



CREATIVE COMMUNITY RESOURCES



OUR PLACE OUR STORIES

TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE SCOTLAND

A NEW INITIATIVE SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES
TO SHAPE AND SHARE THE STORY OF THEIR PLACE



www.tracscotland.org / www.peoplesparish.scot



The aim of the **People's Parish** is to inspire and support creative neighbourhood projects in each of Scotland's 871 civil parishes, connecting local stories, traditions and cultural memory with the distinct local voices, culture and creativity of our places today.

The inspiration for the **People's Parish** came from the old **Statistical Account of Scotland**, which began over two hundred years ago at the close of the 18th century. In the 21st century, we believe that the story of Scotland's places should be told not by a few professionals or central institutions, but by the people who live and work there, *on their own terms*. The resulting work will be archived and made available for future generations.

THE PEOPLE'S PARISH AIMS TO:

- involve all of Scotland's 871 parishes
- bring together local activists and organisations
- encourage participation in community life
- inspire new forms of mapping
- gather and give voice to songs, stories, dances, traditions, visuals, histories and fictions
- facilitate digital representation of local culture and access to it
- create a resource for generations to come.

Read more on the People's Parish website www.peoplesparish.scot/about

This resource contains the following:

- **GETTING STARTED**
- **COMMON GROUND ABC OF LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS**
- **COMMON GROUND PARISH MAP**
- **THE WAY WE LIVE NOW**
- **STORY CIRCLE GUIDELINES**
- **STORY CIRCLE PROMPTS**



GETTING STARTED

There are lots of different ways to approach a **People's Parish** project. You might be starting from scratch, or perhaps you have already started working a project and would like to expand it to involve more members of your local community.

We encourage **People's Parish** projects to involve research *of and by* the community. Be prepared to be open to experimenting with different approaches, especially when proposed by the participants themselves.

Before embarking, **we recommend that you arrange a visit from our People's Parish team**. We will provide an **advice and training session** introducing you to some key ideas in community action research, outline the different stages of a community project and demonstrate some of the different ways in which you could make use of our creative community resources.

If you are thinking of starting a creative community project, consider these starter questions below. We will discuss these and other questions with you during your initial advice and training session.

- Who's involved in your **People's Parish** team?
- Can you run a project with an existing group? Do you need to set up a new group? Advice for setting up a new group can be found on the Voluntary Arts Scotland website.
- Who makes the decisions?
- Who is funding the project? If there is funding, who gets paid?
- Do you have the capacity to achieve what you want to do, or do you need help?
- Do you know where to find local parish sources? e.g. museums, libraries, archives, websites, local knowledgeable people?
- Are there groups in your local area you would want to work with? Perhaps you could link in with the local care home, older people's daytime club, oral reminiscence group, local history society, walking group, tourist information centre, civic society, allotment or community garden, sports club, local school, writers' group or other voluntary arts groups.
- What are the existing significant events in your parish? Are there seasonal festivals, local annual days, occasional or regular events (pub sessions, singing groups, ceilidhs) that you that you could connect with?
- Are you going to use social media? An online group or simple website can be a great way to bring ideas together.



COMMON GROUND - ABC OF LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS

One of the main aims of the **People's Parish** is to encourage people to look at their locality with a fresh eye and highlight distinctive features of the area and community which could form a starting point. The following two resource have been adapted from **Common Ground**, an arts and environmental charity based in Dorset, England.

The **ABC of Local Distinctiveness** is a tool created to inspire people and communities to discover and re-discover whatever is distinctive about a place.

When you have lived or worked in a place for a long time you may cease to notice it unless something happens to jolt you. It might be the sun glinting on a stone wall revealing the fossils in it, discovering that the street name cheap indicates a market place which explains the wide pavements, the felling of an ancient and much loved tree which makes you look more closely at the remaining mature trees in the place. Common Ground describe it like this:

“Creating an ABC liberates us from classifying things as rare or beautiful to demonstrate what we care about in the everyday. It is useful in that it levels everything, it reshuffles things and juxtaposes them in ways that surprise and make you think. This can change what we see, disperse our complacency, make things we take for granted seem new to us and encourage us to action.” Common Ground

We tend to think first about the special landmarks that make our places, but it is the commonplace, the locally typical, locally abundant or the local vernacular which often contribute most to a sense of place. The use of local material is important. The vegetation plays a part. What about the wild life? Landmarks help to define a place: from hills or cliffs to trees with a history; contemporary sculptures like the Kelpies; lighthouses, church steeples or towers, mosques, piers, power stations, cooling towers, wind farms, pit tips, gravel workings, lime-kilns.

There are things which are widespread, but which vary regionally, such as buildings which differ not only in use but in style and building materials. There are the subtle indicators such as family names, street names, language, milestones, smells, gates, gravestones, local food and drink, or signifiers carried in coats of arms. The ephemeral and invisible are important too: customs, dialects, celebrations, names, recipes, spoken history, myths, legend, story and song. Many calendar events are particular to place, such as anniversaries of local events or local Gala days or festivals. There may be places notable for the seasons or natural phenomena such as high or low tides; rainbows or lightning; bird, fish, butterfly migrations; signs of spring and autumn leaves or holiday places. Look for detail, but remember that it is the parts that make the whole.

Making an ABC can be as simple or as complicated as you wish to make it. First, decide upon a definition of your area - it could be one street, one school, one neighbourhood, village or town or any other area that is important to you. As a group, or individually, you could go on walks to look specific things or systematically take different parts of your area at a time. You might put a sheet of paper on the wall and just add things any time you think of them.



We have suggested the kind of things you might like to include below:

- Special landmarks
- Geology
- Flora - vegetation, trees, plants and flowers
- Fauna - animals, birds, insects
- Types of houses and building materials
- Special buildings
- Occupations
- Food and drink
- Festivals
- Customs
- Traditions
- Stories
- Songs
- Famous people and local heroes
- Family names
- Weather

You may decide to spread the net wider by getting in touch with the local radio station and newspaper to ask for suggestions. You could also contact your local history society, field walking association, tourist information centre, civic society, allotment or gardening club, sports club, schools, evening classes to get as wide a range of information as possible. As a group, or individually, you could go on walks to look and photograph specific things or systematically take different parts of your area at a time.

Final Product

Your final **ABC** could take many forms. It could be pictorial or simply words. It may be drawn by one artist or include artwork by different people. Much will depend on the skills of the people within your group, but ideally it would be good to involve as many people with artistic abilities as possible. Choose someone to help organise who illustrates what, and to what scale. A good art director can make the most of visual material of varied quality and create an overall design to hold everything together.

Photography is easy because most people have a camera; some community members may have old existing snaps. Your **ABC** could be made entirely from photographs.

The alphabet could vary too and consist of different type faces or styles of lettering to be found in the locality. Look at the letter-cutting on gravestones, milestones, street signs, manhole covers, sign posts, shops etc.

What Next?

- You could use the **ABC** as the basis for creating something new – a piece of art or an exhibition
- You could turn your list into a poem or a song. Find out if there is a local storyteller or a songwriter who can work with you to create it
- You could photograph your chosen local places to create a small exhibition or display. Take simple pictures of buildings or details of chimneys, people and their houses, trees, local breeds of animals, local dishes, festival days. Some may already have old snaps that could be used
- You could create a story walk based on your **ABC** and encourage people to become tour guides!



COMMON GROUND - PARISH MAP

A different kind of **Parish Map** could be made locally, drawing on the information collected in the **ABC** process. A **Parish Map** demonstrates what people claim as their own locality and what they value in it. It does not have to be precise or cartographically correct, but by illustrating locally distinctive activities and features, it helps you to focus on the everyday things that make your place significant to you and different from the next. For visitors, a **Parish Map** offers a new way of looking at a place, and shows a glimpse of the vibrant life behind the obvious.

The great thing about making the map yourselves is that you can choose what to put in and what to leave out. You can decide on how to gather and discuss, the mix of natural history with buildings, or legends with livelihoods, the scale at which you wish to work. It can include the elusive responses which cannot be measured or counted and also the invisible – the stories, dialect, names and fragments of everyone's history.

“Everywhere means something to someone. You don't have to own it, or even see it every day, for a place and its stories to be important to you. The combination of commonplace histories and ordinary nature makes places what they are. Things do not have to be spectacular, rare or endangered for people to value them and want them about their everyday lives.”

Common Ground

Making a **Parish Map** begins with inclusive gestures and encouraging questions:

- What is important to you about this place, what does it mean to you?
- What makes it different from other places?
- What do you value here?
- What do we know, what do we want to know?
- How can we share our understandings? What could we change for the better?

Turning each other into experts in this way helps to liberate all kinds of quiet knowledge, as well as passion about the place. In this sense, making a **Parish Map** can inform, inspire, embolden.

“Knowing your place, taking some active part in its upkeep, passing on wisdom, being open to ideas, people, development, change but in sympathy with nature and culture which have brought it this far, will open the doors of dissent. But conversation, tolerance and the passing on of memories, are civilising forces. Whatever the forms of knowledge we shall need for the next millennium, humanity and imagination must take a high priority in organising them. In making a Parish Map you can come together to hold the frame where you want it to be, you can throw light on the things which are important to you, and you may find courage to speak with passion about why all this matters.” Common Ground

Read more at <http://commonground.org.uk/gallery/parish-maps/>



THE WAY WE LIVE NOW - LIFELINES

The **People's Parish** explores the creative culture and heritage of every part of Scotland. But how does that relate to everyday lives? How do people live their lives now, and how do we feel about that?

Who are we? What do we stand for? How do we want to be remembered? ... Answering these questions will teach resilience, imagination, improvisation, empathy, and critical thinking. It requires artistic methods and approaches that enable vivid, embodied, first-person learning and understanding.”
Arlene Goldbard

These are big questions, so it might help to look at some themes, some lines of enquiry to get us thinking. We might call these **LifeLines** – the things we can trace through the multiple criss-crossing patterns that affect how we live, day by day, month by month, year by year. **LifeLines** might include:

FOOD What do we eat? Where does it come from? How do we prepare and share?

FAMILY Who counts as family? Is that different from friends? How do we keep in touch? Who do we live with? How do young people and older people influence each other?

HOME Where do we live? Is home stable or changing? Who are our neighbours?

NATURE When and where does nature touch us? How green is our neighbourhood? Are we experiencing pollution or effects of global warming?

WORK Where and when do we work? How much is paid or unpaid? Does work give pleasure or pain and hassle, or both?

CRADLE TO GRAVE Where in our neighbourhood are people born, die, laid to rest, remembered?

HEALTH Are we healthy or ill, or both together? What makes us feel well or ill? Where and how do people cope with being ill?

MEETING PLACES Where do people meet each other? Is that different people in different places? Is face-to-face different from phone or text, and how?

VALUES Could we sum up our values in one sentence? Do we have any kind of spiritual belief? When do these values play a part in our choices and actions?

These are nine rich themes - lines of enquiry – and we could name others. We might consider **EDUCATION, LANGUAGES AND CULTURE, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT, POLITICS, BUYING AND SELLING**, or other things that impinge on life in our neighbourhood – past, present and future.

These topics can become dry and abstract if they do not connect with our own experiences. One creative way to explore **LifeLines** is by sharing experience in a **Story Circle** (see next page).



STORY CIRCLES

Story Circles are a tried and tested way of communicating face-to-face, discovering how people think and feel. Someone acts as host – the holder of the circle. The host might share round a picture, idea, or question to which everyone can respond in turn. It is not compulsory to contribute on any round - you can 'pass' - but it is vital that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute. The aim is that every voice will be heard. Sometimes this is expressed by passing round an object. This is a visible sign that everyone is respected and can 'have their say'.

Sharing memories and experiences in this way allows for humour and honesty. It also prevents people interrupting each other, because although people have the chance to respond when the circle is complete, it is down to the host to encourage input and to gently move people on to the next contribution. Above all, **Story Circle** help us bit by bit to get a shared sense of what is important. That then helps show how a creative project or community initiative might take shape.

We offer are some suggestions for **Story Circles** based on the first nine **LifeLines**. Each question to the group is an invitation, a suggestion or prompt to help open up experiences. Everyone will come up with more ideas that help get things underway. Sometimes an actual picture or an interesting object relating to a **LifeLine** might be used.

Practically, the group should not exceed 15 in number, and fewer can be better. People should be given up to 3 minutes, maybe four, on each prompt. After each round there can be an opportunity for more free flow discussion and response. The host should then send round the next prompt. Timing here is a matter of judgement: not allowing things to drag, but not cutting a good discussion short; nudging participants back to the subject without overriding something that an individual wants to say. The key is to keep things fresh by moving on without exhausting any one topic, or trying to impose an artificial conclusion, or your own summary of the discussion. The host is a guide and creative enabler, not the chairperson of a meeting.

Guidelines

Listening is as important as speaking: each person receives full attention while telling his or her story. A story in this context is not a performance: listen for the essence of what is being shared, rather than mentally critiquing the person's delivery. Each participant has equal time to share a story.

Attention passes round the circle in either direction. Individuals can pass, and will be given the opportunity to tell a story at the end of the circle. If someone declines, that's fine. Don't insist. There are no questions, criticisms, cross-talk, or comments on any story while sharing is going on. People do not speak from notes, and are discouraged from preparing their own stories rather than giving others full attention. Spontaneity is important.

Stories may be recorded. If participants prefer that their names not be used if their stories are recorded, they should say so, and the scribe should note it.



For Facilitators

1. Briefly introduce yourself and recap the guidelines and time allocations. Answer any questions about these guidelines.
2. Remind people of the generative theme. On the following page are some starter ideas for prompts – you will have your own and better ideas!
3. Remind people that stories can be about any experience, any situation. All stories have value. There is no right answer.
4. Explain that each person has a time limit (e.g. a few minutes). Let people finish their sentences when time's up, but don't let them eat too much into other people's time. Make sure you have a clock!
5. If someone wants to pass on the first go-round, that's fine. Come back at the end to give those who passed another opportunity, but don't insist.
6. Tell the first story to set the tone and demonstrate the practice.
7. Thank each person at the end of his or her story, then call on the next person.
8. Allow a moment of silence between stories.
9. At the end, engage the group in reflecting on the stories. Were there common themes? Notable differences? What stood out for you, if anything? What touched you, if anything? What feelings and ideas were sparked? Ask people to raise their hands and call on them in turn.
10. End on time and thank everyone for their participation.



STORY CIRCLE PROMPTS

FOOD Imagine your favourite meal: what are you eating, with whom, where? You might do this twice - once a real occasion remembered, and once your dream occasion!

FAMILY Who counts as family? Are they the people who have/had the biggest influence on you? Is family more or less important than it used to be?

HOME Describe the doorway into your home, and what does it feel like coming out or in? Imagine your favourite place at home - in a past or present house.

NATURE When do you see, touch or smell plants, animals and birds? Where is your favourite green place?

WORK Describe your best work experience in recent times. Describe your worst work experience in recent times. Who appreciates your work?

CRADLE TO GRAVE What has been your closest experience of birth? What has been your closest experience of death? How do you think about the dead and remember them? How do you think about people who will come after us and remember them?

HEALTH Have you been effected by an experience of illness - your own or someone else's? Describe something that contributes a lot to your own health and wellbeing. What helps most when you are ill?

COMMUNITY Where do people meet each other in your neighbourhood? And what kind of conversations happen there? What contributes to people in your area being isolated or lonely?

VALUES Name one action or kind of behaviour you have experienced that you believe is truly good. Name one action or kind of behaviour you have experienced that you believe is absolutely wrong. Can you name a person or an event that helped you understand the difference between right and wrong in your own life?