 years I have lived in a quiet nature place that is full of wonder. I am a creative campaigner, eco activist, project volunteer and – my favourite job of all – a land girl working alongside my husband to protect, preserve and enhance our patch of land that nestles within the Rattlesden river valley for the short time we act as its guardians".

Judith Thompson

Pushing Boundaries - Earth Champions



Concept:

In my mind's eye I saw a tree, deep rooted
with arm-like open branches
holding floral emblems or symbols of nature
and portraits of people linked to the
countries they were born in. The people
began life without fame but became well
known locally, nationally or internationally.
Through influences in their own lives, the
choices and decisions they made, have all
benefitted society. Explore and research
who's who in this painting.



Inspiration:

A magnificent oak tree stands broad and tall on a Danecroft woodland track, a perfect environment for thousands of nature's species. A tree of life.

'Imagine all the people sharing all the world, you may say I'm a dreamer but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live as one.' — John Lennon

Riverline connects to shoreline, shoreline to horizon line, landline to treeline. We are all connected.

Content:

An unusual mix of characters perch in a tree of life. Each provides a snapshot of social history around the world during different time periods. They all have remarkable stories to share. This painting aims to inspire others to be earth champions through their small actions for nature.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary wrote a lot about adventures exploring local nature places and she shares a sense of fun about family life at home.

*'Then as dinner-time neared, a quick scurry home
Brought explorers on time to their places,
The sirloin was carved, and starched, kindly maids
Handed plates round with smiling faces'*

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

'Tell me a fact, and I'll learn. Tell me a truth, and I'll believe. But tell me a story, and it will live in my heart forever.' Native American. Researchers are travellers through time and Stow Stories has been a journey of time and discovery. We have unearthed a treasure chest of connections from people, place and nature, past and present to future. What do you find most interesting about some of their stories? What could you do to give nature a helping hand?

Reflection - Lois as Artist:

Inspired by the timeless symbol of the tree of life, this painting links Stowmarket's legacy with an array of individuals, more than half of whom are directly connected with the town and references many more people and places through the inclusion of other imagery, flora and fauna. Whose portraits would you include in your tree of life? Why would you include them?

A Greener Future



Concept:

How to capture the essence of the town's built and natural heritage and peoples' commitment to a more sustainable town in one small painting? Bonitas Wholefoods shop, both outside and inside, does just that. This painting is an invitation to look closely at built landmarks in and around Stowmarket and to encourage shopping in town.



Inspiration:

Look at the striking Bonitas building from the outside and enjoy the top-quality welcome, service and provisions inside. Stowmarket Town Council, and a growing number of the town's businesses and community groups are committed to a more sustainable and greener future, the preservation of the town's ancient character with evidence of pre- Saxon and Roman Settlement.

Content:

In this painting, vibrant golden colours capture the richness of harvest crops. Meandering patterns of blue skies represent Stowmarket's' two rivers. An inviting window display offers a warm welcome to customers to pop in to sit awhile, look around or shop.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary Fancourt wrote about her childhood memories of her life at Danecroft. Verses of her poem set Stowmarket's historic 'sense of place' in the landscape.

'Those early years living in the country were full of delights to us children. Our greatest joy was provided by the little slow-flowing stream which meandered between water-meadows only just below our orchards.'

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

The free and simple pleasures we find in nature continue to offer delights to young and old. Nature's harvest provides quality ingredients for healthy food to eat and sustainable products to wear and to use in our homes.

Reflection - Loïs as Artist:

This quite simple composition connects the Bonitas Wholefoods shopfront with Helen Whittaker's beautiful stained-glass window of a wheatsheaf design in the parish church window. I reinterpreted both in a painterly style full of iridescent colours and textures to suggest the rich bounty of nature. What are your top ten nature favourites, whether to look at or to eat?

Round and About



Concept:

In the painting, clocks, cogs, circles, wheels, hoops, and spirals interconnect; they depend on each other to function. They represent seasonal, human activity relating to the land, whether historical or a nod to Stowmarket's Gateway 14 future, where a different relationship with the land will become evident.



Inspiration:

The repetitive cycle of nature's seasons, and a Swedish botanist's clock, (Carl Linnaeus: 'Keeping Time with Flowers') influenced this painting. Traditional seasonal activities such as permaculture, horticulture, floriculture and farming remain evident in the Rattlesden River Valley. The rich quality of the land led to Stowmarket's prosperity.

Content:

Images of tools and trade symbolise past and present industries in Stowmarket. They represent the development of machines and engineering and the advancement of technologies. Wheels and curves in sundial and a clock spiral symbolise change through time. Images include hints of distant lifestyles and iconic buildings which 'grew' out of the landscape. Human dependence on nature is constant.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary wrote about the wonder of colourful flowers emerging in spring and changes in the landscape into autumn. She finds pleasure in describing her nature observations.

*'In spring there were cowslips and buttercups gay,
And kingcups emblazoned the ditches,
While in Autumn the uplands were bright with ripe corn –
A landscape of warm golden riches'*

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

Understanding and respecting Stowmarket's natural and built heritage has the potential to enrich us all. Expansion and growth in both industry and housing is taking place, given the town's location. If we lighten our footsteps, we could lessen negative human impact on the environment and loss of nature.

Reflection - Loïs as Artist:

Time can be viewed in a linear fashion, or in a cyclical pattern of minutes, hours, days, months, years, centuries. These patterns are echoed in the circular shape of clocks, sundials and wheels and embodied in the changing seasons of agriculture and nature. In our fragmented, digital world, what simple steps can we all take to reconnect with these timeless circles and seasons?

Settlement



Concept:

Stowmarket is in the heart of Mid Suffolk, various routes cross north, south, east and west. This has been a travelling place for thousands of years. The two rivers and landscape of rolling hills and wooded valley meadowlands of High Suffolk give Stowmarket its unique sense of place through history.



Inspiration:

This painting is dedicated to local archivist Steve Williams (1950 -2020), who told us he had the 2000 yr history of Stowmarket in a bag. Drawn into Stow Stories through an endless stream of questions during Covid, his knowledge, sense of fun, willingness to share information, and his creative spirit, were magical. His comic verse, songwriting and storytelling frequently made us hoot with laughter.

Content:

During Covid on a balmy August evening in 2020, Steve gave an outdoor presentation of Stowmarket's 2000-year history to a small group at Danecroft. His map number 1, which showed the earliest known settlement, was of Danecroft and its river valley landscape. The very place Mary Fancourt describes in her poem. This painting perfectly captures much of the content of Steve's 2000-year history in a bag. I would have loved to have been able to share this Stow Story legacy with him.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary Fancourt wrote about her childhood memories and the joy of nature on her d doorstep by the river Rattlesden when living at Danecroft Villa.

*‘When the century was young, and we were young too,
Memory brings back a store
Of gay, sunny pictures of meadows and woods
Just waiting for us to explore’*

Reflection Judith as Researcher:

Everyone wants a place to call home, somewhere that matters to them. I love maps, they can be digested like a book and hidden stories unfold the more you look or read.

Reflection Loïs as Artist:

A map is a magic carpet for the mind. The land on which you stand today is steeped in history. Whether you dig up the soil to find archaeological artefacts or dig into research archives, you will find a richly layered tapestry of Stow Stories, intricately woven and interwoven with the lives of countless settlers, dwellers and visitors. What stories about Stowmarket do you¹³ remember experiencing or being told?

Home in the Universe



Concept:

‘Home’ in this painting demonstrates that Stowmarket’s infrastructure constantly changes, yet the landscape and landmarks remain the same. The two rivers and the landscape are what give Stowmarket its unique sense of place in the heart of Suffolk. For thousands of years, the town has been influenced by the people who live here, those who travel through, and those who are decision makers.



Inspiration:

Professor Brian Cox describes his home as the ‘Milky Way in the Universe.’ This concept expands my outlook and makes me realise we are all connected to life, on and beyond, planet earth. In my research, I discovered that Stowmarket had two famous astronomers who achieved awesome discoveries. Grace Alice Cook (1887 - 1958) who used an Astronomers Wand for meteor observation, and John Philip Prentice Manning (1903-1981) a visual meteor observer. That finding inspired this painting, as did my growing up with Doctor Who. At some point in everyone’s life the expression, ‘time flies,’ comes true.

Content:

The built and natural landmarks in and around town connect with feelings of stability and pride. Stowmarket has a history as a town that cares for the most vulnerable in society; a town that sets sights high to achieve excellence in science, arts and literature. This painting shines a light on Stowmarket as a creative, caring town.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary had great fun when exploring in her garden and the countryside nearby. She had ‘sharp eyes to espy’ and gives readers an insight into her local environment.

‘In hedgerows and tree trunks the birds built their nests

A goal for sharp eyes to espy,

Violets and five-fingers smothered the woods

With a magic that made time fly’

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

The place Mary describes is where I live. And like her, I too, am greatly aware of the local environment in all its magnificence, which leaves me inspired every day to care about our natural world.

Reflection - Loïs as Artist:

Themes of time, space and the universe flow together placing Stowmarket on a cosmic map. What period or date of Stowmarket’s story would you want to travel to in a time machine?

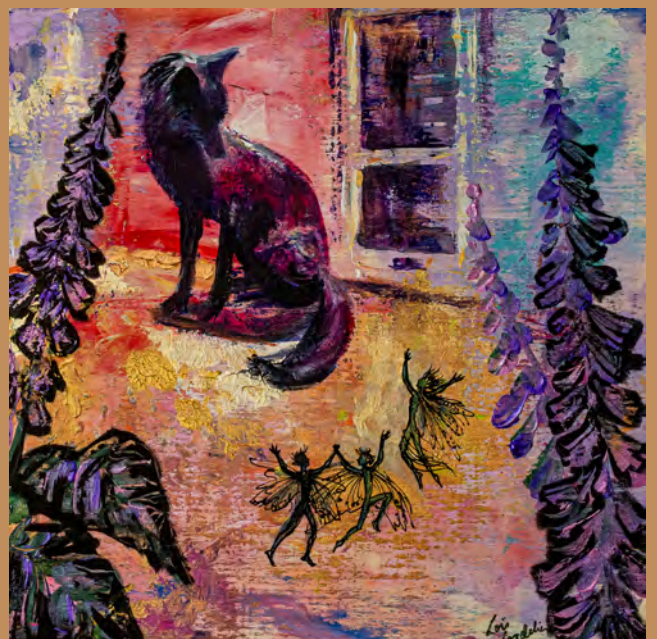
Reflect and Hope



Concept:

This is a painting of contrasts. When farming land and landscape features are unnecessarily harmed it is called ecocide.

This small, beloved field, within a biodiversity rich corridor, became vulnerable to exploitation until community voices acted together and said 'NO.' Using your voice to speak for the vulnerable, whether it be for place, person or nature, will create a kinder, more caring, sustainable society.



Inspiration:

The natural world on our doorstep. Whatever the weather, magical encounters with nature are a daily joy and essential for my mental, and physical well-being. Creative campaigning for nature, brings hope that peaceful advocacy will be effective. My hope is strengthened knowing other individuals and organisations also care about the environment we live in and support positive action to benefit all biodiversity.

Content:

Images of land damage, hedges down, bat roost gone, surface soil scrapped then dragged into piles, saddened humans and a tiny fairy. Marching feet, figures from the past, stand fast, guard the riverside and roadside verge –they hold their nerve in the face of adversity. In this painting the Rattlesden River Valley Network and Stowmarket Eco Future Group represent Stowmarket's collective responsibility and determination to establish a greener future for this town.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary reflects on her childhood memories of play with her brother, especially their freedom to explore outdoors near to Danecroft Villa her home in Stowmarket.

*'Of course there were dull days, rebellions and tears,
But how faded they've grown with time!
It's the happy bright days which reach over the years,
They're the ones on which memories shine'*

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

Tinkler's Meadow is the start and at the heart of Tinkler's Quest. For me, this painting resonates emotionally. It speaks of sadness and hope. Strike up a conversation, share what's on your mind. Could you share a story about a nature place you would protect?

Reflection - Loïs as Artist:

Tinkler's Meadow speaks to us through many voices. Guardians young and old from the realms of history, folklore and contemporary eco-consciousness all stand in staunch support of this virgin Riverland habitat. Will you add your voice to strengthen Tinkler's Quest to conserve this land for future generations?

Life Goes On



Concept:

A patchwork of interconnecting impressions remind us of both the dark and bright sides of life. Images connect rivers of memories running through our life experiences just as water flows through the Rattlesden, Gipping and their tributaries.



Inspiration:

I drew inspiration from my family history and our research of the owners of Danecroft Villa; all have stories of love and loss. The enormity of time and the expanse of outer space brings feelings of how insignificant humanity is. We are on earth for a flash in time. Yet during this time, we want to have ‘the time of our life.’

Content:

Stowmarket in a world of disharmony, grief of past. And present day, sad, tragic events include war, explosions, disease, industrial strikes 1913 and 2023. Many elements of the painting are symbolic and representative –such as rosemary for remembrance. Heroic young people received medals but died too young. Their images contrast with symbols of celebration, love, success and memories of peaceful happy times.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary captures the warmth of her family home in winter. She expresses excitement of winter snow and the use of fresh greenery from Danecroft Villa garden as Christmas decorations.

‘With winter, the garden in Christmas-white guise

Presented a sparkling call

Then back to the fireside to make buttered toast

And with evergreens deck out the hall’

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

For me, this painting ‘packs a punch.’ It is life and death. Powerful, personal, emotional, respectful, poignant, uplifting, enriching and, cherry-picking for me is the luck of living in a peaceful place within a loving home and a kind community – that’s what helps my ‘life go on.’ These days the programme of Stowmarket events is celebratory in nature.

Reflection - Loïs as Artist Reflection:

This painting references much sorrow and tragedy, and yet it also speaks of hope, upliftment and commemoration - sometimes in surprising ways. I chose purple and red as prevailing colours, opposite ends of the visible colour spectrum, to suggest this antithesis, balanced by green, the middle of the spectrum. How would you commemorate a loved one in a creative, life affirming way?

Web of Lifelines



Concept:

To me the marketplace is like a spider in a web. Not to catch prey, but a place in the centre of the community with a multitude of lines radiating out. Production lines and communication lines criss-cross in different directions. Export and import lines as Stowmarket is the place to exchange. Through centuries Stowmarket has been known as the principal place to communicate, conduct business, and meet for pleasure. Sightline, meridian line, grid line, railway line, riverline, bloodline, B-Line, all interconnect through stories within storylines and by reading between the lines.



Inspiration:

The web inspiration threads the history of a shop called Woolworth's, an owner of Danecroft Villa and a rare mosaic of forgotten habitat untouched since the Second World War. 2000 years ago, this was a swamp, 200 years ago, it was farmed for hops and willow osiers. Read the book, 'Down the Bright Stream' (B.B.) and find storylines about the last gnomes in England who have a cosy winter home in an oak tree.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary loved the river Rattlesden landscape and the wide range of wildlife close to her home. She writes with a great fondness of nature and her family life at Danecroft Villa.

*'Beside our small river the dragonflies flew
Above banks where the water flowers bloomed
The proud mother moorhen led out her chicks,
And the snipe up above dived and boomed'*

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

Did you know if invertebrates, insects and any animals without a backbone, were to disappear, the world's ecosystems would collapse? Did you know, a Bee-Line superhighway runs through Stowmarket? B-Lines are networks of wildflower-insect superhighways. They connect our landscapes for pollinators and for people.

Get involved, help to reconnect our fragmented landscape and make the Bee-Lines networks work more effectively. See - buglife.org.uk

Reflection - Loïs as Artist:

We are all connected: through bloodlines, food webs, transport networks, the world wide web, river networks. This emphasis on lines is reflected in the painting style, which incorporates linework and crosshatching, mostly scratched rather than painted. Do you have a storyline to share that links with themes of Stow Stories?

River and Land



Concept:

Create a birds-eye panorama which captures the richness of the Rattlesden River Valley today as it was yesterday: an aerial tilted view which opens up a tapestry of interconnected golden fields and wooded treelines, all with farming histories. Illustrate how nature and people live in harmony in this magical countryside, west of town, where new industries began to thrive.



Inspiration:

Rattlesden River Valley is like jigsaw pieces of interconnecting parcels of land. Each piece is vital to complete the picture. The biodiversity of both rare and familiar species, which exist in river and on land, inspired this painting. Neighbouring communities are seamlessly connected in the landscape, yet each has a unique heritage. Green spaces and connecting to nature are essential for people's wellbeing.

Content:

Notice the animals of the Suffolk Trinity: then rabbits chatting with other species. Symbols of neighbouring parishes illustrate how communities share resources, and that people come together for leisure activities such as golf and swimming.

Mary Fancourt – Danecroft Days:

Mary wrote about her nature observations in the river and on land near to her Danecroft Villa home and by the river Rattlesden.

*‘Dappled shadows disclosed the swarms of small fish
Or sometimes a sleek water rat
At the meadow’s far fringe saucy rabbits popped out
To spruce up their whiskers and chat’*

Reflection - Judith as Researcher:

I was born near to the sea and sand, now I live next to river and land. Life itself is dependent on water. We need to care more about sea and river quality and value the landscape and settlements it supports.

Reflection - Lois as Artist:

Imagine rising up above Stowmarket and seeing the whole landscape from an aerial viewpoint. This painting naturally evolved to become airy and bright, referencing Suffolk's famous farmyard emblems (the trinity of Suffolk Punch, Suffolk Ram and Red Poll cattle), balanced by a garland of beautiful village signs. What story elements would you include in a village sign for where you live?

Stowmarket Landscape Painting



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|--|---|
| 1 - Tinkler's Meadow | 16 - Market Place - Stowmarket |
| 2 - River Rattlesden | 17 - Cannon-shaped Bollards |
| 3 - River Gipping - | 18 - St Peter's and St Mary's Church |
| 4 - Danecroft Villa (no longer standing) | 19 - Stowmarket Football Club |
| 5 - Danecroft Cottage | 20 - John Peel Centre for Creative Arts |
| 6 - Danecroft Brick Bridge | 21 - Old Fox Yard |
| 7 - Danecroft Veteran Oak | 22 - United Reformed Church |
| 8 - B1115 Milestone | 23 - Stowmarket Railway Station |
| 9 - Northfield Wood - Onehouse. | 24 - Library |
| 10 - Paupers Graves | 25 - Courtyard Garden at the library |
| 11 - Old Cemetery | 26 - Milton House |
| 12 - Memorial Gates | 27 - Regal Cinema |
| 13 - Food Museum | 28 - The Mix |
| 14 - Eastbridge Windpump | 29 - Red Gables and Spinney |
| 15 - Abbots Hall | 30 - Pike's Meadow |