

During the summer of 2022, artist and community social care worker, **Christina Inkster**, took on an important project. Her goal was to engage the post-Covid Shetland community in conversation about lockdown and to write a report documenting her findings. This report would suggest how Shetlanders wanted the first period of lockdown to be memorialised.

The following February, an open call was held for local artists to engage creatively with the project, resulting in the commission of five Shetland-based artists. Each artist crafted artwork that captured the varied experiences of Shetlanders during the first Covid lockdown, creating compelling pieces that reflected themes of illness, isolation, and loneliness, as well as more uplifting aspects of Covid such as slowing down, enjoying family time, and picking up new skills.

This book, designed by **Chloe Keppie** with words by **Genevieve White** and photography by **Niamh Wylie** documents the artistic journeys of artists **Heather Christie**, **Malcolm Innes**, **JJ Jamieson** and **Liz Musser**, **Renzo Spiteri** and **Helen Robertson** as they worked towards memorialising Shetlanders' Covid experience.

This is a **greenspace scotland** project delivered by **Shetland Arts** in collaboration with **Shetland Island's Council**.

# Mindin' Tagidder

Shetland's Covid Memorial

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## Drift Into An Elsewhere

Music & text by Renzo Spiteri, performed by:

Renzo Spiteri:	percussion, electronics, field recordings
Annalie Irvine:	violin
Natalie Cairns-Ratter:	violin
Clare Rickets:	viola
Sophie Wishart:	cello
Billy Mail:	voice on tracks 3 & 6
Osla Jamwal-Fraser:	voice on track 4

Brett Culp appearing on track 1 by kind permission.

Composed, recorded, mixed & produced by Renzo Spiteri  
at Orange Dot Studio Shetland, May 2024

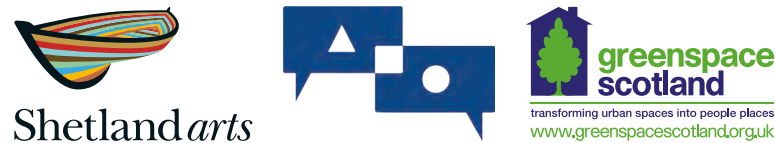
Strings & additional percussion recorded at Mareel  
Recording Studio, Shetland; engineer: Tim Matthew

[www.renzospiteri.com](http://www.renzospiteri.com)

*Drift Into An Elsewhere* is a contemplative sonic narrative capturing the deep connection between human emotion and nature through music, soundscapes and field recordings of the natural environment of Shetland. This body of work is part of Shetland's *Remembering Together* project, funded by the Scottish Government and delivered through greenspace scotland, Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Arts.  
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# Mindin' Tagidder

Shetland's Covid Memorial



**Mindin’Tagidder** is part of *Remembering Together*, a nationwide project commissioned by greenspace scotland with funding from the Scottish Government, delivered by Shetland Arts Development Agency in partnership with Shetland Island’s Council.

This project includes the artistic practice of Renzo Spiteri, Heather Christie, JJ Jamieson & Liz Musser, Malcolm Innes and Helen Robertson.

With writing by Genevieve White, photography by Niamh Wylie (unless otherwise stated) and book design by Chloe Keppie.

An accompanying short film to document the project was created by Liz Musser and is available through the QR code here:



Alternatively, you can find it on the Shetland Arts Youtube channel.

With special thanks to community groups and individuals around Shetland for their participation with the artists in the project.



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Think back to the spring of 2020.

What do you remember?

Silent streets, maybe, or the unexpected calm  
of a world on pause?

Did you revel in the time to breathe, to walk,  
to be with family?

Or do you recall days that were gripped  
by worry and uncertainty?

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# Introduction

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# Remembering Together

## Phase One

In the summer of 2022, as the world cautiously navigated the wake of the Covid pandemic, artist and community social care worker Christina Inkster took on an important mission: to engage the Shetland community in conversation about Covid and to write a report documenting her findings. This report would suggest how Shetlanders wanted the first period of lockdown to be memorialised.

Christina’s task was not an easy one. Within a six-month timeframe, she went out into a community of roughly 23,000 Shetlanders and listened to their Covid stories, finding out how local people wished to memorialise Covid. Some of their responses are on the adjacent page.

“I’d like to have a local Covid memorial that is easily accessible [...] I’m worried I won’t be able to make use of it, if it’s in one location miles away from me. → *I think having a sculpture would be better than having an outdoor space such as a garden [...] gardens soon become neglected unless they are regularly maintained.* → I think the memorial should be something carved, something tactile; people hugging. → *I would like each community to have their own relatable memorial, with all memorials united by a shared common identity.* → I’d like the memorials to have interactive sensory elements for children – especially for those with learning disabilities. → *I think it’s important for the memorial to be in a central location and serve as a means to remember the people we lost during this time.*”



Left: Looking over to Noss from Bressay, home of two of Shetland's Remembering Together artists.

Below: some of the reflections collected by Christina Inkster in Phase 1 of the project.

As an artist whose practice is deeply rooted in community engagement, Christina's challenge was to hold a mirror to a society where everyone had their own personal Covid experience.

The pandemic had cast long shadows, touching every life – taking some, altering others, and uniting many in a shared journey through hardship and recovery.

For some it was a time of missed opportunities. Many people struggled through a long tunnel of anxiety and isolation. But for others it was a chance to experience a new way of life – a time to learn new things and live life at a slower pace.

“I remember using devices as portals in order to be able to spend time with the ones I love. → *Society became more flexible and adaptable to change.* → As a community, we all supported one another. We are now more careful and aware of each other's vulnerabilities. We wish to protect one another. We value life.”





Collective recollection is complex; Shetlanders all experienced Covid in different ways. This variety of experience was the guiding principle as *Remembering Together*. Co-Creating Community Covid Memorials, unfolded.

The report that Christina wrote was a journey into the collective heart of the Shetland-wide community, engaging with the network of lives intersected by Covid.

Glansin Glass Studio, Unst, where Helen's Tree of Life designs were fused in glass.

# Remembering Together

## Phase Two

In December 2023, an open call was issued for local artists to create their response to Christina’s report. This was followed by two workshops for artists to ask questions and gain more information. The response was substantial, with numerous applications reviewed by a panel comprising members from Shetland Island’s Council, Shetland Arts, and greenspace scotland.

The selected artists were:

- Renzo Spiteri, musician and composer.
- Heather Christie, artist and illustrator.
- JJ Jamieson & Liz Musser, filmmakers.
- Malcolm Innes, light artist.
- Helen Robertson, jewellery and textile designer.

Kathryn Gordon, Creative Projects Manager at Shetland Arts, knew that the process of documenting an entire community’s response to Covid would not be straightforward. However, from the outset of the project she believed in the selected artists’ ability to: “use the findings from the consultation to begin to process what the pandemic meant to us, as a Shetland community”.

For Kathryn, the collaborative aspect of the project was important, and provided a welcome contrast to the isolation imposed by the Covid lockdown. She explains: “What felt appropriate [...] was to really bring the artists working on the project together, so that they could exchange ideas and support, while valuing one another’s work. It felt important to place an emphasis on teamwork and collaboration, as we reflected on a long period of time when we couldn’t be together”.

As project manager, Kathryn can share that over 180 people have participated in creating the book you now hold in your hands. And although the artists spent time alone working on the five separate projects, they also collaborated on over 40 different occasions.

Kathryn says: “It really has been a joy to witness such shared creation and we hope that this is embodied in what you see here, and that you – as a reader – can feel part of the book too”.

This book is a chronicle of the five artistic processes involved in creating that response. It is a tribute to the resilience of the Shetland community, and a reflection on the intricate process of memorialising an event that has yet to conclude.

As such, it is a memorial in and of itself.

Drift



An

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A project by  
*Renzo Spiteri*

Into



Elsewhere

## Drift Into An Elsewhere

To listen to the album Renzo created for this project,  
please use your phone to scan the QR code below.



Alternatively, you can find the album at this link here:

<https://renzospiteri.bandcamp.com/album/drift-into-an-elsewhere>



# 11th March

## Bridge of Walls

Driving to Renzo Spiteri’s house feels like a gradual slide off the edge of the map. Once there, though, you realise you are in a special place.

The house has sea on both sides, and there is no sight of another house nearby. All you can hear is the chattering of fulmars and the gentle lapping of waves.

For Renzo, a sound artist, musician and composer, this location is a gift.

“The night before yesterday, it was calm and beautiful. Just standing between our two beaches there were beautiful sounds going on, so I said - I have to go out and record these. So at 10 o’clock at night I was out there recording.”

Renzo’s project for *Remembering Together* is a body of work consisting of seven new compositions incorporating soundscapes, spoken word and field recordings of the natural environment gleaned from different locations in Shetland. Inspired by “the indomitable human spirit”, Renzo wants his compositions to embody hope, resilience, community spirit, collective strength and a connection with nature. The end product, he hopes, will be a sonic exploration of these themes, weaving a musical tapestry that celebrates life and reflects the strength, resilience and unity of Shetlanders during and beyond the challenging times of the pandemic. It will be available on both online platforms and CD and parts of it can be listened to through linking to the QR codes in this book.

### A ‘brutal’ time

Like many artists, Renzo found the pandemic challenging to deal with. As a full-time musician for over 30 years, he suddenly found himself in a new place, with an eerily empty calendar.

“I’ve never had one month where I had nothing to do, let alone two years. So, for the first five or six months, it was quite difficult for me to deal with this new situation as I usually plan what I’m doing at least 18 months in advance. Things just started getting wiped off my calendar and I wasn’t getting enough time to process it. There was this domino effect as one thing then another was postponed. It was quite brutal for a while until I tuned in to doing other things just to occupy my time.”

Through focusing on other projects such as gardening and DIY and learning new technical skills, Renzo found he was able to overcome his initial despondency and feel more hopeful about the future, and it is this sense of hope and positivity that he wants his project to evoke.

### A message of hope

Renzo feels that there was, understandably, a lot of negative feelings around Covid, so has decided to focus on a more positive message. He explains: “Through it all there was always this idea of hope and what tomorrow will bring. People were having more quality time with family, to walk and get outside in nature, so I want to take these thoughts and use them as a message of hope and positivity that transcends the Covid experience”.







Renzo immersed in the sounds  
of da Street

Nature’s soundscape

During the first lockdown, many Shetlanders experienced more time outdoors, tuning into the sounds of the natural world and this is something Renzo wants his compositions to tap into.

“I’m thinking of incorporating field recordings from our natural surroundings, taking sounds from around Shetland – north, south, east and west – and incorporating those to create a certain local atmosphere. Sounds which I would imagine people experience everyday, but maybe because people had more time to be outdoors, to walk, to kill time, maybe those are sounds that relate to the positive side of that experience.”

Renzo hopes that his finished work will act as a “soundtrack” to this book, as the QR code at the beginning of this section can be used to listen while you read. He explains. “Since these tracks will unwrap as part of the book itself through the QR code, there will be an added sensorial level for people who are leafing through the book, stopping at certain pages and looking at images, and being immersed by the sounds that I’ve created to go with the book itself”.

This additional layer means that readers have the option of experiencing the book in a very personal way.

“If they hear certain sounds and see certain images, where does that take the readers mentally? How do they feel now compared to how they felt a few years ago when all this started?.”

The book then will encourage people to slow down, stop and listen – something that Covid forced our fast-paced world to do again. Renzo explains:

“The sounds are everyday sounds but sometimes we just need time to stop and listen because we’re just too busy nowadays.

At that time [lockdown], the world slowed down and that wasn’t a bad thing, actually.”

A collaborative process

Collaboration is an important part of Renzo’s process. He will be working with a string quartet and people who are making voice recordings to add to the compositions, using some of the words and thoughts collected during Phase I of this project. These collected words are not just a source of inspiration for Renzo but also act as a guiding force, to create his own writings that will be included in the recordings.

At the moment, Renzo’s project is still at an early stage, and the artist is experimenting with different approaches. He says:

“I’m processing different ideas and trying things out. So it’s all kind of taking shape. I always say this phase is like having a block of marble and you’re shaving bits off. As I get more immersed in the process, the work is slowly taking some kind of shape. You start thinking by day, then also by night and you’re totally into it. So yeah, I’ve got these very sketchy ideas, but they will come together at some point of time. Hopefully soon!”

“I love the process because there are days when you’re productive, and days when you kind of despair, but it’s part of the process. I’ve been through it so many times, and you accept that as part of the creative journey.”



Renzo rehearsing with his string quartet.



# 15th April Lerwick

## Commercial Street

A clear windless day in early spring. One of the season’s first cruise ships, the *Aidadiva*, has arrived in Lerwick and the town is buzzing.

Calm conditions and a vibrant atmosphere combine to create an evocative soundscape: buskers in Harrison Square, snatches of conversation in different languages, the clinking of masts in the harbour, the keow of gulls.

And Renzo is here to record it all. Standing stock-still in the shop doorways of Commercial Street with his knitted hat and furry microphone, he cuts an enigmatic figure.

He is surrounded by the content capturer entourage for the *Remembering Together* project (writer, photographer, and filmmaker), and so it’s unsurprising when a group of expectant tourists gather round, possibly expecting some street theatre. They linger a few moments, then move on, disappointed by the lack of entertainment this silent group can offer them.

Renzo seems pleased with the recordings captured on Commercial Street, saying: “It’s a nice contrast to the absence of such activity during Covid period. This contrast is something that I’m working with in one of the pieces that I’m composing”.

Cutting an enigmatic figure amidst the bustle of town.





Victoria Pier

After collecting recordings at various points along Commercial Street, it's time to move on to Victoria Pier. Again, there is plenty of activity with groups of visitors boarding the little boats that will take them back to the *Aidadiwa*.

The ambient bustle of Victoria Pier is a world away from the sounds going on below the surface of the water, as Renzo finds out when he lowers a hydrophone into the sea. His under-water microphone picks up an ear-splitting metallic din coming from the cruise ship's



Recording under water with the hydrophone.

engine. It's a deeply unpleasant sound, but one that Renzo was expecting. He explains: "Most of the time I use the hydrophone to pick natural sounds, sounds from sea beds and underwater activity. But for the purpose of this commission, I thought that I should also be engaging with more 'industrial' sounds. I was looking for this kind of sound too".

Renzo is certain of the negative impact this kind of sound has on marine life. "The hydrophone picks a certain frequency of sound, but larger marine species can listen to a wider spectrum which, when you think about it, is even more disturbing, as the sound they hear will be stronger than what comes through a hydrophone. I think if we had to listen to the noise of the ship's engine in the same way that marine organisms do, it would be a very dramatic experience".





Listening at Lerwick Marina.



## Lerwick Marina

The next stop for sound recording is Lerwick Marina, over at Gremista. At first, Renzo feels there isn't much to record. But this soon changes. "It's always a matter of taking the time to let sounds emerge", he says.

The sound of the *Aidadiva* can no longer be heard, resulting in: "a much crisper and nicer, cleaner sound. Less mechanical than when we were close to the cruise ship".

Walking around the pontoon, Renzo records some sounds of water lapping against the boats. He then uses the hydrophone again, reporting back on what he's heard.

"I've been getting this amazing drone sound every now and then. So I've been looking out for it, trying to find a source, but I can't locate it. The unknown is always very exciting."

The sound recording complete, it's time to ask Renzo for an update on where he is with the project.

He says: "Since the last time we met, things have progressed and we're getting closer to our deadlines. I've been carrying out some other sound and field recordings which I've incorporated in some of the pieces, but some pieces are purely music. And I've also developed ideas for the string quartet, who will be playing in three, or maybe four, of the pieces. I've just sent an email to them yesterday so that they can see what I've written, but also to listen to the kind of sound that I'm after, because it's textural in nature".

# 9th May

## Bridge of Walls

As the various strands of Renzo’s project come together, it’s time to reflect on his process in creating the body of work which he has entitled *Drift Into An Elsewhere*.

Renzo explains: “The music I’ve created has a lot of space and breath in it, and I thought that it would be nice if people could just listen to this and be transported to an elsewhere”.

His first step in composing the music was to pick out phrases and words that came up when people shared their experiences of Covid with Christina Inkster. In doing this, Renzo admits he was more interested in positive perspectives.

“During Covid we went through so many negative times that I wanted to find experiences of people who had more positive experiences. Since I wanted my music to be uplifting, I looked at particular angles of the phase one document and brought some of those phrases, words and feelings into my music.”

*Drift Into An Elsewhere* is multi-layered, incorporating music with field recordings and spoken word. These different layers come together to form a body of work, which can also be listened to as you leaf through this book, resulting in a multi-sensory experience.

Renzo’s compositions are rooted in Shetland life. He wanted his music to reflect the calmness and openness of the Shetland landscape. The question was, how could that notion be translated into a sonic fabric?

He explains: “The music that I’ve composed for this project has a cyclical feel to it, giving a sense of transparency”.

Ultimately, Renzo hopes that the simplicity of his composition will allow listeners to “let go, and let the music drift them into another elsewhere”.







Renzo recording a track  
for *It Swept Across Nations*.







## 24th May Mareel

Renzo is recording a section of the track *It Swept Across Nations* for the album *Drift Into An Elsewhere*, and the small recording studio resonates with mesmerising sounds. The primeval quality of the track and its transcendent, universal feel really does transport the listener to another place and time.

Tim Matthew, recording engineer, transmits Renzo's sound recordings through his computer, while Renzo plays the log drum over the top. The track Renzo is recording opens with a line from Renzo's poem of the same name, read by Renzo's friend Billy Mail who was chosen as a reader because of the "amazing texture" of his voice.

*It Swept Across Nations* is a meditation on how Covid spread around the world, and how it affected us. Renzo explains: "There's a resilience aspect to it and how I came out of it [Covid] stronger after a weaker period. The whole sound texture of it is based on field recordings as a reflection of the times when I was just out and about, walking and listening and sharpening my sense of hearing. So, I wanted to bring that ingredient into it. And with that, I'm merging these live percussive interventions, just to form this nice mental picture that I have."

"I've just recorded the middle section of [the track] with the log drum, which is the more melodic aspect of the composition. And now I'm going to record the intro to the tune, which is based on very fluid sounds from these three different gongs that I have here and this very resonant metal plate. This will all be overlaid onto the other tracks that I've been working on already."

The log drum Renzo plays on is inspired by African log drums, which, as he explains, have tongues formed out of hollowed wood from the barks of trees. Renzo says: "The log drums play these melodic patterns. Usually, in the traditional African instruments, there will be four or five tongues carved out, which are the resonating areas that the musicians play on. Multiple log drums are traditionally played by various players and different notes are distributed amongst the players, creating different rhythmic and melodic parts. But this log drum is made by a company in Germany, and it's a very beautiful, warm sounding instrument."

Previous page: Tim Matthew  
in the Mareel studio.

Next page: Renzo rehearsing  
with his string quartet. From L to R:  
Annalie Irvine, Natalie Cairns-Ratter  
& Clare Ricketts.

# Connections

Love  
Nature  
Growth  
Freedom  
Soul-searching  
Connections  
Hope  
Friends  
Connections  
Letters  
Comfort  
Sounds

Connections

Connections

Connections

A new lifestyle  
A new chapter  
With its own pace  
And ease

Slow down time  
Finding myself

Again

Connections

Connections

Connections

Nature  
Is a sensory experience  
The smells  
The sounds  
The views

A reminder  
Of our freedom

Nature  
Growth  
Friends  
Letters  
Sounds  
Hope  
Comfort  
Love

Soul-searching

Connections

Connections

Connections

Renzo Spiteri  
March 2024





A Guide

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to Self-Care

45

A project by  
*Heather Christie*



in Bressay

# What did you do for self-care in the pandemic?







L: *Lunaria annua*, 2019  
R: *Drift of viper's bugloss*, 2020

# 25th March

## Bressay

In her sunny studio, Heather Christie puts two paintings side by side. The first, painted before Covid, is a careful botanical study of *Lunaria annua* (honesty). The second, painted during lockdown, is a much looser and more expressive burst of floral colour.

Heather explains: “My art changed quite a bit during the pandemic. I had been doing more detailed botanical paintings, but my time became very tight, so my work just had to loosen up. I had to do things quickly in the very small amount of time I had”.

For Heather, art is not just work. It’s key to her own well-being. She says: “For me art is about taking myself away from all my responsibilities. It’s a meditative experience. I can either work through things or get myself away from them”.

During lockdown, art provided some much-needed respite for Heather. She explains: “It’s what I did to get away from my busy house when we suddenly had a school and college student and a university lecturer all grappling with online education, and I was trying to work, support them and run the household at the same time.”.

Given Heather’s interest in self-care, It’s unsurprising that her project for *Remembering Together* has a strong focus on well-being – not simply through its emphasis on self-care activities, but also through the space it has provided for the community to talk through their memories of lockdown.

Heather has created a map showing where Bressay people went during lockdown and what they did. The resulting map will be a positive legacy from the pandemic and will be displayed in The Living Hub in Speldiburn Café.

### Community Catharsis

The map is a result of conversations Heather has had with members of the community who were among the most impacted by the lockdown, including people in the under-5s and dementia-friendly groups. The process of taking part in these conversations was a type of self-care as Heather explains:

“I advertised the sessions as Covid conversations, but it has been about people getting to speak their piece and people listening and empathising. That kind of sharing has been fantastic, and I think now has been the right time to do it. Earlier would have been too soon.”

Feedback from the groups has shown how valuable they found the opportunity to share their memories in a supportive setting. One participant told Heather that she’d never talked to anyone about how hard things had been for her at that time. Heather recalls: “She said it was so good to share because, at the time, everyone had just got on with things, without always being aware of what other people were doing or going through.”.

“I do think that circumstances dictated how people experienced it [lockdown]. Pregnant mums were having quite a hard time. People who were crofting could get out and said that it probably kept them sane. Everyone got out and used the island. Even people who found it difficult did what they could.”

Lockdown life in Bressay certainly had its own challenges. Strict ferry rules meant you could not travel without a valid reason. Islanders around Bressay were isolated: unable to see friends and family on the Shetland mainland or further afield.

But there were consolations too. Everyone had space and beautiful places to go. Plus the strong community spirit in Bressay meant people watched out for each other.





Heather's studio, Bressay

### Remembering Resilience

Throughout the project, Heather has been struck by the resilience of Bressay residents, and their ability to look after themselves in trying circumstances.

“Someone said they had a love seat and they would sit in the passing place outside their house and wave to people as a way of making contact.”

“Then there were the collective things that happened. Painting stones, for example. The fact that you could come and put your mark down, that was really nice. Speldiburn did online art classes and they baked for people and gave people nice cakes because they couldn't come to the café.”

The text behind is a section of notes shared by participant Holly Johnstone, reading:

*“Self-care in lockdown – Being outdoors and connecting with nature. Walking is my moving meditation and I find a dip in the sea to be a complete neurological reset. Obviously be aware of safety & tides and let someone know when I'm going & when I'm likely to be back.*

*Gardening is my therapy.”*







# How did you look after yourself in the harder times?

Participants at a Covid conversation  
in Speldiburn Café, Bressay





A Positive Legacy

Heather has been working in design for heritage interpretation for over 20 years. She used to do a lot of map drawing, but in recent times has moved more towards illustration and painting.

She says: “I’ve been missing making maps, to be honest, so this was just the idea that came to me, that I could map what people did. And I wanted to do something that’s positive, so the idea of people looking after themselves came about”.

“I hope people will use my map. I hope they will take it out and say: ‘I didn’t know you could walk there, I’ll go there’ or ‘I might try and make this recipe’ or ‘I haven’t crocheted in years’. Or even just decide to do something to look after themselves.”

The map contains personal touches to honour those who were involved in the making of it. For example, people who have shared their experiences in the community groups are visually represented on the map. Heather points to the map: “There’s also a drawing on the map that represents a woman who was a real part of our community. We lost her (not because of Covid) and it was after lockdown but I wanted to remember her too”.

As Heather listened to people share their experiences in the community groups, she took notes. It didn’t take her long to realise that she was documenting the island’s social history. And so she has decided to give her notes to the Bressay Heritage Centre.

“I wanted to do something which was about reminding people that they did look after their well-being and they could keep looking after their well-being. And it’s turned into something that feels a bit more important than that in the long-term.”



A glimpse of Heather’s process, where she translates ideas from the workshops onto her tablet.

This is more than a map. At its heart lies the stories of the Bressay islanders and their experience of Covid.

As Heather says: “The island has so many different stories to tell. Some people had a good pandemic, and some people had an awful time. I don’t think one story is enough”.

Heather feels that the story-sharing part of her project could easily be adapted to suit other communities around Shetland. “I think it [the project] isn’t particularly dependent on me, so someone else with any kind of similar skills could go and document what happened in their area and share it”.



# 16th April

## Speldiburn, Bressay

Heather Christie is laying large, flat stones and paints and brushes on the table, getting ready for a social evening where people can come along and share a crafting activity they enjoyed during lockdown.

The cold and rain have kept many folk at home, so it’s a small group that sits around the table.

One woman knits and a man sketches. The rest of us paint rocks, an activity which many in Bressay associate with lockdown.

Heather explains: “During Covid lots of people painted rocks, and then they all started to put them around the shop, because the shop was the only place that everyone could go to. It was like your proxy for gathering with people even though you couldn’t really gather. And they’re still there today, you can still see them”. As people paint rocks, knit and sketch, they talk.

One woman speaks about how her husband was in hospital during Covid and how he had to wash all his clothes by hand after heart surgery.

Someone else shares a recipe they cooked during Covid times: baked feta and cheese with tomato.

Another says how strange it feels to talk about Covid as if it was past history.

And it really does feel like past history. Sitting around the table, sharing tea, cake and stories, that period of isolation seems unreal, tucked away as it is into our individual memories.

This is why remembering Covid together is so important. When we share stories about this time in our lives, it’s about more than just looking back – it’s about communal healing.



A glimpse into one of Heather's workshops at Speldiburn Café, Bressay.





Participants making baskets during one of Heather's workshops.



# Heather’s go-to banana cake recipe

Heather has vivid memories of Sunday lunches during the first Covid lockdown. She says: “I wanted to make them special and make them last to keep my family going”.

The family would have internationally-themed Sunday afternoons (such as Indian, Mexican etc.) and would sometimes have a Shetland Sunday tea with cheese, ham and egg sandwiches and cakes.

Heather says: “There would always be banana cake because it was a bit less sugary than some of the others. We’d have scones too, and maybe a bought in traybake”.

### Ingredients

- 3 very ripe medium bananas
- 3 large free-range eggs
- 100g/3½oz soft light brown sugar
- 150ml/5fl oz sunflower or vegetable oil
- 275g/9¾oz white self-raising flour
- 1 tsp ground mixed spice
- 1 tsp baking powder

### Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180C/160C Fan/Gas 4 and grease and line a 900g/2lb loaf tin with baking parchment or use a loaf tin liner.
2. Peel the bananas and mash with a fork. Tip into a large mixing bowl and add the eggs, sugar and oil. Use a fork or whisk to combine.
3. Add the flour, spice and baking powder and whisk together until thoroughly combined. Pour into the prepared tin. Bake for 40 minutes, or until the cake is well risen and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean.
4. Cool in the tin for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack. Serve warm or cold in slices. Spread with butter if you like.

Heather facilitating a workshop at Speldiburn Café.

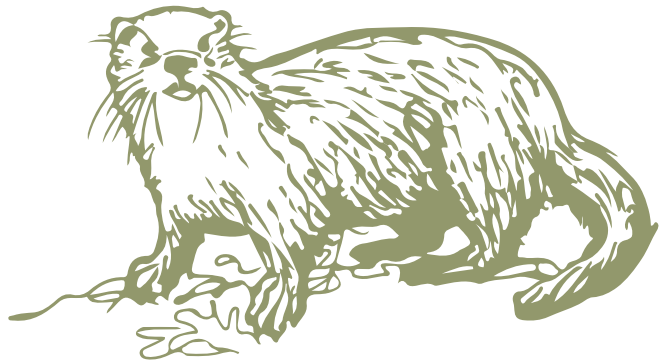






Coming together through a crafting activity.

How would  
you describe  
your getaway  
place?



How did it  
make you feel?





## 29th April Speldiburn, Bressay

Heather is busy hanging her exhibition on the walls of the café. There are paintings, knitwear and little sketch books, but most of all there are quotes – things that people said during Heather’s Covid Conversation groups.

There are poignant memories like this one:

“There was something lost when you were pregnant in Covid times. The Under 5s Group mums never saw each other pregnant. We told my in-laws I was pregnant through their window. All appointments were on the phone. And then in person it was face masks. I’d never seen my midwife without a face mask.”

“I was locked in by the NHS. They decided I was extremely vulnerable and I couldn’t go out my door. I could open my door for air, but I couldn’t go outside. Later I had a review and they apologised. They said you could go out in your garden.”

“I spoke a lot to my sister in the states online. I found there was lots of free university short courses. I did marine biology, physics, biochemistry, cosmology. I have a science background. It was fun to see what the different universities offered.”

“I had a food box delivered to me once a week. My single contact with a human being, he had to put the box down and stand back. Could only chat for a couple of minutes. Going out for the first time I had major panic attacks. It took ages to get back to normal.”

As well as more positive recollections:

“Me and my friends started up a Zoom book club, which is still going. That was fortnightly on a Sunday evening. I read books I wouldn’t normally have read. We didn’t know how to get started and my friend’s sister belonged to a book club and we got her list. But now there’s maybe about ten of us, and we each suggest a book, and then we work through that...”

“...Lots of people learned how to zoom. We did all kinds of things to upskill.”

Heather says she is “pleased” with how the exhibition is taking shape, although it’s not quite how she originally envisaged it. She says: “I thought I’d get out and I’d get people to make art, but people didn’t want to make art. They want to talk, you know. So that’s what we have in the exhibition. We have their words and a little bit of art that people did at the time”. She adds: ‘I think it’s actually maybe more interesting for people to read and see what other people have said, and chat about things more’.

Reflecting on her project, Heather feels that people have found it “cathartic” to share their Covid experiences.

“I’m noticing more general chat about lockdown, so I think it’s come at the right time. You know, people are beginning to share things anyway, but to get to share it with a group of people or to have it written down just kind of validates it, I suppose. It’s like someone taking notice of you.”

“Because you were just one of many people all going through a tough time and it was a stiff-upper-lip kind of time. You just got on with things because you had to. But then, you have to process what happened at some point because it was quite traumatic for some people.”

In working on this project, Heather’s been thinking about all the art she’s made to date, and the different themes she’s explored within it. She says: ‘There’s a collective theme of resilience, and once I get a chance, it would be quite nice to explore that a bit more. Also, I’m interested in art that tells stories. What will come out of that? I have no idea’.

Heather walks toward Noss Sound.



Heather hanging her exhibition in Speldiburn Café.





# 2nd June

## Speldiburn, Bressay

Heather’s map is now on display in The Living Hub room at Speldiburn, and her leaflets are ready to be distributed. She describes herself as “relieved and delighted” by the finished artwork. “The large map looks wonderful, and the leaflets are just as I had imagined. I’m very much looking forward to it going out to Bressay residents, and I hope that any spare copies can be used to help organisations on the island”.

Heather hopes that her work will encourage reflection. She says: “I hope that people will continue to look back and realise that just getting through lockdown was an achievement - there was such a lot of resilience. I hope the illustrations on the map and the suggestions in the leaflet are taken on by islanders - that they get themselves out and about, and consider how they can continue to look after their wellbeing”.

Personally speaking, Heather feels she has learned a lot over the past few months. She says: “I’ve learned to let things happen and go with the flow, to proofread many times! But I also learned a lot about my community and myself, that we all managed differently, that we all had different experiences - some struggled, some found the isolation idyllic, but all these experiences and feelings are equally valid and important”.

A bench with a view: looking across Noss Sound.



# A Guide to Self-care in Bressay

Walks

10 km  
10 miles

## Enjoying Nature And getting out and about...

*This map describes some of the ways Bressay folk looked after their wellbeing outdoors during the height of the Covid pandemic. We hope this provides inspiration for some 'Bressay self-care' now and in the future.*



*“It was the start of me having a think about me and my needs”*

“Me and my friends started up a Zoom book club, which is still going - I read books I wouldn’t normally read. Now there’s maybe about ten of us, and we each suggest a book, and then we work through that.”

**Personal Growth**

“I KEPT A JOURNAL. BECAUSE THE PANDEMIC WAS HISTORY.”

*“We all craved that mastery of a skill, improving in yourself. On my walk I would time myself and see if I could go faster sometimes...”*

“I found lots of free university short courses. I did marine biology, physics, biochemistry. I have a science background. It was fun to see what the different universities offered!”

*“Music Changed. There’s a lack of music now.”*

**Spirituality**

“It made folk realise what they were getting out of life, because they had to stop and think about things, like making more effort to keep in contact with friends”

*“I did an online meditation course and I started doing card readings.”*

“The Kirk was closed and went to video, did online services. I watched them every week.”

**“I GOT INTO SPIRITUALITY. IT REALLY HELPED ME TO COPE.”**

**Creativity**

*“I crocheted rainbows. I got really into that.”*

“I WAS THE COOK FOR A HOUSEHOLD WORKING AND STUDYING AND HAD VERY LITTLE TIME! SO MY ARTWORK CHANGED AND DEVELOPED - IT BECAME FASTER AND LOOSER. IT WAS GOOD TO ADAPT.”

*“I had cancer... in hospital, I did cross stitch, TV would be boring”*

“I knitted things indoors. I knitted quite a lot of hats for the homeless. Very plain - it passed the time.”

*“I did gardening, crochet – and painting stones, I really enjoyed that. I got right into stencils for stones too.”*

Cross Stitch: Tam Christie

**Growing & eating**

“I MADE CROISSANTS FOR THE FIRST TIME.”

“Food became my life, I would make these breads. Then I got into foraging.”

*“My man used to make sourdough. He was great. He started following a recipe first - and then really went for it!”*

Photo and bread: Estelle Hughes

**Lockdown Leek & Tattie Soup**

**Ingredients:**

- 1/2 tbs olive oil
- 3 leeks, washed & chopped
- 2 cloves finely chopped garlic
- 450g potatoes, peeled & chopped
- 1 litre stock (chicken or veg)

**Method:**

1. Heat the oil, then sauté the leeks for about 3 mins.
2. Add the potatoes, garlic and stock.
3. Simmer for about 25 mins, until the potatoes are soft.
4. Let it cool a little, then blend, season and garnish to taste.

*“I got the polycrub just before lockdown started. It kept me sane. Growing was new to me. I’d never grown under cover before.”*

**“The crofting life had to go on. That probably saved many a person.”**

*“Gardening and outdoor work made a huge difference to my husband and his cousin.”*

**Movement**

*“Swimming in the sea...it was such a neurological reset.”*

“I was south and would google ‘streetview’ walks in Bressay.”

“WHEN YOU’RE OUT RUNNING, YOU GET TO THE HIGH POINTS AND LOOK AROUND AND BREATHE.”

*“I dug out these gigantic rigs. I pulled everything up. Creating and building, moving and making and then running outside. I ran three times a day!”*

Drawing: Katrina Christie Lloyd

**A Guide to Self-care in Bressay**

- OR -

Places to walk and immerse yourself in nature,

- PLUS -

additional hints and tips to help yourself feel good

*These hints and tips are quotes and stories from Bressay residents. They describe how folk looked after their wellbeing during the height of the Covid pandemic. We hope these will provide some inspiration for your own self-care now and in the future.*

With grateful thanks to:

- BRESSAY UNDER 5S GROUP
- BRESSAY CRAFT GROUP
- BRESSAY SOCIAL AFTERNOON,
- SPELDIBURN COMMUNITY HUB
- BRESSAY’S YOUNG FOLK

and the many individuals who shared their stories.

Research, illustration and design: Heather Christie





Heather with her map, which she hopes will “encourage reflection”.

# Recipe

## A Community Guide to Wellbeing

Feeling inspired by Heather’s well-being map and leaflet? Want to try something similar in your own community? Here’s how.

### Ingredients

- A handful of community groups
- A few hours’ worth of reminiscence and chat
- One map of your area to plot ideas and notes on (plus additional paper for notes)
- Pens and pencils
- Tea, coffee and cake (optional but highly recommended)

### Stage 1

- 1.1 Choose a community group to focus on.
- 1.2 Discuss their experiences during the height of the pandemic – what did they do to look after themselves? Where did they go for self-care?
- 1.25 (You can talk with individuals 1-1, work in groups, chat to people on Facebook, whatever works for you!)
- 1.3 Collect stories, quotes and photos from your conversations.
- 1.4 Look at the material you’ve collected. Plot some ideas for well-being activities on your map.

### Stage 2

- 2.1 Draw up your final map, and add illustrations (you can do this digitally, or by hand, although it will need to be scanned to create a leaflet).
- 2.2 You can ask an artist to illustrate your map, or you can collect illustrations from your groups.

### Stage 3

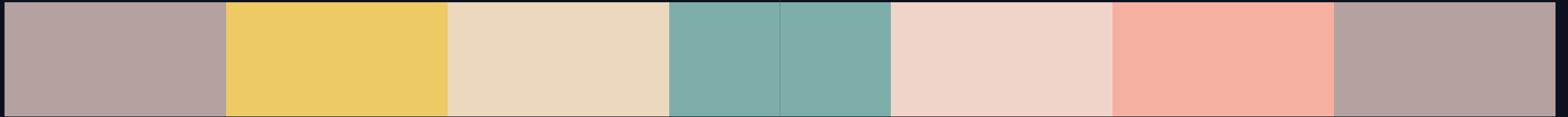
- 3.1 Now it’s time to create your leaflet. Put the map on one side of it.  
  
Fill the other sides with a title page and quotes, drawings, and photos from your conversations. Group the content into themes, for example: cooking, spirituality, gardening etc.  
  
Get a few people to proofread your leaflet for errors.

Now your leaflet is ready, it’s time to share it. Well done – not only have you collected some local history, you have also made a practical self-care guide which can be used by locals and visitors to your area.

# Connected

# Memory

A project by  
*JJ Jamieson & Liz Musser*



# 78

# 79





# 30th March, Sandwick

March 2020. Shetland has been transformed overnight. With no traffic on the roads, the initial silence is eerie. Then, as we all hold our breath and listen, an entirely new soundscape emerges.

The sound of the NorthLink's foghorn announcing its arrival to a seemingly deserted Shetland. The sound of Sandwick drumming on pots and pans in tribute to the NHS. The sound of the Town Hall clock chiming over Lerwick, answered only by pigeons and starlings.

What emotions might these sounds evoke now in the Shetlanders who lived through the first lockdown? How might it feel to remember these sounds together, rather than in isolation? And how have Shetlanders, famed for their strong sense of community, managed to reconnect after a period of forced separation?

These are some of the questions that local filmmakers JJ Jamieson and Liz Musser are seeking answers to in their project, *Connected Memory*.



Up Rompa Hill, where JJ recorded many of his sounds.





Project participant Andy Anderson listens to JJ's soundscape.

This project is made up of two parts. At first, participants from across the community are filmed individually as they listen to Shetland's Covid soundscape. They are asked to reflect on what they hear and to say whatever comes to mind. In doing so, their own personal memories come to the fore, unpacked and free from media interference.

In the second part, participants are filmed again. This time they listen to other participants' reflections and comment on what they have heard, connecting to each other through memory and emotion. Participants are also given the chance to ask the question of their choice to other people in the community, for example: "How did Covid change your relationships?".

The project's outcome is a video in two parts. The first part reflects on the isolation of the lockdown; the second part explores the community's reconnection with each other. This part of the video mimics the Zoom calls which, for so many during lockdown, represented time with the family and friends they could not physically see.







## Shetland's Covid soundscape

Some people baked bread daily during Covid.  
Others undertook ambitious DIY projects.

JJ Jamieson, on the other hand, went outside and collected sounds.

He reflects: "I really started to enjoy going out and hearing the birds and wildlife without any of the cars or the engines or diggers. I would bring my kids for our health walk every day and I would say to them: 'Listen, just listen – this is what people used to hear 100 years ago!'"

He started to record what he heard, with no fixed idea about what he wanted to do with these recordings.

He recalls: "I got a lot of ambient sound, but I got a few other things as well that were kind of exclusive to Covid like the population of Sandwick clapping for the NHS. Sandwick is spread out so far you gotta make a lot of noise. Clapping wasn't cutting it, so everybody was hitting metal pans and making as much noise as they could. And when you listen to that recording it's not far off a tribal dance or something. It's an odd recording but anyone that lived here would feel straight away as soon as they heard it: 'I know what that is, I remember that'".

Aware that he had collected a precious record of these first months of lockdown, JJ hit upon the idea of filming people's reactions as they listened to the recordings. He shared his idea with fellow film-maker Liz Musser, who suggested the idea of having listeners react to each other, thereby connecting with each other. Through this creative collaboration, the idea for the project *Connected Memory* was born.



Sound and collective memory

Liz was intrigued by research findings which show that sound uniquely activates neural pathways. She explains: “When we hear sounds, the brain lights up to analyse emotional content and memories”.

It is the connection between sound, memory and emotion that the two artists have set out to explore.

Project participants listened to JJ’s recordings from lockdown. The sounds they heard included birdsong, the sounds of a deserted Lerwick, and shoppers in Tesco. They were given a few minutes to reflect before sharing their responses.

The sounds evoked a range of emotional responses, which shared common threads.

Liz says: “Just about everybody touched on how nice it was to be able to go outside, how the bird song was louder and more pronounced than any they ever remembered before. I don’t think there was anybody that didn’t talk about the value of the outdoors and space here and having access to that”.

And yet, the project also exposes “the two sides of Covid” as JJ sees it. “We found too that there are some people who thought it was a great experience and enjoyed it while other people really didn’t enjoy it and suffered badly”.

As Liz sees it, this is where collective memory plays its part in collective healing, as people navigate each other’s very different experiences of lockdown. She explains:

“I think people are quite respectful of other people’s experiences. They acknowledge that, even when someone has had a basically positive experience, there’s also an acknowledgement that others suffered.”



Shots of JJ's studio in Sandwick.

JJ and Liz have both been able to sense people’s relief in having the time and space to reflect on a period of time that already seems distant and dreamlike. JJ says a common response to the sound recordings is: “That just took me right back.”.

And as people remember an aspect of lockdown, such as panic buying, they remember “a whole chain of things linked to it”. As a result, buried memories come to the surface, needing to be talked through.

There is clearly a need to connect with others through these memories. As Liz says: “Every time we’ve shut the cameras down, we’ve probably ended up talking for another hour because people want to release this stuff.”.

Liz testing the camera  
and audio set-up in the studio.







# 19th April

## Mareel

JJ and Liz are taking a break from putting together the final components of their exhibition, *Connected Memory*.

The exhibition's location has been carefully chosen; anchored at the home of Shetland Arts, the screen will be set up outside the cinema at Mareel, so viewers will have the chance to engage with it as they wait to see their film.

The two artists could have installed the exhibition at a public hall, but decided against this, as they hoped it could be accessible to a diverse group rather than just one community.

They also wanted their exhibition to be something that people came across as they went about their lives rather than an event that they had to make a special trip to experience. JJ explains:

“This way takes the pressure off [people] having to go and see it, you know, and it's just there anyway. And you have multiple listens as well, because you might be in that space every day or several times a week. Because the other alternative was to show it in a hall, but that way we'd have been booking a specific slot in time and saying, if you want to see this, you've got to get to this particular time. It's not quite as open as this.”

JJ and Liz have chosen a setup which allows visitors to engage with the participants' stories at their own pace, similar to overhearing and then joining a conversation. As Liz explains:

“It's like eavesdropping. Or like joining a conversation at a party where you plop yourself in and pick up on what they [the participants] are saying, and hopefully it sparks something in your own thinking. So the idea is that when it's exhibited, that a person can come up at any time and it will get them thinking. And if they're with somebody else, you know, hopefully that sparks a conversation.”

The legacy of long Covid

Both JJ and Liz agree on the impact that one specific participant has had on shaping the project – a person whose life has been turned upside down by long Covid.

Up until they spoke to this participant, many of their interviewees had reflected on enjoying the downtime that the first few months of lockdown afforded them.

This participant showcased the other end of the spectrum. As JJ observes: “While many had a less severe experience, this person’s life was completely altered by long Covid”.

What was most surprising about interviewing this participant was her resilience in the face of life-changing illness. Having lost her job and her mobility, JJ and Liz didn’t expect this person’s story to be anything other than grim. But what transpired from their interview amazed them both. Liz recalls:

“Everybody we spoke with had come out of it [Covid] with a positive perspective. And I was just dreading [interviewing the participant with long Covid] because how can not being able to work anymore, being unable to get out of bed some days, having all the things that are the result of long Covid be anything but horrific?”

It turned out that the experience of long Covid was life changing, but not in a wholly negative way. Liz explains: “She [the participant] went on to do mindfulness courses. She’s connected with people all over the world now who share the common experience [of long Covid] and have that desire to get the word out about what is happening with long Covid and how it’s been overlooked”.

“It’s hard to emphasise how affirming it is that even in really dark times, we manage to pull something out of it and see this positive thing.”

JJ and Liz had initially planned for six participants, which “visually worked perfectly”. But including the perspective of the seventh participant and what she had to say about long Covid, was important to them, and so they had to go back to the drawing board. As JJ says: “We’ve rethought the entire presentation. It’s more dynamic now; not everyone appears in the same order as initially planned. We’ve had to adapt and reorder the content, but that’s just the nature [of film projects]”.



Ella Robertson and Jamie Dalziel, both project participants.



Preserving memories

Liz sees the project as a way of keeping memories alive. “[It’s] almost like revisiting and reconstructing memories, which is integral to how we retain them. This project isn’t just about creating memories but helping preserve them in a communal way”.

Both JJ and Liz have found the experience of gathering these stories and seeing them come together a rewarding one. They hope the final product resonates with viewers as much as it has with them during its creation. Liz says: “You have a sense you’ve gotten a chance to hear these stories. And we just hope that when it comes together that other people will feel the way we felt in doing it”.

The next steps are to put the exhibition up in Mareel, towards the end of May. There are many unknowns, but both artists say that they are “excited” about the installation.

JJ says: “We don’t know what it’s going to look like when it’s finished. We don’t know how it’s going to turn out. But we know it will be good”.

Next page: Participants in *Connected Memory*. From L to R: Juan Brown, Janice Leask, Karen Rennie, Bottom row: Neil Pearson, Andy Anderson, Jamie Dalziel and Ella Robertson

I joined an international Pogues tribute band [...] a collaboration of people all around the world. → *We had closer family contact during Covid times than we had done previously.* → We decided, my partner of 35 years and I that we would actually do something really positive through the pandemic. As soon as we could, we decided we were going to get married. → *I was morbidly obese. I’m hardly small now, but during Covid I took to fitness. [...] I managed to lose quite a significant amount of weight and reverse the type 2 diabetes.*

Maybe the question is what new ways can we learn to connect with each other?



reflect  
connect





# 15th May

## Rompa, Sandwich

JJ stands on Rompa hill, at the spot where he made the sound recordings of the NorthLink and of the Sandwich community clapping for the NHS.

It's a gorgeous spring morning, reminiscent of some of the sunny spring days that Shetland experienced in those early days of Covid lockdown. Hoswick spreads out below us, crystalline water lapping against the bay. A curlew calls. Only the sound of distant traffic reminds us that this is 2024 and not 2020.

JJ's microphone picks up every single sound around it. He tells the story of a time he was out recording sounds. As he went about his business, he was distracted by a distinct noise, that he couldn't quite place. Neither could he work out where it was coming from. Peering around him, he suddenly saw a small duck around 50 yards away emptying the water off its beak.

The microphone is so sensitive, that it has to be attached to a long pole and held in mid-air. JJ has to get it as far away from himself as possible. Any closer and it would record his breathing.

"It's a very sensitive mic", he concludes.



A look at JJ's equipment.



JJ recording sounds up Rompa Hill.









# 29th May

## Mareel

Our group of artists and content creators is sitting in a semi-circle outside the two cinemas, watching JJ and Liz’s film, *Connected Memory*.

The faces of seven well-known Shetlanders pop onto the screen one by one, just as they do on a Zoom call. They put headphones on at JJ’s request and listen to his Covid sound recordings. As they listen, each face tells its own story, displaying emotions ranging from wry amusement to antipathy.

The plain pastel-coloured backgrounds focus all our attention on these facial expressions. From the slightest wince to the smallest smile, nothing goes unseen.

From the viewers, there are smiles and nods of recognitions as participants describe their Covid experiences. One describes listening to the birds, and noticing that they sounded “happier”. Another shares the social awkwardness of emerging from Covid after spending weeks with just her family.

As the film concludes, JJ and Liz are congratulated by their audience on this small gem of a film. But how do they feel about their achievement?

JJ says: “In many ways it’s what we had planned to make, but in other ways it’s evolved and developed its own character, due to our mix of participants. I’m really pleased with it”.

Karen, one of the participants in *Connected Memory*.







You can find a QR code to watch JJ and Liz's film here:



The film can also be found on Shetland Arts Youtube.

He adds, "I was quite surprised at how easily it sparks conversations amongst viewers. People seem really keen to relate their Covid memories".

Both filmmakers are grateful to the participants for sharing their pandemic experiences so generously.

Liz says: "Whenever I start a new project, it feels like a leap of faith [...] I pray it'll all come together. I'm quite happy with the outcome, which was only possible because of the Shetlanders who participated in our film".

She adds: "The pandemic was a huge event in our lives. We had a cross-section of Shetlanders sharing their Covid stories. I hope viewers will identify with some and maybe get a new insight into a completely different experience. The best thing for me is when I think I know what a person is going to say and they completely surprise me. I had some happy surprises in the process of making our film".



Left: Neil Pearson.

Top to bottom: Ella Robertson, Juan Brown, Janice Leask, Andy Anderson, Karen Rennie, Jamie Dalziel.

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Back to

A project by  
*Malcolm Innes*

the Light

109



# 27th February

## Mareel, Lerwick

“I’m a light artist and a lighting designer. I’m also interested in sound – there’s quite a lot that kind of works its way into my work.”

It’s Tuesday morning, and Malcolm is speaking to the HNC music students at Mareel. He’s visiting the class to introduce himself and his work, talk about *Back to the Light*, and find out if any of the students would be interested in helping to provide a soundtrack for his installation.

The students watch and listen, transfixed, as Malcolm shows them images of his work – from *A Night in the Garden* (a light and sound installation at Edinburgh’s Royal Botanic Gardens) to *Night of Heritage Light* (a dramatic light projection that transformed Edinburgh’s Writers’ Museum and parts of Makars’ Court).

Malcolm’s love affair with light goes back a long way. He says: “I can remember going to school in the morning, in the winter and realising that I really liked the light in the winter. If it was a sunny day and clear skies, the depth of colour in the sky was amazing and I loved the low angle light casting shadows across the buildings and through the trees”.

He recalls travelling home as a young art student and capturing his first light sculpture: “It was in the dark in the winter, and it had been raining outside. The inside of the bus was all steamed up because everyone was wet and damp.

“[I remember] going past streetlights and the streetlights casting shadows of tree branches. And it was winter, so there were bare trees casting those shadows onto the bus. When the bus stopped at the bus stop, there was a very clear image of the trees cast onto the windows. You couldn’t see out. And then the bus started driving off and sped up, and the branches got faster and faster until there was just a blur, and you couldn’t make them out anymore. And then it slowed down again.”



Malcolm talking to music students at Mareel, Lerwick.



And these images resolved slowly.

“I was absolutely transfixed by this and set out to find a way to represent this to other people, because it was such an incredible experience, once I became aware of it. And so that was the basis of my first light sculpture.”

For Malcolm, nothing beats the quality of Shetland light, especially in the wintertime. He explains: “That narrow window of low angle light is extended for a much longer part of the year, and so I get the chance to have the low angle sunlight much more often in Shetland. I know from talking to lots of friends from around the world, it’s quite difficult to explain to them what the light is like here, especially if they live near the equator, where it’s pretty much the same every single day”.

With the students, Malcolm shares his plan for a light installation that will allow participants space for their personal recollections of Covid, while allowing them to contemplate the broader themes of hope, resilience, and the journey through darkness towards the dawn of a brighter future.

He says: “We went through a period of darkness through Covid and through lockdown. Gradually we are emerging from that and we are working our way back to what life used to be like before. And that is us. Back to the light”.

# 25th March

## Bressay

Just five days before Malcolm’s live participatory event *Back to the Light (Together)*, not everything is going to plan.

Illness has laid Malcolm low for two weeks, pushing him behind schedule. He’s also relying on two notoriously unreliable factors for his event to be a success: technology and the Shetland weather. Neither has been on their best behaviour over the past few days.

It’s hard not to feel stressed on his behalf. Yet Malcolm seems calm, as he consults the weather forecast (which looks hopeful at this point) and chats about his work from the comfort of his Bressay home.

In fact, he describes himself as feeling “excited”.

“I’m happy that we’re getting to the point where we will have something to show, something to see. And I’m happy with where we’re doing it. I’ve tested it on site, and I feel much more confident that it’s going to work.”



“We’re using the Mareel façade as the main projection space. There’s still a lot to do in terms of fine-tuning the content of what the show actually is and what the visuals are, and I’ve been working through a lot of the quotations that were collected in Phase 1 of the project. That’s been really valuable because there’s a lot of things in there that just encapsulate what so many people were feeling, both during the pandemic but also afterwards, how it’s changed people’s lives. Some of these quotations will appear on Friday night in the ‘Together’ event but quite a lot of them will be stand-alone projections around Shetland in the ‘Apart’ phase of the project.”





Malcolm preparing for his installation, *Together*, in his studio.

Malcolm is preparing a large format interactive digital projection which will capture and reflect the essence of the Covid experience. Quotes (collected by Christina Inkster) will be projected on the façade of Mareel and the boating shed along with images. The light projections will be accompanied by music composed by Michelle Henderson.

The event cannot be rescheduled. The light installation needs to take place in the dark, but not too late at night, so that it is inclusive to everyone who wants to attend.

The problem is that we’re now racing against time – or, more specifically, the lengthening of the days. In fact, the day after the event marks the beginning of British Summer Time. The rapidly increasing amount of daylight is the reason why the project might seem back to front in its execution. Malcolm’s project is in two parts: ‘Together’ and ‘Apart’. Logically, the ‘Together’ phase should come after ‘Apart’ as lockdown separated people before allowing them to come back together again. But there is good reason for the order Malcolm has chosen to approach things in, as he explains:

“It seems like it’s the wrong way around, because we’re doing the ‘Together’ bit first. But this gave me the most amount of time to develop something before the clocks changed. You could do something that would be later on in the year, but it would be starting so late. We want young people to be there and not to have to stay up too late.”

The next few days will be intense for Malcolm, who admits that there will be “a huge amount of activity right up to the wire”.

“Because of the nature of the projections it doesn’t really matter how much you think and plan about things, there will still be stuff that you need to fix on site. I know that from experience so I’m not expecting to have it all worked out before I get there.”

Together

Through working on *Back to the Light* Malcolm has found himself cast back into a time which seems increasingly unreal.

“Everything seems to be back to normal in the world around us and you almost have to pinch yourself that it [lockdown] actually happened at all. It’s been interesting working through this project and particularly seeing what other people were saying cos you do go – oh yes, that happened didn’t it? I forgot about that! I forgot about the feeling of fear about going to the supermarket, wondering if we could survive another week without going shopping...”

“And it was so weird and unnatural, that sense of both missing having other people around but also being scared of other people. That juxtaposition was very odd. Whenever you left the house, you were going: ‘is this the time I’m going to catch Covid?’”

Through this event, Malcolm wants to help people experience and reflect upon the togetherness that “was missing from everyone’s life during the pandemic”.

It is set up to contrast with the second part of the project, ‘Apart’. Malcolm explains: “Apart is about the time we spent away from our loved ones and our friends and our families. And then the Together. The stuff we were missing before and the stuff that gradually has come back - although everyone was very scared at the beginning, of having too much together time”.

Malcolm hopes that the quotations collected by Christina Inkster in Phase 1 will trigger people to say other things, which might end up being projected somewhere in Shetland for the second phase of the project.

“I want this event on Friday to suggest things through people, either through the imagery or through things that other people have said.”





# 29th March, 7pm

## Mareel

After a day of anxious sky watching, an orange sun sinks slowly over a glassy sea. The evening is dry and windless, with a clear sky. And, at seven o'clock, it is still light.

Malcolm seems every bit as calm as he did on Monday morning, his only nod to potential issues being the spare lap-tops and projectors he has on stand-by.

In the museum car park, a small crowd has gathered. The buzz of anticipation intensifies as everyone waits for the darkness to settle.

And then it happens. Slowly the sun sinks in the sky and the projections can be seen.

As Malcolm's swirling, rippling and pulsating light projections illuminate the still night, music composed by Michelle Henderson combines with quotations about Covid to create an experience that is reflective, poignant and celebratory all at once.

A truly intergenerational event, the silhouettes of children pirouette across the boat shed wall, followed by the enormous shadow of their dog. A group of teenage boys laugh as their hands form shadow puppets.



As darkness descends, Malcolm prepares for his light installation, *Together*.



And then, figures stand in front of the light box and start dancing to the music, delighted at seeing themselves projected on the side of Mareel. Laughter rings out through the night's stillness. It is reminiscent of the lockdown gatherings that occurred in the summer of 2020, when the restrictions eased and people gathered in gardens to socialise.

As the evening draws to a close, Malcolm is content that all has gone well.

"I'm very pleased that the weather was kind to us. I'm relieved that the technology worked. It's always strange in a project like this because I always see things that I want to do differently or do better. It's really gratifying when people do actually interact with it as well. No one else knows what I see and if they're enjoying what's in front of them that's perfect."











“On that side it feels very much like water and time together, as if the weaves of times are evoking more memories now. And then with the spinning and the circles it’s like going back. Then there’s one that’s brain-shaped and it evokes memory and thinking as well as all the quotes that are up on there.”

Participant at Malcom's Together event.















Participants observing, interacting and reflecting at *Together*.

“I feel like it’s really freeing, everyone being out and together watching. The feeling that it’s brought back is the happiness that we can all commemorate together like this.”

Participant at Malcom’s Together event.

# Home

## Main theme

Michelle Henderson  
Violin

8

A

7

1. 2. B

13

18

# 12th April

## Online

Michelle Henderson appears on screen, piano and guitar in the background setting the scene for the chat.

A couple of weeks have passed since *Back to the Light* and Michelle, the musician who composed its haunting soundtrack, has been catching up on rest after the frenetic run-up to the event.

Michelle is a music student at Mareel and first met Malcolm when he visited her class to talk about his project.

She recalls: “When Malcolm came into the college that day, he talked about his project and the ideas behind it. I had only started the HNC in September and was new to composition. I only had what I’d done for college”.

As Malcolm explained his vision to the class of NC music students, Michelle remembered a piano piece she’d done called *Missing You Within My Heart* and another composition called *Home*. Both pieces seemed suited to the themes Malcolm was speaking about.

She had poured her feelings into *Missing You Within My Heart*, a piece composed with recent loss in mind. “Although they [relatives] are gone, they’re still very much there within you. You kind of feel their energy. It’s like they’re gone, but they’re not really gone. That piece was very much composed around how people must be feeling through their loss, feeling energetically connected despite the absence”.

Looking back on the pandemic, Michelle feels “robbed” of precious time with older family members. “Now when I think of it, I have a bit of anger in me because I feel like I missed some really important years. I’ve lost older relatives during the last year or two and didn’t get the chance to spend time with them because of Covid”.

Michelle’s diverse musical influences are reflected in her compositions, which are a mixture of modern and traditional influences, perfectly complementing *Back to the Light*’s fusion of technology and timelessness.

“I’m half raver, half folky. My clubbing days in the ‘90s had me living a double life between tunes in Da Lounge and clubs in Edinburgh. I always wanted to merge those worlds.”

“Although there are fiddles [in my compositions], they have an electronic, more ambient sound to them. They mix the modern with the traditional, so it worked well on the night of Malcom’s event.”

“Being down at Mareel, with the boats, the sea, the Shetland landscape and the light, I couldn’t believe it. I had to pinch myself.”



# 30th April

## Bonhoga Gallery, Weisdale

It’s eight o’clock in the evening, and the sun is just starting to sink in the sky. Malcolm is unloading his car and setting up his generator in preparation for darkness, when he will light up the gable end of the Bonhoga Gallery and the bridge across the burn that runs in front of it.

Tonight’s installation is one episode in the ‘Apart’ section of Malcolm’s project, a series of individual projections at sites around Shetland. He is aiming to include a spread of different locations, places which were once lively but which have been abandoned since lockdown. He says: “[I wanted] that sense of there being a busy world around us then suddenly there wasn’t. And everything being very quiet and still”.

Malcolm’s initial plan was to project his art onto buildings around Shetland. However, a new idea came to him as he travelled around Shetland, scouting out sites.

He says: “I started noticing other things, like I started finding boats that were hauled up, boats that someone had clearly intended to refurbish a decade or so ago. It started to feed that sense of things being slightly abandoned and decaying. So, I have some projections onto boats that are pulled out. And at Aith I’ve got a projection onto a boat that’s actually in the small harbour at Lunna. I also projected onto the fishing booth next to Lunna Kirk”.

Not one of these installations have been publicised. Apart from the small team of content capturers, there is no one around to witness the illumination of the Bonhoga Gallery. Yet Malcolm does not regret the fact that his work will go unnoticed.

The Bonhoga Gallery, scene of one of Malcolm's light installations for *Apart*.









He says: “I think it’s wonderful if people do drive by and happen to see it, because then there’s a: ‘what was that?’ experience. And this part of the project, is really not about experiencing it in person. It’s about experiencing it principally through a screen. Because that was so much of our life during lockdown. We’d lost those collective experiences where we gathered together and we experienced concerts and gigs and exhibitions second hand, if we were experiencing the outside world. But lots was going on inside our own homes that other people couldn’t see and couldn’t share”.

“So this is very much things are happening in the Shetland landscape. But actually, unless you happen to be there at just the right moment, then you won’t see it. Unless you see the book or you see the film or some other representation of it on screen.”



The Bonhoga Gallery, illuminated.

A cold mist creeps in as the last of the daylight disappears, creating the perfect atmosphere for the light projection.

Now a quotation materializes on the side of the bridge (two more will appear over the course of the evening). Malcolm selected these texts from Christina Inkster’s report in Phase 1 of the project.

Malcolm deliberately selected quotes which reflected people’s sense of loss and loneliness. He says: “A lot of these quotations [in the Phase 1 report] are about the kind of the joyous things that happened [during Covid]. But the quotations that I’ve chosen for the other locations [in the ‘Apart’ section], and particularly this project at Bonhoga, are actually about separation. It’s about those times when we couldn’t be with other people and what we were losing and what we were missing”.

Above the bridge, the gable end of Bonhoga is lit up, with an ethereal image of a person dancing. Malcolm explains:

“This was film that I took from the computer that I was using for the ‘Together’ part of the project. So that was the interactive system where people could manipulate the projections, and so their image was adjusted and messed around with in the software, and their movement actually created ripple patterns across the wall. I’ve recorded some sections of that, and this is one particular image that’s being reprojected back onto Bonhoga, because I think it encapsulates a lot of the feeling of people being alone and apart from their loved ones.”

It’s properly dark now. In the quietness of night, the figure keeps dancing, swaying rhythmically to music that no one else can hear.



The bridge in front of Bonhoga, illuminated by a quote from Phrase 1 of the project.



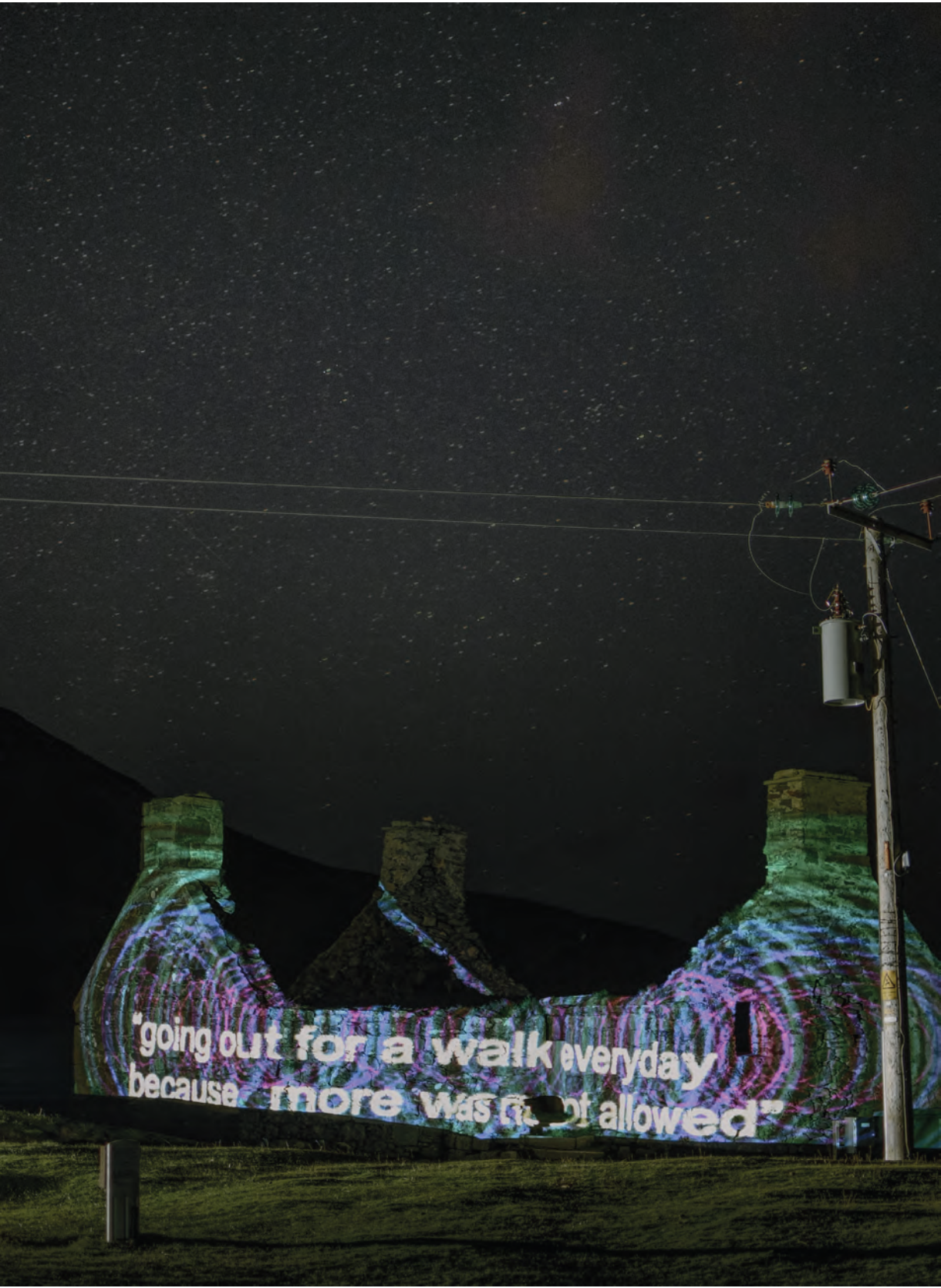


Apart 9:04 pm, 11th May,  
Pump House, Bressay.

Photograph by Malcolm Innes

Apart 9:04 pm, 11th May,  
Pump House, Bressay.

Photograph by Malcolm Innes





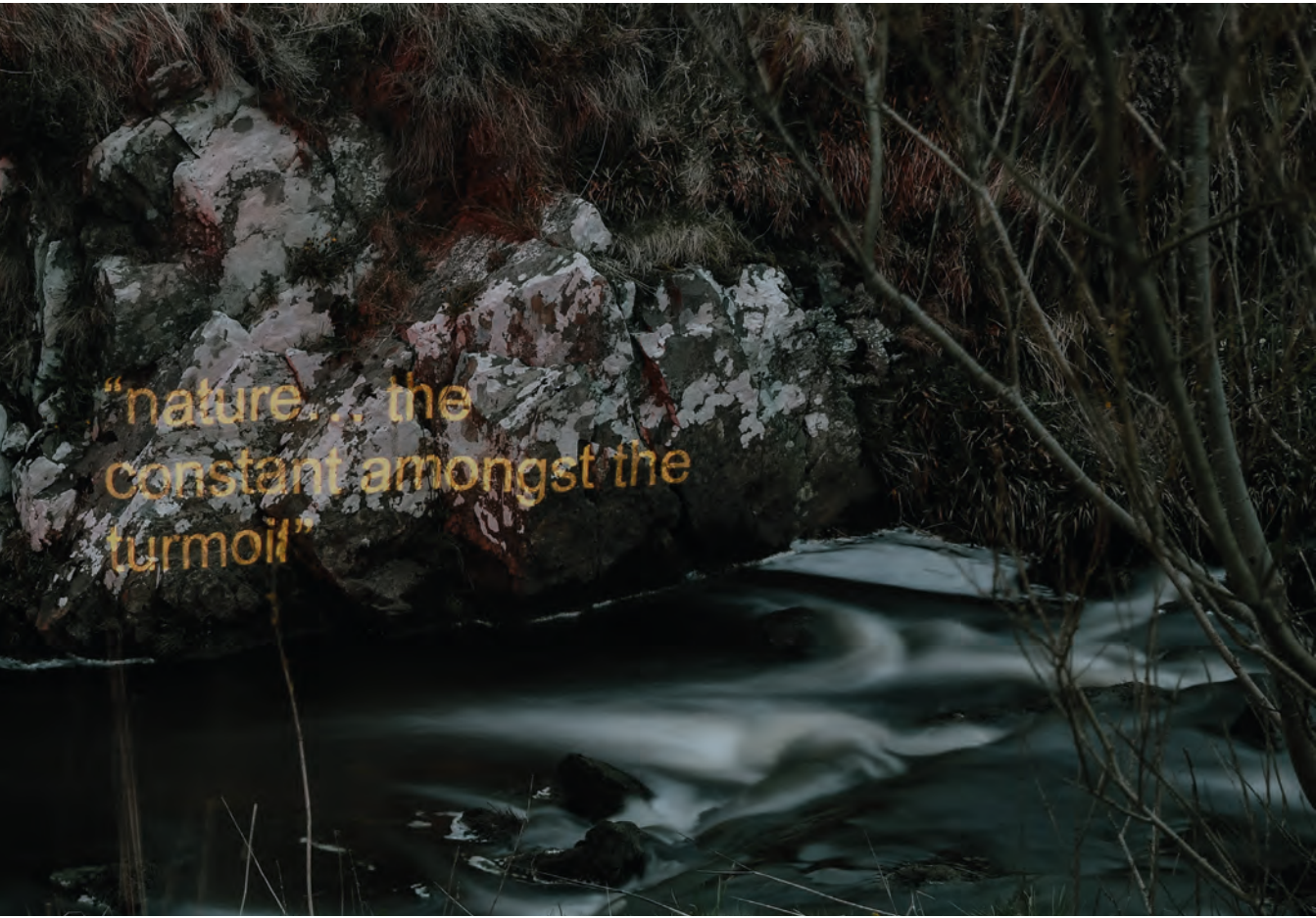


Apart 9:21 pm, 25th April, Aith.  
Photograph by Malcolm Innes



Apart 9:23 pm, 25th April, Aith.  
Photograph by Malcolm Innes





Apart 7:52 pm, 30th April,  
Bonhoga, Kergord.

Photograph by Malcolm Innes



Apart 8:59 pm, 27th April,  
West Lunna Voe.

Photograph by Malcolm Innes





“being away from the love  
of my life for 7 months”



# Tree of Life,

A project by  
*Helen Robertson*



# 150

# 151



# Interrupted

# 13th March, Sullom

It’s a bright spring day with a bitter wind. Just the right kind of day to sit in Helen Robertson’s front porch, warmed by the sun yet protected from the elements.

And, surrounded by glass, it’s the perfect place to talk about the significance of windows during the first Covid lockdown and the part they play in Helen’s memorial project

## Windows

The commission for *Remembering Together* got Helen thinking about how important windows were during the pandemic. She explains: “Folk were inside looking out through a window, or they were outside looking in. They were connected through glass and also disconnected through glass”.

The symbolism of windows during the Covid lockdown is a central element in Helen’s project. Not only will Helen’s wire knitting design be encased in fused glass; the finished memorial is also designed to be displayed in the window of a community building.

Helen recognises that while some may have pleasant memories of socially-distanced encounters, others may experience feelings of grief and distress when they remember the windows that separated them from their loved ones. She wants to acknowledge all aspects of the lockdown experience with the memorial she is creating: “Obviously some folk had a horrendous time through Covid and other folk didn’t have such a bad time so it’s about trying to pay respect to both of that groups”.

Helen in her workshop, Sullom.







## Tree of Life

Helen's design is based on the Tree of Life pattern which has appeared in Shetland Lace designs since the early 19th Century. While this is normally one of many motifs in a larger rectangle knit wool design, Helen is planning to isolate it and, using precious wire, create a 2 dimensional piece that is recognisable as the Shetland Lace Tree of Life.

She says: "The Tree of Life idea came quickly because it's symbolic of Shetland lace and Shetland knitting and love and comfort. It's in baby haps and shawls, that kind of thing. I didn't ever really wonder about another pattern".

However, Helen's Tree of Life will have its own special twist, which she has called *Tree of Life, interrupted*.

Helen explains: "I didn't want it to be a straight Tree of Life. I wanted it to be obscured in a way, to reflect what had happened, to symbolise the change [that took place during Covid]. There will be a circle in the middle of it, to distort the light passing through and to give a sense of that change, of the way our lives were interrupted". Depending on the viewer's perspective, that circle could represent life disrupted, birth, death or hope.

So far, work is progressing well. Although it is a time-consuming process (each Tree of Life takes a day to knit) it is an enjoyable one for Helen who says: "I love it [knitting with wire] because you can make three dimensional things. It can hold its own weight and it's malleable. When you're knitting it, you have to handle it really carefully but when it's actually knitted it's quite strong and robust".

Helen's design is also a nod to the surge in popularity of crafting activities during the Lockdown period, with people around the world discovering how relaxing and therapeutic making things can be.



Some of the materials used to make the Trees of Life.



A hap around Shetland

Helen’s project is deeply connected with her love of knitting, and what the knitting tradition means, not just to herself, but to the Shetland community.

She says: “In Shetland we’re known for our knitting. Folk spend a lot of time producing something and handing it on and this connects us on a level that we probably don’t realise. Knitting is about connection – if you knit something for somebody it’s an expression of love”.

“I hope the knitted Tree of Life plaques can help folk feel together and reflect on what we went through as an island community. I hope it can be comforting. Like a kind of a hap around Shetland.”

Remembering and moving on

On the 29th May, 2020, the first lockdown in Scotland was lifted. People could begin to emerge from their homes and meet each other outside. To commemorate this date, Helen plans to print her final design onto a flag, which will be flown from Lerwick Town Hall. She says: “The idea is to bring all the communities together. Every Shetland community will have a plaque with this symbol on it and the same symbol will be flown from the Town Hall”.

Helen hopes that her project will bring people together to allow them to process the events of 2020. She believes that a sufficient period of time has elapsed to enable this to happen – any earlier would have been too soon.



Helen knitting a Tree of Life.





“I think the idea with flag flying is that it’s a chance for folk to reflect, and to think ‘oh yeah – this happened to me’. I think we’ll all be processing this for a long time.”  
“My daughter was in primary 7 when Covid happened. That’s a kind of transition stage from primary school to secondary school and there was a whole lot of things those bairns missed out on. Now my daughter’s in S4 and she’s going on a school trip, after all these years of there being no school trips happening.”

This is just one example of the return to normality Helen sees her project as celebrating. She also hopes that her plaques and flag will bring the community together in remembrance and spark ongoing conversations about shared experiences.

Ultimately, Helen hopes her design will be accessible to the community. For her, art is about connection. As she says: “If you can somehow get what’s in your heart out, and if other people can connect with it, then I think that’s a really important thing”.





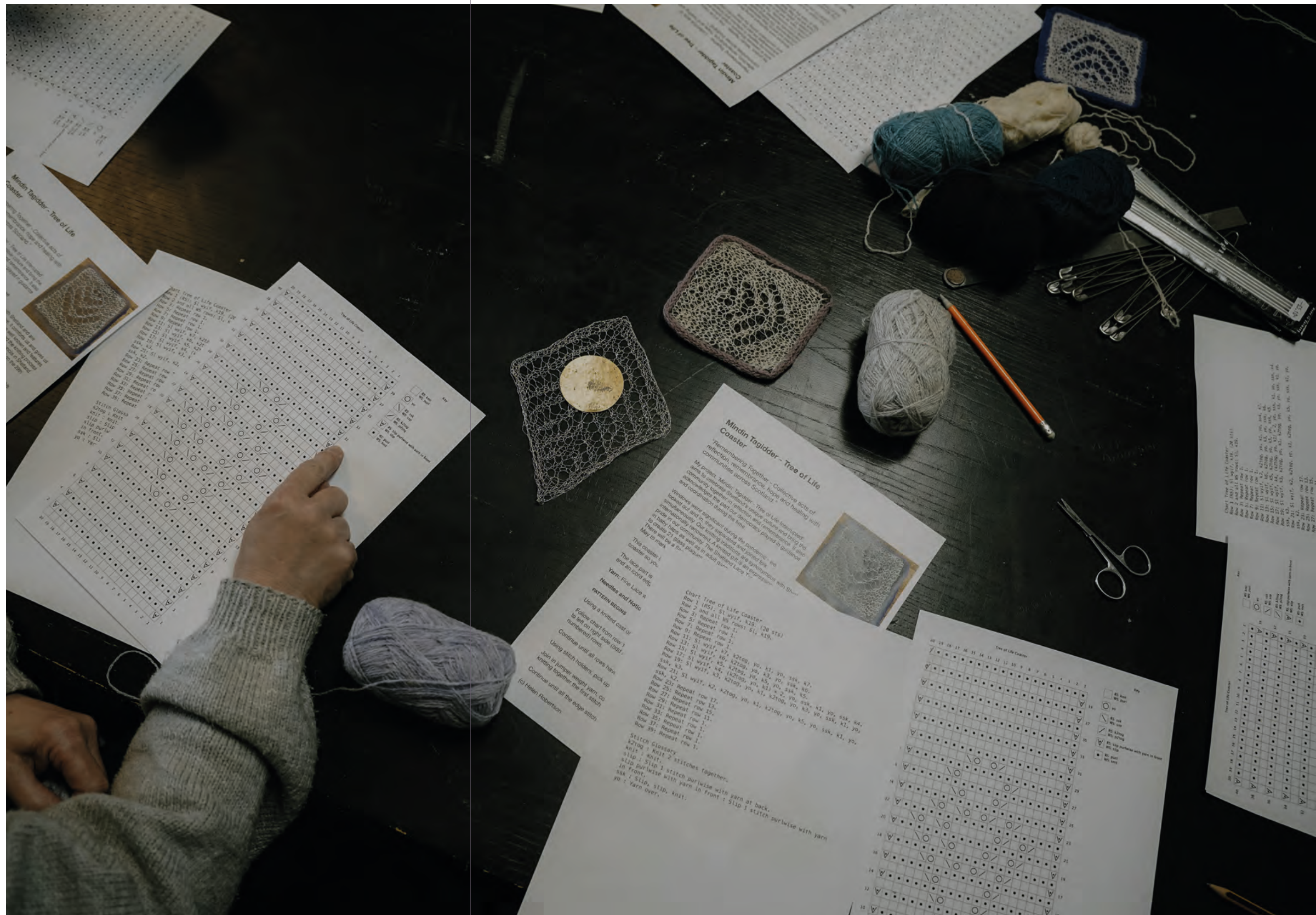
# 20th April Sullom

The five women in Helen Robertson's workshop are concentrating, heads bent as they knit the first few rows on their Tree of Life coaster.

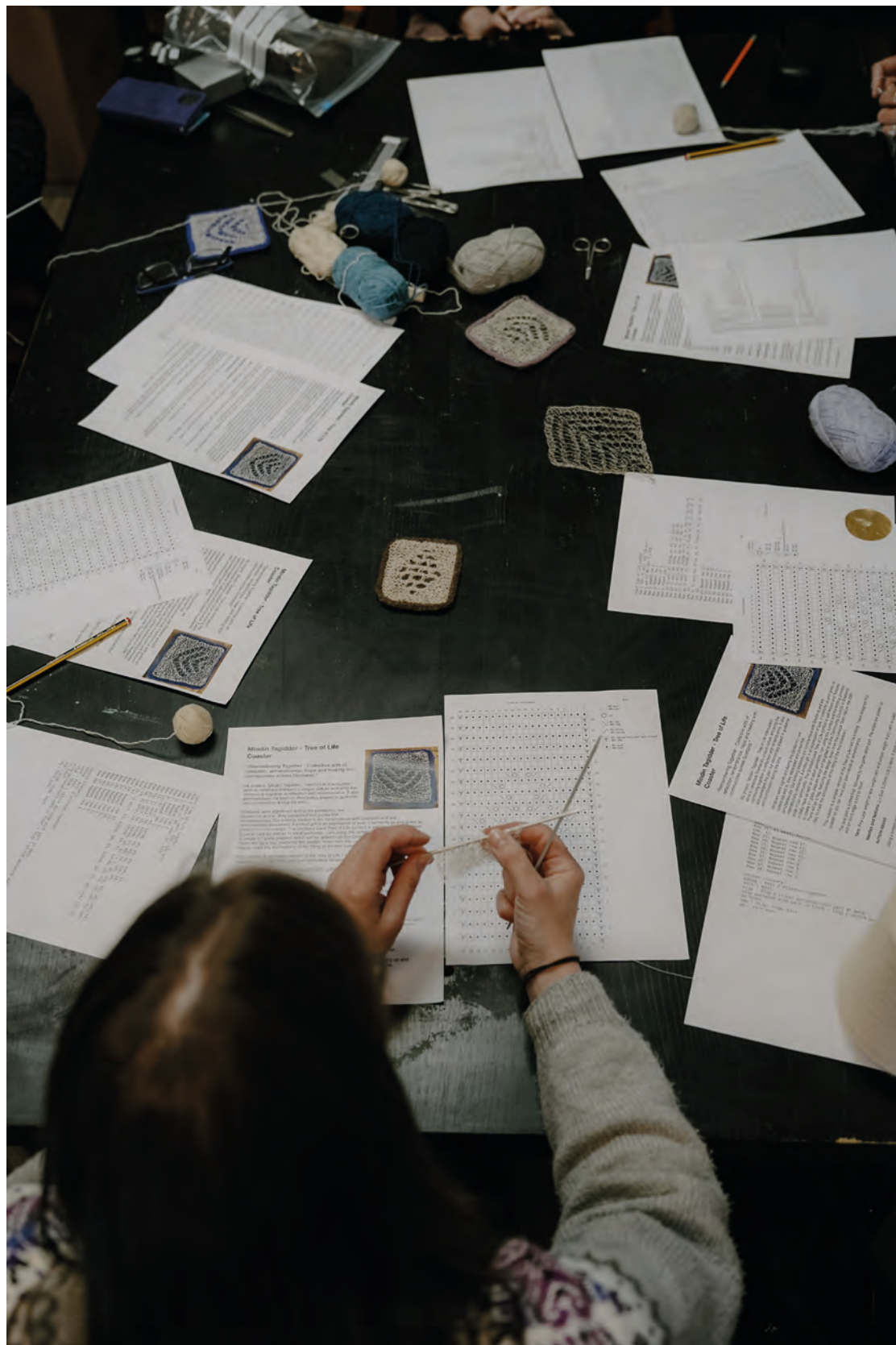
Murmured voices around the table reveal the progress the knitters are making.

“Knit two together. And then put the yarn forward”  
“Knit stitch”.  
“Oh sugar! Honestly...”

The table is covered with knitting patterns and there's an array of yarn in a delicate seascape palette of grey, blue, lilac and cream. Beyond the table lies the creative chaos of Helen's artistic space: ethereal wire tiaras, baskets, mannequins, knitting needles, books, and patterns. Wherever your eye falls, you'll find something intriguing.







Helen helps a participant with the pattern.

This workshop is made up of Helen's friends, some of whom she's known since school. The conversation is frank, affectionate, supportive.

One of the women is still feeling the effects of long-term Covid. As her friends knit, she puts down her needles, feeling the need to take a break. She recalls having to work through the pandemic, as an essential worker, being isolated from her family. And then the symptoms she experienced when the illness kicked in – insomnia, memory loss and a brain fog so heavy that she almost burnt her house down. The impact that Covid had on her mental state was even worse than the physical effects, although they were far from pleasant.

“My breathing's improved a lot since then”, she says.

“It has. You sounded like a selkie!” one of her friends remembers.

Another woman recalls how hard things were for her son, who has learning disabilities. The young man found the isolation he experienced in lockdown impossible to bear.

“He kept saying ‘I’m sorry’. What nearly killed him was everything shutting down. He actually stopped eating, because food was the only thing he had power over at the time.”

Stories spill out. There are funny stories too, among the tales of loss and suffering.

One woman laughs about her elderly father, who needed to be strongly persuaded to stop visiting his friends at the height of the pandemic, even asking a neighbour to administer a Covid test when he felt unwell.

As the women focus on knitting their Trees of Life, they reflect on how the pattern of their own lives was interrupted; what they lost and what they gained. They add row upon row to their trees and the shared remembrance continues throughout the day.





Workshop participants knitting  
Tree of Life coasters.



“Knit two together. And then  
put the yarn forward”.

“Knit stitch”.

“Oh sugar! Honestly...”.

Following the pattern  
for the Tree of Life coaster.

Participants at Helen's  
Tree of Life Coaster workshop.





# 23rd May

## Zoom

Participants from around the world are joining Helen's online Tree of Life workshop to learn how to knit a coaster in remembrance of Covid.

The screen displays a global mosaic of individuals from the UK, USA, Sweden, Australia, Belgium and Israel in their homes. Across time zones, and within their individual Zoom frames, participants engage in knitting, frown in concentration, pause to sip tea. The scene mirrors the early days of Covid, when work meetings, pub quizzes, and family birthday celebrations – all vital social interactions – were compelled to shift online.

For Helen, these online classes are a key part of her project. She explains: “The weekly online classes I ran during Covid were what got me through. Having that international group on screen in my kitchen helped with the isolation and gave me something to look forward to”.

As the group knits, they reflect on Covid.

One of the participants was in New York on 9/11. He compares the silence and uncertainty of the tragedy's aftermath to the early days of lockdown.

### Knitting in a time of Covid

Inevitably, for a group of crafters, there is talk of the impact it had on their creativity.

For some, Covid provided a time to craft and create. One participant says that knitting “kept [her] sane”.

Another participant speaks of an international knitting book group that came about as a result of the pandemic (and is still going strong, four years later). Yet another participant was working as an admin in ER. He worked three 12 hour shifts, then had four days off. During his four days off he obsessively studied Shetland knitting. He watched some Wool Week online films, especially Hazel Tindall's. “That's what got me through” he recalls.

As row upon row is added to the Trees of Life being crafted simultaneously around the world, the conversation shifts to knitting's capacity to connect people, show love, and serve as a force for good.

Helen enjoys the three-dimensional aspect of knitting with wire.





Glansin Glass, Uyeasound, Unst.

### Woollen hearts

The knitters share poignant stories. One participant talks about the woollen hearts she knitted for hospitals.

“My husband and I made dozens of scrubs that went to the local hospital. When the fabric [for the scrubs] ran out, I started to knit things. I knitted two little hearts. The hospitals gave one to the patient and one to the family, so that kind of linked them together. I knitted loads of these.”

“Then I found a little book about knitting toys and little clothes and things. I knitted loads of those, and they went to a local hospital. One of the paramedics from the local hospital [...] said that one of the little dolls I’d made had been chosen by an eleven year old girl as her very favourite toy and her means of communication with the family [...]. Sadly the eleven year old girl didn’t survive. And that just threw me. I put the book away, and I kept thinking well actually I shouldn’t [stop knitting] because it’s helped a child. One toy has helped a child that much. But I couldn’t bring myself to be brave enough to carry on. Lots of little things happening and stressors.”

At this point, another participant chimes in to tell the knitter of the woollen hearts how much her gesture would have meant to the patients and families who received them.

“We [my family] were given hearts too. We were only allowed an hour a day with my son when he was ill, so they gave us hearts. James had ones with him and we had one and I’ll tell you that meant so much. It really did.”

### Supporting through sewing

Some of the participants were involved in making masks in the early days of the pandemic. They remember having to find ways around the elastic shortages, with one person remembering they’d had to raid their grandmother’s sewing box.

One recalls: “In the early days, when you couldn’t get enough masks, they ended up making masks. I wrote the patterns that people ended up using to sew masks for people. I sent some to someone I went to high school with. She was a nurse in Manhattan, and her job was literally to hold up an iPad for patients and their families to say goodbye”.

After two hours of shared stories and crafting, the participants of Helen’s Tree of Life workshop conclude their session. They take it in turns to share their rows of knitting to the camera, a testament to the community and solace they found together. These online gatherings, more than just a space to share knitting techniques, have served as a vital support network during dark and lonely times.

It’s clear from the heartfelt stories and mutual support that knitting has been a lifeline, helping each member not only to cope with the isolation but also to make a meaningful impact on the lives of others during Covid.



# Helen’s Tree of Life

## Coaster Instructions

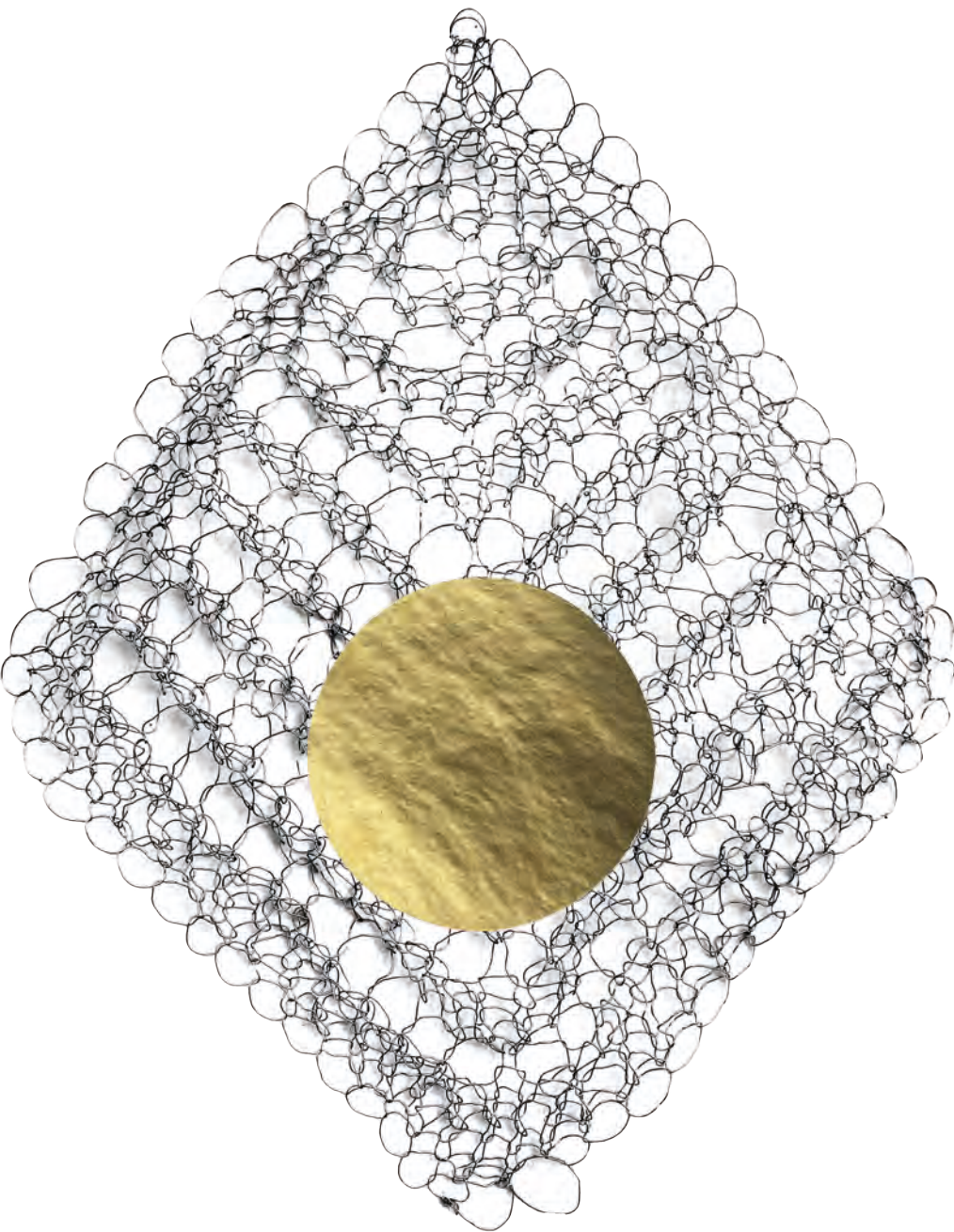
My project, *Mindin’ Tagidder – Tree of Life, Interrupted*, aims to celebrate Shetland’s unique culture and bring the community together in reflection and remembrance. It also acknowledges the part our democracy played in guidance and coordination during the time.

Windows were significant during the pandemic – we looked out and in, they separated and joined folk simultaneously. Our knitting traditions are synonymous with Shetland and are internationally renowned. A knitted gift is an expression of love, it comforts us and gives us pride in our community. The Shetland Lace Tree of Life symbol is well known and features in baby haps as well as in adult garments. I am using this symbol and the knitting process to create 21 glass plaques which will be gifted to all the Community Councils in Shetland. There will be a flag, featuring the design, flown from the Lerwick Town Hall on the 29th May to mark the anniversary of the lifting of the first lockdown.

This coaster is a smaller version of the Tree of Life I will be knitting. I have designed this coaster so you can have your own individual remembrance.

The lace part is knitted first, followed by the garter stitch part. The edges are picked up and an icord edge is knit to finish.

– *Helen Robertson*



# Tree of Life Coaster

**Yarn:** Fine Lace weight or lace weight yarn and jumper weight (4 ply) yarn is used.

**Needles and Notions:** 2 x Size 3.25mm (US 3) dpns, 2 stitch holders, 1 darning needle

## PATTERN BEGINS

Cast on

Using lace yarn and a knitted cast on, loosely cast on 20 stitches

### Lace Part

Follow chart from row 1 stitch 1. Please note, as this is knit flat, the chart is read from right to left on right side (odd numbered) rows and then from left to right on wrong side (even numbered) rows.

Continue until all rows have been knitted.

Please note in traditional Shetland knitting, knitting 2 together is usually performed as knitting 2 together through the front of the loops. Following a yarn over I prefer to knit 2 together through the back of the loops (K2tog TBL). You can choose which method you prefer.

### Pick Up Stitches

Using stitch holders, pick up 20 stitches at the right and left side of the coaster. I picked up the inner leg of the outermost stitch but as long as you are consistent with which part of the stitch you pick up its fine.

### Garter Stitch Backing

Join in jumper weight yarn, continue in garter stitch (knit every stitch),picking up and knitting together the first stitch on the holder with the first stitch on the needle as follows:-

At the start of every right side row, with yarn in front, pick up a stitch from the holder and knit it together with the first stitch on the needle.

At the start of every wrong side row, with yarn in front, pick up a

stitch from the holder and knit it together through the back loops with the first stitch on the needle.

Continue until all the edge stitches have been knitted.

You should now have a pocket with lace on one side and garter stitch on the other.

Pick up stitches.

Pick up the 20 original lace cast on stitches.

Using another needle place the stitches together on a needle, ie one backing stitch and one lace stitch alternately.

With lace side facing, pick up 20 loops down one edge of the garter stitch part of the coaster and place on a needle or stitch holder. Do the same for the cast on edge and the other side edge.

### Icord Cast Off

Using the thicker yarn and treating the lace and garter stitches as one stitch, (ie knit them together as you perform the icord cast off) continue in icord cast off as outlined below:-

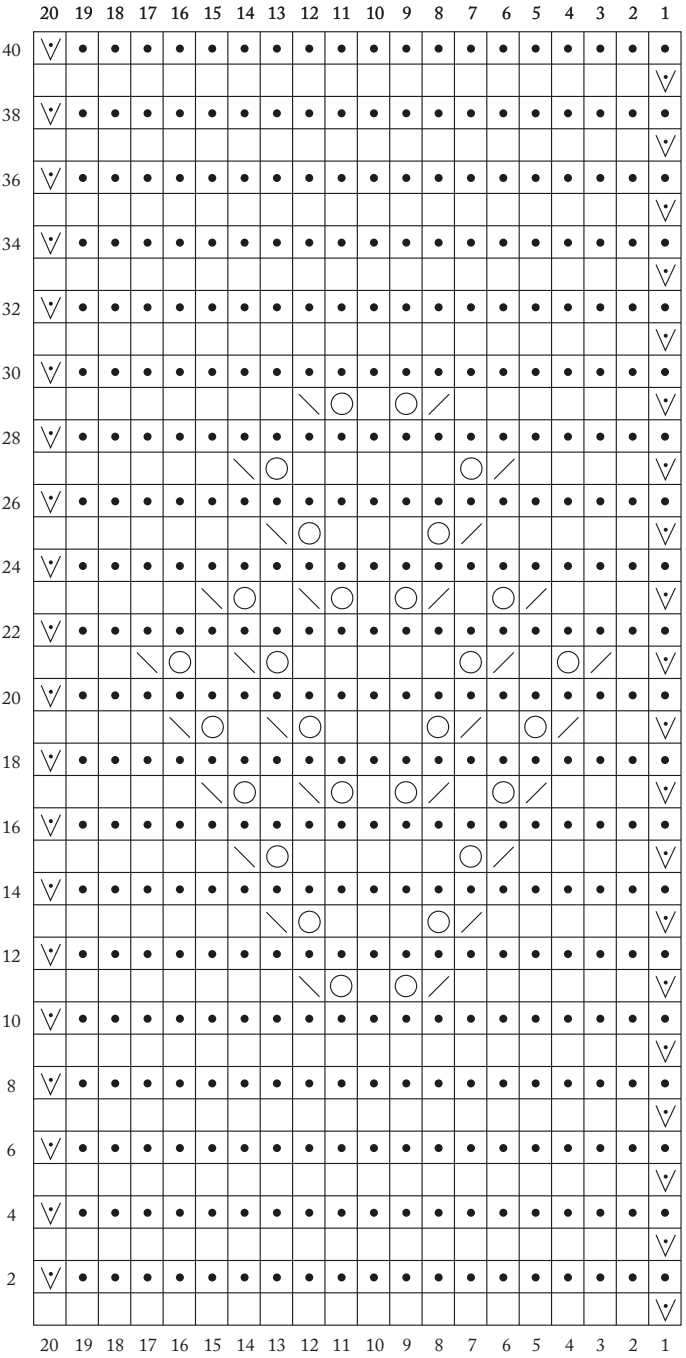
Cast on 3. \* Knit 2, K2tog. Pass stitches back to needle. Taking the yarn around the back of the needle repeat from \*

Please note the K2tog refers to one stitch on your needle and one stitch that you have picked up.

Continue until all the edge stitches have been knitted.

TIP: When you come to a corner, perform 2 or 3 rows of icord alternately without picking up a stitch from the holder, this helps ease the icord around the corner. Sew in ends.

Wash gently and pin out to dry.



Key

RS: knit  
WS: purl

○

yo

↘

RS: ssk  
WS: ssp

↗

RS: k2tog  
WS: p2tog

◻•

RS: slip purlwise with yarn in front  
WS: slip

●

RS: purl  
WS: knit





Helen's glass plaque designs  
in the Glansin Glass studio.

# 28th May

## Zoom

A balmy Monday evening, late spring. Two days from now, Helen Robertson's Tree of Life, Interrupted flag will be flown from Lerwick's Town Hall, marking four years since the end of the first lockdown.

Helen says she is "just delighted" with her flag design. A short while ago she had a "flash of inspiration" that the circle on the Tree of Life should be gold-leafed. She tested this out on scrap fabric before deciding to run with her idea. So far, it seems to have worked – now she is just hoping that the gold-leaf (which covers a circle around 35 centimetres in diameter) will hold.

Her wire trees knitted, her workshops (both online and face to face) delivered, Helen can now start to relax. During this intense period, she has lived like a hermit and knitted around the clock to meet her deadline. Having delivered on this project, it's time to reflect.







Obstacles and setbacks

Helen looks back at the challenges she faced. Firstly, this was a huge undertaking for such a short time scale (bear in mind that each Tree of Life took a day to knit, and she knitted 30 designs in total including test pieces – this is before we consider the time needed to encase the knitted designs in glass, prepare the flag and deliver the workshops). Within this time scale, Helen had deadlines to meet for other projects, so it is little wonder that she is looking forward to a more “social time” over summer.

Time was not Helen’s only issue. In her pursuit of the perfect texture and strength, she experimented with various wires, including gold-plated silver and copper. Although her initial plan was to use gold-plated silver, compatibility issues with kiln firing forced her to rethink her approach.

Helen also faced logistical challenges with her wire designs, as shipments to Cheryl Jamieson at Glansin Glass were taking up to a week to arrive. Frustrated by the delays, she eventually decided to personally deliver the designs by taking the ferry to Unst. Sudden disruption in ferry operations meant limited capacity so the final five Trees of Life were taken up by a “kind friend”.

Helen says she is “delighted” with the handmade plinths Cecil Tait of Paparwark Furniture made to hold the plaques. “He added his signature chamfered edges which enhanced the whole thing. It’s great that the plaques were 100% made in Shetland.”





## The world on her kitchen table

As someone who often works alone, Helen appreciated the collaborative aspects of this project, working as part of a larger group of artists and collaborating with Cheryl Jamieson of Glansin Glass to produce her design.

Helen enjoyed the visits of the content creators and is “delighted” with the words, images and footage that have been captured.

She has decided to continue delivering occasional free online knitting workshops on a regular basis. She says it’s like having “the world on [her] kitchen table”.

## On the role of art in healing

Reflecting on this project, Helen notes that art projects have the power to engage people on sensitive topics more effectively than direct conversations might.

She says: “You can run a workshop on insects, or whatever, but if you have a ‘Make your own insect’ workshop, then you’re going to attract lots more folk. Because it’s less about the information given and more about the experience”.

“It’s the same with this project. It’s the art people have been engaging in, and on the way, you’re releasing some of that Covid backstory and you’re connecting with your neighbours [...] I mean, I would never have got five folk in my shed if I’d said to them – Do you want to come to my shed on Saturday and we’ll talk about Covid? – they’d be like – nah, I’m not going to do that. But because I said – Do you want to come to my shed on Saturday and knit a coaster and we might have a peerie speak about Covid – then they’re like – Well, okay then – because the hook is the art.”





Even with the tough schedule she's had these past months, Helen says she is honoured to have been selected to work on a memorial that captures the Covid experiences of the Shetland community. "It's just been such an honour, really, to be honest. It's just been such a privilege to have done it".

As Helen says goodbye, she says she hopes that Wednesday will bring wind and sun. She wants that flag to fly high and shine.





Helen Robertson with Cheryl Jamieson  
in the Glansin Glass Studio.





## 29th May

### Lerwick Town Hall

8.30am Wednesday morning. A group gathers around the Town Hall, including three onlookers from Wisconsin, friends that Helen has made through her online knitting classes.

The wind Helen had hoped for has not materialised. “It’ll come though”, she says, glancing skywards. “Mam says that’s a windy sky”.

The flag is raised, then unfurls.

Apart from the lack of breeze (a rare complaint in Shetland), conditions are perfect. The white of the flag lights up the deep blue sky; the gold-leaf circle winks at the sun.

People smile, sigh, applaud, shielding their eyes from the sun to gaze at Helen’s flag and its design.

Helen chose white for her flag because of its associations with peace and surrender. It’s a perfect choice: the design shines just as she hopes it would. As her flag flies, she describes her emotions as a mixture of joy, relief and gratitude:

“I’m delighted that it’s such a perfect day for it weather-wise. I’m also touched people have all come out to see it being raised and that the American group has come too. It’s made me feel really supported. I’m grateful to the Town Hall for flying it and I’m looking forward to seeing it flying in the years to come.”

Lerwick Town Hall, minutes before Helen’s flag was raised.

It’s always nerve-racking witnessing your artistic creation being unveiled in public, but Helen says she is “satisfied” with her design decisions: “I think black on white was a good choice and I’m so glad I gold leafed it as I think the gold circle lifted it visually and symbolically”.

“Linsey Nicolson of Art Machine did a great job of preparing the file for print and I’m delighted that the knitted lines of the tree are so clear.”

Having savoured this peaceful moment of remembrance, the group disperses – each person making their way to a busy day of interactions and activities which would have been unthinkable four years ago.

Meanwhile, Helen’s flag flies high, shining over Shetland, a reminder of all we experienced as a community. A call to remember – and heal – together.





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Helen's Tree of Life flag  
flying high over Lerwick.





# Conclusion

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## 29th May Mareel

At the initial artist meeting back in February, project manager Kathryn Gordon asked the individual members of the *Remembering Together* team to share one word summing up what they would bring to the project.

Today marks the end of the project. As Helen's flag flies over Lerwick's Town Hall, the team gets together to reflect on the process of creating Shetland's Covid memorial. Thinking back to that first meeting, there is laughter and good-natured banter as they try to remember their chosen words.

Renzo's word was "connections", as his main focus has been connecting all the "different dots" of the project, whether that be "...connecting past experiences with your present state, connecting my feelings with those of other people, connecting myself with the words that I've written, transmitting those to someone who is reading them and letting them come up with their own interpretation through lived experience".

Heather chose "care", a word which she feels not only summed up her project, but also the community she is part of. She explains: "I cared about what I was doing, and I think I did bring that to the project. I was also amazed at how much other people cared, how much people wanted to contribute and how much people cared about listening to other people's stories. I think that underneath everything, particularly in Shetland, especially in a small community or a small island, people just do care about each other and what goes on. And that's what gives you the resilience to carry on, I think".

JJ's studio, Sandwick.





Shadows on the side of the Boat Shed at the museum.

As Malcolm prefers to be “behind the curtain making things happen for people to experience” his chosen word was “shy”. This shyness was the rationale behind his light projections. “It was about allowing other people to be the performers on the big screen and just enabling that. And the simple idea of putting the other projector on the ground so that people would stand between the projector and the surface of their shadow was there. That was an effective way of getting them to take part. And that does really stem from me not wanting to be on the stage myself.”

JJ the perfectionist chose “OCD” as his word. He explains: “When you’re working on a project and you’re concentrating on it yourself, it’s hard to see what you’ve got in front of you after you’ve been looking at it for so long. And you have a thing called, um, shelving it where you can shelf it for a while and come back to it and you immediately see what’s wrong and then you gotta sort that. Well, I collaborate with Liz and we work on a lot of projects where we’ve got tight deadlines. You don’t have time for a shelf life. You don’t have time for that. And Liz is worse than I am with OCD”.

“What we do is, either one of us works on it and then goes to the other one: what do you think? And we bat it back and forth. You have to be a little bit thick-skinned because I’ll quite often go to Liz and go: Here, I’ve been at this all night. It’s perfect. It’s literally perfect, you understand? And she’ll look at it and squint and go “soooooo....”

While JJ often finds this process challenging he concludes that it’s “a good feeling” to have this level of quality control built into the collaborative process.

Back in February, Helen was the last person to be asked to name her word. She laughs as she recalls her struggle to think of something that had not already been taken. She says: “I was sitting and I was thinking I’ve got a word, I’ve got one. And then Chloe [this book’s designer] said my word, which was “enthusiasm”. And then I was thinking like, okay, I’ve got another word, which was “connection”. Then Renzo said that, and I was kind of a bit flustered. I said, I can’t think what the word is, but it’s like, I will get this done. And everybody said, “determination”. I said yes, that’s the word. And that has been my word. And I think that, you know determination kept me going because I was up till five in the morning to get the stuff [designs] onto the ferry”.

As the five artists wrap up their work on this project, the bonds formed and the experiences gained are sure to spark new creative endeavours. Whether sticking together for future projects or exploring new horizons, the impact of their work will echo in community endeavours, encouraging others to bring their own interpretations of “connection”, “care”, or “creativity” to Shetland’s story.





