



ONLY CONNECT

Arts touring and rural communities

A Comedia report for the NATIONAL RURAL TOURING FORUM 2004

François Matarasso

additional research by
Phyllida Shaw, Helen Denniston,
Anselma Gallinat and Emma Martin



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with the financial support of the Carnegie UK Trust, the Countryside
Agency, Arts Council England, the Arts Council of Wales, Cheshire,
Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Somerset County Councils, East Lindsey, Mendip and
Wycombe District Councils and Queens Hall Arts

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Only Connect: Arts touring and rural communities

ISBN 1 873667 82 5

First published 2004 by Comedia

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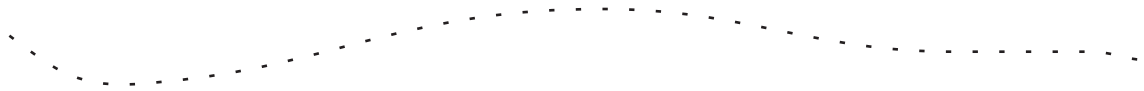
Designed by Jeanie Finlay www.ruby-online.co.uk.

Photographs and original design by François Matarasso.

Printed in the UK by Pyramid Press, Nottingham.

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WELCOME TO THE HOUSE OF FUN



'JOE: ...small town. I suppose. You have to make your own fun.

ANN: Everybody makes their own fun. F'you don't make it yourself, it ain't fun, it's entertainment.'

David Mamet¹

It's night when we arrive, and the darkness is barely relieved by a few scattered street lamps and porch lights. Luckily, the village hall is signposted from the main road; there's no-one about to ask. It isn't raining, but it has been, and everything's damp. The air is March cold; we're not many miles from the North Sea. The hall lights are ablaze, and the ubiquitous white van stands near the fire door; the musicians are here. The tiny car park is full, and cars line the muddy verges, though there's a good half hour before the show.

The hall is square and low, dark, with a pitched roof. Inside, there's a long corridor, then a turn into the main space. The box office is a card table, and one of the promoter's helpers is there to welcome us. It's the first show, but all the tickets are gone, so they're understandably thrilled, if a little anxious about how things will go. The hall itself feels like a social club, not the usual chilly 1950s space, though it's probably been here as long. There are pictures and wall-lights, and a curtained-off bar area at the far end, with benches and tables. A hundred plastic chairs are ranked in front of a shallow stage littered with mikes and music stands; keyboard, vibraphone and drum kit stand out against a startlingly white backdrop.

The room is already half-full. It's a local audience — everyone chatting and exchanging news, on first name terms, new layers being added to some very long conversations. Some people have already taken their seats, keen for a good view; they talk amongst themselves, holding pints or balancing coffee cups on their knees. There are lots of children and teenagers. Not allowed in the bar, they've colonised the first three rows, deep in discussion; a group has been put in charge of selling raffle tickets. The promoter is on the move, talking, thanking people for coming, answering questions.

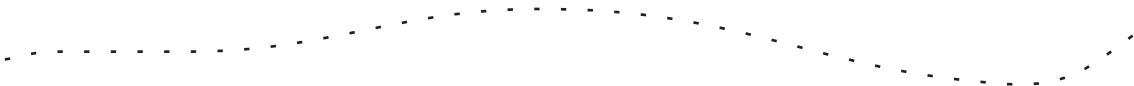
Then the lights dim and a handful of spotlight beams bounce off silver stands and cymbals. A saxophonist comes centre stage, and begins a slow looping melody; the audience settles like a dog on a hearthrug. The melody builds, and then there's a pianist, adding texture to the breathy line; one or two at a time, other musicians take their places from the wings, or through the centre aisle. Soon there's barely room to move. As well as the jazz instrumentalists, there's a singer, a violinist and a cellist, and, in front, a conductor: this is the Homemade Orchestra, bringing jazz and contemporary classical music together in unexpected ways. Just how unexpected becomes clear as the saxophonist's melody, now part of a complex arrangement, mutates into the old Beatles song, 'Paperback Writer'. From that stunning opening, the Orchestra takes the audience on an unimagined interpretative journey through a 20th century

songbook, refreshing the familiar, and introducing the new. Gershwin and Ellington rub along with Peter Gabriel and the Human League, and new work by Tim Whitehead and Colin Riley.

Whatever their age or expectations, taste or experience, people respond to the music, and the virtuosity of individual players, with warmth and enthusiasm. And the musicians, unsure what to expect on the first night of the tour, respond in turn: this is a dialogue, a felt conversation with few words. The mystery of live performance is at play, drawing people in through the unmediated sound, the energy and the infectious enjoyment of the musicians — the present-ness of art experienced.

There's a palpable buzz in the hall at the interval, as people refill their glasses, exchange impressions and buy the Homemade Orchestra's CDs; the teenagers are making sure no-one has escaped the raffle tickets. There's no hurry, and the interval stretches as people stretch their legs: this is a social occasion. Then it's the second half, even stronger than the first, rousing applause, an encore that seems genuinely to please the musicians, and it's done. The music hums in the memory, reverberating inside as the raffle is drawn, people get last drinks, or talk to the performers. Slowly, the packing up starts: it's midweek, and everyone has things to do.

In a matter of hours, the Homemade Orchestra and the audience have encountered each other, shared an unrepeatable moment, and gone their ways. It's been a brief, but resonant, connection. The evening feels like a triumph on all sides: there will be more shows in this hall, and more halls for the Orchestra to connect with new audiences. The ripples will run far and long, linking people and art. This is rural touring: professional and homemade.



SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

Rural touring

Touring schemes, connecting voluntary promoters with professional performers, have been extending access to the arts in rural Britain for almost 25 years, since the first initiatives were set up in South East Wales, Hampshire and Lincolnshire. They have grown rapidly in number and importance, especially in the past decade, and the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) now has over 40 members. *Only Connect* is the first large scale study of this work, commissioned by NRTF and funded by the Carnegie UK Trust, the Arts Councils of England and Wales, the Countryside Agency and several local authorities.

The research

The study is concerned to understand how rural touring has developed, the nature of its practice, its distinctive contribution to the arts, and its impact on the communities where it works. Research was undertaken during 2003 in eight case studies in England and one in Wales. It involved extensive interviews with promoters, residents, artists, managers and others involved in touring, sometimes focusing closely on a small number of villages, at other times looking at development across a county or district. In addition to case studies, further contextual research was undertaken, including a literature review, analysis of scheme programmes and records, research visits to other parts of the country and to France, and an audience survey to which 994 people at 27 events contributed.

The study does not include Scotland, but a parallel review of 25 years of theatre touring in that country was undertaken by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow, and is published separately. Nor does it include other forms of touring, such as that organised directly by companies themselves, or rural arts development more widely, focusing only on the particular practice of touring schemes.

RURALITY

Seeing the rural landscape

Rural Britain is a landscape of the mind, as well as a place where people live, work and play. Ideas of what constitutes the country, and what values should reign there, loom large in culture and policy. They have grown in importance, in politics and the media, as a result of rapid change which some characterise as a 'countryside crisis'. This change is complex: its symptoms include continuing decline in the domiciled agricultural workforce, growth in the rural population as a whole, shifts in farming practice, problems in food production, such as BSE and FMD, changes in the kind and availability of services and the demand for them, and many other aspects of social, economic and cultural life in rural areas. It has seen greater recogni-

tion of the complexity and, above all, the diversity of rural Britain. The residents of rural areas – between 11 million and 14 million people according to different sources – have interests, needs, tastes and backgrounds as varied as those of many urban and suburban areas. Consequently, services in rural areas, including the arts, must be equally diverse if they are to fulfil the government's stated ambition of equitable service provision in rural and urban areas.

Rural areas and the arts

Although touring schemes exist to improve access to the arts in rural areas, it would be a mistake to imagine the countryside as empty of artistic opportunities. There are many artists, professional and amateur, living and working in rural areas, as well as arts organisations, touring theatre companies, and local authority arts officers; the arts also thrive in festivals, historic buildings and commercial enterprises. Touring schemes have a distinctive place within this rural arts ecosystem, not least because of their valuable partnerships with local promoters. There is an evident growth in rural arts activity, particularly in the kind of self-directed initiatives that link communities with professional artists. Rural touring is part of this development, which is often intended by those involved to strengthen a sense of community in the face of the change just outlined.

RURAL AND COMMUNITY TOURING SCHEMES

Rural touring schemes

There are at least 40 rural and community touring schemes in England and Wales. Most cover counties, but some operate in smaller areas; most focus on rural districts, but some extend into urban areas, and one operates exclusively in the metropolitan West Midlands. They have different management structures, levels of resources, artistic policies and ways of working, but they are united by a belief that:

- High quality, live arts performance offers a unique, and increasingly uncommon, experience, which is life-enhancing, and sometimes life-changing;
- Rural isolation, poverty, social exclusion and similar disadvantages should not prevent people from having good access to those experiences;
- Local people are essential actors in arts development, sharing responsibilities, risks and rewards as equal partners with artists, professional bodies and funding agencies;
- The results of successful arts promotion extend widely and contribute to personal growth and strong, sustainable communities

Working with local promoters to put on performances in village halls and similar venues is the core of rural touring schemes' work, but a number are also involved in related arts development activity including workshops, artists' residencies and exhibitions.

Audiences, artists and promoters

In 2002/03, rural touring schemes put on nearly 3,200 shows, attended about 226,500 people (194,500 in England and 25,500 in Wales). These events were widely dispersed across the country; although many promoters aim to put on several shows a year, limited resources often mean that there is only one or two in each village. More than 250 different companies and

performers were involved. Some theatre companies performed between 30 and 50 shows, but most played far fewer nights: the median number was three. Theatre and music each made up about a third of the performances, with the rest being dance, circus, storytelling, puppetry, children's shows and other forms; there were additionally over 300 film screenings. All the shows were chosen and promoted by local people, principally village hall committees, who shared the risks and benefits of the productions. In 2002/03, there were at least 1,530 active promoting groups in England and Wales, involving an estimated 5,850 volunteers.

The economy of rural touring

The collective annual turnover of the touring schemes is about £2.3 million, a third of which comes from the Arts Council, and a third from local authorities (who also make a substantial 'in kind' contribution); box office income makes up most of the rest. Touring is also supported by the huge unquantifiable but invaluable voluntary effort of promoters and others; free use of facilities and generous hospitality make further invisible contributions. All this helps keep the administrative costs of rural touring low. The partnership with local promoters is notable for strengthening the demand side of the economic equation, and partly accounts for the rapid recent expansion of rural touring, which saw the number of performances grow by 171%, and the number of active promoters by 163%, between 2000 and 2003.

ARTISTIC ASPECTS

Access to the arts

Rural touring should be seen as a part of mainstream arts provision, ensuring access to high-quality professional productions by people who live in rural areas. A substantial proportion of the audience does not see live arts except through the touring schemes: about a third of the audience survey respondents (34%) had not attended other events in the previous 12 months. In more remote areas, and among young and older people, this figure is much higher. For those who do see the arts elsewhere, rural touring is a valued additional opportunity, especially because of the distinctive experience it offers.

Diversity and choice

Part of the artistic value of rural touring is in extending the range of work available to people living in rural areas, and especially in adding to the amateur and commercial work which is most common. It brings the best of small-scale dance, theatre and music, excellent children's performances, and work from Black, Asian and other cultures into shared community spaces, connecting them with the mainstream of current cultural life. Many performers, particularly in music, are well-known and highly-rated; others bring forms, like physical theatre or Indian dance, under-represented in rural areas. In doing so they both affirm and challenge their audiences' values; and often find their own ideas developing in return.

A unique experience

Rural touring is not a poor substitute for the kind of experience offered by urban arts venues. It is qualitatively different in several respects. The facilities may not be as good, but the intimacy of the space, the opportunity to meet the performers, the fact that most of the audience know each other – these give a village hall show a unique power. Indeed, they can make it a more challenging experience for the audience, who often come for reasons unconnected with

an interest in the arts, and for the performers, who cannot expect people to be familiar with their work. Both artists and audiences consistently feel that such shows are exciting, memorable and have a quality which is distinctively valuable.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND DEVELOPMENT

Bringing people together

Village hall shows have a great capacity to bring local people together and that aspiration is common among promoters. Audiences span the age range, and include many families; friendship is also important, and people feel comfortable going alone in the expectation of meeting people they know. Audiences include people who have lived in the village for a few months, a few years or lifetimes: shows provide a space where locals and incomers meet and mingle. As a result, the shows contribute significantly to overcoming individual isolation and some of the difficulties of getting to know people in growing communities with less stable populations. They provide reasons to meet and talk for weeks of preparation beforehand and, often, for months of discussion afterwards. As arts events, they offer memorable experiences, and can provoke lasting debates, becoming part of the shared history that is a basis of community.

Community development

The importance of rural touring in community development is that, rather than simply giving people access to a service, it involves them directly in all aspects of its delivery, where they live. It is less of a good provided, than a process acquired, and its impact on the community organisations involved can therefore be profound. Rural touring has often been the first step in local arts and community development initiatives, valuable because it is accessible, yet demanding. People in villages like Terrington (Yorkshire), Bergh Apton (Norfolk) and Ashbrittle (Somerset), have used touring to develop new community projects and organisations, with positive outcomes for rural cohesion and regeneration.

Viable villages

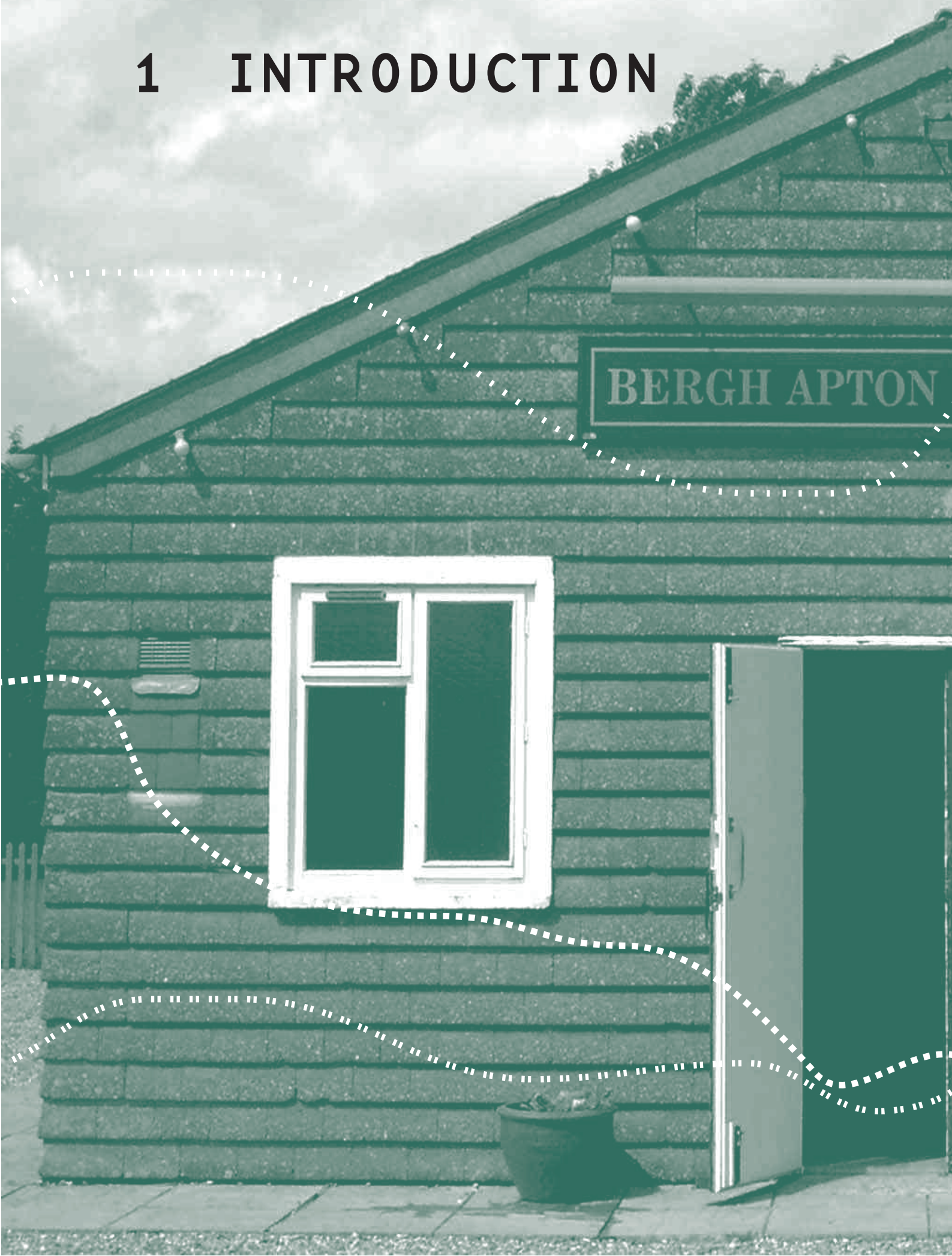
Rural touring has a valuable role in a changing social and economic environment. Its contribution to community development, social capital and voluntary activity make it very relevant to the Rural White Paper's headline indicator of 'community involvement and activity', and the Countryside Agency's measures relating to 'community space, community engagement and community capacity'. It is not a panacea, but it should be part of any policy aiming to support regeneration, social inclusion and a good quality of life in rural areas.

THE FUTURE

The research identifies some challenges for rural touring, including issues of village hall regulation, volunteering, and finance. It also considers the possible effects of expansion on sustainability. It records the important contribution of rural touring to artistic and community vibrancy in rural areas. It describes some characteristics on which success has been built, notably equitable partnership, a commitment to quality, the diversity of work and approach, the stability of the organisations and the availability of resources. Finally it suggests areas for further consideration by those involved, including whether there is an optimum level of activity, opportunities for schools work, and how the promoter network might be extended.



1 INTRODUCTION





VILLAGE HALL

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 ONLY CONNECT

'Development cannot be given. It has to be *done*. It is a process, not a collection of capital goods.'

Jane Jacobs²

The evening described above was one of about 3,000 such events which took place in rural, and not so rural, community venues during 2003 with the support of the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) and its member schemes. All involved professional artists: musicians, actors, dancers, storytellers, clowns and others, doing the same work, to the same standards, that they do in arts centres, concert halls and theatres. All were organised by rural touring schemes, in partnership with local people acting as promoters in their community, sharing equitably risks and rewards. And, if not all, then most of those events were equally valuable artistic experiences and social occasions to those involved: the Homemade Orchestra's concert was of the highest quality, but in that it was not exceptional among rural touring performances.

Rural touring matters because it does two things supremely well. First, it extends access to the arts to tens of thousands of people who do not otherwise see live performance from one year to the next. It extends access to children and young people, introducing them to the arts for the first time, and to the oldest members of the community, keeping them in touch with things they often value highly. It extends access to new experiences, including opportunities to learn from artists and participate in workshops. It extends access also to many who do go to theatre or to concert halls in towns, but would go more often if it were less difficult, or less expensive. It extends access to performers who would not otherwise be seen in small communities – well-known names and recording artists, innovative theatre and dance companies, Black and Asian performers, international artists. And it does so in ways which properly value the artistic experience, while bringing performer and audience into an intimate space rare in a big, organised world, and allowing real contact between them. It extends horizons, sometimes affirming, sometimes challenging values, and people are changed as a result.

Rural touring also matters because it plays an important part in the social life of rural and other small communities. It is a reason for people to get together as a community, and to open themselves up to shared, often memorable, experiences. It involves people of all ages and social backgrounds, including many who do not see themselves as being interested in the arts, and crosses boundaries between them. It is a focus of social interaction for weeks before and after the show, helping reduce isolation and loneliness, and getting people out to see, or make, friends. It motivates people to volunteer and get involved, and supports the work of village hall committees and other associations. It can be a catalyst for community development, because it always requires people to become active partners in the work. The perform-

ance is the heart of a social process which extends very widely, strengthening people's capacity to shape and pursue their common interests, as a result of participation.

These two aspects of rural touring are inseparable, and equally valuable for those involved: the faces of one coin. A live performance in a community space, such as a village hall, is a particular kind of experience, not a poor substitute for what may be available in an arts venue, its distinction shaped by its social aspects. It is, among other things, the difference between what is done for people, and what they do for themselves.

Perhaps it seems excessive to suggest that a few performances can make such a difference to community life, or to arts access. After all, compared to the scale of arts provision, or the effort and resources invested in community development, the work of rural touring schemes is hardly substantial. But small things can have a disproportionate importance, and rural touring is a seed from which some stout plants have grown, as this report shows. The connections it makes, between artists and audiences, between funders and communities, between professionals and amateurs, between people of every estate, are of wide cultural and social value. They build confidence and competence, empower people and lay foundations for them to act. Without anybody noticing – because nobody is bothered – rural touring builds the connections on which so much else depends.

1.2 THE STUDY

This report is the result of work commissioned by the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) in 2002, as the first substantial, independent study of their members' activities. It was planned in discussion with NRTF and individual scheme managers, who felt that, while rural touring was an important area of arts provision in its own right, it made a wider social contribution, particularly in terms of community development and social inclusion. The research therefore set out to examine:

- What contribution rural arts touring makes to rural community life;
- What outcomes it produces, for individuals and communities, at what cost, and to what extent those outcomes are distinctive, or even unique, to the practice;
- Whether it offers models of value to other areas of rural community development;
- What policy and planning frameworks might make the most of the work's potential to contribute to rural life and regeneration; and
- What distinctive contribution it makes to wider artistic practice.

In designing the study, it was assumed that:

- The cultural life of rural areas is as valid as that of towns and cities, though it is likely, for many reasons, to be different in many ways;
- The work of NRTF members, if only because of its extent and the resources invested in it, is a significant area of rural arts activity that can be expected to produce identifiable outcomes; and that

- ∞ The NRTF approach to partnership with local promoters is of particular interest as a model of community development which may be transferable.

The heart of the research was a series of nine case studies conducted in the English regions and in Wales. Each was different, sometimes focusing closely on a small number of villages, sometimes ranging more widely to consider cross-cutting issues such as access or the role of the promoter. The case studies involved extensive, in-depth interviews and discussions with promoters, village hall and community association committee members, audiences, residents, artists and professionals in arts management and local government, as well as touring scheme staff themselves. These interviews, and many informal conversations taking place at shows and similar occasions, form the core of the study.

In addition, much contextual research was undertaken, including a literature review, analysis of documentary material provided by touring schemes, and field trips to other parts of the country, including the South West, the South East and the Midlands. A research visit was also made to a touring scheme in Seine-et-Marne (France) to provide an international comparison with the British approach. In all, 45 shows were observed, along with a number of workshops, promoters' events and similar activities. Finally, an extensive audience survey was conducted at a sample of 27 performances from County Durham to Cornwall, and Norfolk to the Rhondda: 994 individuals contributed to this.

The study was concerned with rural touring only in England and Wales; it does not cover Scotland or Northern Ireland.³ It focuses specifically on the work of the 41 schemes who are members of the National Rural Touring Forum, not with touring generally, nor with the arts in rural areas as such. There are other models of rural touring, (e.g. theatre companies acting as direct suppliers to communities, or booking venues directly), and there are many areas of arts activity in rural areas apart from professional touring; the study does not address these.

There is wide diversity in the programmes and approaches of NRTF members: some are rural arts development agencies offering performances alongside participatory work, artists residencies and other activities; some work in areas, such as Dudley, which no-one would consider rural. What unites them all is their partnership with local promoters. This is, in many respects, a unique approach to arts development on which depends the success of rural touring and it is a central concern of this study.

1.3 THE REPORT

This report sets out the findings of the study, beginning with some contextual background to rural communities and their cultural relationship with urban areas; chapter 2 touches on some recent changes in rural demographics and society, and how they have been seen from different perspectives, and concludes by looking at arts activity in rural areas.

Chapter 3 describes how the rural touring model works in England and Wales, dealing with the schemes and their programmes, the promoters and artists they work with, and some economic issues. The focus is on statistical data, compiled for the study and from the records of

NRTF and its members, to provide a context for the next two chapters which consider the impact of the work on arts and community development.

Whatever other benefits they produce, rural touring schemes are arts organisations first. They exist to promote opportunities for people to see and participate in artistic experiences, and their work stands or falls on the quality of those experiences. Chapter 4 focuses in detail on the artistic work undertaken through rural touring schemes, and its contribution to the overall pattern of arts activity in England and Wales. It considers the value of rural touring in extending access to the arts, looking at the nature of the experience offered, its impact on audiences, and the benefits and problems for performers and companies.

The idea that village shows both belong to the community, and help strengthen it, is reflected in a widely and strongly held belief among those involved that live events bring people together. What is meant by this is not just the literal gathering of people in the same space, but something more complex, to do with the processes by which a group of individuals come to see themselves as having a degree of common identity. Chapter 5 looks at the impact on communities, describing its contribution to social relations and cohesion, and its capacity to bring people together. It considers rural touring in the context of community development, and why some villages become more active than others. It describes the role of rural touring in strengthening social capital, and in maintaining viable village communities

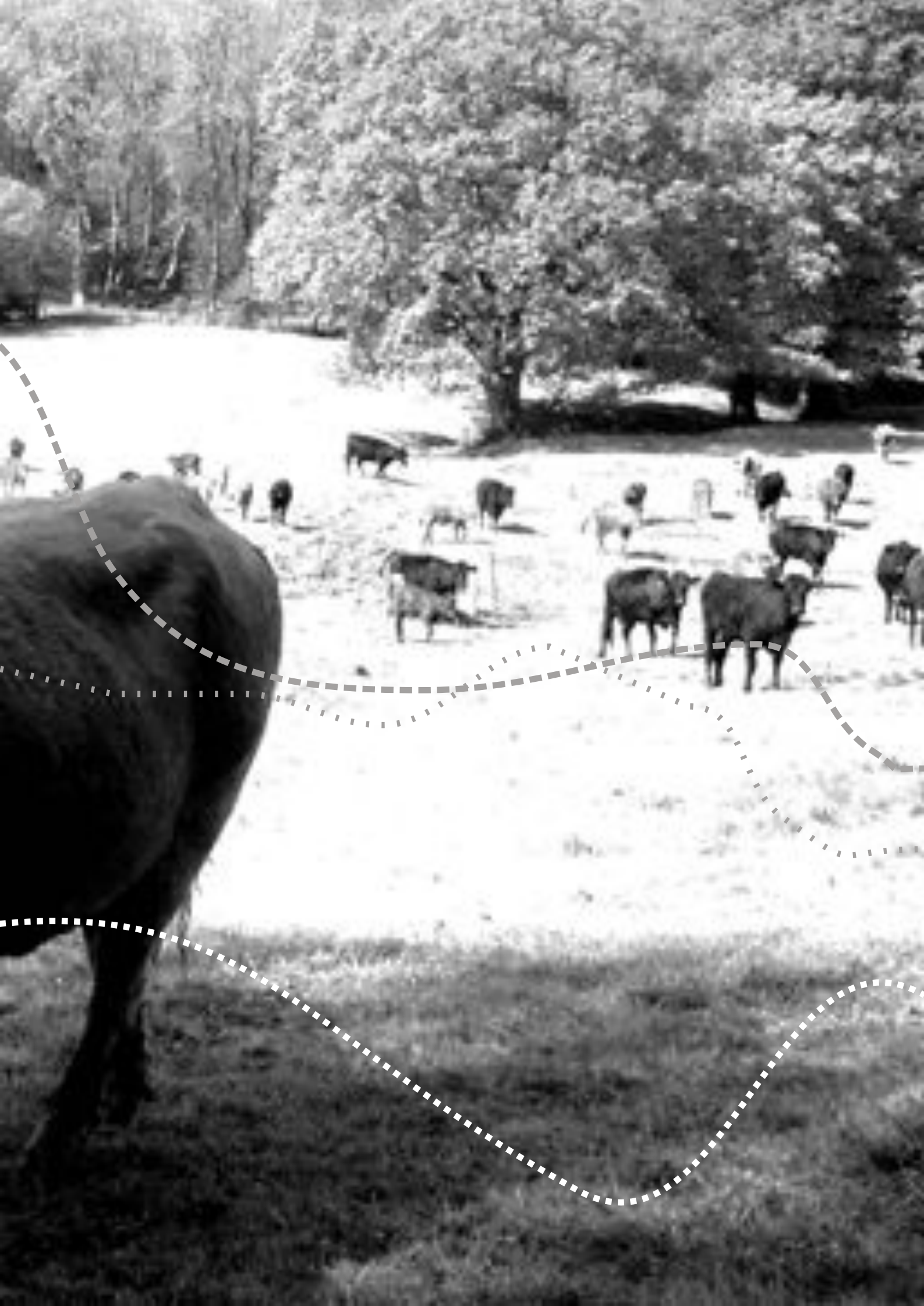
Chapter 6 examines some of the wider challenges arising from rural touring, focusing on areas largely beyond the schemes' own control. It deals with some current problems arising from promoting the arts in village halls, key financial questions, and some issues which may become more important as rural touring expands.

Chapter 7 summarises the key strengths of rural touring and the reasons for its success and considers potential areas of development. Appendices describe the research methodology, report the audience survey data, and provide other background information.





2 RURAL



2 RURAL

2.1 DUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Town and country

The word 'rural' packs a lot into its five small letters, perhaps because it is such an ancient concept, born at the same moment as 'urban': the one cannot exist without the other:

'The tension between town and country is a cornerstone of European culture and probably of every society that has established towns. The symbiotic needs of rural and urban communities – rooted in the desire on the one hand to be fed and on the other to earn a better living – locks both into a relationship of exchange, where buyer and seller are forever trying to get a little advantage over one another, as much, perhaps, for the joy of victory as for material gain. It's the story of the country tortoise and the city hare and there are endless variations of it, usually involving one moving into the other's territory only to discover that the survival skills which served them so well in their usual habitat have no value in these new surroundings. It may be the country boy or girl arriving on streets supposedly paved with gold, only to be befriended, duped, fleeced and dumped, getting older and wiser in the process: French novelists made a positive industry of this story in the nineteenth century.⁴ But it can just as well be the other way around, the city sophisticate who sets up in the country only to find themselves befriended, duped, fleeced and dumped: if they're really unlucky, they'll be butchered too because, as that poet of the city Tom Waits knows, 'There's always some killin' you got to do around the farm'.⁵ The degree of bitterness expressed by these morality tales depends largely on the perspective and affiliation of their creators. We have constructed an archetype of opposites: town-country; radical-conservative; lively-dull; sophisticated-conventional; tense-peaceful; frivolous-rooted; industry-agriculture; man-made-natural; etc., etc.. Town and country is one of the basic expressions of interdependent contrasts, of yin and yang, through which humanity interprets its experience. How we respond to these polarities says more about us than about either town or country. But in truth, almost everything that can be said about one has its counterpart in the other: greed is supposed to typify city slickers and big farmers equally; the city is notorious for individual loneliness – think of the sad typist in Eliot's *Waste Land* or Paul McCartney's Eleanor Rigby – yet it is always the country which is described as isolated.'⁶

Post-modernism has made us wary of how we imagine, or construct, reality, though without identifying a coherent alternative to subjective experience. If we cannot be truly objective, we must be alert to the factors of our subjectivity, and understand how experience and culture, education and position, shape our perspective. It is hard to escape the sweeping cultural tropes outlined above, whether one's experience is urban or rural, or both. The force of those ideas, always important in this first industrialised society, reasserts itself periodically, as it has in the political struggle over the future of the 'countryside' – a word which, like 'landscape', and 'rural' itself, is a way of defining, as much as expressing, a reality (Newby 1979:16). So before looking at arts touring in rural areas, it is useful to explore a little the concept of rurality.

Defining the rural

The problems of defining rurality are not new. The current approach classifies local authority districts into four broad categories: metropolitan, major urban, coalfield and rural, itself sub-divided into 'accessible rural' and 'remote rural' (DEFRA 2004b:7). Although this system was only introduced in 1993, and has since been revised, it is already deemed inadequate, and government has commissioned a consultation exercise 'to produce a standard definition of urban and rural areas which will be useful for general purposes'. This is intended to be more sensitive to local variations in the pattern of settlement and its effects on people.⁷

In the absence of a clear definition of rural, even the most basic figures become unreliable. According to ACRE, the national charity supporting rural community development, about 11 million people live and work in the rural parts of England.⁸ But the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), puts the figure at 14 million, or 29% of the English population (DEFRA 2004b:16). Clearly, such large differences can only be accounted for by different definitions of what is rural.

It difficult to say exactly what we mean by rural because non-urban Britain is so varied. Rural can mean the hardship of farming beautiful hills in an elemental struggle against meteorological and economic change. It can mean the preserved life of estate villages, where the squire, or the National Trust, still determines the colour of people's front doors. It can mean the weeds in the pavements of villages long abandoned by a National Coal Board which itself belongs in a folk song. It can mean the Cotswold town of antique shops and delicatessens, or streets of papered windows and charity shops half a mile from the superstore. It can mean lanes more often disturbed by the whisper of a Mercedes than the low of cattle, or pitched battles between travellers and police enforcing court orders. It can mean the smoking pyres of healthy cattle, or the vegetable factories staffed by illegal workers under the gangmaster's thumb. It can mean wind farms and barn conversions, foxhunting and holiday cottages, isolated pensioners or old-fashioned village schools. Pick your own.

This complexity can be demonstrated less impressionistically. Take the Lincolnshire villages of Fulstow, Grainthorpe and Saltfleet. They lie between Grimsby and Skegness, and appear very similar to the visitor. Each is a substantial settlement with an old core and recent development, and all have successfully promoted live arts in the village hall for several years. But they occupy widely different positions in the national Index of Multiple Deprivation: the wards are ranked, respectively, 5,277th, 2,794th and 914th. Saltfleet is just outside the 10% most deprived wards in England, before wards in Lambeth or Tyneside.

Rural diversity

Though the old cultural archetypes still shape ideas of town and country, both domains are far more complex. This is not new (though its character changes); but its recognition is:

'The most significant development in the field of rural studies seems to have occurred during the early to mid-nineties. The change occurring at the time is termed the cultural or post-modern turn in rural studies, which was certainly linked to similar developments in the other social sciences. Until then rural studies seem to have been dominated largely by a popular perception of the countryside as an idyll: peaceful, quiet, natural and communal. This, whilst at the same time rural areas seemed to be just as

often lacking any inhabitants. This was due to a focus on agriculture and farming rather than those carrying out these activities.' (Gallinat 2003:1)

Gallinat goes on to note 'recent developments in rural studies, which emphasised the increased study of diversity in the countryside. This notion of diversity regards differences between various rural spaces as well as demographic and social diversity within the same space' (Gallinat 2003:11). This growing recognition of rural areas, and their populations, as diverse, is an important shift in attitudes, and is becoming evident in government policy, including the Rural White Paper of 2000. Importantly, it implies that services must also be diverse, in their appropriateness to different situations, and in their response to people's needs and interests.

This is also true of the arts. The artistic interests and values of a diverse rural population cannot be taken for granted. The nature and degree of difficulty that people living in rural areas have in seeing or participating in the arts varies. The arts figure little in the Rural White Paper, which notes only that 'Access to cultural and sporting activity helps to provide an increased quality of life for rural communities' (DETR 2000:40). But the Arts Councils in England and Wales have given more attention to rural arts development in recent years, supporting arts organisations and venues in rural areas, and increasing support for touring. Arts Council England East Midlands was recently awarded a 'Rural Charter' by the Regional Rural Affairs Forum for its work in this area. But the challenges of developing policy and service responses to rural diversity remain substantial, and different from the parallel issues in urban areas.

2.2 CHANGE IN RURAL LIFE

Agriculture, employment and poverty

'The rural areas of England have undergone considerable demographic, social and economic change over the last three to four decades. These changes have led to a much more socially and economically differentiated countryside, much less dependent on agriculture and related activities for employment and generally more prosperous than ever before. Despite this increased general prosperity, however, some parts of rural England still contain areas and settlements experiencing long-standing economic under-performance, social deprivation and lack of services.' (DEFRA 2004b:8)

If diversity has become an important way of understanding and describing rural areas, it is not the only one. Change is another, considerably older, rhetoric of rural life. Seen historically, the rural world is constantly evolving in the face of technology, innovation, disease, economic fluctuation, culture and similar forces; the Black Death in the 14th century, and mechanisation in the later 19th, for example, transformed the supposed continuity of rural life. The change described by DEFRA may be different because it has been associated with a critical diminution of the place of agriculture in rural economy and society. Never has so much been produced, for so many, by so few; only 1.4% of the population now works in agriculture (DEFRA 2003:17). Employment in this sector in England continues to fall: by 25,000, or 11.5%, between 1998 and 2001 (CA 2003:125). The 2003 Agricultural Census records 354,000 people working in agriculture, a figure long surpassed by the numbers of people living in rural areas who work in sectors such as banking, finance, insurance, public services and hospitality (DEFRA/ONS 2004:10).⁹

The fall in numbers of people living in rural areas working in farming does not imply an equivalent reduction in the importance of agriculture itself. It remains of literally vital importance, since it produces the food on which we all depend. It also remains the foundation of rural life, because it governs the management of land, shaping every aspect of its appearance, bio-diversity, amenity value and economic worth. Agriculture also retains a huge cultural authority that is constantly expressed in political, social, religious, artistic and other domains. But if these matters are increasingly contested, it is partly because so many people who live in rural areas are affected by farming without being directly concerned in it.

The move from farming is a long-term trend, but the reversal of rural depopulation is recent. Between 1991 and 2001, the rural population grew by 6%, compared to an urban growth rate of 1.4%; in some rural areas, including parts of East Anglia and the South West, the population grew by well over 10%. Overall, rural districts gained 780,000 residents in the decade (DEFRA 2004b:17). Many of these people are older and relatively well-off, and they have contributed to the rural prosperity noted by DEFRA. Their different needs have also had complex effects on rural services from schools to shops, often to the disadvantage of those less able to supply their own needs in markets of debatable freedom.

Many people living in rural areas do not share the new prosperity: living on low incomes, they do part-time or seasonal work, or are unemployed, retired, chronically sick or disabled. Economic differences are accentuated in rural areas: those nearest to towns have the highest overall median income, while the more remote have the lowest. But even in the wealthiest areas, there are poor communities and individuals whose relative invisibility contributes to their exclusion. In all, it is estimated that 2.1 million people, or 15% of the adults, living in rural areas receive income related benefits (DEFRA 2004b:22). Change has indeed 'led to a much more socially and economically differentiated countryside'; but have our ideas of it caught up?

A sense of crisis

'Countryside crisis can be interpreted as 'creeping' because its very existence is a matter for debate, and part of the response to it uses routine operating procedures.' (Greer 2003:524)

The idea of the countryside crisis is widespread and often shaped by media interpretations, since most people do not live in rural areas. There has been a flow of rural bad news in recent years, divided into two broad channels. The first relates to agricultural problems, ranging from economic recession to developments which can properly be termed crises, such as the emergence of BSE in the mid 1990s or the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in 2001. Regular food scares, from salmonella in eggs to toxins in farmed salmon, the controversy over genetically-modified crops, and the entry of the word 'gangmaster' into popular usage, have all helped taint old-fashioned ideas of the bucolic idyll.

Against this specifically agricultural backdrop, stands another range of problems, relating to decline in rural services and the traditional communities that depend on them. The post office has become a symbol not just of public service in the country, but of community itself, the last peg holding a village together in the face of an urban tide. In the more lurid parts of the media imagination, incomers and second-home owners price out honest locals, supermarkets cheat farmers and undercut village stores, while burglars and drug-dealers wander country lanes in

search of easy pickings. The presentation may be highly-coloured, but the realities on which it plays can be acute: poverty, isolation and social exclusion are not less real for being less visible, and people living in rural areas who depend on public services face growing difficulties.

The sense of rural crisis has not been lessened by political divisions that have arisen over issues as different as the foot and mouth crisis, fuel prices or the proposed ban on foxhunting. The Countryside Alliance has mobilised many who feel neglected, misunderstood or worse by a predominantly metropolitan society and its interests, echoing sentiments that have been current far longer than most people realise. Sixty years ago, it was already being argued that 'England is a manufacturing country and its people have become largely town dwellers, so that the public outlook and legislation are apt to consider the urban population most readily.' (Hartley 1943:3). Government has responded with white papers, reviews and initiatives aimed at the diverse problems evident in rural Britain today.

Although these tensions are symptomatic of the pressures on rural communities, as well as wider societal change, they are also specifically cultural. Whatever the costs of economic and social change in the countryside, and they must not be under-estimated, what is also in question is an *idea* of rural life itself. The countryside crisis is a story of threat to ancient ways of life, deep values and an ideal of what an English community should be, and it is not new. In 1975, Robin Page wrote *The Decline of an English Village* 'to describe the gradual death of a village community; [...] a change from a simple and palpable past, to an ephemeral present and an impersonal synthetic future' (Page 1975:9-10). Forty years earlier, A. G. Street contrasted rural 'stability, peace and continuity' with 'an age of mechanised noisy speed and so-called logical planning of everybody' (Hartley 1943:v). The theme of rural decline could be traced back through Thomas Hardy and William Cobbett to Virgil and Theocritus, but the continuity of concern does not make it less real. The Countryside Agency reports that 91% of adults believe that it is important 'to keep the English countryside the way it is now' (CA 2003:14).

The changing village community

'Every summer she would fear lest the well should give out, every winter lest the pipes should freeze; every westerly gale might blow the wych-elm down and bring the end of all things.'

E. M. Forster¹⁰

Part of what is thought to be under threat is a spirit of community which many still associate with the village, in contrast to what they expect from cities. It is true that as the village population has grown, as work has diversified, and social values altered, so rural life itself has changed. Somewhat paradoxically, given the influx of new residents, many of the institutions and networks on which rural life has depended, have been in decline for a generation or more. Religious observance is an obvious example. Older residents of one case study village remember when there were four chapels in the village, as well as the church: there is now one, and its members have little confidence in the future of their congregation. A Scot interviewed recently on BBC radio observed that '*The only time that the community come together here, in connection with any kind of worship, is at funeral services, and it's so sad, so sad, that you have to have the dead in church before you get a gathering of people coming.*'¹¹

The economy of villages, once so self-sufficient, has become increasingly dependent on towns, and, although home-workers have partly revived a daytime presence, they do not share the interdependency of farmers.¹² Shops, post offices, butchers and garages have all closed, along with quasi-social institutions like schools and surgeries. Those pubs that do survive are often restaurants, and sometimes expensive ones at that. In 1997, over 40% of parishes with fewer than 10,000 residents had no shop, and more had no Post Office; 30% had no pub, almost as many no hall, and 50% no school (Simmons 1997:101). This affects vast swathes of the country: there are about 10,000 parishes with fewer than 10,000 residents.

With more women at work, the Women's Institute can struggle: several case study villages had lost groups recently. With fewer young people, playgroups, scouts and guides, and sports teams can be hard to keep going. According to one resident, *'The big problem now is lack of children. Every time a house changes hands it's too expensive for a family, so we are desperate; the village school is now down to 27 children.'* In 1998, ACRE conducted a major survey of village halls in England, following a similar study undertaken 10 years earlier, focusing on them as institutions and local centres. The results highlighted 'a worrying drop in use by activities and services serving disadvantaged and vulnerable people', with reductions of 6% to 11% in the number of halls hosting playgroups, youth clubs, WIs and senior citizens' clubs (ACRE 1999:45). It is the poorest members of the community who suffer most from the loss of these services and activities, since they are least able to source alternatives independently. In our Buckinghamshire case study, some residents thought little of driving to Oxford or Milton Keynes for entertainment, or to take children to music lessons, but there were others for whom such a trip was exceptional in many senses.

The effects of these changes were commented on by many of those interviewed for this study. In talking about local change, new housing, more traffic, and loss of services, tended to be referred to as both cause, and evidence, of their dominant concern: a diminishing sense of community. People spoke of how difficult it was to know people in a larger community, particularly if they were away at work all day: the term 'weekenders' was applied to people who lived in the village, but were only seen on Saturday and Sunday. This connected with the concern about getting people involved in local activities; one pensioner said of the village in which she had lived all her life, *'It has become only a village to sleep [in], not to enjoy.'* Promoters and village hall committees were very conscious of the change: *'20, 30 years ago, there weren't half so many houses here but you got a lot better support. [...] You would go in the pubs most nights, and there was three or four dominoes schools going, and folk playing darts. [...] All that has gone by. [Now] it's hard work: if you try to do anything, you know you have got to really push it.'*

Similar views were reflected in the audience survey. In 18 villages, this included a question about whether people felt their village had changed, and, if so, how. Three quarters (72%) of residents felt that it had. Naturally enough, these tended to be older people, who had lived there for many years; the following comments are representative:

'It has become less of a community, more just a place to live for many newcomers.'

Nurseryman, 63, Lincolnshire

'Change in the rural situation, mainly agricultural leading to a change in the type of resident – from farm/estate workers to professional commuters.'

Pensioner, 71, Cheshire

'It has grown, become more sophisticated and less secure, lighter at night and busier.'

Artist, 54, Nottinghamshire

'Pub is now more of a restaurant. School closed. Lots more cars. More vandalism. Still community spirit but many people miss out on events like this – shame as they don't know what they're missing.'

DTP worker, 55, Warwickshire

Not all those who thought the community had changed felt it had done so for the worse, especially in terms of social life and activities. People spoke about improved local facilities, including village halls, and more things to do. A Dorset villager noted that *'The productions and plays in the village hall are much better now than when I first arrived in the village'*.

In 2000, the Rural White Paper responded to this complex evidence of rural change by making 'Community involvement and activity' one of 15 headline indicators against which to assess development. This was to be measured in terms of 'Community vibrancy: % of parishes in four categories (vibrant, active, barely active, sleeping) assessed on numbers of meeting places, voluntary and cultural activities, contested parish elections' (DETR 2000:166). The Countryside Agency has translated this into: 'Community Space (a measure of local facilities and services), Community Engagement (measures of social capital and participation) and Community Strength (a measure of community organisational capacity). Taken together they give a picture of rural community vibrancy based on three types of community potential: physical, social and organisational' (CA 2003:17). This research has found that rural touring can make a substantial contribution to each of these. More significantly though, arts touring is one of the means that rural communities are using to adjust to the changes they are experiencing.

2.3 RURAL COMMUNITIES AND THE ARTS

This brief exploration of the concept, and reality, of rural life today would not be complete without considering the role played by the arts. Rural areas are not, and have never been, lacking in cultural activity, both indigenous and imported. Among the former are long-standing practices of music, dance, theatre, story, craft and visual art sometimes dismissed as 'folk'. The marginalisation of this work, in favour of urban modernism, is increasingly challenged, and the growth of 'world' music and contemporary craft has eroded some distinctions. Several rural touring stalwarts, including John Spiers and Jon Boden, Nancy Kerr and James Fagan, and Bill Jones, have featured extensively in national media and won BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, while new facilities, like the Hub craft gallery and workshops in Sleaford, are bringing a different kind of recognition to these forms.

Other arts activity includes forms adapted to rural society by amateur drama groups, choral societies, bands etc.. Fulstow (Lincolnshire) is a village with a typically active amateur drama group that puts on several productions a year. The autumn cabaret, 'Talk of the Town', is so

popular that the week's tickets are sold within hours of going on sale. Such events can licence transgression in the form of satire or mockery, allowing local controversies or tensions to be aired; they are often long social evenings with food and drink. Publishing is also common in rural communities. Ashbrittle (Somerset) is one of many villages to mark the millennium by producing a book about the place and its people: the result, a copiously illustrated 170 page volume, would do credit to a commercial publisher. The extent of arts activity is clear in the ACRE survey, which shows a wide range of arts classes and events, and a marked growth in the number of village halls hosting them.¹³

Arts activities	1988	1998	Percentage change
Line dancing	-	35%	+35%
Amateur dramatics	22%	34%	+12%
Art/craft exhibitions	4%	30%	+27%
Ballroom dancing	11%	20%	+9%
Band practice	4%	18%	+15%
Art classes	7%	18%	+10%
Old Time dancing	14%	16%	+2%
Ballet classes	16%	15%	-1%
Craft classes/clubs	4%	11%	+7%
Film shows	20%	10%	-10%
Other arts	-	10%	+10%
Art clubs	-	8%	+8%

Table 1: Proportion of village halls hosting selected arts activities (ACRE 1998:43)

Then there are all the artists, craftspeople, makers, musicians and other creative professionals who live and work in rural areas, selling their work from home, putting on exhibitions, playing in churches and pubs, producing books, teaching and otherwise earning a living. In Grainthorpe (Lincolnshire), local artists run an August Bank Holiday art show in the church and village hall. Up to 100 professional and amateur artists and craftspeople take part, and about 1,500 visitors attend. The event demands a huge amount of work, not least to remove all the pews from the church, but involves many residents and raises about £5,000 from sales and entry fees; these profits are donated to the church fabric fund, the village hall, the primary school and the cricket club. It is also a good opportunity to get together: *'All the villagers come and stand and gossip in the middle, groups of 5 or 6, and other people are trying to get around and look at the pictures. [...] It's marvellous: you see people you haven't seen for years.'*

Many arts organisations are based in rural areas, including development agencies like Rural Arts North Yorkshire or Take Art!, and specialist groups, such as the Rural Media Company in Hereford or Littoral in Lancashire. In different ways, and from various perspectives, they work with community groups on arts projects, and advocate their interests in arts and other arenas.¹⁴ A number of theatre companies and musicians also base themselves in villages and small towns, for cultural or practical reasons; as one performer explained, *'[the company] was set up in 1987 primarily to do rural touring because my background is from Argyll in Scotland, and we felt that the rural communities were not being served as well as the towns'*. The regional touring theatre companies set up during the 1970s – New Perspectives, Forest

Forge, Eastern Angles, Pentabus and NTC Touring Theatre, among others — were pioneers in this respect, and laid the foundations for much subsequent village hall programming.¹⁵

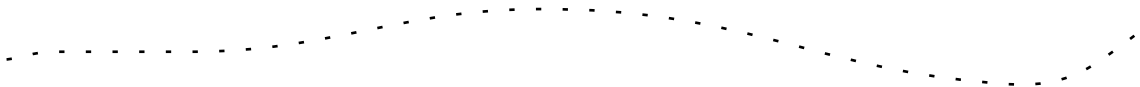
Rural local authorities, at county and district level, have become increasingly involved in the arts, and most have, at least, one arts development officer in post. Some, like Cheshire County Council, have substantial teams working across the range of art forms; Hampshire, which runs arts centres in New Milton, Winchester, Fareham and Aldershot, is one of a number of councils involved in direct service provision. Councils also support the arts through other policies, such as regeneration programmes: South Norfolk District Council's Cultural Regeneration Officer has developed an extensive community-based arts programme since 2001.

Private sector and quasi-commercial cultural activity also plays its part. Market towns like Helmsley (North Yorkshire), support bookshops and art galleries, while pubs put on live music. There are craft centres in hamlets, country houses with collections to match those of great museums, and schools with theatres. Between Easter and October, festivals of every kind and size flower across rural England and Wales. Some, like the Hay Literature Festival, with its star names and huge visitor numbers, are local industries; others, like the Lowdham Book Festival (Nottinghamshire), aim for community involvement and are as successful in their terms. There is a growing presence of public art in rural areas, as in urban ones; indeed, it is getting difficult to go for a walk without tripping over the results of one residency or another. And, finally, there has been more and more opportunity to see professional live arts in village halls.

Change has brought problems to rural communities, but it has also brought ideas, energy and opportunities, as new residents have become involved in village affairs. It is striking, for this study, that these areas of growth often relate to the arts. The development of rural touring is itself partly the result of change in rural communities. People's expectations, of the arts and of community life, have changed. This is most obvious among incomers, who may be used to the easy access to culture available in urban areas, but locals also share the changing attitudes to culture observable throughout British society. For both, however, becoming involved in rural touring and local arts activity often springs from a commitment to community, rather than a dedication to the arts. As their communities change, many of the people interviewed during this research expressed their intention to play an active role in their future, and saw rural touring as one way to do that.

'We actually can't do without [the arts]. If we didn't have a wide spread of things happening in villages like this... because there's not the indigenous farming [and] employment which acts as the cement between people, there has [to be] something else, and currently that something else is largely what happens to the arts in a village like this. If you didn't have that, we would not be sitting around this table.'

Committee member, Norfolk



3 MAKING CONNECTIONS



BLIND

HOCKERING 1

• WELBORNE 1 1/2
• RUNHALL 2 1/2

LANE

3 MAKING CONNECTIONS

3.1 RURAL TOURING SCHEMES

Diversity is a major strength of rural touring schemes in England and Wales. Because they have developed independently, they have made different choices about the nature and extent of their service, and the ways in which they work. It is therefore unwise to generalise much about schemes with different structures, approaches and priorities. That said, they share a strong belief in certain core values, and it is these, rather than technical matters, which have underpinned growth and led to the formation, in 1997, of the National Rural Touring Forum.

The development of rural touring

Although artists, and notably the regional touring theatre companies, have been performing in villages for many years, the development of touring schemes as such is relatively recent. The earliest, in South East Wales, began in 1980, and was followed by schemes in Hampshire and Lincolnshire. Though they adopted different approaches, the ideas they established inspired initiatives in other areas. By 2004, there were about 40 different schemes, covering most rural parts of England and all of Wales. (Rural touring has developed rather differently in Scotland, mostly without schemes acting as brokers between companies and promoters.¹⁶) Growth has been particularly rapid in recent years, with many new initiatives being established.

	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004
New schemes	3	3	6	13	12
Total number of schemes	3	6	12	25	37

Table 2: Starting dates of NRTF member schemes; (source NRTF)¹⁷

At the same time, existing schemes continue to expand, offering more shows to more promoters. There has been a sharp rise in performances, promoters and audiences in the past 5 years:

NRTF members: England	2000	2001	2002	2003	Increase
Audiences	160,265	159,445	178,978	194,592	+21%
Performances	1,856	2,208	2,439	3,168	+71%
Workshops	448	454	802	588	+31%
Active promoters	1,024	1,133	1,291	1,664	+63%
Expenditure	£1,369,600	£1,676,704	£2,137,554	£2,337,120	+71%
Box office income	£278,240	£357,686	£410,340	£497,172	+79%

Table 3: NRTF member schemes in England, activity 2000-03; (source NRTF)

This success inevitably raises many questions for those involved, not least how to choose between alternative demands and opportunities, and how to sustain and enhance the work. These issues, among others, are considered at the end of this report.

Management structure

Rural touring is managed by organisations of different kinds. The most widespread model is the independent, not-for-profit company, usually with charitable status. For some, like Live & Local in the West Midlands, the promotion of community-based shows is the main or only activity; for others, like Take Art! (Somerset) or Creative Arts East (Norfolk), touring support is the cornerstone of a wider arts programme including participatory work, issue-based programmes, artists' residencies and more. In Northamptonshire, the rural touring scheme is managed by New Perspectives theatre company, which is also involved in participatory work.

Other schemes fall within local authority arts provision. Cheshire's rural touring network is managed by County Council staff with a remit for rural arts development. Hog the Limelight, in Hampshire, is a service provided by the County Council's Recreation and Heritage Department. The Arts Council of Wales, unlike its English counterpart which supports the work through grant aid, manages small-scale touring directly through its Community Touring Unit.

A third management model is based on a contractual relationship with a service provider. In Essex, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, Derbyshire, Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire and elsewhere, rural touring is managed, on behalf of consortia of local authorities, by an independent contracted agency such as Artservice, or by freelance administrators, such as Cecilia Kean, who delivers Theatre in the Villages for Buckinghamshire's four district councils. In some cases, work which originated in this way has led to the creation of an independent arts organisation: Applause (West Kent) became a charitable trust after several years of depending on part-time freelance work.

There are advantages and drawbacks to each model. Contracting services is cost-effective, and allows for flexibility, but may limit the wider influence of an outsourced service on arts and cultural development. The larger, independent organisations, such as Artsreach, Creative Arts East or Take Art!, have built the capacity to engage in arts development on a wider scale, so that professional touring connects with other creative work.

The rural touring scheme service

The task of rural touring schemes is to help local people, financially and otherwise, promote professional arts in community spaces like village and community halls. Many do more than this (as described later), and approach the task in different ways, but they are united by the partnership with community promoters to bring live performance to places it would not otherwise go. The following outline of the relationship between scheme and promoters, published by Hog the Limelight, is broadly representative of how the responsibilities are divided:

HOG PROMOTERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- Booking events for their venue through the Hog the Limelight scheme;
- Returning all forms by the deadline dates;
- Deciding, at the time of booking, what format the event will take in their community, and costing ticket prices appropriately;
- Booking the venue for the appropriate dates, and covering all local costs (rent, electricity, licences, insurance, accommodation where necessary, etc);
- Making sure that all appropriate insurances and licences are in place;

- Using Hog The Limelight publicity material to advertise the events;
- Selling tickets;
- Looking after visiting performers, and providing accommodation for them if requested;
- Providing volunteers to help at the event;
- Observing Health & Safety regulations during performances;
- Running the event;
- Returning a completed Performance Report Form within a fortnight of each event;
- Paying our invoices promptly;

HOG THE LIMELIGHT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- Programming the Hog the Limelight season;
- Supporting promoters with advice and information;
- Finalising dates with promoters and performers;
- Confirming bookings with the promoter and the performers;
- Contracting and paying the performers;
- Providing tickets and publicity materials for events;
- Providing promoters with relevant information about visiting performers/artists and their needs;
- Providing performers with village contacts and information about venues;
- Providing promoters with a Performance Report Form for financial and monitoring purposes;
- Invoicing promoters for events;
- Assessing all performers and artists to ensure safe working practices.¹⁸

The details of the partnership do, however, vary widely. For example, in Lincolnshire, promoters pay their contribution to companies directly, (the subsidising balance is paid to them by the district councils); in Somerset, they pay an agreed part of the income to Take Art! who contract the artists. In Wales, the Arts Council's charge to promoters is standardised for all work (at £265 per show in 2003), while in England schemes vary their charges according to costs, or to achieve specific objectives such as helping small halls, or supporting more adventurous work. Some schemes provide printed tickets and publicity material; others expect promoters to be self-reliant. Some, like Creative Arts East, offer a range of art forms, including visual arts; others, like Black Country Touring, focus on theatre and dance only. These differences are mostly technical and insignificant, but one or two do have an effect on the pattern of activity in specific areas, and therefore demand some attention.

Planning seasons

Rural touring schemes promote work in one or two seasons, normally between late September and early May, though shows sometimes take place in summer. Planning begins months in advance, with the selection of 20-40 possible shows offered to scheme promoters through a detailed menu. Promoters submit bids for one or more shows, with their preferred dates, and the programmer then puts together a season which best reconciles the wishes of local groups, touring companies and funding partners, within the overall framework of the scheme's own artistic policy and ambitions. It is a complex process, like trying to complete Rubik's cube on paper, but schemes are very adept at creating seasons that offer promoters diversity, value and ambition, and companies a cost-effective number of performances, often amounting to a week's tour. The season brochure, with details of shows and venues, can be a good marketing tool, and is valued by promoters who see their show as part of something bigger.

In Wales, the Night Out scheme does not programme seasons. Instead, promoters select a company themselves through a website or a printed prospectus; they can also choose an artist not yet listed, by agreement.¹⁹ They negotiate dates and other details directly with the performers, but contracts and payments are handled by Night Out. In the absence of seasons, there is no general brochure, so marketing is limited to what promoters do themselves. This may mean, among other things, that audiences are more local than elsewhere, since they are not publicised so widely.

Rural and urban communities

The other important variation in approach is the remit of different touring schemes. Some are specifically rural in character. Highlights, for example, serves the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: 'a landscape of high, wild moorland, cut through by green, settled dales, where tumbling rivers and waterfalls, exciting wildlife, dramatic history and welcoming communities await those who come to explore this special place.'²⁰ Although not all touring schemes serve such picturesque areas, they are concentrated in counties with substantial rural areas, on which they focus their work. However, some have a broader remit: in the East Midlands, for example, there are promoters in Lincoln and the suburbs of Nottingham. Live & Local serves Solihull, and the Cheshire scheme includes places like Congleton. In Wales, Night Out serves villages, towns like Chepstow, Tredegar and Llandudno, and districts in Cardiff and Swansea, reaching urbanised communities with poor access to services, such as those in the valleys; in 2003-04, the scheme made a big contribution to the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Communities First' initiative, targeting services at the poorest, often urban, areas. One NRTF member, Black Country Touring, works entirely in the urban, and frequently disadvantaged areas of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The differences and similarities between rural and community touring are important and are touched on below.

Shared values

These various approaches reflect history, local interests and the partnerships of individual schemes, as well as the ideas of the people concerned. Apart from the issues of programming and reach, they do not significantly affect outcomes. What unites touring schemes is far more important than what divides them – particularly when it comes to fundamental cultural values. Although the NRTF has no formal statement of principles or code of practice for its members, the study has identified shared values which it may be useful to describe briefly. What unites rural touring schemes is a belief that:

- High quality, live arts performance offers a unique, and increasingly uncommon, experience, which is life-enhancing, and sometimes life-changing;
- Rural isolation, poverty, social exclusion and similar disadvantages should not prevent people from having good access to those experiences;
- Local people are essential actors in arts development, sharing responsibilities, risks and rewards as equal partners with artists, professional bodies and funding agencies;
- The results of successful arts promotion extend widely and contribute to personal growth and strong, sustainable communities.²¹

The differences in approach, style and management structure evident between touring schemes arise because people follow different routes towards these ideals. Part of the task of the present study was to test these beliefs against people's experience.

The National Rural Touring Forum

As the number, and confidence, of touring schemes grew during the 1990s, the need emerged for a structure which could encourage networking and represent their interests nationally. In 1997, the National Rural Touring Forum was established as a charity and company owned by its members.²² Its resources were initially drawn from those members, but it has since had support from Arts Council England towards running costs; these remain minimal, consisting of a part-time development worker and contracted administrative support.

The National Rural Touring Forum has made progress principally through some ambitious projects funded by grants from charitable bodies, such as the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and National Lottery grants administered by ACE. These have supported major commissions and national tours, including *Rural Voices of Kala Sangam*, a show that combined Indian and British tales through storytelling, music and dance, and was seen by 2,500 people in 21 villages across England in Spring 2002.²³ (The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation also provided the support for a tour by Mtiebi, a male-voice choir from Tbilisi in Georgia, brought to about 1,500 people in 18 East Midlands villages by Artservice in Autumn 2003.)

NRTF has developed guidance materials for promoters, touring scheme staff, funding agencies and others, to strengthen their effectiveness. Through its work in professional development, information exchange and research, it has built a reputation within the membership and become recognised as a central point of contact for national bodies. Its annual conference, attended by promoters, artists and touring scheme staff, is a lively forum for exchange of ideas and experiences; a website with a members' area helps keep that going through the year. Through all this, it is perhaps the Forum's main achievement to have fostered a sense of common purpose within the growing number of independent-minded rural touring schemes, and thus to have made the field more visible. The continuing growth in numbers of schemes is due in part to the work of NRTF.

The increased visibility of rural touring does, however, raise an important question. It has already been noted that some NRTF members do not work only in rural areas, and there has been debate within the membership about the relative importance of the term 'rural', as against 'community'. Some schemes place greater emphasis on one or other word, while others, such as Lincolnshire's, use both. It is not an irrelevant point. Market towns like Spalding or Chipping Norton may be considered rural in government policy, but both have theatres which, in important respects, offer experiences more akin to a city arts venue than a village hall. Equally, a show in a suburban school or an inner city community centre may be a shared experience typically associated with the village hall. In other words, the nature of the event, and the performer's relationship with their audience, may be more important in characterising the work and values of NRTF and its members, than the venue's location. There are important questions here for touring schemes and their funders, about the audience they intend to serve and the experiences they wish to offer.

3.2 RURAL TOURING SCHEME PROGRAMMES

Live arts performances and promotions

Programming professional performances in villages and other communities, in partnership with local people, is the central element of all rural touring schemes. For many, including the schemes in Wales, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall or Kent, it is the full extent of their work.²⁴ For others, it is part of a programme of that includes workshops, education projects, commissions and similar activities, sometimes across the range of arts. But even in schemes with extensive programmes, like Creative Arts East or Artsreach (Dorset), touring remains the heart of their work, not least because it is very popular with the communities they serve.

The scale of the programmes promoted by individual schemes varies widely, principally in relation to their resources. The smaller schemes, often more recently established, promote between 10 and 50 performances a year, while seven English schemes produced over 100 performances each, and four exceeded 200 in 2002/03.²⁵ In Wales, Night Out produced 374 live shows during the same period. However, the median figure for the number of annual performances is 57 and this is a more representative picture of the pattern of rural touring in England.

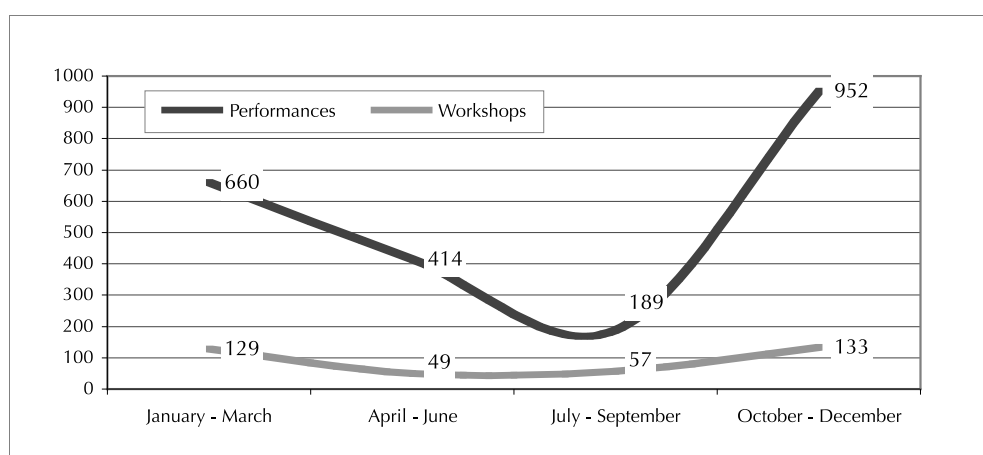


Figure 1, Seasonal distribution of activity, 2002-03, 27 schemes in England and Wales; (source NRTF)

The distribution of performances is highly seasonal, concentrated in the autumn and winter. The reasons given for this vary, and are often related to promoters' perceptions of what is happening in the village and its agricultural life. Overall, however, the emphasis on the winter months is very marked, with nearly three quarters of performances taking place between October and March.

The programmes are discussed in more detail below, but the importance of commissions should be noted. It is not unusual for schemes to work with artists to develop a tour or show to meet a particular area of interest. Increasing the diversity of available work often involves such commissions, as in the case of the national tour by the Bradford-based South Asian music and dance company, Kala Sangam, or an Annapurna Dance tour in the North Pennines for Highlights. Other examples include the Hanby & Barrett production for Village Ventures, commissioned by the Nottinghamshire Consortium of Local Authorities in partnership with Art-

service, and looking at changing village life. Although the core of rural touring programmes depends on what, and who, is available, some schemes are enterprising commissioners.

Film

Some rural touring schemes also promote film screenings, directly or in partnership with other organisations. The largest programme is Flicks in the Sticks, run in Herefordshire and Shropshire by Arts Alive, alongside their live arts promotions. Between January and April 2004, they screened films at 237 events across the two counties, offering 65 different titles, from *Finding Nemo* to *Dr Strangelove*, *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* to *Goodbye Lenin!*, and contributed to the Herefordshire Borderlines Film Festival. The approach is similar to live performances, with the promoter selecting the film and contributing to costs; a technician and equipment is provided by Flicks in the Sticks. Since there is no artist present – except at silent films with live music – promoters are often imaginative in creating an atmosphere with food, local performers or other special events.

Schools and participatory arts work

Many rural touring schemes offer some workshop activity in addition to live events. This is often linked to tours, but also includes workshops by artists unconnected with the touring programme. The extent of this work is limited: only 8 schemes ran more than 10 workshops during 2002/03. This is more a matter of policy than of resources, with some of the largest schemes, such as Village Ventures (Nottinghamshire) or Night Out (Wales), defining their purpose in terms of live performance rather than participatory work. A smaller group of schemes provide substantial programmes of participatory arts activity alongside their performance programmes. Artsreach, Black Country Touring, Cheshire Rural Touring Network, Highlights, Hog the Limelight, Live & Local and Take Art! all offered at least 30 workshops during the course of 2002/03, while other schemes, such as On Tour, are part of larger organisations or local authorities with participatory programmes.

For some, like Artsreach, participatory work balances the winter performance programme, with workshops concentrated in holiday periods: in 2003, Artsreach ran 54 workshops in Dorset villages, 36 of them in the summer.²⁶ Other schemes develop substantial programmes of work with specific communities. Take Art! has undertaken photography and music projects with disabled and non-disabled children in South and West Somerset; Creative Arts East is involved in literature and reader development in Norfolk; Rural Arts North Yorkshire has a programme of raku and pottery work with communities in the county. Each of these is a rural arts development agency, for whom touring is a strand of work among others: they are well networked and able to engage with diverse partners including social services, education authorities, youth services and others.

Visual arts

With 2 or 3 exceptions, rural touring schemes are entirely concerned with performing arts. Schemes often use visual arts in their workshop programmes, as in the examples cited, but, at least two curate and tour their own exhibitions to village halls. In 2003, Artsreach toured an exhibition called *Farming Matters*, 'exploring contemporary artists' relationships with agri-

culture'; the work of 17 artists was included, and workshops using felt, willow and fabric were offered. The exhibition spent a weekend in each of six village halls, and 10 days in a gallery in Stalbridge. Creative Arts East's summer programme uses a similar approach. Each year, an exhibition is created, usually with local artists, and offered to promoters before being shown in Norwich; as in Dorset, village shows take place at weekends to concentrate the audience, and are accompanied by workshops and artists' talks. This success in touring visual art to villages is notable in adopting a different model to that usually used for community exhibitions.

Arts development

Many rural touring schemes act to some degree as local arts development agencies, providing advice and information to artists, voluntary groups and local people on their areas of interest. Building capacity through the network of promoters is a valuable part of this. Most schemes encourage their promoters to meet and work with one another. In spring 2002, for example, Take Art!, organised three events in different parts of Somerset; they were attended by over 110 people from 54 villages, and gave people a chance to meet potential artists. Cheshire's Rural Touring Network, among others, uses such meetings to support new promoters and encourage the sharing of experience and ideas. Live & Local provides tickets and travel expenses to promoters willing to review shows by companies that have previously been booked by the scheme or that might be of interest to its promoters for future seasons.

3.3 LOCAL PROMOTERS

The number of local promoters

Rural touring schemes depend on partnership with local people who act as promoters in their communities, either as individuals, or, much more often, as small groups or committees. Although these partnerships vary between schemes, they all depend on a fair division of risks, rights and rewards. Promoters choose what to put on and when, from a more or less broad range of options, and meet an agreed cost. This is generally, though not always, subsidised, and a guarantee against loss may be offered by the local authority. There is normally a profit-sharing agreement, if the event does well. Promoters also take responsibility for most practical aspects of the event, from marketing and selling tickets to preparing the venue and providing hospitality.

Promoters act, in short, as arts development officers in their own communities, using their own networks and reputation to raise interest in a show. In doing so, they take financial and social risks: it is they who must field complaints in the days after a bad show, when the company and the touring scheme are both far away. Their reasons for taking on the role, and the benefits and challenges they encounter are central to this study. In 2002/03, there were at least 1,530 active promoting groups in England and Wales.²⁷ There was a wide variation in the number of promoters supported by each scheme, according to the size of the schemes themselves. Five schemes had fewer than 20 promoters, but four had over 100: Lincolnshire Rural and Community Touring Scheme (110), Live & Local (160), On Tour (180) and Night Out (187). The median number of promoters per scheme was 40.

Promoters: some characteristics

Promoters are as diverse as the villages in which they live. In the course of the research nearly 100 individual promoters were interviewed in 60 villages, and they are a wide cross-section of people living in rural Britain. Within that group, there were slightly more women than men (5:4), and they were much more likely to be over 50 years old; none was from an ethnic minority. They tended to be well settled in the village, with most having lived there for 15 years or more, though a few were recent arrivals. Beyond these broad lines, it is not possible to generalise. The group included 34 people who were working, 31 who were retired, and 18 who were parents or full-time carers. They tended to have professional backgrounds, notably in teaching, but there were promoters working in manual and semi-skilled jobs, in farming and in the arts, and people who had not had a formal career.

Most promoters are members of village hall committees or other community groups. A review of Somerset performances in 2002/03 showed that only 9% of promoters worked alone, and some of these are committee members who have moral support if not practical assistance. A survey of Staffordshire promoters by Live & Local found that 24 of 28 were officers of hall committees, mostly secretaries; one promoter worked alone, seven drew in help on an ad hoc basis, and the rest worked within the framework of the committee.²⁸

A small proportion of promoters are not volunteers in the sense that they take on the role within the framework of paid responsibilities: community and leisure centre managers are the obvious example. However, even in these cases, the work is usually voluntary, in that it is not a requirement of the job, and involves others, especially committee members, as volunteers. This is more common in urban or semi-urban areas than in strictly rural ones. The principal exception is Black Country Touring, almost all of whose promoters are professionals, particularly in education and social services. These people usually co-ordinate voluntary groups, particularly of young people, but also of people with learning disabilities and others.

The promoter's role

'It used to make my tummy churn; I have to say, I didn't enjoy the show because I worried that everybody wouldn't be enjoying themselves, and there was many a morning when I my tummy would be in knots because I thought, what is the day going to hold?'

Promoter, Somerset

Promoters work in different ways, according to circumstance, personality, and the style of scheme to which they belong. The staff (or freelancers) who run the touring schemes have a significant influence on the way promoters approach their work. Every scheme provides promoters with written guidelines on how to promote a show but, beyond this, promoters need to feel they can trust the product the scheme is offering, and be confident that help will be forthcoming if they need it in dealing with the company or promoting a show.

Some have a light touch, perhaps because they are well experienced and have a good team of supporters, and take each show in their stride. Others expend a great deal of time, effort and, sometimes, worry, in making sure that everything possible has been done to make the event a success. Hog the Limelight's outline of responsibilities gives a fair idea of the essential tasks. Some promoters do only this, and get very good audiences. Others will get on the phone to the

local press, trudge round the village stuffing leaflets through letterboxes (or persuade their teenage children to do it for them), turn up at local meetings to push the event, drive miles to put up posters in other villages, prepare hot meals for the company and put them up after the show, beg raffle prizes from local sources, decorate the hall and much more. Above all, they bring audience and artist together in an atmosphere conducive to a shared artistic experience.

Rural touring venues

Rural touring performances take place, almost without exception, in community venues: indeed, this is vital to their character and success. In England, village halls are the most common venues, with three out of four events being promoted there. Although schools and community centres are used, venues such as churches, pubs, residential homes and so on, are used only exceptionally. A few promoters do use theatres, such as the Regal in Minehead or Daneside Theatre in Congleton, but these are very rare.

In Wales, the picture is different, reflecting the Night Out scheme's broader focus on community rather than specifically rural touring, and the distinct social character and facilities of the Welsh countryside. Here, there is no single 'typical' venue; because the scheme is also used by promoters working with groups, such as young people, or as part of their work, locations include social services day centres, hotels, pubs, health centres, youth, social and sports clubs, and volunteer-run arts venues like Theatr Twm o'r Nant in Denbigh.

	Village Hall	School	Community Centre	Leisure & arts centre	Church & chapel	Open air & marquee	Other
England	74%	9%	6%	3%	2%	2%	4%
Wales	22%	18%	22%	7%	11%	2%	18%

Table 4: Venues used by promoters in England and Wales; (source NRTF)

The designation of a building as a village hall or a community centre may not reflect a significant difference in structures or purposes: culture, history and politics all play a part.

3.4 ARTISTS WORKING WITH TOURING SCHEMES

Programming

The diversity of scale and approach within rural touring, already noted, is also evident in the work supported by schemes. They aim to offer promoters a range to suit different halls, pockets and tastes; as one scheme manager explained, her aim is to provide choice: *'We offer the range of art forms – theatre, dance, music, literature, puppetry, film, poetry; [...] then there's the range of local, regional, national and international work; [...] we have our own target of at least two non-western companies or performances on the programme each year; [...] then there is also a balance of female and male performers; [and] work that might be of interest to children and families, work that might be of interest to young people – teenagers to 20 year olds – work that is interesting to adults, work that could be interesting to older people.'* This commitment to diversity is widely shared, partly because

of a perceived need to enlarge the range of work seen in rural areas, and partly because different promoters want different things, for different reasons.

Promoters influence the programme as much as the touring schemes. Programmers act as gatekeepers, filtering the range of possible performances to a more manageable choice of about 30 per season, but if they did not select work that promoters wanted to pay for, and audiences to see, the rural touring partnership would collapse. Established trust may allow a manager to persuade a promoter to take a risk on something different, but bad advice will not be accepted again. So the final shape of rural touring programmes reflects the combined judgement and different knowledge of professional and local actors.

Seasons emerge by negotiation between programmers, promoters and artists, and the skill lies in meeting the needs of rural communities while offering performers interesting and viable work. Given this, the final variety and quality is notable. This is better appreciated by looking at rural touring as a whole, rather than individual scheme programmes, which may be small and plan to achieve their goals over several years. In the 2002 programmes of 26 English rural touring schemes, music and theatre made up about a third of total performances each, with the rest comprising work for children, storytelling and dance and other less common forms. (There were also some 300 film screenings, but these have a somewhat different character from live performance and are not included in these figures.)

All Performances	Percentage	Music	Percentage
Music	37%	Jazz & blues	24%
Theatre	33%	World	21%
Children's theatre etc	17%	Classical	12%
Storytelling, comedy etc.	9%	Traditional and folk	19%
Dance	4%	Cabaret & other music	24%

Table 5 Types of performances promoted by 26 English NRTF schemes in 2002²⁹

Schemes promoted nearly twice as many individual musicians and groups as theatre companies, though number of performances was very similar. The difference reflects the structures of the two sectors, with most music performances involving unfunded groups. Theatre work tended to involve larger, publicly-funded companies.

Company	Performances	Company	Performances
New Perspectives Theatre Co	61	Ophaboom	28
Blaize	37	Circus Berzercus	27
North Country Theatre Co	37	Old Rope String Band	26
Storybox Theatre	36	Grand Theatre of Lemmings	26
Sid Kipper	35	Forest Forge Theatre Co	25
The Looking Glass Theatre Co	34	Lempen Puppet Theatre	24
Cleveland Theatre Company	32	Oxford Touring Theatre Co.	23
Puppetcraft	32	Bob Hall Duo	22
King Villa	28	Eduardo Niebla Trio	22

Table 6: Companies performing more than 20 shows for 26 English NRTF schemes in 2002

In fact, it was generally theatre companies who performed most for NRTF schemes in 2002, especially the regional touring companies which toured two or three productions each during

the year. Forest Forge Theatre Company, for instance, performed four different shows – *The Pony Drift*, *The True Tales of Robin Hood*, *Briar Rose* and *Doctor Faustus* – through rural touring schemes in 2002. But even in theatre, there were many young companies, and other small-scale groups which did not receive Arts Council support. In all, 250 different companies and performers contributed to these 26 schemes' live programmes during 2002, (not including workshops and other additional events). Most of these (82%) performed fewer than 10 shows in the year, sometimes doing one or two nights in various parts of the country, in other cases doing a tour for a single scheme: the median number of performances by each performer or company was three.

Artists and companies

The diversity of these companies is illustrated by the following table; these classification reflects a programmer's perspective, rather than that of the artist or the audience, so the figures are indicative of the pattern rather than an exact representation.

Art form	Companies	Art form	Companies
Theatre	63	Cabaret & other music	16
Jazz, blues & popular music	28	Dance	16
World music	27	Puppetry	9
Classical music	22	Comedy	4
Children's theatre	20	Literature	3
Traditional and folk music	20	Circus & street theatre	2
Storytelling & narrative	19		

Table 7: Number of companies and artists performing for 26 English NRTF schemes in 2002

Few of these artists receive arts funding. Of the 63 theatre companies, 22 are supported by Arts Council England (ACE) and one by the Arts Council of Wales; five dance companies, five children's theatre companies, two classical music ensembles and one puppetry company also receive support. In all, just 14% of the companies who worked for English rural touring schemes in 2002 (accounting for about 21% of the performances), received regular support from the arts funding system, though a few others will have had one-off project grants.

3.5 AUDIENCES

Audience size

During 2002/03, NRTF calculates that performances promoted by their members were attended by a total about 226,500 people (194,500 in England and 25,500 in Wales).³⁰ Although a proportion of this audience will have seen more than one show, the wide distribution of performances in villages implies a fairly low number of 'regular attenders' in this overall figure, as compared, for example, to an arts centre. The number of people attending any individual show varies widely. In the 2002-03 Somerset season the smallest audience, of 16 people, was for a storyteller in a pub, while the largest village hall audience was 191 for the Old Rope String Band at Chilcompton.³¹

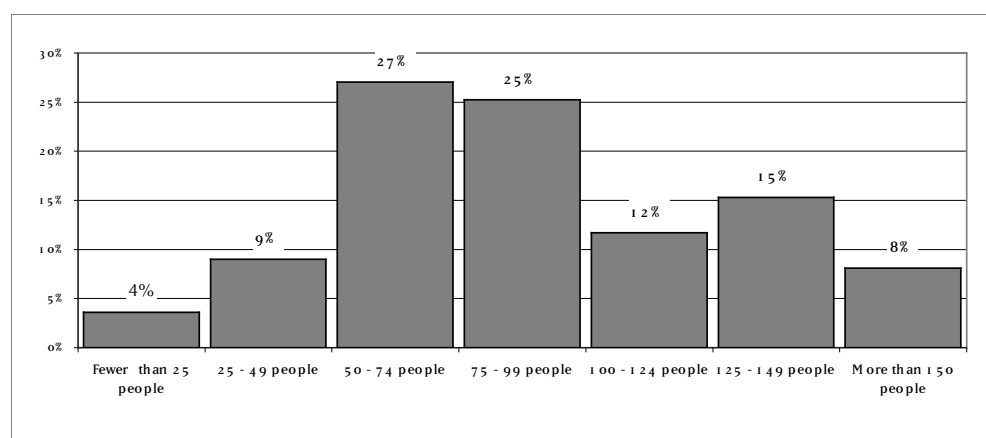


Figure 2: Audience size at 111 shows promoted through Take Art!, September 2002 to March 2003

A small audience does not necessarily mean an unsuccessful event: 20% of the venues in this sample could accommodate fewer than 100 people, and another 50% no more than 150.

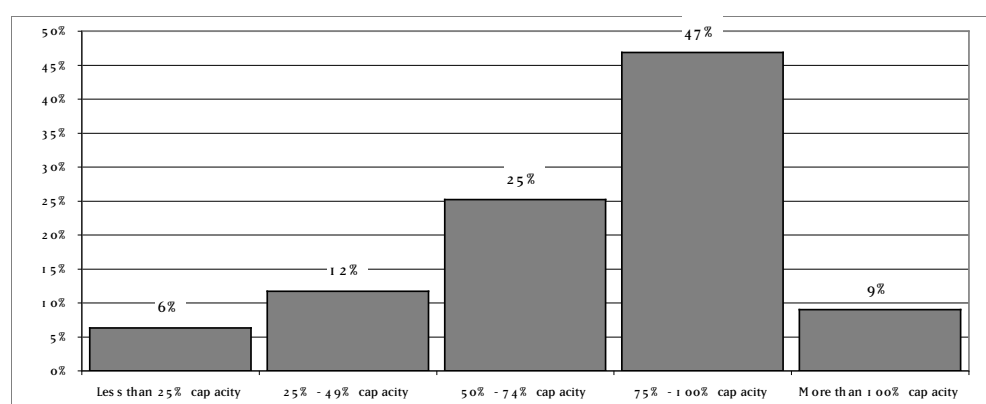


Figure 3: Tickets sold at 111 shows promoted through Take Art!, September 2002 to March 2003

Village hall capacity is not actually very meaningful, since it depends on the show and how the room is set out. Many companies prefer to use the floor rather than the stage, which reduces audience capacity considerably. Some promoters sell fewer seats than they might to ensure that people can see; others are unwilling to turn anyone away, but being inclusive can mean that the quality of the experience suffers in a crowded stuffy hall with restricted sightlines.

Audience characteristics

Almost a thousand people, at shows in 27 villages, completed the audience survey forms, and the results provide a detailed picture of rural audiences.³² The survey audience includes more females than males: 65% to 35%. Observation of shows and the reported experience of promoters suggests that, though this may under-represent male attendances, women do make up the larger part of village hall adult audiences. Women were more likely to come alone, and more likely to be with friends than in a family group.

Did you come with...	Family	Friends	Friends & family	Alone
Women (aged 18+)	41%	32%	17%	10%
Men (aged 18+)	55%	21%	18%	6%

Table 8: Audience social groups; (371 women and 191 men)

Whoever they were with, it was often women who had made the decision to come: several men had come because their wives or partners had wanted to. Women were also more likely to bring children to shows on their own: half-term matinees, especially, tended to have audiences of mothers and children.

Age

The youngest person at the shows observed was a six month old baby, (who did, admittedly, sleep through the performance), and the oldest to volunteer their age was 92; they were in the same audience, for Fresco Theatre at Batcombe. This broad representation is not surprising, given that many the shows are intended for family audiences: 45% according to NRTF estimates, including those provided specifically for children.³³ None the less, rural audiences differ from the population as a whole in attracting more people aged between 40 and 70. Young adults are less well represented, partly because of the older profile of the rural population.

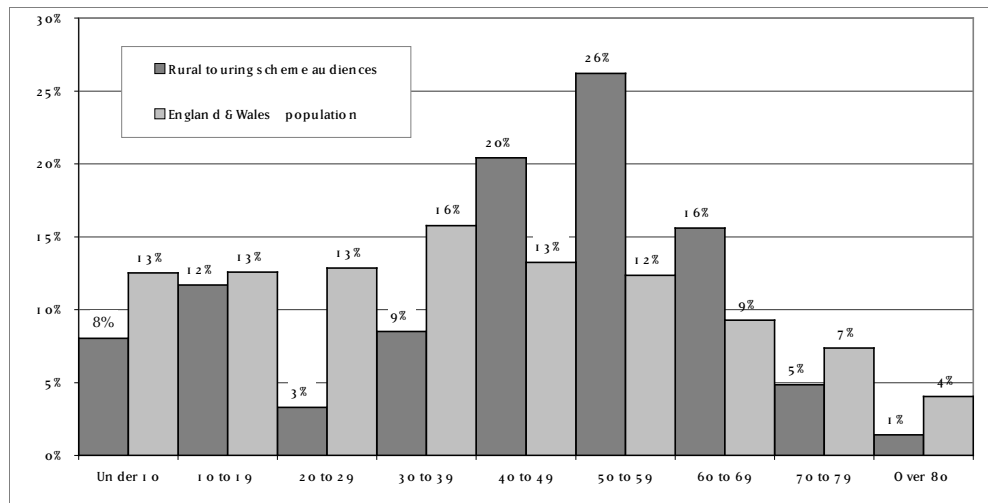


Figure 4: Age of audience at surveyed performances; (847 respondents)

This general picture masks sharp differences in the audiences for individual shows; the figure below contrasts audiences in Penygraig (Rhondda), Mickleton (Cumbria) and Calverton (Notts).

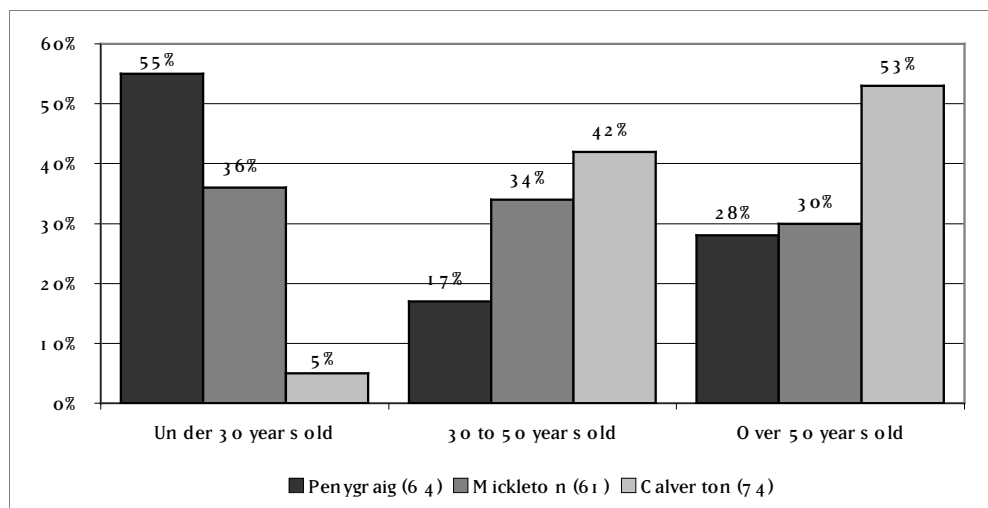


Figure 5: Comparative ages of three performances; (199 respondents)

The Penygraig show, with Ugandan and Welsh performers, was in a converted chapel now used as a youth centre; the Mickleton show, by Annapurna Dance, was in a village hall; the Calverton show, featuring well-known folk performers including Jon Spiers and John Boden, was in the Miner's Welfare of a former colliery village. In each case, artist, venue and the promoter's approach contributed to attracting a different group of people.

Ethnicity

According to the 2001 National Census, the population of rural Britain is almost wholly of white ethnic origin: the ethnic minority population in the areas where rural touring schemes operate rarely forms more than one per cent of the total. According to the audience survey undertaken for this study, people from ethnic minorities form a similarly small part of village hall audiences. Asked to describe their ethnic or cultural background, most respondents wrote 'English', or 'White English'; 'British' was less common. In Wales, 'Welsh' was preferred; some people put Irish or Scottish, and more local affiliations, such as 'Yorkshire' or 'Geordie', were given. A few individual descriptions were offered, including: 'agnostic WASP', 'Caucasian', 'true Brit', 'ex-teacher', 'middle-class', 'Christian', 'nondescript', 'working class', 'uncouth', 'fortunate' and 'average'. Slightly less than one per cent of respondents described themselves as Asian or of mixed ethnic origin. A quarter did not to answer this question at all.

Schemes operating in urban and suburban communities do serve more diverse communities, but, except in the case of Black Country Touring, these shows are less common and none was included in the audience survey. Black Country Touring's own survey shows that, in 2003/04, almost a third of their audience was non-white, including 16% who were of African Caribbean background, 11% who were of Asian origin, and 4% who were of mixed or other origins. Their experience demonstrates that non-white audiences are equally interested in the experiences offered by rural and community touring schemes.

Disability

Three per cent of respondents to the audience survey described themselves as disabled. They were between 30 to 85 years old, with a median age of 65. Given the number of older people who attend village hall events, this may under-represent the actual situation; 18% of respondents did not answer the question. People using wheelchairs and walking aids were present at a number of the shows observed; many halls have a good level of accessibility, and this has been improving. In some cases, rural touring schemes are instrumental in this change: Cheshire, in particular, have been working with promoters to review and improve access, and have improved relevant information in the season brochure.

Occupation

About half of the respondents (51%) were working. Their occupations were very diverse, but there was a high proportion of professional people, especially in education and health: 23% of respondents worked in the first, including 62 teachers, and 19% worked in the second, mostly in nursing. Nine per cent worked in the social and community sectors, and 9% in culture, including the arts, museums, heritage and library services. Four per cent were in farming, horticulture or other country occupations. Figure 6 contrasts occupations of the respondents in the audience survey with the distribution of occupations in the population as a whole.

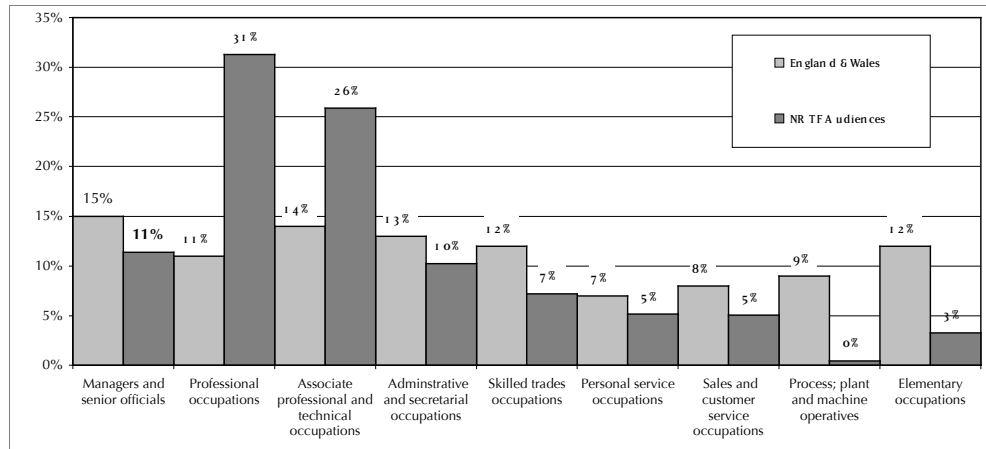


Figure 6: Occupations of NRTF audiences (446 respondents)

Nearly a quarter of the respondents (22%) were retired. Of these, 18% were under 60; the involvement of younger retired people in rural touring is a significant aspect of its development. Eighteen per cent of the survey respondents were in full-time education, training or apprenticeships; 90% of them of school age. Seven per cent of people were looking after family or not working for some other reason, and one per cent were unemployed and looking for work.

Distance travelled

The audience for village hall shows is predominantly local. Almost a third of respondents (31%) lived in the village, and 18% had walked to the venue, though most shows take place on winter nights, and country lanes are rarely well-lit.³⁴

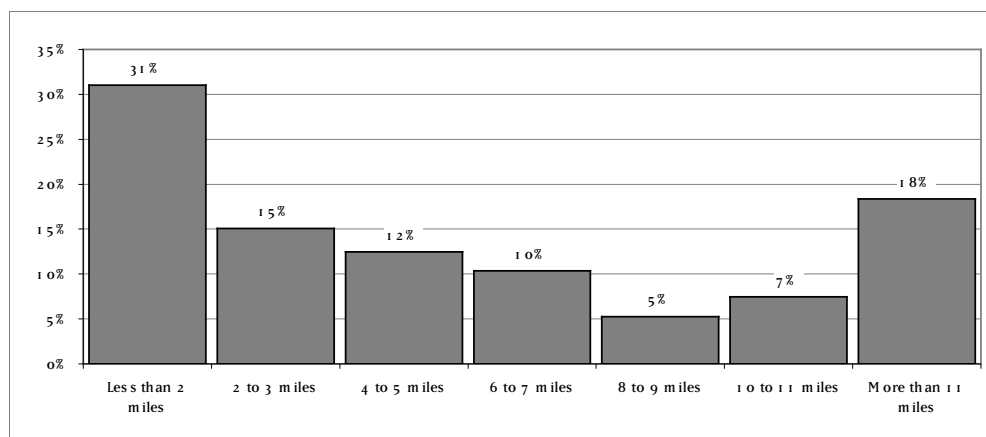


Figure 7: Distance travelled to the performance; (954 respondents)

A further 37% lives between 2 and 7 miles from the venue, a distance at which, in many parts of the country, they might be in the same parish. Nearly one person in five is prepared to travel quite a long way to see the arts. In the more remote rural areas, this is often inevitable, given that most villages do not promote shows. The Lincolnshire case study, with three villages east of Louth, found that some people would plan which shows to attend as soon as the season brochure arrived, even if it meant travelling 10 or 15 miles.

Again, there are big variations between communities and shows. Some are intensely local affairs, with scarcely an outsider; others, especially those with well-known performers, may attract an audience from far and wide.

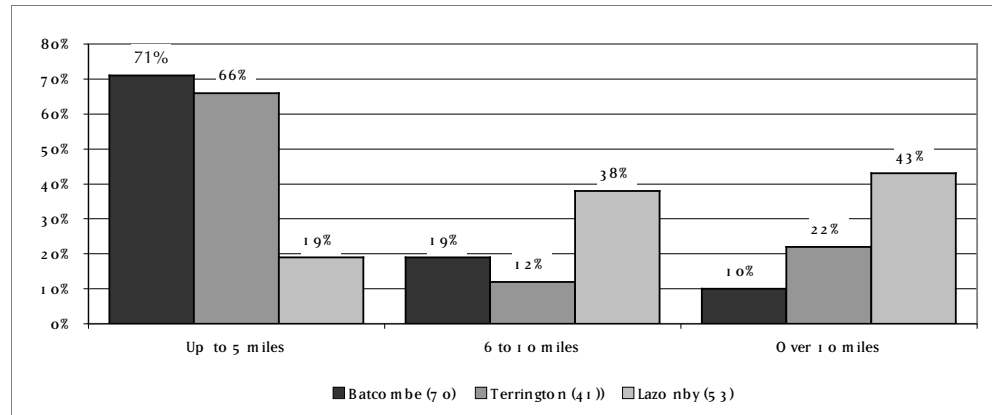


Figure 8: Distance travelled by three audiences; (164 respondents)

In the case of the audiences profiled above, the high proportion of people travelling to Lazonby is partly due to the character of Cumbria, with thinly-spread settlements, and partly because some people were especially keen to see South Asian dance.

Length of residence

A third of the audience (32%) lived in the village where the performance was held, and the survey shows an even cross-section of recent and long-established residents.

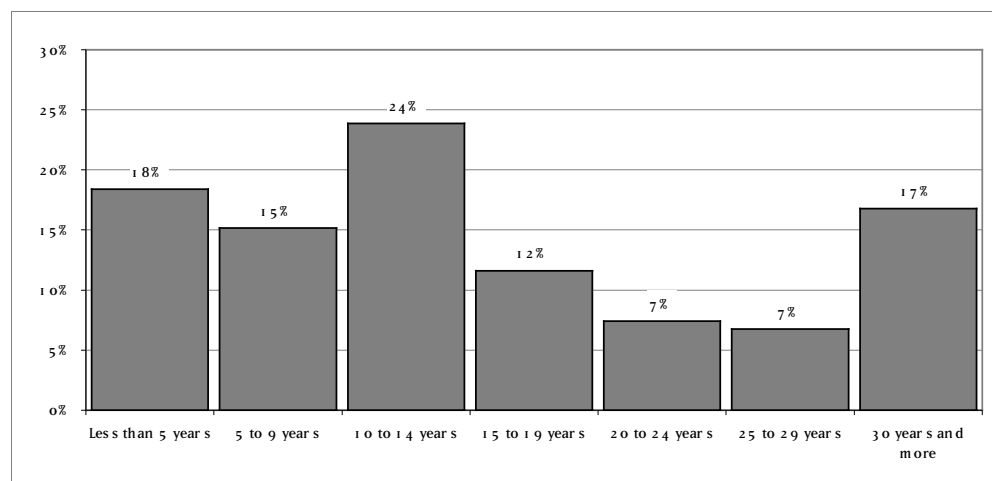


Figure 9: Length of residence in the village; (310 respondents)

This was one characteristic of the audience which did not change significantly from one performance to another, although the promoter's own networks can have a substantial influence on the audience profile.

A typical rural audience

This overview of the demographic aspects of the audience survey shows, above all, that there is no typical audience member, or typical village audience. In general, and at individual shows, there are professional people and labourers, grandmothers and toddlers, incomers and people whose families have lived there for generations, locals and visitors. The audience includes people who are professionally involved in the arts, or frequent attenders, and people whose only contact with live arts is through the rural touring scheme. The audience is pre-

dominantly white, but the musician and dancer Goodson Mbewe was greeted enthusiastically by fellow Zambians in rural Somerset, and Annapurna Dance with equal warmth by people of South Asian origin living in Cumbria. It is, in short, a diverse, varied and broadly representative audience.

3.6 THE ECONOMICS OF RURAL TOURING

Elements of the rural touring economy

The economy of rural touring is complex, subtle, but not large. Whether in terms of the subsidy needed, the stimulus to local consumption, the contribution to the wider arts economy, or tax revenues, it cannot be said that rural touring has a big impact. Nonetheless, it can have a local importance that is easily missed. For example, the income to village halls, as described below, is in some cases vital: Terrington, in Yorkshire, is but one instance of this. Likewise, the level of public funding is not large, but it is enough to make the whole process possible. In this section, we consider each of these aspects in turn, to give some account of how the financial viability of rural touring is achieved.

Public funding

The pattern of public funding invested in rural touring varies according to the history and structure of individual schemes. The two major sources, each now accounting for about a third of total income, are local authorities and the arts funding system. In 2002/2003, councils provided a total of £592,500 to the 25 principal touring schemes.³⁵ Regional Arts Boards (RAB, since merged with ACE) contributed £348,500, plus £231,000 through the Regional Arts Lottery Programme (RALP): a total of £579,500; Arts Council initiatives in black theatre and dance development, jazz, marketing and so on, contributed further small sums. In addition to these primary sources, about £100,000 was received from the Countryside Agency and the European Union, about £45,000 from charitable sources, and £16,000 in sponsorship.

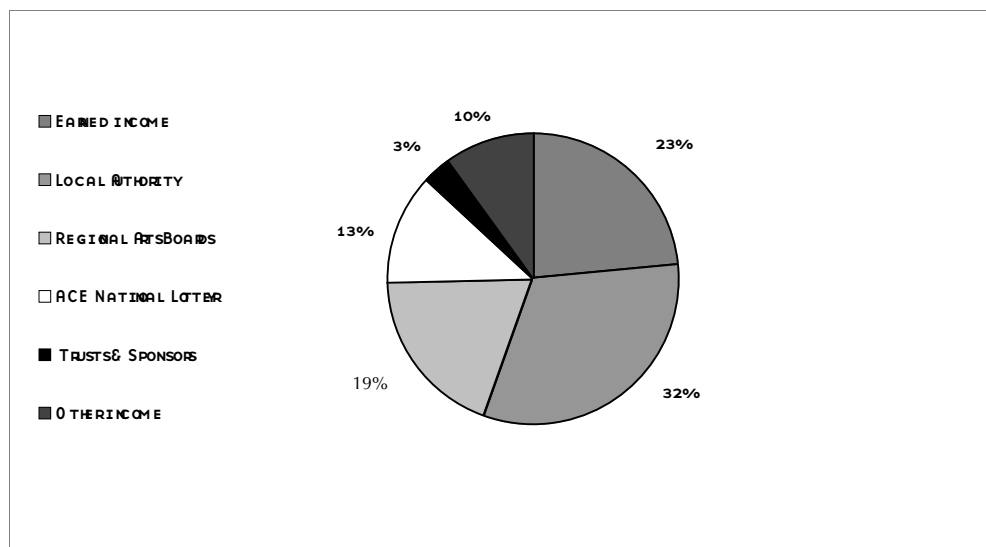


Figure 10: Sources of income for 25 rural touring schemes in England in 2002-03; (source NRTF)

Some of the work promoted by rural touring schemes, also receives subsidy from other routes. This is principally the case with small-scale dance and theatre, where the company may be funded by ACE or the Arts Council of Wales, either for a specific project or, as in the case of regional companies like Forest Forge or Eastern Angles, as a regularly funded organisation; music has a different economic structure and most musicians performing in village halls are not subsidised. Producer subsidy enables companies to offer shows at substantially below cost to rural touring schemes, who may further reduce the cost to promoters with their own grant aid. Such double subsidy is common in the arts, typically when a subsidised company performs in a subsidised venue. Some schemes, particularly those linked to local councils, also benefit from an unquantifiable degree of further support, for instance in management or office costs.

Box office and earned income

Between them, the 25 schemes earned £380,000 through ticket sales and a further £51,000 from other activities: just under a quarter of total income was therefore contributed directly by the service users. Take Art!'s programme budget during 2002-03 (excluding salaries and overheads) was about £55,000, of which about £45,000 was recovered in ticket sales and other income. The actual direct subsidy for 114 shows was therefore only about £10,000: less than a pound per attendance. The capacity to earn box office income is very important, not least in allowing programmers a degree of flexibility. The profits from a popular tour are used to support new promoters, small halls or more risky companies. It is the reliable income from performers like the Old Rope String Band that enables, for example, Artsreach to promote Jackie Chan, a Chinese Trinidadian performer, in some of the more remote villages of Dorset.

The contribution of volunteers

'Workload varies but your voluntary contribution is considerable in virtually any week. [...] People give according to what we ask them to give, and we tend to identify those people who are prepared to give and work assiduously.'

Committee member, Norfolk

Volunteers are the heart of rural touring. They choose the shows, book the halls, get licences, put up posters, find accommodation, sell tickets, badger the recalcitrant, reassure the doubtful, prepare refreshments, feed the company, distribute audience surveys, cadge raffle prizes, tidy everything away and write up the accounts. In short, they do a huge amount of work without which councils couldn't support rural touring schemes, who couldn't promote artists, who couldn't perform to audiences who couldn't see shows. The scale of their contribution is difficult to overstate, but equally difficult to assess. The number of volunteers involved in rural touring is considerable. There are over 1,500 active promoters, mostly with a wider group of helpers. In Somerset about two thirds of promoter groups (63%) have at least four members, while some include as many as 10, 12 or, in one case, 20 people. The NRTF audit calculates the total number of volunteers at 5,849, and, whilst this figure is partly estimated, the close contact between scheme managers and promoters allows a degree of confidence in it.

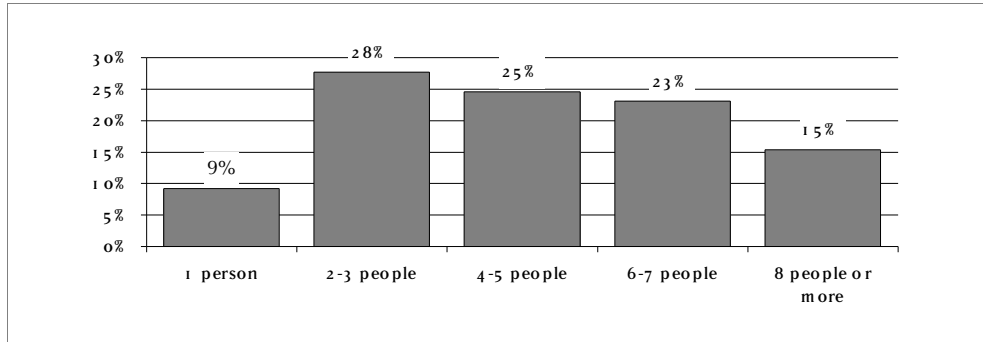


Figure 11: Number of volunteers in 65 Somerset promoting groups, 2002/03

In Live & Local's survey of Staffordshire promoters, people reported spending an average of about 22 hours promoting a show, but our interviews with promoters suggest that most spend a good deal more time than this. However, since some of the work is fitted into everyday life, rather than involving dedicated tasks, it is hard to quantify; it also varies widely from person to person. Nonetheless, if volunteers contribute 20 hours each whenever they put on a show, their collective support for rural touring would represent a value of at least a million pounds annually.³⁶ Such a calculation is unreliable for many reasons, but it does help demonstrate the level of invisible subsidy volunteers provide.

Support for village halls and community institutions

Live theatre and music can attract large, paying audiences, and in many rural communities touring has become part of the financial viability of the village hall, as committees faced with rising insurance and running costs have turned to the arts to fundraise, whatever social or artistic aspirations they might also have. In Terrington (North Yorkshire), the committee had successfully built a new, multipurpose hall, but was struggling with the costs. Two members attended an On Tour conference about funding for rural arts and A4E lottery funds, and decided to join the scheme. The resulting shows have not only stabilised the village hall finances, but raised money for improvements such as stage lighting; by 2002, Terrington Arts events was contributing a quarter of the village hall's annual £6,000 running cost.

This is by no means exceptional. Between September 2002 and March 2003, Take Art! promoted 114 shows in 67 villages and small towns across Somerset. Of these 82% made a profit for the village hall, and 43% made over £100; performances by artists like Gordon Giltrap or the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, brought in £300 or more. Surpluses are not generated only from ticket sales: raffles, food and drink account for a large part: in fact, a quarter of shows would have broken even or lost money without this additional income.

The surpluses are not only important as a means of supporting the village hall itself. Schemes often discourage promoters from allowing surpluses to disappear into general funds, preferring to see them used to develop the arts programme, and many committees do cross-subsidise. Profits are used to support artistically risky work, or shows, like those for children, where ticket income will not cover costs. In September 2002, Luccombe village hall committee promoted a jazz concert by Hearnshaw & Barrett which attracted 20 people – the hall can seat 56 – and made a loss of £40, which was split with Take Art!. The following March, another jazz concert, by Renato D'Aiello, attracted 48 people and made a surplus of £31.60, putting the

books straight for the year. No village is typical, but Luccombe's experience illustrates how delicate the balance can be, especially where a hall's capacity is limited. There are other villages where the finances were much easier: Holcombe, for example, made a surplus of £139 on their Hearnshaw & Barrett concert, and a further surplus with a Somerset Film evening.

Overall, however, the activity of rural touring schemes has the capacity to inject small but significant amounts of money into village halls. In 2002/03, the shows promoted in Somerset by Take Art! contributed a total net surplus of £10,792 to 66 village halls, an average of about £164 each: not huge, but welcome support for a community institution.

Support for the local economy

'The local shop may benefit in a small way from the events: if people from outside the village buy their tickets there, they may buy something from the shop; the pub benefits occasionally if the performers or members of the audience go there after the event and often they do.'

Promoter, Lincolnshire

Rural touring does not make a significant contribution to the rural economy: its costs are small and, in most cases, shows are not frequent enough to make a difference. Businesses may benefit, particularly the local pub which artists and audience often repair to after the show; in some villages, the landlord also helps with village hall bar facilities, and so gains further sales. Local shops involved in selling tickets may gain a few sales; the garage likewise. Accommodation is often local, in bed and breakfast or a holiday cottage if a company is doing a series of dates, and the income is welcome. In Scotland, some promoters prefer not to put up visitors themselves, seeing touring as a part of the tourism economy: the distances involved, and the relative frequency of shows, may make touring more financially important here.

If rural touring produces little benefit to the rural economy, beyond a welcome but marginal increase in trade to some local businesses, it makes a wider economic contribution. Between them, the 25 English schemes under consideration, created jobs for 78 people: 16 full-time, 36 part-time and 26 freelance contractors. In addition, they spent a large sum on fees to artists and companies (£912,500 in 2002/03), contributing to the livelihoods of many people.

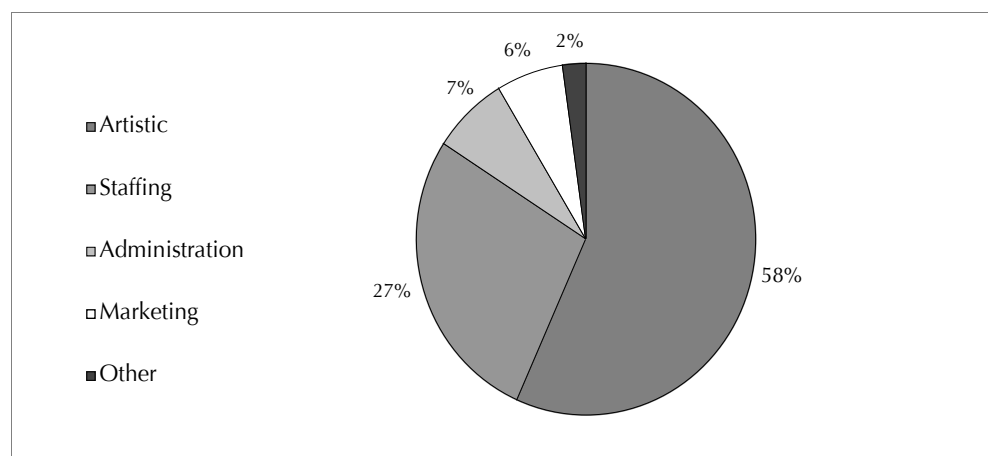


Figure 12: Expenditure for 25 rural touring schemes in England; (source NRTF)

Although this, along with the revenue accruing to the state in the form of tax, national insurance contributions and licensing, and the spending of schemes, promoters and companies in local businesses, is unquantifiable, it is real money in the local economy.

Value for money

'Running costs for almost any person-oriented service in the countryside are almost invariably more expensive than in the towns. Users of the service live further apart from one another, making economies of scale almost impossible to achieve.' Simmons (1997:74)

It is all but impossible to make meaningful comparisons between the costs and results of different types of arts practice: it is in their particularity that each contributes to a rich cultural life. However, an account of the economics of rural touring would be incomplete if it did not consider its value for money, at least in its own terms. There are several aspects to this. The importance of volunteers is one; their time, effort and, often, resources, amount to a substantial subsidy without which, if it could even be envisaged, rural touring would be much more costly to deliver. But their contribution is not limited to reducing costs. They help ensure the greatest public value from the investment made in each show through their effectiveness in building audiences. Their effort is not only free, it reaches people and places often distant from arts marketing. Communities contribute in other ways: they make halls, social clubs, churches, schools and other buildings available for events, often at no charge, and provide hospitality to visiting artists. This largely unseen support is offered because of the sense of involvement people have in the process: it could not be commanded.

The administrative cost of rural touring varies, but is generally low: as noted in Figure 12 above, administration accounts for only 7% of NRTF members' turnover. In Wales, rural touring is managed by one Arts Council officer, with part-time administrative support. During 2002-03, this scheme supported 370 events in 187 places; the following year, it supported 393 performances, at an average subsidy of £249 each, not including staff costs. In Lincolnshire, where the scheme is contracted out, the cost of putting on 200 shows in 85 venues, after artists' fees, was £90 per event, or about £1.40 per attendance – less than West End theatres charge for selling a ticket.

However, the relatively low cost must be put into context. It does not account for much support in kind of local authorities and other partners. Thus in Lincolnshire, district councils are closely involved in programming, marketing and handling payments to artists, (which, incidentally, has helped cement their commitment to the scheme). It must be also recognised that operating on very low overheads may be neither desirable, nor viable, in the longer term. Arts management costs cannot be viewed simplistically, since they relate so closely to artistic purpose. It may be more time-consuming to support young promoters, or to work with a company new to rural touring, but these may be essential artistic ambitions: the point of public funds in the arts is to develop important work that is not otherwise viable, or, as one theatre manager has put it, *'to lose the right amount of money'*.³⁷

One last point may be noted, in relation to the husbanding of resources. Rural touring reverses usual practice by bringing artists to audiences; consequently, each show requires far fewer people to travel than if it were to take place in town. With government committed to

reducing leisure travel in rural areas, this is a small, but worthwhile, contribution to environmental and social sustainability (DETR 2000:66). As Michael Simmons has observed, services are generally more expensive in the country than in towns: the relative efficiency of the rural touring model is therefore particularly notable.

Supply and demand: the rural touring model

The British state, in common with its European peers, has generally responded to the problem of supporting the arts by investing in the supply side. Since 1945, and the creation of the Arts Council, public funds have been directed towards the producers – artists, musicians, actors etc. – and, even more, towards the structures that employ them and bring their work before the public – orchestras, repertory theatres, galleries and such. Given the financial precariousness of artists and the need to secure the stability for professional development and high quality production, such a focus has seemed entirely appropriate. It has also helped foster the huge expansion of the cultural offer, in scale, quality and diversity over the past half-century. Less attention, however, has been paid to the demand side. This has grown partly in response to the increased offer, but more through wider societal change, including greater prosperity, leisure and education. The focus on marketing, and the widespread concern about the future of audiences, arise from a recognition that demand for the arts cannot be taken for granted, especially in a growing and diversifying leisure environment. An interest in new audiences, however conceived, and innovative relationships between artists and public, are further reasons to reconsider the character and development of demand for the arts.

In this context, rural touring schemes are notable for developing demand. (National Lottery programmes, such as Awards for All, have also begun to do this, and some promoter groups, as discussed below, have found these funds invaluable.) Rural touring aims principally to enable people to access an existing offer, rather than to support that offer directly. Unlike marketing, which seeks to influence choice, it gives people scope to shape the choice itself. The extent varies but the basic commitment is to enable people to decide what they will promote in their own communities, and so to determine where the subsidy will be directed. Having chosen what they want to see, and believe that others will also enjoy, promoting groups become advocates for the work in their own communities.

The public funding invested in touring finds its way to artists, performers and companies, but having first been used to involve people actively in the process of local arts development. Subtle choices between financial security and innovation, familiarity and diversity, the everyday concerns of arts professionals, are opened to people with a general interest in the arts. The result is by no means predictable: the choices promoters make, often in discussion with scheme managers, local authority arts officers and others, defy any assumptions, as shown by the range of work selected in 2002 (see Appendix B). Much of the work also goes to artists who are currently not supported directly by Arts Councils. This does not devalue the expertise or judgement of the professionals involved: the promoters interviewed for this study had a huge appreciation of their local scheme's knowledge, enhanced, rather than lessened, by their own experience of arts promotion.

The value of involving promoters directly in shaping local arts provision, was recognised by some artists: as one company manager put it, *'Although it is fine to give a lot of money to the [company], it just makes your product better. But if you give it sometimes to the touring people out in the rural touring networks then they can bring more people in, and you then get to see a complete range of theatre. [...] So you are building up a good base for the people to actually come in'*.

However, this view is not shared by all managers: *'There are a huge number of companies employing actors on fixed term contracts, working at improving the conditions for actors and stage managers, keen to develop the relationship with particular communities and who require ACE investment to develop the work; should schemes attract more of the funding at the expense of new and emerging companies it will further hinder the chance of building a progression route within the funding system'*. Clearly, there is a balance to be struck between interests, none of which, alone, is capable of achieving a successful result.

Whatever one's view, rural touring and the involvement of local promoters has been central to the expansion of demand within rural communities for work by companies and artists of all sorts. There are practical and philosophical reasons for considering this experience in other areas of arts development, especially those that focus on community-based work, and new audiences. Rural touring shows that non-professionals can play a valuable and distinctive role in arts development, to the good of communities, artists and, perhaps, arts practice itself.



A teal-tinted photograph of a theater stage. Two actors are visible: a woman on the left in a dark dress and a man on the right in a dark suit. The background features a large star pattern. The image is overlaid with several white dotted lines that curve across the frame. The text '4 THE ART OF TOURING' is centered in the upper half.

4 THE ART OF TOURING



4 THE ART OF TOURING



4.1 ACCESS TO THE ARTS

'[The Rural White Paper] established key principles of equity of service provision regardless of whether people lived and worked in rural or urban areas.' (DEFRA 2004a:16)

The obvious reason for developing a rural touring programme, and the one which underpins public expenditure in this area, is simply to extend access to the arts. That was one of the founding purposes laid on the Arts Council in its original charter (the other being to support excellence) and it remains a core of policy. As the British arts world has grown, urban areas are increasingly well served by theatres, galleries, arts centres, concert halls and similar venues. Some of this provision now extends to smaller towns, thanks to the National Lottery: in Lincolnshire, for example, Spalding Arts Centre and Sleaford's contemporary craft centre offer a level of access to contemporary cultural life hard to envisage even 20 years ago. But villages and rural communities will never have provision where viability depends on a minimum population level. Touring therefore remains the heart of arts service provision in rural areas: for that reason, it is, or should be, seen as mainstream.

This is true for many local authorities, particularly rural district councils, whose arts and leisure policy places a high value on touring. It is sometimes the only direct investment in the arts; elsewhere, it is part of a wider programme of support to venues and arts organisations. But in either case, rural touring is seen as worthwhile because it extends services to wards and electors who would not otherwise be reached. Village hall arts performances are seen, in effect, in much the same way as mobile libraries: a way of improving and extending access.

Serving existing audiences

Rural touring is a highly effective way of extending access to the arts. It is popular with its audience, and they value it in its own right, whether or not they also see the arts in other places. Rural touring schemes in England and Wales sell nearly a quarter of a million tickets each year, for performances which would not otherwise happen. About two thirds of those tickets are bought by people who also see the arts in other places: 64% of the audience survey respondents had seen other professional work in the previous 12 months. They had attended shows in nearby towns and regional centres, and had also been to London and other major cities, often 100 miles or more from their home. Some had seen the arts abroad, in the Faeroe Islands, Verona Opera House and points between; experience of the arts in India and Africa was given as a reason for coming to a show with artists from those cultures.

A proportion of people living in rural areas, then, are interested in the arts, and go regularly to plays, concerts and exhibitions. To do so, they are prepared to travel, as they must to access many other services. But the effort and expense of travelling to see the arts can be sub-

stantial. Anyone living in Llanbedr (Powys) who wanted to go to a concert in Cardiff would have to leave before 5.00pm and could not expect to be home by midnight; to the cost of the ticket, they would have to add petrol (public transport is unavailable) and, if they have children, long hours of babysitting fees. Unlike other services for which rural residents have to travel, such as shopping, health care or education, arts performances tend to be in the evening, long after any public transport has ceased.

It can be done, and it is done, but rarely as often as people would like. For those who can manage it, such a trip is a big commitment; and there are many who cannot manage it at all, for financial or practical reasons. As one Lincolnshire resident explained, *'This area is so remote that visits to Hull, Lincoln [or] Sheffield during the winter months are difficult and expensive; the productions in village halls are always excellent value for money.'* Given such obstacles, it is not surprising that many who attend village hall shows are committed supporters of the touring schemes: they are often regular attenders not only where they live, but in nearby villages also. Though people see travel as an inevitable part of rural life, precisely because of its ubiquity, they are very thankful to avoid it. Consequently, rural audiences value their local shows highly, and there is a widespread desire for more. Access is for everyone, even those who can and do travel widely for the arts.

'The concerts provide an introduction to the arts right on our doorstep, and, to be honest, give an opportunity to see and listen to things that we probably would not make the effort to go and see otherwise [or] elsewhere.'

Audience member, Northamptonshire

Touring extends people's opportunities to enjoy the arts, and the choice available to them. One person, a carer in her sixties, came to the Welborne Arts Weekend, in Norfolk, *'because I am really hungry for art but not always able to get to exhibitions.'* Those who did attend urban venues said that rural touring made them aware of different artists from those they were used to. They also appreciated the character of village halls and the intimate relationship between artist and audience. Rural touring is a distinctive additional offer, not simply an alternative or more accessible venue.

New audiences

'I have really enjoyed several of the touring professional companies who have come to our area of Lincolnshire. It's a real pleasure to be able to see professional actors and musicians without having to travel. I would not otherwise get the opportunity; there is very little entertainment in this area.'

Audience member, Lincolnshire

Rural touring is a valuable service to thousands of people who enjoy the arts and live beyond easy reach of towns, extending opportunity and choice. For others, rural touring is a chance to see the arts they might otherwise not have at all. One in three people (34%) reported that they had not seen professional arts in the past year (some had seen other work locally through the touring scheme). In some cases, the proportion of the audience who had not seen the arts recently was much higher: at three Lincolnshire shows, this applied to almost 60% of respondents. The relative isolation of this area, and the age of many of the audience members, pro-

vide some explanation. The reasons why people do not see the arts are complex and varied. However, conversations with audience members and other residents, with the audience survey responses, suggest that those who only see local promotions fall into two broad groups.

The first includes those who face substantial difficulties in going to a theatre or concert hall in town: here, lack of transport, limited financial means, disability and age all play a part. Those who only saw the arts in the village hall included a higher proportion of retired people (32%, as against 24%) and disabled people (6% compared to 3%). There were also young families for whom the cost, whether of tickets or babysitting and transport, was an issue. There were other less tangible obstacles: for example, older people were often intimidated by the thought of the city at night. Single people, especially those who have been widowed, felt they had no-one to go to the theatre with, whereas at the village hall they would see local friends or acquaintances; they felt less vulnerable in such a situation. Many of them were keen on the arts, and would have liked to be more involved, but depended on rural touring for access to live performance.

The other group did not face such obvious difficulties, beyond the ever-present issue of travel, but did not attend for various reasons, including a lack of time or interest. They came to the village hall show for equally diverse reasons, often unconnected with the performance itself: the promoter's persuasion, a commitment to supporting community events, the interest of friends or other family members, and simple curiosity all played a part. They often came with relatively low expectations, and were surprised by how much they had enjoyed the performance: *'This type of entertainment isn't something I would normally be interested in, [but] live it is much more fun.'* As a result, they frequently resolved to be more open to local arts events and make more effort to attend.

Children

'This programme was my daughter's first introduction to professional acting.'

Audience member, Lincolnshire

Children living in rural areas have similar access problems to their parents; even as they become more independent, trips to cinemas, galleries or concerts, and access to arts training or workshops, remain limited. So it is significant that children make up a substantial part of the audience at many village hall shows: 18% of the survey respondents were under 18. This is partly because all rural touring schemes promote work specifically for this age group, notably children's theatre, puppetry, circus, and storytelling; workshops also tend to be provided principally for children, though their parents sometimes get as much out of taking part. Promoters and hall committees value shows for this age group, in themselves, and as a way to involve their parents. Many try to put on at least one show for children during the year, and there can be strong competition for appropriate companies during half-term and holidays. Deri Rugby Club, in South Wales, promotes an annual pantomime through the Night Out scheme for children at two local primary schools; in October 2003, Welborne (Norfolk), promoted Storybox Theatre as a half-term show for younger children. In the Buckinghamshire village of Bledlow Ridge, the shows are always aimed at families and the promoter and the primary school work together to advertise and sell tickets. There can be difficulties in reaching

this group, in smaller communities with few children, if there is no local school, or where promoters are older and are less connected into the networks of young families.

More unusual is the chance to see contemporary visual art locally, hence the value of events like Creative Arts East's annual touring exhibition. One teenager, who found the work very inspiring, explained that he had come to see it in Welborne because he was doing Art GCSE. Several children who visited the Bergh Apton Solar System in November 2003, and attended the related storytelling evening, mentioned their interest in astronomy and school work: an eight year old said that *'I will be learning it in school soon so it was really interesting'*.

But children's access to the arts through rural touring is not limited to work promoted specially for them: they are a substantial presence in most audiences, with one in ten of the survey respondents being under 13. The cost, and limited availability of babysitters is one factor, but, since most promoters offer generous group discounts, a family of five or six can go out for the evening for as little as £10 or £15. Parents in these audiences valued the chance to see something with their children: *'I enjoy it more because kids react to it better, don't they?'*. As a result, it is often the case that children in villages are exposed to quite demanding artistic experiences. For example, a concert by the Homemade Orchestra, at Alvingham in Lincolnshire, introduced about 20 children and young people to a contemporary fusion of classical music and jazz; elsewhere children have been enthralled by Indian dance, physical theatre, contemporary folk and much more.

Parents of young children felt that it was much easier to introduce children to the arts locally than to take them to an arts venue. A village hall show is often their first experience of the live theatre or music. Though lacking the excitement of a city trip, these experiences can make powerful impression; village hall shows offer a chance to meet the performers, to walk on the set or even play with the props. Most children enjoy and remember the experience; some will be changed by it more deeply.

Young people

'Why don't we get younger audiences? [I'm] always conscious of the fact that the 20 to 30 generation is absent.'

Audience member, Nottinghamshire

Young people aged between 15 and 30 are under-represented in village audiences. In the audience survey, they make up 7% of the total, though they are nearly 19% of the national population.³⁸ (In comparison, the under-15s make up 17% of the rural touring audience, only two points below their proportion of the population.) However, the rural population has a lower proportion of young people than the national average.

District	16 to 19	20 to 29	Total	Difference
East Lindsey (Lincs.)	4.3	8.6	12.9	- 4.6
Eden (Cumbria)	4.2	9.3	13.5	- 4.0
Mendip (Somerset)	5.2	9.1	14.3	- 3.2
England and Wales	4.9	12.6	17.5	

Table 9: Young people in rural districts population, percentages; (source ONS).

In individual villages, the difference can be even more marked: in Saltfleet, for example, one of the East Lindsey case studies, just 9.6% of the population is in this age group.

But there are also social and cultural reasons why young people attend village hall shows less than other residents. Networks are key to rural audiences and promoters can find it difficult to reach this group, unless they have children of that age; where they do, for instance in Alvingham or Styrrup, young people not only turn out, but are active helpers. But not all promoters are comfortable with teenagers, and there can be suspicion or anxiety about how they will behave. While they go out of their way to programme for children and encourage families to bring them to shows, promoters tend to give less attention to the 15 to 25 age group. Consequently, their programming choices are of less obvious appeal to young people: stand up comedy, for example, is almost unknown on the rural touring circuit.³⁹

But young people also exclude themselves for various reasons: a perception of the village hall as 'un-cool', a fear of being patronised or told how to behave, a preference for social life away from the supervision of parents and neighbours, and different cultural interests. Young people have a different perspective on the rural community, looking outwards to urban opportunities, whereas the village is more central to their parents. As one scheme manager put it, '*Young people are young people: they want to go to the pub and leave home*'.

Young promoters schemes

Several touring schemes, including those in Lancashire, Cheshire, Lincolnshire and the West Midlands, have had some success in involving young people as promoters. By working with established groups – youth clubs, schools, theatre groups – they have supported teenagers in selecting, marketing and running their own shows. However, such initiatives are costly in staff time for training and mentoring, and have depended on finance from sources such as the ACE New Audiences fund. They have also been difficult to sustain because those involved naturally tend to go on to college, work or leave home. In practice, the ideal of passing on skills and experience to the next cohort has proved difficult because young people's lives change fast.

Some local authorities, anxious to meet policy or service targets, have pressed rural touring schemes to do more for this age group. But the young promoters schemes illustrate the difficulty of transferring a model that works well in one context to another. Adults and young people are not interchangeable. Adult promoters start with greater skills, experience and resources than young people; they are at a more settled stage in life and can develop as programmers over many years. Young people face practical obstacles, from transport to handling money, as well as going through a period of their lives characterised by change.

Older people

'There are people who don't see people from day to day, and they end up being isolated and that is another aspect of village life that we can all play our part in. [...] Some people do still need that contact to draw them in.'

Volunteer, Norfolk

Older people are well represented in the audience for rural touring: 22% of survey respondents were aged at least 60, fractionally more than the national population, reflecting the older population profile of rural areas. More surprising, perhaps, is that almost 3% of the audience is

75 years old or more. For a substantial proportion of this age group, isolation, low income and poor health are serious problems, increasingly recognised by rural health and social services. Some have lived in a village all their lives, experiencing at first hand the changes in rural life, and feeling sharply the loss of old social networks and support. In these circumstances, maintaining people's involvement in the arts and community activities is especially valuable.

But the presence of older residents in a village does not necessarily mean that they will be well represented in village hall audiences. There are many obstacles to going out, including transport, limited income and the comfort and accessibility of the venue; at night, these can be magnified by fear of walking in the dark, the need to take medication and simply tiredness. Several older women spoke of an isolation which limited their evening social life. Though they couldn't, or wouldn't, go to a city venue alone, the village hall was an accessible space where they were likely to feel welcome. Much attention, in terms of arts development and marketing, is paid to the needs of young people and families, groups that are rightly seen as poorly provided for by the arts. This work is essential, and rural touring schemes are very committed to it through programming and special initiatives. But it should not overshadow the different needs of older people, many of whom face major hurdles in accessing arts provision.

Visual arts and rural touring

Some touring schemes, including Creative Arts East (CAE), Highlights and Artsreach in Dorset, have developed a successful approach to touring visual arts in rural areas, concentrating on the summer when performances are much less in demand. Creative Arts East offers its promoters an annual exhibition, specially curated for village halls, but there are some important differences from promoting live events:

- It is much more labour-intensive for everyone involved, even though the exhibition is often in the village hall for just one day;
- There are different practical problems, including site security, and artistic problems in village halls no more designed as exhibition spaces than as theatres;
- It is more expensive to tour an exhibition, especially if some of the artists are present, or there are workshops involved;
- Admissions is usually free, so it is hard to recoup expenditure;
- It is a daytime event, and has no fixed attendance time;
- The audience experience is more individual and less communal than in a performance.

These aspects make touring visual arts more difficult in many ways than village hall shows, but, by limiting each exhibition to one or two days per village, CAE and local promoters create a sense of occasion. Opportunities to meet artists, or try out some of their techniques, adds value, and in some cases the village can do much more. Since 2001, the tiny community of Welborne have used the touring exhibition to develop an arts weekend, inviting professional artists' groups to exhibit and hosting school workshops. The result has been to focus attention, and attendances into a short period, producing a much greater impact than the typical library foyer exhibition.

4.2 THE ARTS EXPERIENCE

The village hall as arts venue

'My experience has been that what pleases the London public is not always so acceptable to the rural mind. The metropolitan touch sometimes proves a trifle too exotic for the provinces.'

P. G. Wodehouse⁴⁰

Village halls, community centres, schools, churches and day centres have one thing in common: they were not designed for the performing arts. In terms of facilities for artists, and matters like sightlines, acoustics and general comfort which affect the audiences' experience, they fall far short of purpose-built concert halls and theatres. That being so, it is remarkable how successfully village halls and other community venues are adapted to arts performances. Much of the credit is down to the promoters, who see themselves as hosts and often go to great lengths to ensure a good experience for performers and audience.

Renewing village halls

The standard of village halls and their facilities varies hugely, but has improved recently, in part thanks to the National Lottery. Many halls used by promoters have been refurbished, particularly in terms of access and health and safety standards. Some committees, like Terrington, have used surpluses from touring promotions to improve facilities: in Llanbedr, the committee have bought stands for raked seating.

In some areas, especially disability access, rural touring schemes have worked with village hall committees to raise standards. Since 2001, Cheshire's Rural Touring Network has commissioned a disability consultant and trainer, Jude Sefton, to work with promoters and committees to plan a programme of work, dealing first with legal requirements and then with other desirable changes. As a result, venues have installed accessible toilets (e.g. Mollington & Blackford, Faddiley and Gawsorth village halls), provided designated parking spaces (Malpas and Plumley Brook village halls and Daneside Theatre in Congleton) and installed induction loops (Bollington Arts Centre). This programme continues to work with other villages. In Nottinghamshire, Village Ventures has helped provide hearing induction loops. In other parts of the country, village hall committees have also been improving the accessibility of their venues to conform with the latest legislation: this is inevitably an incremental process, but research by ACRE showed a big improvement between 1988 and 1998, with 60% of halls being accessible to wheelchair users, and 40% having an adapted toilet.⁴¹

National Lottery funds have also enabled villages to build new halls: in Batcombe (Somerset) and Kettleasing (North Yorkshire), shows now take place in large, architect designed and stone-built millennium halls with excellent facilities. In Eathorpe (Warwickshire), a stunning new village hall has replaced the old, and the promoting group celebrated with a mini festival of three shows in quick succession to warm the place up. Not all such halls are ideal for the arts: so-called multi-purpose halls, suitable for indoor sports, tend to have a volume and surfaces which make them unsympathetic arts venues. One of Terrington Arts' first projects was the creation of needlework hangings designed to humanise and improve the acoustic of their large new hall; musicians now perform against a splendid backdrop. But some of the new halls are

excellent venues: for one visiting audience member at Batcombe, the *'incredible village hall, fantastic sound system and lights'* was the surprise of the evening.

Meeting the performers' needs

Performers who tour regularly in rural areas get used to basic facilities. Technical equipment can be brought in, but the lack of dressing rooms, difficulties with blackouts, poor acoustics, and cold or oddly-proportioned halls, to say nothing of more niggling problems like noisy heating units or intrusive emergency exit lights, are more difficult. Experienced performers are adept at making the most of the space: NTC Touring Theatre, New Perspectives, Kneehigh and the other regional theatre companies design productions to work in varied spaces with level seating. Companies like Theatr Bara Caws or, in France, the Compagnie Théâtre de la Paillasse, plan stripped-down designs of some repertoire for smaller venues.

Scheme procedures ensure good communication between promoters and artists, and unexpected technical problems are rare. But difficulties do occur – for instance, if performers decide not to use the stage, since this reduces the space available for the audience and the sightlines. When this occurred at Lazonby (Cumbria), the promoter was in a difficult position of trying to accommodate the artists, and reorganising the seating so that her capacity audience could see; people accepted the difficulty, but some were disappointed to be unable to follow the intricate footwork of the Indian dancers.

If promoters cannot always meet performers' technical requirements, they make up for it in the generosity of their hospitality. It is normal for a company to find that someone has been in to turn on the heating (or, in some cases, to light the coal fires), and prepared sandwiches or a hot meal. In Llanbedr, in the absence of a dressing room, Theatr Powys were provided with a caravan parked by the back door of the hall. Relations between companies and promoters are therefore generally excellent: in 120 shows in Somerset, during 2002/03, only two criticisms were made of performers' arrangements. Much more representative was the description by one promoter of a well-known musician as *'so easy going, and easy to talk to, and so interested in all of us: no 'prima donna' element at all'*.

Despite the limitations of village halls, several companies compared them favourably to arts centres, where they felt that technical support was sometimes more theoretical than actual. For instance, a puppet company found that promised lighting could not be used *'because they were set up for "legitimate theatre at night"'*. A foreign theatre company, touring to arts venues and village halls, was scathing about the lack of care they had experienced in some of the former, where they found their publicity still in boxes, uninterested staff and small audiences. By contrast, village hall promoters could not do enough for them, in one case, building a metre-wide extension to the front of the stage when it was discovered that a mistake had been made about the size of the set. In this case, as in others, the human side of the touring experience more than made up for any deficiencies in the facilities.

'It comes out of a van and it gets set up in the village hall, it still makes you gasp and captures your imagination. I think it's magic, the transformation of the place.'

Promoter, Nottinghamshire

Meeting the audience's needs

Promoters put as much effort into preparing the hall for the audience as they do for the performers. Theatre normally requires little more than rows of seats to be put out, but because they generally know the size of the audience in advance, they put out only as many as are needed: as a result, the audience is physically brought together, and even when numbers are small, performers do not have a sense of playing to a half-empty auditorium. For music, it is common to set out tables and chairs; tablecloths, candles and snacks make the atmosphere more welcoming. In some cases, promoting groups will decorate the hall itself, perhaps with flowers or backcloths: for a valentine's night concert in Bergh Apton (Norfolk), the hall was decorated with hearts, and people were given hand-made chocolates as they left. A space used for so many events can become boring, as well as comfortable, and such strategies create a sense of occasion. Since village halls are often in use by other groups during the day, all this generally has to be done immediately before the show, (and put away afterwards so that the playgroup can be in at 8.30 the following morning).

Audiences are tolerant of these limitations. They know the chairs will not be very comfortable, and that it may be too cold or too hot, and tend to see such discomfort as inevitable. Promoters, however, are sensitive to this, and often feel that it must be reflected in ticket prices, though they also want people to know they are seeing excellent, professional shows. Since people have realistic, not to say low, expectations of the venue, they can be very pleased by how good things turn out to be. One man at a folk concert in a Nottinghamshire Miners' Welfare said, with some surprise, that *'Although I was sitting at the very back of the room, the sound was superb'*. The performers' professionalism helps them overcome the limitations: older people observed that they could hear well, though this was not usually the case at village hall events. That said, it must be recognised that halls are often poorly suited to the needs of disabled people, and particularly those with sensory impairments.

Audiences value the artists' commitment highly; more surprisingly perhaps, they are often aware, and appreciative, of the role of the rural touring scheme and the local council. But the contribution of local promoters and volunteers can be taken for granted; people from outside the village may not know them or what they do, while locals, perhaps themselves involved in community activities, can see the work as normal, much as people stay behind after the show to help tidy up. On the night, the promoter will offer thanks to everyone possible, but does not always get a round of applause herself.

Forming the experience

Taking art seriously

The warmth of their welcome to artists and audiences is one way that local promoters overcome their venue's limitations; how they present the performance is another. As has been said, rural areas are not artistic deserts. Pubs put on bands, galleries sell paintings, opera companies and orchestras perform in the gardens of country houses, amateur drama groups attract large audiences, local festivals draw metropolitan performers and audiences. Part of the village hall show's distinctiveness is to make art the purpose of the event. Through rural touring schemes, art is presented, not reverentially, but seriously, as an experience worth proper attention. It is not a background to conversation, a commercial transaction, or an ex-

cuse for a get-together and a laugh, though those may accompany it; and, unlike some festivals, village hall shows belong to the host community.

Touring schemes offer new promoters useful guidance: the inappropriateness of using a local singer as a warm up act for an audience that has paid to see a professional performance, or of serving drinks during the concert are not always self-evident. Yet such things can be fundamental to the artistic experience: one Midlands promoter's first show was very tense because most of the audience was treating it as a concert, but some had taken the music to be a background for a vocal night out. That such occasions are very rare, given the varied expectations people have of a community event, is due to the seriousness with which promoters and schemes treat the art, and the quality of experience they offer audiences.

The relative rarity of the opportunity to see live art in a small community also creates a sense of occasion. The cultural offer has expanded enormously since 1945, through the Arts Council, commercial cultural suppliers and the development of media, like recording and television: the result is that experiences, like classical music, which were once the preserve of the well-off, and even then were exceptional, are now available at the touch of a button. As the critic Thomas Sutcliffe has observed, 'our subjection to art, the necessity for us to surrender and submit to its demands, is inevitably diminished by its subjection to our whims'.⁴² Village hall performances go a little way to countering this trend, and demand the respect of audiences.

Approachability

The drawbacks of the village hall – its technical limitations, lack of comfort, multiple use and so on – are real, but the experience of rural touring demonstrates that, in the right hands, they are far less important than its great strength: its approachability. For all that it may sometimes encourage low expectations of the arts, the village hall is seen by most people (though not necessarily all) as a common space they are entitled to use – not something that can always be said of arts venues. Only two survey respondents, both of whom had travelled over 25 miles to the show in question, felt that a venue was at all unwelcoming; in contrast, people spoke constantly of how friendly local shows were, and this was often a factor for people from outside the village in going. Because the hall is familiar from the mothers and toddlers group, whist drives, parties and many other activities, people have little hesitation in going, even to see something unfamiliar or that they might avoid elsewhere. As a result, the audience tends to be open-minded, with few expectations of the show beyond a wish to be entertained, and willing to judge it on its merits.

Intimacy

'Village concerts are much more intimate and accessible, and you feel closer to – and part of – the performance.'

Audience member, Northamptonshire

That approachability does much to remove the barriers between performers and audience: artists find themselves having to relate more directly to an audience they can see, and which may respond freely to rhetorical questions from the stage. As one performer explained, *'in the right hall I am happy to put the acoustic guitar around my neck; [...] it keeps me mobile, and the tables are in front of you or the seats are only a yard away, and so you have an immediately conversational approach to them and you can hear every prickle and com-*

ment.' Village hall shows offer people a chance to meet and speak with the artists, and the engagement is much appreciated on both sides. For one audience member in Saltfleet (Lincolnshire), the concert's highlight was swapping notes with Jonathan Preiss, and trying his unusual Brazilian guitar; in fact, both artists felt the dialogue with the audience gave that particular evening the intimacy of a workshop rather than a concert. The dance and drumming group, Brekete, involves audience participation in its performance. After the show every artist makes a point of shaking the hand of everyone in the audience; some of those attending the show in Lighthorne (Warwickshire) were very appreciative of this sign of respect.

The relationship between artist and audience can extend well beyond the performance itself, in welcoming the company and solving the get-in problems, in providing hospitality before the show, in post-performance social gatherings at home or the pub, and often in putting up the artists. Many performers, used to the vagaries of touring accommodation, welcome the personal welcome they often get in rural communities; one musician explained, *'The one thing that seems to be changing a bit, which I regret, is that less villages seem to be offering accommodation in the village, hospitality, which I always think is part of the whole thing, in that I arrive in the village at half past four or something like that, and I am in the village then till the next morning and everything fits in with that. Whereas when I am staying some distance away and arrive a bit later, I do the show and then just go away again. And I find that less satisfying personally.'*

There are artists who find this too demanding, and prefer a hotel where no more is expected of them after the performance. But bed and breakfast accommodation often means that they have nowhere to be during the day, and for longer tours, a holiday cottage is an alternative. There are also financial advantages to local hospitality, since it keeps costs down for both artists and promoters; if the show is unsubsidised, that may make the difference between being viable and losing money.

Promoters and volunteers enjoy putting up visitors from other places and cultures, and value the opportunity to discuss the show and the arts generally. When the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School bring Shakespeare to Dulverton, *'It's 20 to 25 beds that we have to find, but, generally, everybody has loved it, and they also come into contact with those people who just bring something special into their homes [...] and that is the added value as well'*. Getting to know the artists, fosters an appreciation of what they do: one promoter in the South West described a company *'living on a shoestring, terribly appreciative of anything that was on offer, and they put their hearts and souls into the production, came home afterwards absolutely knackered and sort of fell asleep at the kitchen table and they were going to do the same thing again that evening. [...] I am full of admiration for them.'*

There are many instances of friendships developing between promoters and performers, with return visits and further shows. Theatre companies like Hijinx, Kneehigh or Forest Forge become regular visitors, part of the village calendar. The warmth of the contact between artists and audience depends absolutely on the quality of the show, but develops in the business of setting up and packing up, and all the contact around the performance.

Perceptions of change

Rural arts performances may be small scale, but they can still have a big impact on audiences: that, after all, is what they are supposed to do. Art is entertaining, usually, but it is more than that: at its best, it is a powerful experience which leaves us changed. It renews, questions and creates meanings, defining and reshaping our values: we expect to feel differently as a result. There was much evidence, from interviews and the audience survey, that the performances promoted through rural touring schemes often do make a real impression on audiences.

About a third of the survey respondents (37%) felt differently after seeing the production. This figure was slightly higher (39%) among adults, partly, perhaps, because of the difficulty some children had with the question. More surprisingly, the figure was the same for music and theatre audiences, despite the very different nature of the experiences. However, there was a marked difference between people who had seen other live performance in the previous year, and those who had not. Regular attenders were much more likely to feel that they had been changed by the experience: 56% compared to 20%. A high proportion of non-attenders (38%) were unsure whether the experience had changed their feelings, perhaps because of the relative unfamiliarity of the experience.

The ways in which people said their feelings had changed through attending a performance fell into three broad groups relating to their views of the art or style of work, of the community where they lived and their part in it, and of issues raised by the content of the work.

New views about the arts

A change in how people thought about the work was common, partly because a proportion of the village hall audience comes without much experience of it, or, sometimes, not really expecting to enjoy it. This was common with music, where people were surprised to discover that a style of music they disliked could be a very different experience in live performance. The audience at a performance by the 18th Century Concert Orchestra, in a Northamptonshire church, included several people who were not keen on baroque music, as well as knowledgeable enthusiasts; as one person explained, *'I just don't like baroque music, but I'm surrounded by fans'*. In the event, she, and several others with initial doubts, were caught up by the performance, especially a *bandango* for solo harpsichord: *'I thought it might be boring, but it wasn't!'*

Similar discoveries were made by people attending all the shows in the study, as they revised their opinions of jazz, theatre, Indian dance, circus and more. One 9 year old boy, who came because *'my mum wanted me to'*, said after the show, simply that *'Indians are brilliant'*. As well as the excitement of live performance, people's views were changed by the performers' talent, and their ability to engage an audience that might not be very comfortable with their work. Surprise, even disbelief that shows of such quality can be seen in the village hall was an constant refrain: one promoter reported that some of his audience had not believed that the musicians were the same group they heard regularly on BBC radio until they spoke to them on the night. As a result of the artistic discoveries they made, and their unexpectedly enjoyable experience, people were often inclined to say that they would go to arts events more. How much they do we cannot say, but the growing audience for village hall events suggests that

many become regular attenders at least in their own village; the survey showed that over half the audience (54%) had seen other work in the same venue in the past year.

Strengthening commitment to community

Many people said that they felt differently about local community activity after a show. One woman spoke for many when she said the evening had '*made me realise I need to get out more!*'. People felt they should make more effort to attend village concerts, either to support the community or the rural touring scheme itself: as with other local services, there was a strong sense of 'use it or lose it'. There is a widespread belief that, as one person put it about her Dorset village, '*the shows did help to put a bit of heart into the place which had no pub or shop*'. The shows often give committee members and volunteers a boost, particularly when there is a good turn out and the performers create a memorable atmosphere: such evenings help keep people committed to playing a part in community life.

Several people said they wanted to put on similar shows in their own villages. One group of friends at a Lincolnshire concert became converts, reporting that: '*we have decided [...] that we will make every effort to bring the concerts to our village hall*.' Nine months later, they did put on their first concert, the Homemade Orchestra, to a packed hall in Alvingham. In Buckinghamshire, a resident of East Botolph Claydon saw a show in nearby Waddesdon and approached Theatre in the Villages to put herself forward as a promoter: she now books shows both through Theatre in the Villages and independently. The spread of rural touring in recent years has often followed this pattern, with people seeing something in another village, and wanting to achieve the same in their own community.

Other kinds of change

The third kind of change audience members spoke about related to the content of the work, or wider issues it raised for them. When work was new to people, as in the case of some Black or Asian performances, it often made a deep impression. Many of the Penygraig audience felt that seeing Ndere had changed their feelings about Africa, its people and its culture. One 10 year old said she felt differently about '*racism [and] that African people couldn't do anything*', though such issues were not touched on in the show, while another felt we should '*respect other people not the same colour*'. Similar views were expressed by audience members at other shows by Black and Asian artists or by artists from outside the UK.

Most people who see live music or theatre for the first time are not radically changed by the experience; but some are. As one arts manager interviewed during the research explained, '*I lived in a Norfolk village, and saw a show when I was a child which made me learn the piano and become interested in music; in a way I am a sort of a product of that kind of small scale – it influenced my life*.' It is exceptional, but there are people whose lives are changed profoundly, if unforeseeably, by the arts. The particularity of such experiences is no reason for them to pass unnoticed. In addition to changes in people's ideas or opinions, there was also an important, but less easily described impact on their feelings. Most common of all was the pleasure which is fundamental to a great artistic experience; one woman said simply that she was '*always uplifted by hearing performers of such skill and quality*', while a middle-aged social worker said that seeing Ndere had '*improved my mood 100% tonight*'.

Shared experiences

'People don't understand that a theatre performance is not passive; being in an audience is not a passive experience, [...] it's a very active thing to sit in a piece of live theatre when you are close to it all.'

Theatre director

The arts deal in meanings; they evoke experiences and raise questions of universal concern. A good show can be a talking point for weeks and months after. In Llanbedr, compelling productions, like Hijinx Theatre's *Dreaming Amelia*, are remembered years later as vital experiences. Issues raised in Theatr Powys' *Hansel & Gretel*, provoked family discussions after the event: *'There were issues there which [my children] talked about afterwards; it was quite an ambitious production in the sense that, [in] traditional fairy tales, there are quite disturbing underlying issues, and they were beginning to get a sense of those.'* Productions that divide opinion create debate about things that matter to people.

The difference, and the importance, of live theatre and music is that it offers a shared experience to people living in a village. At Soar Ffrwdamos, the converted chapel in Penygraig where Valleys Kids promote regular events, this sense of community is deliberately nurtured. The audience, which includes many young people, socialise in the café, before being invited to go into the auditorium together, immediately before the performance. In a world of individualised work and leisure, an experience shared with neighbours has a distinct value. As a public event it becomes part of the common, recognised history of a place and a community.

4.3 QUALITY

The programming

'You are seeing a very polished production, whether you are seeing it in a big theatre with master of ceremonies and ice-cream ladies, or whether you are seeing it in a village hall.'

Promoter, Nottinghamshire

The work offered to promoters by rural touring schemes ranges from established theatre companies and well-known musicians to emerging talent in dance and physical theatre and ensembles brought together specially for a rural tour. In putting together the menus from which promoters choose, programmers try to offer a diverse and balanced choice, appropriate, in cost and scale, to very different venues. Many are passionate about including new work, and the rural touring network is an effective source of recommendations and advice. They are also keen to hear promoters' ideas, and encourage them to see new work which might be suitable. Some programmers regularly visit festivals, especially Edinburgh, but also in London, Brighton and abroad; however, limited resources makes this difficult for small schemes. Some are very reluctant to offer work they have not seen, but may do so if they have confidence in the artist; others, of necessity, rely more on recommendations. Since scheme managers tend to be based in rural areas, they have similar difficulties to their audiences in seeing new work.

Some schemes are active producers, working with companies to commission productions, bringing in performers from other countries, or proposing new collaborations between artists.

Because they can offer a week or more of engagements, they are also in a much better position to negotiate with companies than individual promoters. Artservice, who manage the schemes in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Rutland, include new work in every season. Working across four counties, they have been able to put together tours for artists such as Barachois, from Canada, and Mtiebi, a traditional choir from Tbilisi in Georgia. This commitment to ensuring that rural communities have access to outstanding artistic experiences is shared across the network.

The service offered by rural touring schemes to artists and promoters helps ensure success on the night. Company administrators and agents value a process that often enables them to book several days work. Technical and practical needs are met, and many schemes help with accommodation: *'Once they have got the information back from the villages, that's all very efficient. You get a contract, you get details about the village promoters, you get directions, you get maps, the promoters themselves are told they have to provide refreshments'*. In all the interviews and informal conversations with artists, no complaint was made about how the schemes operate, though people were quite ready to be critical of other bookers and venues.

Promoters were equally positive about the touring scheme service, mentioning the practical support, financial arrangements, liaison with companies, advice and, sometimes, help if things went wrong. Above all, they valued the scheme's role in finding great performers. People often spoke of the excitement of getting the new season menu, and meeting to discuss what they might choose next. Even very experienced promoters, who can put on unsubsidised shows and run the whole event like clockwork, wanted help in identifying good work; without the support of the touring scheme, they would have to depend on familiar names and people who had played in the village before. The touring schemes have built up an extraordinary level of trust among their promoters, and programming can involve long discussions about their artistic ambitions. As a result, they are often willing to try shows they would not have risked; not everyone would go so far as the promoter who said of her touring scheme manager *'I would trust him with my life'*, but most do have real confidence in the partnership.

The performances

'The performers' incredible range, their imaginations, their energy and passion. Beautifully timed and hysterically funny. Inspirational. It's really exciting. Shall I go on?'

Audience member, Somerset

Audiences are very aware of the quality of the work, and particularly of the artists' skills. This aspect was most valued: more than 96% of survey respondents thought the quality of the performances high, and people spoke frequently of *'the incredible talent of the performers'*. The intimacy of the show, and closeness to the performers, play a part here. Similarly positive responses were given in relation to other aspects of the performances, which were seen by almost all the audience as entertaining and memorable. Given that a third of the respondents were not regular arts attenders, it might be thought that their assessment of quality would err on the side of generosity. However, the views of this group were marginally less positive than those of regular attenders in most areas:

"What did you think of tonight's performance?"	Regular attenders (555 respondents)	Others (280 respondents)
Entertaining	93.8%	89.9%
Well-performed	98.1%	95.0%
Involving	87.3%	87.8%
Memorable	90.2%	85.3%

Table 9: the views of attenders and non-attenders

Although people were very appreciative of the artists, they were not uncritical, commenting freely on technical weaknesses – a singer with a tired voice, for instance, an inadequate sound system, or issues to do with the work itself. Audience members at one theatre performance felt that *'parts of the writing and performance were contrived and weak'* or that there was a *'slightly predictable script'*, while still liking the show overall. Rarely, people were very disappointed by performances they judged to have been poor. One show was enjoyed by most of the audience, but not everyone: one man felt it was *'amateurish'*, and another spoke of being *'convinced this sort of show does great harm to people's idea of drama'*, before making a plea for less condescending productions.

People value being able to see something locally, but only if it is of high quality. That is not the same as whether they like it or not: audiences distinguish between whether something is intrinsically good, and whether they personally like it. That sense of recognisable quality is what distinguishes the performances offered through the rural touring schemes from amateur or semi-professional work which may be available locally. People's pleasure in the quality of a performance may be linked to their expectations, and a delight that something in a village hall can be so good: 82% of the survey respondents said that the event had exceeded their expectations. As one member of the Batcombe audience put it: *'If the quality of tonight's performance could become what you could expect when you go to the theatre, a lot more people would make the effort a lot more often'*.

Extending choice

There is a range of art within reach of rural areas, in different places and on different terms. Rural touring's importance lies partly in extending that range, particularly beyond the commercial cinema and music experiences that were the main alternative for many audience members. Most of the artists working with rural touring schemes would not otherwise be seen in these villages: many perform in such venues for the first time, on the initiative of rural touring schemes. Particularly in theatre, dance and some areas of music, they bring cultural forms, ideas and values which are sharply different from, and often more demanding than, those usually available. And, according to almost everyone involved, from passionate promoters to reluctant audience members, they bring a rare level of quality.

This is true of most rural programming, but particularly so of companies such as Brekete, Joji Hirota, Annapurna Dance, RJC Dance Company, Kala Sangam Nachda Sansaar and Ndere, which work in traditional or contemporary Black and Asian styles. (Black theatre is less significant in the programme, though the reason is not clear; one programmer felt that it was difficult to find work which connected with rural audiences and was suitable for the spaces.) But

whatever the style of work, both promoters and audiences were very enthusiastic about performances by Black and Asian artists.

'I don't think it is about cultural diversity. It is more to do with being about quality: whatever the subject matter is, if it is good quality then people will come.'

Promoter, County Durham

Local promoters tended to see cultural diversity as part of good, varied programming, not something they had to support. Promoters in Cumbria and County Durham who put on Annapurna Dance felt the show reinforced their village hall's reputation as a venue for quality entertainment. Neither for them nor their audiences was this work different, or to be judged differently, from other work they saw: it was simply part of the offer. A proportion had come because they liked Indian dance, including several who had been to India. Similarly, some of those who saw Goodson Mbewe in Somerset were familiar with African culture. Equally, some people from ethnic minorities who do live in the country valued the chance to see work that reflected their own culture: *'We have also had Zambians in the audience, you know, my fellow countrymen coming to watch a performance, and they feel so happy because they are revisiting their culture, and that is where you see in the audience somebody [who] really is in flames and on fire because they are so, so happy.'*

For others, seeing African or South Asian artists for the first time was a revelation. People in places as different as the Rhondda Valley, the Mendips and the North Pennines, spoke of their pleasure at being able to see work from cultures of which they felt they knew little. Clearly, it would be unwise to make simple assumptions about rural audiences or their experience.

'I take my son to Darlington for pantomimes, as this is the nearest big place, but there's not a wide choice of arts events in the area. I want to be able to educate my son and bring him to more multi-cultural events like this one.'

Audience member, County Durham

Adults living in rural areas often valued the opportunity to introduce their children to work from other cultures, and the opportunities to talk with the performers after the show was a special part of this. In some cases, artists were also able to run school workshops as part of their visit to a village. In Chilcompton, Goodson Mbewe worked during the day with a primary class who performed with him in the village hall that evening. Highlights arranged a tour by Annapurna Dance to several villages in Cumbria and County Durham, including school workshops. The pupils enjoyed their introduction to Indian culture, and the workshop was an important chance for first-hand contact. As one 14 year old girl explained: *'You see things in film or on TV about Indian people dancing but you don't really get what they are doing, or why. [...] They explained how they dance because it was popular to them back home, and it had a story to go with it; it makes more sense now.'*

As well as British Black and Asian artists, the rural touring schemes book international artists visiting the UK: in 2003, Fresco Theatre, a South African company, added several dates in Somerset to an existing tour of arts centres and festivals. Sometimes, it is the touring schemes which have brought companies like Barachois and Mtiebi, specially to tour village halls.

'The touring network allows us to host professional events of a skill and on a scale not available in our amateur productions; we are trying hard to increase the diversity of what we can see.'

Promoter, Cheshire

Some companies have included disabled performers, but disability arts is not as significant a part of rural programming as Black and Asian work. Schemes have promoted performances by companies such as CandoCo, Shysters, StopGap and About Face, and workshops by artists such as Caroline Parker, linked to her one-woman show 'Walking Amongst Sleepers', but this area of work remains less well developed. For some schemes this is a weakness, and a project is being developed in the West Midlands by Arts Alive, Black Country Touring and Live & Local, to work with the Shrewsbury-based integrated dance company, Blue Eyed Soul.

Affirming culture

By extending the range of work available to people in rural areas, rural touring schemes help people to connect with important aspects of their culture and identity. An obvious instance is Welsh language touring which brings contemporary theatre, music and other performances to communities across Wales. According to the 2001 census, 21% of people living in Wales speak Welsh.⁴³ This is a rise of 2% over the figures in the previous census, and the first rise in a century: crucially, it is greatest among children, with 39% of 10 to 15 year olds able to speak, read and write Welsh. In Gwynedd and Anglesey, where the majority speaks Welsh, the importance of Welsh language theatre is self-evident, but it also plays an important role for communities in counties like Denbighshire where the language is spoken by fewer people.⁴⁴ In 2002-03, Night Out supported 70 performances in Welsh – 19% of the total. Companies like Theatr Bara Caws play a vital role not just in using Welsh, but in articulating the unique cultural sensibility embedded in every language. With different styles of show, they tour to theatres, village halls, clubs and other community venues. Coming together to see a Welsh language play is a social event, and an affirmation of a wider sense of commitment and belonging. The opportunity to get together to see theatre is highly valued, and it is relatively easy to get an audience through social networks such as those associated with chapels, social and educational groups.

This sense of people coming together to affirm their cultural values, consciously or not, is common across the arts, and rural touring is no different. Art can reflect and strengthen existing values, contributing to social cohesion (and, sometimes, to social exclusion). Even if the work is new, it can connect with existing values: as one audience member said of an Indian dance performance, *'It confirmed my view that a multi-cultural society is rich indeed'*.

There are also performers who, to a greater or lesser extent, aim to reflect the experience of rural life and concerns from the perspective of those who live there. Theatre companies like New Perspectives, Blaize and others have developed plays which specifically explore the changing culture, even such painful experiences as the FMD crisis. In 2003, Nottinghamshire Village Ventures toured a new production by Hanby & Barrett, *Your Village No Longer Exists*, confronting some current anxieties about village communities. Others use music and story to keep alive a passing culture, or engage newcomers with local traditions. And there are unique performers, like Chris Sugden, who performs as Sid Kipper, and bases both persona and act on a range of sometimes sensitive issues in rural life.

Strong links often develop between villages and theatre companies, with regular visits becoming part of the local calendar. Confidence is built on both sides, and people enjoy seeing the same actors in different productions. The relationship can help the company deepen their understanding of the communities they perform in. While such connections are essential to rural touring, some scheme managers encourage promoters to diversify what they programme, less to challenge existing audiences, than to draw in people who are not attending: *'I think they're missing out a whole tier of people within the community who might go and see music, for example, or dance or story telling [...] It's not just about bringing the same old people back each time, [...] it's about extending it to the peripheries of the community'*.

4.4 CHALLENGING EXPECTATIONS

Risk and rural touring

'We will adopt a more modern definition of the arts, one that is open to current trends in emerging (and often challenging) arts practice, in arts and technology, and in breaking down the boundaries between art forms, and between the arts and other disciplines.'

Arts Council England, 'Ambitions for the Arts', 2003

The idea that art should challenge is widely-accepted in our post-Romantic, post-Modernist culture: like medicine, discomfort is how we know it's good for us. But, even if we accept this improving ideal, it leaves open the question of who is challenged, by what. No work of art is intrinsically challenging: everything depends on audience and context. What one person regards as *passé* or banal, another may find threatening or exhilarating. What seems normal in one space may offend in another. The meanings and power of art arise from interaction with people, place and time; such variations are central to how live art works in small communities.

Villages are sometimes characterised, stereotypically, as conservative places where only safe, worthy performances take place. Certainly, there can be scepticism about the arts. In one Somerset village, the idea of live performances was resisted by the hall committee: they were thought to raise all sorts of unspecified problems better left alone. At one Staffordshire village hall, the committee feared that promoting shows would 'bring the wrong sort of people into the village'. Elsewhere, promoters have spoken of their difficulty in overcoming people's reluctance to come to an 'arty event', though the approachability of the village hall helps. But such attitudes are not confined to rural areas: Britain has deep roots of cultural scepticism.

In fact, the experience of rural touring schemes is that challenging work can be very successful, though defining what is challenging is very difficult. There have been complaints about food being thrown about on stage, or actors smoking during the performance, both instances where people felt that their values were being frivolously disregarded. On the other hand, companies like Spymonkey, whose show included nudity, or Zygo Theatre, who performed in a complete blackout, produced some of the best-received shows in recent years. Hijinx Theatre's *Tarzanne, Queen of the Jungle* was the Llanbedr Hall Association's introduction to rural touring. It was enthusiastically received, and set a high standard for future shows. But it was also controversial. The play included a frank portrayal of a gay man, and some of the com-

mittee spent the evening worrying about how it would go down: as one member put it, *'I have to say that the contents made our hair stand on end. [...] That was the one that the rector actually felt impelled to write a piece [in] the church magazine to say how brave we were to have booked such a thing.'*

Why was this so brave? After all, Llanbedr people watch the same television programmes and live in the same society as everyone else. But this was a communal experience of live theatre. It could not be turned off at the flick of a switch, while leaving would be a public statement. The power of village performances arises from a unique sense of shared experience, where the audience know each other, and may be conscious that how they react to something will colour how they themselves are seen: the village hall has none of the anonymity of an urban theatre.

Music presents its own challenges and demands: sitting through, and perhaps discovering value in, music one usually avoids is an instance. But there are others. The Bakelite Boys present a largely light-hearted account of popular music, performing a song from each year of the last century. This stroll down memory lane became something very different during a performance in Saltfleet, when a group of war songs were introduced with a reference to British soldiers serving in Iraq in 1901: the sudden change of mood, and the pathos of the songs, transformed the concert like a summer storm. One group of musicians, who perform some politically-charged material, have been made aware that this might cause offence; once, at the promoter's request, they dropped a song, to their subsequent regret. This was the only example we encountered of content being adjusted for village audiences. Most artists feel that how they relate to the audience is the crucial factor in dealing with controversial issues.

The promoter who asked for the change was also exceptional. It was more usual to meet promoters who welcomed a challenge, keen to bring new experiences into the village, and stimulate discussion. One Midlands promoter wanted *'to give everybody a chance to have something difficult put in front of them; I think people should be challenged, but, you know, you have also got to be realistic with it too.'* In Penygraig, Valleys Kids put on a professional show at least once a month, and see extending the audience's choices as central to community development. Because of the trust they have built, people come not knowing what to expect, or even sceptical, and are often surprised: *'It was something I had not previously seen and it gave me a whole new perspective on performance'*.

The challenge for artists

'Because it's a rural venue, you are never sure who is sitting out there; it could be a husband who has been dragged along there by his wife, who does not want to be there, but watching the football, [or] they could be sitting next to somebody who has been to the Royal Opera House or Glyndebourne for the last 25 years and knows opera backwards.'

Musician

Since people rarely come to a village hall show to see a particular company or performer, audiences are often more open and more subject to challenge than in urban venues, which tend to attract people through their interest in the artist or the work. Several artists commented on the difference of performing to an audience that knows nothing about them. Even very experienced performers can find it challenging to begin without a reputation: *'the start*

of a show might be a little different, if not in content then in mood, because they are just getting used to the idea of what you do and how you do it'.

Many artists felt that it is more challenging to perform without the psychological support of an arts venue and an arts audience: as one singer explained, *'This is not by any means saying that this is lesser quality. It is actually harder. You are not hiding behind anything.'* They saw touring as more demanding than playing in a theatre, because they had to adapt creatively to each new venue, each new community: *'Artistically, every day it presents a different challenge.'* But they welcome the audience's openness and freshness of response. Several musicians said that village hall audiences, being more diverse than those in clubs or arts centres, were more willing to respond to interpretations as they found them.

For some artists, performing in village halls is an important way of reaching out to a different audience, to extend interest in their field and build their reputation. Traditional musicians said that getting away from folk clubs and festivals was essential if they were to get beyond preaching to the converted: one artist's manager explained, *'that it is just part of her way of getting more people to keep in touch with traditional music.'* This view was shared by jazz and classical musicians, who saw a sharp distinction between a small committed and knowledgeable audience, and a larger public ignorant of, if not indifferent to, what they do.

Hatstand Opera have been working in village halls almost since their inception 11 years ago; their audience surveys show that about a quarter of their audiences have no previous experience of opera, and that, after the show, nearly three quarters would be prepared to hear opera again. Whether or not people 'graduate' from highlights to attending an opera house, the experiences are clearly valued by audiences. Several of the case study villages had seen the company and were big fans, putting them first among companies they would like to welcome back. It's a long way from Saltfleet to an opera house, and most of the residents will never make it; but they value greatly the experience when it comes within reach.

There are performers who commit themselves to community touring because it allows them to work in a different way. Some argue that public funding encourages novelty, putting pressure on a company to create new work. Instead, they want to develop repertoire over time, allowing shows to evolve gradually with their own thinking and in response to audience's changing reactions. One performer explained: *'After 6 weeks the show has only just started to mould itself into what it could possibly be. [...] Five years is a minimum; some shows we have even longer and we just keep reworking and updating. But after twenty shows your original show is completely different; so it's a living thing'.* Rural touring helps companies like this to work within other economic and artistic models than those required by the funding system. As a result, it supports the diversity of practice and the options available to artists.

While many of the artists working with rural touring schemes are highly experienced, others are young, and establishing themselves as performers. For the latter, but by no means only for them, the intimacy and variety of village hall performance provide valuable opportunities to develop experience. In some cases, this professional development is more deliberate, and touring scheme managers are a source of advice and guidance to young companies and artists more used to professional venues. Their experience of marketing, planning shows, connecting with local people, adapting to life on the road and so on, is freely shared.

Inside the narrow room

'The conventional marks of esteem are highly appreciated in rural communities, my lord.'

Dorothy L. Sayers⁴⁵

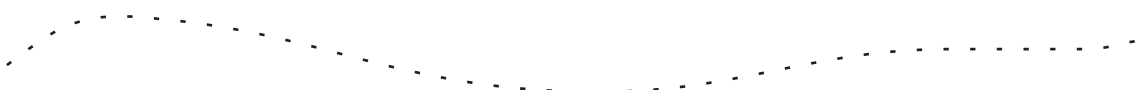
Artists used to working in village halls are clear that the important differences are not to do with the facilities, but with the audience, the space, and the relationship between them:

'People have come out to be entertained in their space. This is the point. They use this space all the time in a rural community. We don't. So we are very much coming into their space, quite a different feel. It is almost like walking into somebody's front room. Say you are mum in the village; you have probably been to the village hall that morning to pick up your son from the play-group; the week before you might have been in the jumble sale and the next you might be performing on the stage as part of the amateur dramatic group. And we are slotted in between all these community events. Very much one feels like a guest in somebody else's home, which is very nice. It is a different feel to a theatre where almost anyone can come in.'

This sense of the village hall as a communal space was a constant theme, stressed by artists, promoters and residents. In France, the same view was expressed, filtered through a culturally-appropriate metaphor; *'When you walk into somebody's dining room, you don't do so with mud on your boots'*. This is a space where, as one actor put it, the artists are the guests of the audience, the reverse of the situation in a theatre or arts centre. The character of the interaction is changed fundamentally by this shift, and the difference is felt on both sides. It is a much less commercial transaction: the audience will not ask for its money back if they dislike the work. But they will be more deeply offended, if offence is caused: *'It was a bit crude ... people didn't really like the humour in it; we didn't enjoy that one.'*

That does not prevent challenging issues. Sid Kipper, a very different kind of performer, includes material which treads on some tender rural issues, like land ownership, hunting and incomers, without causing offence, though there can be evident discomfort. The impact of such work can be strong, because of the communal nature of the space and fact that so many of the audience know each other: as one scheme manager put it, *'whatever you do in that space, you do to the power of ten'*. It works, mostly, because artists recognise the difference, and accept the codes which operate: *'[It's] not a neutral space like a theatre, it's their village hall; and therefore you can't say: well, I am coming to present this piece of work, it is what it is.'* But, by respecting and working within those codes, artists create the freedom to do the work they want to do. They recognise the distinction between challenging an audience, which many aim to do even in the intimacy of the village hall, and upsetting them, if only because, as one artist put it, *'they stop listening to what you are doing then'*.

Challenge, risk, controversy are all possible, even desirable for many involved in rural touring, but there are ways in which it must be done. In this respect, village hall audiences are similar to those in urban venues, governed by a set of social norms and cultural codes which control the nature and extent of transgression. Wordsworth wrote of the artistic value of constraining forms: those 'who have felt the weight of too much liberty', would recognise the possibilities of the 'narrow room' that forces imagination.⁴⁶





5 COMMUNITY



5 COMMUNITY

5.1 THE IDEA OF COMMUNITY

'Unlike all other terms of social organisation (*state, nation, society*, etc.) [community] never seems to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.'⁴⁷

Things have changed since Raymond Williams wrote so warmly of the word 'community', not least because of its exploitation in contexts where it has no valid meaning, and is used merely to influence perception. As a result, a certain wariness has grown up around the word; 'community arts' has been largely replaced by 'participatory arts'. But there is no such reticence among people involved in rural touring. Scheme managers, artists, promoters and, to a lesser degree, audience members, use the word continually, seemingly without concern for how it may be interpreted. They use it in three of the senses recognised by Williams: to mean 'the people of a district', 'the quality of holding something in common' and 'a sense of common identity and characteristics'.⁴⁸ In rural touring, these ideas equate to the people who live in a village, who share ownership of its hall, and have a common identification with, and commitment to, a place. As one Midlands promoter put it, *'the village still likes to think of itself as a village community.'*

The idea of community, as the shared experience and interest of people living in a relatively small area, is a powerful force in rural touring. A strong community is seen as a cornerstone of people's quality of life, and something more easily found in rural areas; as one South West promoter explained, in moving from London, she gained *'community – that's the main thing, a much greater support network; it was great'*. In villages like that one, both committee activists and people attending events expressed a confidence in the place and its people and were committed to an idea of local support and mutuality. The village hall shows were not only opportunities for the community to come together, as described below, but visible symbols of community.

Elsewhere people sometimes felt that community spirit was under threat, or even lost, and saw village hall events as a way to rebuild it. In one village, a deep division about an aspect of local affairs had left scars: rural touring was seen by the village hall committee as a way to begin rebuilding relationships. But loss of community was more usually thought of as a gradual process, associated with many small social and economic changes, and promoters felt that performances were a way to restore the balance. This was often very conscious: the revival of social events in one Buckinghamshire village was described by the promoter as a deliberate strategy to rebuild a sense of community. The idea of providing a kind of space in which people could come together was a constant theme: *'When they come to films, and they come to performances, and they come to the project[...], they are there as a community'*.

For most people, the ostensible reasons for attending village hall shows are social and artistic: they expect an enjoyable night out among friends and neighbours, and to be entertained by high quality performers. Some come simply because it is *'better than watching TV rubbish'*. But many come out of loyalty to the village hall, individual members of the committee or the village itself – as one person said, *'to support Welborne'*. They want to demonstrate commitment to village life: it can be a kind of civic duty. In the event, the experience often has the effect of strengthening that feeling, and many people said they had resolved to attend more often or to be more active in village life.

That should be good news to the many promoters who become involved for the same reason, wanting to create situations for local people to be visibly together and thus strengthen community spirit. As one promoter from an urban part of Lincolnshire said: *'It is a struggle in such a mixed area as ours with pockets of real deprivation, to develop a sense of community. But building a community spirit is not only about improved housing, safer streets and better child care, vital though such infrastructure is.'*

5.2 BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Social gatherings

'When you go to the theatre it's a sort of formal aspect; when you go to the hall, you know everybody, so when you serve drinks to them, you are serving drinks like at parties, rather than buying drinks at the bar. And you are talking to people that you wouldn't normally speak to.'

Volunteer, Nottinghamshire

Village life affords fewer opportunities for people to get to know each other than it did, and yet with a changing population, there is more need for those opportunities. When they work, shop and are entertained miles away, even people who want to know their neighbours can struggle to feel part of a community. One mother who had moved from suburban London to East Anglia said what a change this had been for her family, not least because they didn't *'bump into people'*, now she was dependent on a car. A visitor to Welborne Arts Weekend valued it because *'it is a social event: you see people from your own village you don't see very often, or have never seen before'*; she had lived in the village for 28 years.

Village hall events are social occasions because so many people know each other. In a dispersed parish like Llanbedr, where homes can be isolated, the hall retains something of its force as a centre of shared life; for one person who came to see *Hansel & Gretel*, the point was *'for our village to all be together after Christmas'*. It is not fanciful to see a continuity with the halls where *Beowulf* was once heard. In another village, where the venue is a converted chapel whose vestry is still used for services, the promoters felt that they *'do the secular part of what chapels have always done.'* In such places, a show really can reach the community: when 60 or 80 people see a performance, they can be a big proportion of the local population. If community develops through shared experience and common points of reference, it is not surprising that the performances can make a big impact.

A touring show is the keystone of a much wider social process. The meetings and discussions committees have about which shows to book, planning the event, selling tickets and persuading people to come, are continuing interactions. The discussions and debates, the exchange of impressions, which may rumble on for weeks, even years, afterwards, are equally important.

Performers enjoy the sense of being part of a community gathering, and are often susceptible to the atmosphere. As one actor explained, there is *'very much a feeling of the very traditional, the WI, the women in the kitchen, bringing the food and baking, and that whole kind of feeding people, [...] and joining together and being together, [as] very small communities'*. For many artists, being part of this helps compensate for the discomfort and limited technical facilities; this, and the close connection with an engaged audience, is why they feel that village hall shows are some of their best work.

Family

Many shows attract families, without specifically targeting them. Indeed, promoters often start by assuming that there may be children in the audience, (otherwise the parents will stay at home), and choose work accordingly. Though little work unsuitable for young audiences is offered by the touring schemes, a good deal can be demanding in terms of concentration, and children are often introduced to work which their urban peers, with more choice, might never see. It is common to see children as young as five sit quietly through an adult play, or an evening of traditional music. For young families, who, for various reasons, may find both arts and social opportunities limited, local shows offer an important opportunity to go out together, to see friends and get to know people.

Friendship

The demographic and social profile of each village is different, and within them, there are wide variations in lifestyle. Mobile young families, travelling to work and leisure, live alongside elderly people who rarely go further than the nearest market town. Isolation, particularly for single people on low incomes, can be the dominant experience of rural life. Village hall shows offer a valuable opportunity for a social evening with friends, not as part of a regular activity or club, but simply as a member of the community. In some places, family ties were much less common in the audience than friendships: at two concerts in Lincolnshire, over half the audience had come with friends, and a further 16% had come alone, expecting to meet people they knew. Such evenings can be very sociable, giving people who live alone a chance to go out. Like the pensioner who had come because *'a friend saw the advert and thought we might enjoy it for a change'*, people use the show as a reason to be in touch with a friend.

Crossing generations

'It was improving the communication within the community [...] because we have children from the school, so you could chat to them and then when you saw them hanging around the phone box of the evening, there is some point of recognition.'

Committee member, Yorkshire

Village hall audiences often have a wide age range: few arts events simultaneously attract children, young people, adults and retired people. Many promoters are good at engaging young people, especially if they have children themselves, and make arrangements to enable older, frail or disabled people to attend, arranging for them to be collected by car. In bringing these people together, village hall shows facilitate interaction between people who may not meet socially at all. Unless they have grandparents, or grandchildren, they may know little about one another. In Fulstow, the promoter asks some of her oldest audience members to sit with children whose parents cannot come to the show, to offer explanations, and to calm over-exuberance: by all accounts, both parties enjoy the attention, and the chance to see one another as people rather than intimidating local presences.

Getting to know people

'[It's about] bringing people together, so that new people [...] can come to an event and meet people who they might have seen in passing, or they didn't even know lived there, and they actually find their own place in the village.'

Promoter, Lincolnshire

Village activities do not inevitably make people feel welcome; clubs and societies may want members, yet still look unfriendly from outside. But village shows are overtly public events: everyone is invited. Indeed, promoters will often be grateful for a sale. The arts are a chance to meet new faces, or socialise with people known by sight. At concerts, the hall is often set out with tables and chairs, and, where there is no bar, people bring drinks. People mingle in the interval, and the show gives something to talk about: it is not so hard to start a conversation with a stranger in a queue for a cup of tea. In subsequent days and weeks, the evening provides a starting point for dialogue in the shop or the street.

Children living in rural areas can experience particular isolation, unless they actually live in a village. School may be far from home, and friends likewise; social networks are harder to develop and maintain. Family-friendly shows are an opportunity for children and parents to meet: as one parent, now a promoter in Wales, recalled of the period when she was bringing up her own children, *'There was nothing at all with which you met people, unless you actually had children's birthday parties or whatever. I lived up a valley, quite a long way away from anywhere; I never saw anybody for 20 years apart from school dos or whatever; that was it.'*

Promoters also extend their social networks. Some people do it as a way to get involved in a community they have moved to. One person in Shropshire responded to a request for a promoter in the parish newsletter, hoping she would get to know people, and has been delighted by the way it has opened doors. Others joined the hall committee for the same reason, and found themselves taking responsibility for touring almost by default. Committees, who worry that new, and especially, younger, people are reluctant to get involved, often welcome the energy and ideas outsiders can bring. But newcomers can find it difficult to access local networks, and build up trust. One such promoter lacked sensitivity and struggled to get audiences; eventually, he gave up, and his local successor quickly rebuilt relationships: as the scheme manager put it, *'that's all about the individual at the sharp end, isn't it?'*

Incomers and locals

Rural touring creates a space in which long-term and more recent residents of villages can forge relationships. At one level, that is simply about breaking the ice, putting names to faces and getting to know people socially; at another, it is about building trust between groups. People who have moved to a village may be wary of how they will be received, and express a sense of belonging cautiously. *'I have lived in the village since 1978, and I was born and grew up in Norfolk so I am local in some respects'* – 'in some respects' only, after 25 years, service as a parish councillor and a mainstay of local voluntary groups. Equally, it may be the locals who feel that the village's latest residents have no use for them and their ways of doing things: it was not uncommon to hear that *'the majority of the newcomers don't really mix that much in the village activities'*.

Rural touring, in all the case study villages, is playing a useful role in bridging this division, where it exists, and that may be especially valuable if people do not have other ways in, such as children at the local school. Every audience included people who had lived in the village for a short time and people who had lived there for decades, if not their whole lives. Weekenders, though, are less well represented, partly because their semi-residence makes them less easy to contact or include in local networks. In villages where rural touring has become a fixture, and especially where it has sparked wider development, as in Terrington, Welborne, Ashbrittle or Bergh Apton, it has enabled people from across the community to work together to organise the shows, and on other arts and local activities.

'I think it has given a lot more people a lot more confidence, and a lot more feeling of belonging, which I think was disappearing. [...] The people who have their roots here feel more that they own the community, and they are not being elbowed out of it, so to speak. And I think a lot of people who are coming in feel they are a part of a community, rather than a place where you come home and close your gate at the end of the day.'

Promoter, Yorkshire

Inclusion

'Individuals can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong.' (Peter Townsend)⁴⁹

Differences exist everywhere, but they can seem sharper where company directors and widowed pensioners live side by side. Promoters are conscious of the diversity of wealth, social position, education, health, values and taste behind seemingly similar facades, and a desire to bridge these differences guides many village hall committees. Indeed, it was hard to find promoters who did *not* actively want to involve the widest possible range of residents, not for ideological reasons – there is as much resistance to being told how to think in villages as anywhere – but because of their ideas of community, and motivation. They are concerned to be inclusive partly because their sense of community means that everyone in the village has the right, and perhaps the obligation, to be involved in local activities.

Promoters work hard to reach beyond the loyal supporters who can be relied on to turn out: there is more rejoicing over one new audience member, than over ninety-nine familiar faces.

Equally, they know their villages well, and have few illusions about them. There are those who exclude themselves: one Yorkshire promoter spoke of the difficulty of delivering show fliers to houses defended by electric gates. There are people to whom the arts simply do not appeal, and most committees recognise that inclusion demands a broad programme of activities: according to one village hall chairman, *'it's taken a while to get people involved, but the more different things you do, [the more] you are actually appealing to different segments'*. There are people who stay away for more complex reasons. Promoters often work to interest the more reluctant over a long period: *'There are some children who I think would enjoy it, but because it's not in the parent's remit, they don't come, and I would quite like this kid to have a chance'*. As it happens, the child came to, and enjoyed her next show.

Promoters are particularly conscious of local differences in wealth; as one said, *'there's people who wouldn't lend us a fiver, and there's other people for whom a fiver is real money'*. The cost of tickets and refreshments is a constant concern as people try to cover costs and ensure that families, pensioners or others on low incomes are not put off. They rarely charge more than £5: most would rather break even with a full hall, than build funds on a half-empty one, though some envisage their responsibility as trustees more narrowly. Concessions are widely offered to people over 60 and to children: family tickets are also used to ensure that people with young children can attend as a group, and several promoters mentioned taking a very relaxed view of what constituted a family. Some promoters do not offer individual concessions, feeling that their standard price is low enough; there is a particular kind of inclusion in ensuring that everyone is there on the same terms, without attention being drawn to their particular situation.

The choice of work is a key to inclusion, and programming is often guided by a wish to attract more or different people. The obvious instance is work for children, and for many promoters this is an essential part of the annual programme. Village hall committees take programming seriously, with voices raised in favour of more demanding work, and more accessibility. Some villages will stick with the theatre company or style of music they know goes down well, while others will try to meet the interests of those who are not coming; as one Somerset promoter explained, *'we are mindful of things that would reach out to people that perhaps we haven't reached out to before'*. There is no suggestion of 'dumbing down' in these discussions, just a serious engagement with fundamental arts choices.

The concern to include is constant, and people put in a lot of legwork to get the word out; even so, as one Midlands promoter said, *'with a larger village like this, you are not reaching all parts of the community all the time, are you?'*. Inevitably, since word of mouth is the most common way for people to find out about events, the promoter's networks play a big role in shaping the audience: where promoting groups themselves involve a cross-section of the local community, that may be reflected in the audience.

It is difficult to assess promoters' success in attracting inclusive audiences: social exclusion is intrinsically complex, as are the reasons which govern people's participation in local events. The audience for each show varies with the promoter, the character of the village, the style of work on offer and many other factors. Taken as a whole, however, the audience survey suggests that rural touring is relatively inclusive. There are more professional people, as usual in

the subsidised arts, but otherwise, in terms of age, occupation, length of residence in the village and similar characteristics, the audience profile compares broadly to the rural population as a whole. Social exclusion exists, in villages involved with the arts as in others, but the survey shows that rural touring has the capacity at least to be culturally inclusive.

Michael Simmons has written that rural poverty 'is lived out in an environment where total privacy can be hard to come by, where life may be conducted in a "goldfish bowl", because too many other people know more than enough about each other's circumstances'.⁵⁰ In this context, rural touring provides a valuable opportunity for people on low incomes to take part on the same terms as everybody else. It offers something approaching equal access, and full participation – a small but important contribution to social inclusion.

5.3 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

'Community development is a range of practices dedicated to increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life, improving local conditions, especially for people in disadvantaged situations, and enabling people to participate in public decision-making and to achieve greater long-term control over their circumstances. Community life means activities undertaken voluntarily by people pursuing common interests, improving shared conditions or representing joint concerns.'

Community Development Foundation⁵¹

A virtuous circle

The connection between the arts, especially locally-organised activity, and community development has been recognised since the 1970s. It is not the only conception of the link between culture and social policy, but it is arguably the most coherent. Importantly, it does not conceive the arts instrumentally, but as an independent practice which can have significant outcomes on community organisations, networks and what the Community Development Foundation describes as 'community life'. Civil society enables people to organise collectively for their wider good, acting as an important balance to both state and private enterprise. Britain is fortunate in having long experience of such activity, and the development of rural touring illustrates what such traditions enable, and how they are themselves strengthened through use. Rural touring depends on the kind of local voluntary commitment and organisation which empowers communities to act on their own behalf; at the same time, it is a form of community development practice that strengthens the partners involved.

Strengthening existing community organisations

Committees and promoters

Village halls are cornerstones of local associational life, providing a vehicle for a wide range of activity: as ACRE says, 'The key purpose of any community building is to provide a place where people can meet and carry out activities *as a community*'.⁵² But village hall committees vary as much as the buildings they run. Some are dynamic and imaginative, others more passive, feeling that their duty is to provide and maintain premises, not animate them. Some take a

narrow view of the hall's use, others act as social entrepreneurs, making links with education and health services, the post office and arts organisations. It is impossible to say whether village hall committees are dynamic because they are involved in rural touring, or whether they put on shows because they are dynamic. But it is true that many villages involved in rural touring do have dynamic halls, and there is certainly a virtuous circle in which promoting arts events helps build people's sense of community and commitment to local activities.

That depends on local promoters. It is their local knowledge, commitment, adventurousness, enthusiasm and energy which gets people to spend the evening on a hard chair seeing someone they have never heard of perform something they don't expect to like. They run a considerable financial risk, which is one reason why most promoters like being part of an organisation which provides some cover. They also run a considerable social risk in bringing live art into the community, especially since they have rarely seen the work beforehand. They persuade friends, neighbours and acquaintances to attend, and get the complaints if people are bored or offended by what they have seen. By booking a show, most promoters feel that they are, implicitly or otherwise, indicating their approval of it and the values it presents: *'People feel that we are inviting them, they feel that we have reviewed this thing, that we know what it is [...] and that is difficult to handle when it doesn't go down well.'* When, in one case study village, there were complaints about a children's play that some parents felt was unsuitable for younger children, the complaints came to the committee.

Some promoters do act independently, hiring a venue for the event; though they are not part of a community organisation, their work can still influence the hall, community centre or school where they are working, by raising expectations and showing what is possible.

Capacity building

'We are just village people, but you dig deep and we have got some immensely interesting people in the village; well, everybody really.'

Committee member, Norfolk

The village residents on whom rural touring depends bring a wide range of professional and life experience to the work. They tend to be older, and have often brought up families, as well as working in demanding occupations; many have travelled or lived abroad, and many have long experience of voluntary work. It would be simplistic to see their participation as a route to personal development, since they already have so much to offer. On the other hand, rural touring makes its own demands, and most promoters do things they find challenging. They adapt to new tasks and situations, or take on roles they might have avoided, for the good of the project and the community; indeed, many people get involved because of the possibility of discovery and learning new things. Promoters often spoke of how much they had gained through the work, in specific business or artistic skills and in less tangible human experience.

Some of those they work with also benefit in this way. This was evident, for example, in the schools which worked with Annapurna Dance during their residency with Highlights in Cumbria and County Durham. The workshops were valued by teachers since they had fewer opportunities to enrich and add variety to students' learning than exist in urban areas. The company's visit provided teachers with new skills, fresh ideas and ways of approaching cultural themes in the classroom. One teacher said, *'One of our Ofsted areas of concern was that*

the children did not have enough contact with multi-cultural Britain. [...] One of our aims is for our children to be able to respond to people of different skin colours and from different cultures confidently. They certainly are learning to do that.'

New skills and success build confidence. Whether it is mastering a complicated dance routine, seeing an interview come across well in the local paper, negotiating a fair contract with a company, or getting a grant from the local council, the achievement contributes to people's sense of themselves. Promoters spoke of such successes as being important results of their involvement. But the biggest boost is a full hall, a great atmosphere and everybody going home inspired: many said there was nothing that gave them quite that feeling of having triumphed against the odds.

In many cases, the successful development of rural touring, and the lift to people's confidence, has encouraged village hall committees to take on more ambitious events, or to promote shows independently. Dulverton is one of about 20 villages in Somerset which expanded their arts programme by taking additional unsubsidised shows: as one promoter said, *'we have continued ourselves, because we built up such an audience with them, thanks to the subsidy Take Art! gave, that we were empowered to take them on'.⁵³*

Local democracy

There is a strong commitment to democratic processes in most promoting groups. It was rare to meet a promoter who selected shows without formally consulting the rest of the committee, though in a few cases, the task has been delegated in this way. But usually, the list of options are circulated to each committee member (and often to others) when they are received from the rural touring scheme, and a decision made in a committee meeting, often on a majority vote. There is no evidence that such rigorous application of democracy leads to dull or safe programming. But it does ensure that the responsibility for the choice, and for persuading people to attend, is shared by the group rather than left to an individual. The time it takes, which can make it difficult for rural touring schemes to book some companies, is a drawback, but one which those involved are prepared to accept.

There is a more human aspect to this. Many promoters are willing to accept the effort, and the risk, of putting on shows, but not as individuals: that would be too exposing in a small community. They feel more comfortable within a group or committee, whose decisions are fair and accountable. One resident had proposed bringing live events to her village, but had not been able to persuade the hall committee: rather than working alone, and simply booking the hall, she had abandoned the idea: *'I wouldn't have been interested in me taking that risk, me taking that chance and me sort of doing it. I wanted to have people around me who were also enthusiastic, and the lack of enthusiasm I found very off-putting; so I just channelled my efforts elsewhere, really, and did other things. I always felt a bit sad that we weren't doing anything here but [...] it wouldn't have occurred to me [to do it alone].'* This sense of a right way to go about things was common among promoters, reflecting a deep belief to democratic ideals which encourages people to get involved in community activity, and governs how they are willing to do so.

Networking

'I think we know many more people in other villages now than we did 5 years ago'

Committee member, Yorkshire

Rural touring also strengthens community organisations by facilitating the development of their networks. These extend in all sorts of directions, including links with promoters in other villages, with the professional arts world, and with public bodies such as the Arts Council and local government. Such contacts can be very empowering, as they help people get access to people and resources that may be valuable in their own programmes of community activity. The experience has given some promoters the confidence to use the knowledge gained in times of need. In 2003, Bassetlaw District Council proposed to cut its arts budget, including the small grant supporting rural touring. Promoters felt strongly enough to mobilise against the decision: within days promoters from 15 villages had organised a petition with over 600 signatures and a letter-writing campaign, focusing on the needs of rural communities. Previously unaware just how important rural touring was to many of their constituents, councillors reinstated support for Village Ventures. As one of the promoters involved said, *'It showed you can do something, you can fight city hall'*.

Developing new community organisations

In some cases, rural touring has been part of a process leading to the establishment of new community organisations. This has been helped when the touring programme is organised by an arts development agency, such as Take Art!, Rural Arts North Yorkshire or Creative Arts East, with the capacity and resources to support other kinds of project.

Bergh Apton Community Arts Trust (BACAT)

Bergh Apton lies 10 miles south of Norwich, its few score houses spread over a large parish. The Community Arts Trust was formed by local people to support a growing range of arts activities, including village hall performances, workshops and other events. The Trust's flagship is a remarkable Sculpture Trail which grew out of existing open gardens and arts initiatives, but, even in its first year, far exceeded them in scale and ambition. It was open in 1997, 1999 and 2002 (a 2001 event was postponed because of foot and mouth disease), over three weekends each summer. In the last event, 53 artists exhibited 220 sculptures in 15 gardens; 6,808 tickets were sold, and an estimated 1,600 children were admitted free. An assortment of vehicles (tractors, minibuses and a fire tender) ferried people around a six mile route, and 105 bicycles were available for visitors to make their own way. The organisation, stewarding, refreshments, driving and other tasks involve about 100 people – nearly half the local population. Over £45,000 worth of sculpture and other artwork was sold in six days, raising valuable funds for the village hall and other local causes. In addition to the exhibition, there have been other arts activities, notably music and literature, and workshops, and the local history group put on an exhibition in the church. According to one visitor, *'It's a fantastic idea, the mixture of arts, the countryside and local community satisfies many aspects [...]; to go for a walk with [things] to see between strolling in our lovely countryside is a great pleasure for heart and soul.'*

In 2003, the Community Arts Trust contributed to South Norfolk Council's 'Celestial Festival', with the characteristically original idea of creating a solar system in the village. With the shop

as its centre, sculptural representations of the planets were made by artists and local people, and sited across the parish, correctly in terms of relative distance and position. A free booklet guide indicated the sites of each sculpture, so that visitors could find their way around the lanes of a widely dispersed village, searching out ever more remote planets. The solar system was linked to an evening of storytelling which featured myths about the creation of the stars from around the world.

BACAT's success depends on a small number of imaginative local people, with time, energy and a strong sense of the kind of community they want to be part of. With experience in teaching, business, farming and other fields, they have come to arts development relatively late in life. In doing so, they have established a way of working which is absolutely steeped in a voluntary ethos, but completely professional in its standards and expectations.

Terrington Arts

Terrington is small village of about 400 in the Howardian Hills about 20 miles north of York. The introduction of rural touring through the Rural Arts North Yorkshire (RANY) On Tour scheme has been the catalyst for a series of impressive developments, mostly, but not only, in the arts. From the first performances in 1996, and an ambitious textile project to decorate the hall with banners, people have become increasingly involved in, and committed to, cultural projects. In 1997, these were secured through the formation of Terrington Arts, which is run by a working group rather than a committee, to signal the active ethos of the group.⁵⁴

Since then, the village has seen the revival of the Terrington Players (last performance 1971), the establishment of a textile group, a choir and a local history initiative, as well as a succession of visual arts projects, workshops and exhibitions. Activities in 2003 included professional drama workshops for a production by Terrington Players; a millennium arts project, *Hands On*, in which over 80 people took part; completion of local history albums showing everyone living in the parish in 2000, for the Borthwick Institute in York; South Asian dance workshops at Terrington school, with children from Slingsby and Foston schools; the formation of the Richard Spruce Society to celebrate a local Victorian botanist; the launch of *Upshoots*, a RANY exhibition of photographs of rural working people; workshops and outings by the Textile and Craft group; and an organised trip to see *Tosca* in Leeds.

Terrington Arts is now involved in the Howardian Rural Learning Community centred on the village. Following consultation, courses have been developed in digital photography, water-colour and using the Internet, with others planned in local history, art and music. They have enabled Terrington Arts to extend to neighbouring villages including Brandsby, Huttons Ambo, and Hovingham, where the village hall has an ISDN line. Terrington itself is so lively that '*you have to pace yourself or you'd be out every night*'. This helps explain why 44% of the audience survey respondents were involved in the arts voluntarily, compared to an average of 19% in the Cumbria, County Durham, Somerset and Norfolk case studies. Those most involved, including the Working Group, believe they have learnt much from the experience: one young woman who joined the weekly textile group has been able to overcome illness and go on to establish a small business of her own.

Much of this was made possible through grants from the National Lottery, beginning with an Arts Council A4E award; funds have since been secured through Awards for All, the Millennium

Commission and Ryedale District Council. They have enabled Terrington Arts to commission RANY to work on various projects and their support has been valuable. But it is significant that the Lottery funds were applied for by Terrington Arts, who were thus able to commission work on their own terms. It may be that this small shift from providers to commissioners in the arts will prove to be one of the more far-reaching outcomes of the Lottery experience.

Other developments

The experiences of villages such as Bergh Apton and Terrington are exceptional, but far from unique. Rural touring has been a factor in other rural communities that have used the arts as a route for community development. For example:

- **Ashbrittle Arts** is a voluntary organisation based in a small West Somerset village. From putting on village hall shows with Take Art!, the group undertook a project to celebrate an ancient yew in the churchyard, involving artists and residents making stained glass and carved benches, and a small festival. They have since undertaken a series of increasingly ambitious projects, including a book about the village community published to mark the millennium, arts workshops, performances and, most recently, a music festival. The group involves people with diverse backgrounds, including several people with artistic skills which have been valuable in some of their projects.
- **Riccall Regen 2000**, in a coalfields village near Selby (Yorkshire), is on another scale, and touring has played a much less significant role in its development.⁵⁵ Problems with the old village hall led the committee to create ambitious plans for a new centre to include space for concerts and functions, a social club, nursery, computer suite and education facilities. A successful campaign raised £1.5 million for the creation of the Regen Centre, designed in partnership between the architects and the project team to serve the needs of local groups; it is now used by nearly 700 people a week for education, sport, the arts and other activities. Local bands have a place to rehearse and perform, and an amateur theatre group has been started. Regular concerts take place in the hall, featuring musicians on the rural touring scheme and commercial promotions. The community development project has been so successful that they now envisage expanding on another site.
- In **Constantine**, a village on the Cornish coast, rural touring has helped transform a redundant chapel into a local arts and social venue. The conversion of the Tolmen Centre was undertaken with funds from the Millennium Commission, South West Regional Development Agency, European Regional Development Fund and other sources. It has provided a space for children's activities, including holiday playschemes, and a 180 seat community venue for concerts and theatre. Carn to Cove, the local rural touring scheme, provide 4 shows a year, giving a professional core to an expanding programme of voluntary arts activity. As one member of the committee explained: *'There is some sort of pride as well, I think, in the fact that Kneehigh are here, and that this building, our building, is being used to put on really good stuff that people want to go and see'*.
- Since 2001, **Welborne**, in Norfolk, has been developing an annual arts weekend, based around Creative Arts East's summer exhibition. The cornerstone of the 2003 event was 'In Print', the CAE exhibition, featuring four artists and four poets, including new work in which the artists reflected on the poems. In addition, Welborne village hall put on

exhibitions by Breckland Artists, Norfolk Contemporary Craft Society and some local artists, in separate marquees. Work made by children from Mattishall School with Annette Rolston, a printmaker in the CAE exhibition, was also shown. There were poetry readings, art demonstrations and a church flower festival, and about 300 people attended over two days. In the longer term, the organisers hope to merge the village hall committee, the parochial church council and the parish council into a single community organisation which can use projects like the arts weekend for the regeneration of the village.

Of course, things do not always work out as planned, and all these community projects have encountered problems and knockbacks. One group recently had to confront the failure of its most ambitious idea: *'It's a bit bruising when you have done things that have worked fairly well to suddenly find yourself [losing money]'*. Nor is arts touring the only catalyst for community cultural development in rural areas; arts development agencies, local councils, voluntary organisations and others have all contributed to the projects described above, and to many others. But that should not diminish the value of village hall shows, which are often a community's introduction to the arts and a very approachable first step. Small-scale success is a good platform for larger ambitions, and, in many villages, rural touring has proved an effective catalyst for community development.

Village confidence

'It feels as though visiting performers make the village special and distinctive.'

Audience member, Cornwall

Finally, it should be noted that rural touring can contribute to the intangible matter of how a community sees itself. Most of the case study villages were lively, at least in terms of the use of community facilities and the number of voluntary groups and activities. It was striking that, unlike people working in urban communities, local activists rarely complained about apathy. They knew it could be hard to get people out on a dark night, or to take an active role in village hall events, and they often worried about 'community spirit', but promoters, committee members and other local residents generally described villages with a lot going on. It is likely, of course, that lively, confident places are more inclined to put on community events. But it is also the case that promoters often saw the arts as a way to inject new life into a community whose bonds they perceived to be weakening, and in these situations, they believed that things had got much better since the shows had begun to provide a focus for people to get together. Promoters and audience members expressed pride in having shows that local people rated highly, and that people from outside the community were prepared to travel to see. A successful village hall arts programme does build a community's confidence in itself, and that confidence can empower people to develop in all sorts of directions:

'... the gardening club, and the wine society, and the choir and so on: all these new things sort of spawned in the last few years as well. [...] I'm sure there has been a change in that kind of culture, and we're tending to make our own entertainment to a certain extent. Yes, we like to see the professionals coming in but it's OK to have a go yourself, because you don't have to be brilliant at things.'

Arts group member, Yorkshire

Contrasting approaches to community cultural development

The quality and importance of the voluntary input into rural touring in England and Wales is underlined by comparison with a similar scheme in France. Act'Art is an autonomous association funded by the Conseil Général in Seine-et-Marne, a large, mostly rural *département* east of Paris.⁵⁶ Over 10 years, it has promoted professional arts in rural areas, in partnership with *Mairies* and voluntary cultural organisations. The 2002-03 programme included 105 performances, organised in local clusters to encourage inter-communal co-operation. In most essential respects, Act'Art is very similar to the rural touring schemes in England and Wales, and the events it produces in village halls are very comparable. The staff team, the artists, and the audiences share the values and ideals of their British counterparts almost exactly, to the extent of sometimes using the same phrases to talk about their experiences.

However, there are differences which reflect important distinctions in the national cultures and, more pertinently, in ideas of the relationship between state and people. The first is the amount of public money invested. In 2003 the Act'Art programme budget was more than three times that of a comparable English touring scheme like Take Art!, though the number of shows promoted by each was very similar. The additional resources mean that artists are paid better in France: the average fee to companies in Seine-et-Marne was 2,200 euros (£1,565), compared to about £425 in Somerset, though the difference is partly due to the greater number of music performances in England. Act'Art also has substantial funds for technical support which allow it to provide local communities and performers with raked seating, lighting and people to set up. The audience's experience is therefore, in some respects, closer to that of a small British arts centre, though the *salles de fêtes* are otherwise comparable to the village halls used by rural touring schemes. Another consequence of lower subsidy in Britain, is that the work is much more self-financing: in Somerset, about 80% of the artists' fees were met through ticket sales, compared to 15% in Seine-et-Marne.

But rural touring in England and Wales draws on levels of voluntary organisation and support not available across the Channel, where it falls almost entirely to local government action and finance, with a minor role for local associations who provide a post-show buffet. The British reliance on local people to do much of the work and share the financial risk, has no parallel in Seine-et-Marne, and the difference in the impact on local communities is marked. Act'Art's work has brought about a gradual engagement with culture by some *Mairies*, but the limited voluntary input, relatively infrequent performances and greater reliance on state support has led to less independent action like that evident in England and Wales. The result of a process which favours community development, as adopted in this country, can be seen partly in the rapid growth in rural touring, but even more in the willingness of many villages to take on additional shows, promoted independently at full cost. In Somerset, for example, where this is particularly well developed, a third of shows promoted through Take Art! in 2002-03, (41 out of 130) were put on by villages without subsidy.

Community and association

Some aspects of the developments described here were observed somewhat critically by Howard Newby 25 years ago. In an important analysis of social change in rural England, he noted the growing influence of newcomers on village life, recognising that many had moved to the

country specifically to find a different, perhaps idealised, community to be part of (Newby 1979:197). Newby argued that problems arise from different ideas of what constitutes community, with incomers focusing on associational life:

'A common characteristic of social life in the modern village is thus the attempt by newcomers to create an *ersatz* sense of community by founding and running local organisations – branches of the WEA, amateur dramatics societies, art clubs, etc. – and even building a new 'community centre' in which to house them. Given the diversity of employment among newcomers this *formal* method of association is usually necessary to bring the population together. To the locals, however, it appears to lack the spontaneity of what *they* consider to be a 'real community', which they regard as arising 'naturally' out of living and working together over succeeding generations.' (Newby 1979:197).

This is a crucial insight into how the ties which once brought people together incidentally, above all work, have loosened and replaced. It is also notable that the examples of new organisations mentioned, even in the 1970s, related to education and the arts. But some caveats should be considered. First, villages have always been diverse, not least in class. Secondly, formal associational life, from chapel and darts team to Young Farmers and WI, has long played a role in rural life. Thirdly, community based on living and working together is not unique to villages: many urban areas have a parallel experience based on industry or mining. Finally, the criticism of associational life as '*ersatz*' is harsh, and does not take account of whether those involved in it consider it to be so, or recognise associational contact as laying the foundations of other kinds of less formal social interaction.

Newby's contrast between associational life and 'real community' is important, but should not encourage a simple nostalgic view of what has been: the past is defined by its disappearance, and the kind of life that was lived in rural areas is gone. What matters to people living in rural areas today, is the quality of the life they have, including their social contacts, their sense of inclusion and belonging and the opportunities available to them. Rural touring cannot replace shared work as a shaper of traditional rural communities; but it can play a valuable role in bringing together the kind of communities which do now exist.

The rural touring model and community development

British public policy has placed a high value on partnership in development for many years, and it has been a cornerstone of rural policy since at least the 1980s. Partnership involves the co-operation of government, local authorities, public agencies, the NGO sector, private enterprise and, sometimes, the people who are intended to benefit from an initiative. But it is clear that there are wide differences in power between these groups, and the results have been mixed. As our literature review found, previous research has shown that:

'Despite all policy talk about empowering local communities the frameworks in which local solutions are developed are dominated by higher authorities and the agendas will similarly be made by those with more power. [...] Most partnerships are formed on the basis of requirements of funding bodies for example; they rarely emerge naturally.' (Gallinat 2003: 9)

The experience of partnership between touring schemes and promoting groups is different. The model created in the early 1980s, and subsequently adapted in many other situations, has proved itself to be durable, effective, and capable of forging genuinely equitable partnerships.

Touring scheme and promoter bring different, but indispensable and complementary, capacities to their partnership: their work is interdependent. One constant in interviews with people on both sides was a quality of respect, and more specifically, of respect for what Richard Sennett describes as the autonomy of others:

'Rather than an equality of understanding, autonomy means accepting in others what one does not understand about them. In doing so, the fact of their autonomy is treated as equal to your own.'⁵⁷

In this, and in many practical matters, touring schemes have developed an approach to arts development with communities which is empowering. The sharing of choice, responsibilities and benefits between the partners ensures that community groups are able to shape their arts programme, not just accept or decline what others have decided. The balance between scheme and promoter varies, but the differences reflect local values and needs, not the equilibrium of the relationship. To date, the rural touring model has been applied principally to promoting live performances, though it has also proved itself in visual arts, workshops and artists' residencies. Its success in these areas suggests that it may have a wider interest for arts and cultural policy aiming to meet the needs of identified communities. Questions of replicability or transferability are always complex, and one should think in terms of the adaptability of the model to other situations. But in its fundamental respect for the autonomy of partners, and its equitable sharing of decisions, duties and rewards, rural touring has much to offer, within and beyond the arts.

5.4 VIABLE VILLAGES

Social capital

'The social capital of a society includes the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development. Social capital, however, is not simply the sum of the institutions which underpin society, it is also the glue that holds them together. It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust, and a common sense of "civic" responsibility, that makes society more than a collection of individuals. Without a degree of common identification with forms of governance, cultural norms, and social rules, it is difficult to imagine a functioning society.'

World Bank 1998

Social capital has become increasingly fashionable in research, as subject and theory, and in policy formulation in national and international contexts; yet, as many specialists acknowledge, 'social capital remains an imprecise concept' (Ruston 2003:2). There are different approaches, united by an interest in the influence of values, trust, social norms and networks on individuals and their interaction, and a belief that societies with high levels of social capital are more successful. It is questionable whether building social capital is a desirable or achievable goal of social policy: perhaps such complex aspects of our lives are, or should be, beyond state influence. But the concept is useful in understanding how communities work, and, given its policy interest, it is worth considering the contribution of rural touring to social capital.

One way of envisaging how social capital operates, and may be accrued, is through social networks. *Bonding* networks unite people with a strong sense of shared identity, typically within family or ethnic groups, whereas *bridging* networks unite people with specific interests, such as a profession or political affiliation (Putnam 2000:22); some writers also recognise *linking* networks, which unite 'people at different levels in social hierarchies' (Field 2003). The extent of an individual's access to these types of network influences different aspects of their lives, while the overall richness of these interactions, and the confidence, reciprocity and understanding they allow to circulate influences society more generally.

Rural touring certainly enables each type of network to flourish. Shows and exhibitions bring together people with strong existing bonds, including families and friends, and those with looser ties based on shared commitment to community life, an interest in the arts, or the village itself. The diverse social background of audiences, including age, occupation, local ties and so on, in a convivial social atmosphere, encourages the development of bridging networks. That is not inevitable, and the tensions between different social groups should not be underestimated: a resentment of incomers' standoffishness was sometimes expressed, while local people's familiarity easily makes a newcomer feel like an uninvited guest. At the start of one or two shows, there was little interaction within the audience and it was the performance that wove a spell of commonality. Many promoting groups and village hall committees also unite people with widely different backgrounds.

Rural touring makes links between residents and artists, local authorities, voluntary organisations and funding sources: the increased confidence in dealing with such partners expressed by many promoters underlines the value of these connections. In Cheshire, for example, the programme to improve access to venues has encouraged some village hall committees to apply to local authorities for funding. Linking networks also help public bodies, agencies and local government develop their understanding of communities. Contacts developed through rural touring enable officers in the arts, leisure, regeneration and community development to connect more effectively with people in the areas they serve.

Rural touring contributes to the networks that constitute, exploit and expand social capital, but so do other community activities. Its distinctive value may lie in that its currency is art, which deals with the building blocks of social capital itself: values, cultural norms and social rules. The arts may play a uniquely important role in social capital because they enable people, individually, and through shared experience, to participate in questioning, affirming and revising those values and norms; and, crucially, they do so on their own terms, because they choose to, enjoying art for their own reasons, not according to anyone's prescription. If so, we are still a long way from fully understanding the connection of the arts to social capital.

Village differences

'We haven't a school, we haven't a pub, we haven't a village green. There's no centre of entertainment, there's no focal [point]; I suppose that is why we tend to make entertainment for ourselves.'

Arts group member, Norfolk

The more we learnt about the case study villages, the more conscious we became of the particularity of each. Some had used rural touring and the arts generally to become dynamic centres of community activity, while others were content just to add professional theatre to the range of local events. Still others appeared to have no interest in the arts, or perhaps community life, at all; it was not unusual to meet people at shows who lived in neighbouring villages, which they felt were moribund in comparison. As one said, *'My village was an agricultural community, but it is now some commuters and some retired [people; there is] little community activity – people not born in the village don't always want to know their neighbours'*. Some people, like the speaker, gravitated to communities where things were happening, becoming regular attenders at shows and other events; the contrast with their own community was such that they sometimes said that they would move into the lively village if they could.

Given the differences, in the character of local activity, and in the perception of different communities by those who live in them, it is important to ask why some villages are so much more active than others. Each is different, but some common factors have influenced developments of in villages such as Terrington, Bergh Apton, Ashbrittle among others:

- The presence of a number of like-minded, sometimes retired, professionals in the village, with expectations, and the skills and experience to make them a reality;
- The availability of project funds for community groups through the National Lottery;
- Access to the support of an arts development agency or local government arts officer.

Elsewhere a crisis has provided a spark. Divisions arose in one village when some residents wanted to build a new, multi-purpose hall, and others preferred to upgrade the existing one. After much controversy, including ballots conducted by the Electoral Reform Society and offers of lottery funds being refused, the existing hall was refurbished. But the experience was bruising, and the committee felt that the hall must become a much more vital centre for the community. They saw rural touring as a way to do this, and have since promoted three performances a year, gradually attracting most of those who had campaigned on the other side. Less dramatic crises, for example in village hall budgets, have prompted other villages to begin putting on performances which have led to wider arts and community development. The developments at Riccall were sparked when the old village hall committee resigned *en bloc* over a planning permission problem: a new committee took over, and saw the opportunity to make a real change in the village. Sometimes, the motivation is not a crisis as such but a sense that community spirit has reached such a low point that something must be done: as one promoter explained, *'We all sit back and we all say, well, somebody will do something, and I just thought, this time I am going to do something; and I did'*.

The creation of a membership organisation, as in Ashbrittle, Bergh Apton and elsewhere, can be crucial in sustainable development. Terrington Arts began as a sub-group of the village hall, but soon became an independent trust. As a result, its energies have not been limited or dissipated by other demands, and it has been able to use funds strategically: surpluses from popular touring shows have subsidised other activities, such as children's workshops. Membership was introduced to show local support as part of the fundraising process, but *'once we had*

members it was necessary to cherish them by communicating with them'. A newsletter was introduced, keeping people in touch with activities, and a members' discount means that the subscription can be recouped over the year by loyal attenders. At the 2003 AGM, Terrington Arts had 133 members, 71% of them living in the village, 9% in outlying farms and hamlets, and 20% further away. There is a member in every fourth house in the parish, and the working group is extending membership across a wider area to help sustain Terrington Arts in the longer term. 'The great advantage of having the members is that you can presume they support you. You can introduce activities they might not have thought of before, and encourage them to have a go. You can also ask them for help.'

Some of these factors could also be seen in terms of the capital – economic, human, social and cultural – available to the communities concerned. However, this availability is only a starting point for understanding the unevenness of local cultural development. Villages are different, as illustrated by the neighbouring Lincolnshire villages of Fulstow, Grainthorpe and Saltfleet. There are communities with substantial resources which have not seen much development, and others with few which have achieved a great deal. Though more work is needed to understand these issues, this suggests that human and social capital are the critical factors in development, rather than economic or cultural capital which may be accessed externally.

Change in small communities

Villages like Terrington and Bergh Apton were not as lively 20 years ago as they are today; and it is possible that they will not be so 20 years hence. No community is static, and small communities are most liable to be affected by change. Village hall committees rely on a few people who provide leadership; sometimes a single person may be the driving force behind several ambitious projects. Fortunately, village and community arts development require people with all sorts of skills, and people who are willing to help can usually find a role within the team.

Promoters mostly adopt a consensual approach appropriate to voluntary activity. Even so, the trust placed in them can have the unintended result of making others see themselves as mere helpers; *'we would have a tremendous job if [she] didn't do it, to find anyone who would be willing to actually do the work, [...] because I honestly don't think I could take it on; I really don't'*. Consequently activists worry whether their work will continue if they step down, and some continue doing it past the stage when they should have stopped. In fact, committees do renew themselves, because people reluctant to fill a hypothetical vacancy, do so more willingly when it is actual. Even so, many promoters feel that the village community has changed in ways that make this process of renewal less reliable than in the past.

These difficulties are magnified in a small community, where the impact of one or two people retiring, moving away, or dying, may be disproportionate. When people do reduce their commitments, perhaps because of age or illness, they often remain a powerful presence, and their success can be difficult for others to follow. Demographic changes can have a similarly big impact. A village with plenty of young children may develop activities to meet their needs; as they grow up, unless new young families move in, it can become impossible to sustain those activities for a diminishing number of children. A thriving football team or youth club can find itself struggling to find enough people within a relatively short time.

The effect of this, as experienced by many residents, is to make small communities specially vulnerable to peaks and troughs of activity. When there are people with time and energy to invest, the village can become very lively, with a rich mix of social and cultural opportunities. But, as people's lives change, and perhaps they take the current liveliness for granted, energy fades, ideas are lacking, attendances fall, and a spiral of decline sets in. Then, if things get really low, someone decides to do something about it and the cycle goes off again.

A vehicle for community action – a building or an organisation – can be crucial. A committee has to meet, members have to be engaged; a village hall can be equally valuable in sustaining the idea of the village as a community for which something must be done. Such structures, whether organisational or physical, are hard to ignore, and offer a resource to people willing to use them. In one Buckinghamshire village, local scandal plunged the hall into crisis, and the building was closed; before long, others were seeing it as a means to get things going, and are now working to make it a centre of community life once again.

The future of villages

'I always wonder why anybody lives in our village, really, because if you were coming in, why on earth would you choose [here]? It's got nothing, it hasn't even got a shop, so it's about doing something, and getting people out, and meeting.'

Promoter, Nottinghamshire

Current government policy focuses on development in larger rural settlements, where facilities and services can be concentrated (Shorten *et al* 2001:3). This may be sensible in the wider context of planning policy, but it does little for the thousands of smaller rural communities with few, if any, existing services. Community development is not only about access to services, but about interaction, co-operation, working towards shared goals and much more that can only happen where people live. In the context of a changing and diversifying countryside, where people have fewer social or occupational ties than in the past, it is often harder to develop the familiarity and mutual confidence intrinsic to a sense of community. These may be intangible, but they are not negligible: how we feel about where we live, and our connections with others who live there, contribute much to our quality of life.⁵⁸

The belief frequently expressed by older locals that incomers did not want to take part in village life partly reflects cultural differences which make established institutions, like the church or hunt, and social groups, like the WI or the Young Farmers, less attractive for younger people and those who have been used to urban life. The role of the arts, along with other broadly cultural activities such as local history or conservation, has therefore become important in providing a route for incomers to become involved in the village's associational life. The evidence from this study, including the rapid growth in numbers of communities taking part, shows that, in terms of its contribution to community life, rural touring is playing a valuable role in that process.

'We hope that we do achieve, as a village, that sense of community. That doesn't happen just by itself, you have to actually work [at it]; you can still create that, but that does take a lot of effort and time.'

Committee member, Norfolk



6 CHALLENGES

Art
Exhibition
To-Day





6 CHALLENGES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Rural touring is a story of remarkable achievement, as the model developed in the early 1980s has evolved and been extended to more areas. That experience has thrown up all sorts of practical problems inherent to the work, and these have been considered in the context of other findings. There are also wider issues which are less capable of being resolved by rural touring schemes themselves, at least not without the active involvement of their partners in local government, the Arts Council and other bodies. This chapter considers existing problems with village hall promotions, financial problems and a number of issues which, though not yet significant, are beginning to raise concerns among people involved in rural touring.

6.2 SOME CURRENT ISSUES

Village hall regulation

Village halls have been changing, partly because of the constant social evolution of villages themselves, but also because of the investment some of them have received, and an increasingly close regulation of facilities. The National Lottery has helped renew or rebuild scores of halls, and many promoters now use warm, accessible and well-equipped buildings. In some cases, grants and planning permissions have brought new obligations. One hall in the South West must now serve a wider area than the village itself, and so it attracts more activity and traffic than the building it replaced. This has caused some local complaint; the private hires which keep the hall viable can lead to noisy Saturday nights. As a result, the district council requires windows to be closed when there is amplified music, despite having given the building a sustainability award, based on a heating system controlled by free air circulation.

This is a very specific problem, but it illustrates the competing interests in small communities, and the practical problems which can be caused by regulation which appears perfectly sensible in Whitehall. In Cheshire, the support of the rural touring scheme and the local authorities is helping to bring village halls in line with the requirements of disability rights legislation. A sensitive approach has avoided problems, and promoters are more concerned with how to market their more accessible premises. But elsewhere, without the support of an adviser, some village hall committees were less positive: *'they resent the fact that facilities that they are proud of might be considered inadequate in terms of disability access'*.

People's reaction to licensing also varies, even though they recognise its importance to health and safety. Some hall committees are well experienced in obtaining licences for performances and for the sale of alcohol. Others find it confusing or difficult: one promoter cannot book

more than two performers because the committee will not obtain the necessary licence. The Licensing Act 2003 has brought uncertainty and confusion to many people in rural touring, as the various restrictions and costs were debated, revised and finally enacted. The exemption of village halls from the fees, though not the licences, for 'regulated entertainment', is welcome, given the delicate financial balance involved in keeping facilities going. But the regulatory system remains a source of worry to many involved.

'What the village hall committee resents is the imposed bureaucracy, and we, in our attempts to have an arts programme that is full, keep on rubbing up against that. [...] Sooner or later they will have to confront these issues, but they don't see why they should. They think, we are not the Odeon, we are a little country village hall, they don't want to be dealing with all this stuff'.

Promoter, South West

Many committee members met the researchers laden with thick ring-binders and box files: nobody could accuse them of not taking their responsibilities seriously. Often on the committee for years, they observed the increasing administrative burden with resignation. But volunteers can always walk away: if things get too complicated, they may begin to ask whether the game is worth the candle.

Volunteers

The idea of the volunteer is deeply ingrained in British culture, and the value of this aspect of community action has long been recognised in government. Rural touring exists in its present form only because of the willingness of several thousand people to match the offer with their own time, effort and resources. These people bring knowledge of their community, competence and sensitivity, and draw on much professional and life experience. But they are not professionals, and most do not want to be treated as such: they are volunteers with distinct interests, needs and motivations. Touring schemes have built good partnerships with them because they understand the value and character of volunteering. They offer appropriate everyday support and opportunities for development. They adapt that support to suit individual promoters, and have a real respect for, and appreciation of, what they do.

The difficulties reported by promoters affect all volunteering: support and personal development, establishing boundaries, clarity of responsibilities, planning for succession and so on. The latter is especially troubling to many people: how will they get someone else to take on the responsibility, and will they do it properly? *'I worked very hard at selling the tickets [...] and that is what always worries me when I let go, and pass it on to anyone else, whether they will actually get on with marketing the seats, because that is never easy, and it's never a cinch; you have to work at it, you have to keep going at it'.* The commitment to the community, combined with the worry that no-one else will pick it up, means that some promoters do continue too long, past the point of exhaustion.

But they also felt public agencies did not always understand their role as volunteers, treating them instead as quasi-professional partners who could provide access to a community. As a result, some felt taken for granted – for instance in terms of availability, or readiness to travel (without expenses) to meetings arranged to suit others – and patronised, in being steered

towards training they did not want or require. In short, promoters sometimes felt they were used to meet other people's priorities, in a less than equitable partnership.

Publicity material

Although audiences for rural touring are mostly attracted by word of mouth, artists' publicity material is vital in giving people an idea of what a show offers. Promoters distribute it widely, and give it to people to remind them of the event and the date, but they rarely feel it is very suitable to their needs. Posters and leaflets are too big for the sites available in the village, or, if reduced in size, lack impact; obscure images are a particular bugbear. Promoters depend on this material to interest people in shows, especially theatre, and they are often frustrated by its style and content. Occasionally, problems have arisen because the publicity does not give a clear enough indication about the suitability of the work for children. Simpler posters, which can be seen from a car, and more informative flyers, would answer their needs better.

6.3 THE FINANCING OF RURAL TOURING

The financial balance

Financing rural touring involves a delicate balance between interests: it works, and should not lightly be called into question. The schemes are cost-effective, requiring a low level of public subsidy compared to the performing arts generally, despite the increased costs associated with rural areas. The voluntary input partly accounts for this, and should not be undervalued because it does not appear in the accounts. Ticket prices, usually set by promoters (often with guidance from schemes), are widely seen by audiences as offering good value for money; they are within most people's reach, yet still raise up to 40% of overall costs.

But there are risks in working on such limited funds. The fees to artists are generally very low: while some well-known musicians can get reasonable fees, the average fee paid to companies by Take Art! in 2002/03 was £425. One highly-rated theatre company with four actors and a stage manager was offering its new tour for £350 per night, all in, despite having no regular public subsidy. The result, inevitably, is that the work is subsidised by the performers. Audiences are frequently surprised to see such excellence in their village hall: they would be astonished to learn how poorly it is rewarded. The limited budgets of unsubsidised companies can affect their work: the difference an outside designer or director might have made is sometimes discernible, though this was not commented on by audiences.

Limited funding also restricts the ability of touring schemes to support promoters. Although some schemes, such as Theatre in the Villages in Buckinghamshire, attend every show, the larger ones cannot, and promoters are used to working without support on the night. If there is a problem, for instance in the company's requirements, they must resolve it themselves, or get on the phone. It is also difficult for scheme managers to spend time identifying new companies, or see work before booking it, while for many schemes, ambitious international tours or new commissions are out of the question: funds may be available, but they do not have the time to put together the proposal. In these circumstances, it is natural for touring schemes to work with villages which have the capacity to respond to their offer. There is insufficient ca-

capacity to help all the promoters who need support to take part, or communities that are not initially interested. The experience of young promoters' schemes illustrates both the potential for reaching beyond the core promoters, and the costs involved.

Limited funding also encourages some promoters to programme safely. Whether they or the village hall funds will have to make good any loss, they are very conscious of the financial risk and some are more comfortable with it than others. Where the council offers a guarantee against loss, as in most of Wales and some English districts, it is easier to try something new. This increases the diversity of touring, encourages existing audiences to try unfamiliar work, and attracts new audiences who have not been interested in previous shows.

These issues raise the question of whether there is enough money in the rural touring system to make it work as well as it might. Clearly, it functions, and does so well; but the ratio of investment to return is not fixed. It is possible that, with a relatively small increase in resources, the rural touring economy would function more efficiently and more effectively.

Public funding and promoter groups

Since the advent of the National Lottery, it has been easier for voluntary groups to raise funds for community projects, and many village arts groups have benefited from this. This has encouraged some to grow and become more ambitious, often with lasting community benefits, not least because it has put the resources directly into their hands. But funding for voluntary action reduces some vulnerabilities at the cost of introducing others. Though they know that nothing should be taken for granted, people can anticipate that a fund which supported their project last year will do so this. As one local organiser explained, *'This year we've got a bigger budget, and we were talking about more marquees, more this, more that, [...] but Awards For All turned us down completely. [...] It's absolute isn't it; they said no, so move on'*. Another village experienced similar difficulties when a local fund decided, late and against expectations, not to offer support: their deficit has had to be shared between the committee members: *'two of the team members have collected materials for a car boot sale, when I come out of hospital I am going to do an auction; [...] some of the others will just write a cheque'*.

These are complex, not to say intractable, issues, as people develop voluntary initiatives, but run the risk, in working with public authorities, of becoming dependent on external resources. They can also find that with resources come other ideas of what they should be doing. The solution is not obvious, from any perspective, but a better understanding of the tensions by some funding agencies would help. For example, they tend not to like guarantees against loss because they involve a lot of administration for small sums, and can tie up funds which may never be spent. But from a voluntary group's point of view, they offer some security without undermining independence, and people take pride in not having to call on the support. It may be time to reconsider the mechanisms by which small sums of cultural funds are directed to voluntary groups, and develop new instruments appropriate for community action today.

6.4 CHALLENGES OF SUCCESS

There has been a strong growth in rural touring in the past 10 years, and more schemes are being developed all the time. The success of the idea, and its rapid expansion, have begun to raise various questions among scheme organisers and promoters, and, though there are no standard solutions, the most important of these issues should be noted.

The audience for rural touring

The principal justification for investing in rural touring is that it enables people with restricted access to live art, and particularly those living in rural areas, to see work on terms comparable to those enjoyed by urban populations. This study has demonstrated that it is very successful in that, since a substantial proportion of the audience would not otherwise see the arts, and many others enjoy a richer and more diverse offer. However, sometimes, especially in easily accessible villages, the audience includes people who have driven from a town. A concert by Kathryn Tickell and Karen Tweed at Hoby (Leicestershire) attracted people from as far away as Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. A promoter in North West Lancashire observed that, over the years he had been putting on shows in the village, the proportion of the audience coming from Bolton and Bury has gradually risen. People have phoned from London to book tickets for village shows in Northamptonshire.

The proportion of non-residents attending village hall productions is still small. The survey shows the audience to be predominantly local, with only 9% of people travelling more than 20 miles; nor can it be assumed that all these have come from towns. Many village halls are, in any case, very pleased to have outside visitors: they bring in funds and fill seats. There is also a pride in putting on something so good that people will travel a long way to see it, and people really enjoy having well-known performers in the programme. For people who live in town, the attractions of village touring are obvious: it is cheap, easy to park, the shows are excellent, and the atmosphere unique: people also appreciate the temporary sense of community.

The future of rural touring depends on this balance being maintained, but that may not be easy as it becomes better known. The season brochures, highly valued by promoters as marketing tools, are improving in quality and distribution, and will reach more people. The very success of the shows is a powerful marketing tool. There may come a time when it will be necessary to widen mechanisms such as pre-booking – as already happens in some Leicestershire villages – to ensure that local people can always get to local shows.

The availability of product

Some rural touring programmers have expressed a fear that good shows are in limited supply, and that, as the numbers of promoters and performances grow, it will be harder to maintain quality, especially in theatre. However, growth has not yet been accompanied by a decline in standards, or in the number of companies booked. On the contrary, experience is encouraging people to extend the range of work they book, particularly internationally, and some artists are performing in village halls on a first visit to Britain. Some theatre companies are moving from small- to mid-scale work, often with the encouragement of funders, but the grass roots continue to attract new artists keen to establish themselves, and well-known artists interested

in the experience they offer. Some people involved in rural touring argue, however, that Arts Councils could do more to nurture high-quality, small-scale work.

In areas such as in contemporary dance or disability arts, there is less small-scale work. The strength of the rural touring network, however, means that it has the capacity to stimulate production in areas it is interested in. It has done this at a regional level – in developing co-operation between schemes in the North and the South West – and nationally, through the Kala Sangam project. By working with the Arts Council, or with orchestras and dance companies who include small-scale work in their programming, NRTF might address perceived deficiencies in the supply of work.

Saturation

It is a truism that people have less time, or more to do, (which amounts to the same thing), than in the past. Certainly the cultural offer, subsidised and commercial, has expanded greatly in the past 30 years: television itself, once seen as a threat to live arts, is threatened in turn by other media. It is possible to imagine a point where the rural touring offer is equally rich, and equally threatened. Too many shows, in too many villages, and the audience may begin to take the experiences for granted: stay in tonight, there'll be something else, somewhere else, tomorrow. So far, the experience of the larger schemes suggests that there is room for growth: in 2003, Artsreach increased live performances by nearly 20% over the previous year, (from 143 to 170), maintaining average audiences of 84 people. We are a long way from saturation, and there are far more villages without access to the arts than there are in the touring network. Nonetheless, part of the power of professional arts in a village hall arises from the sense of occasion, and it is important to nurture the unique experience of each live performance.

Sustainability

The future of individual rural touring schemes is a critical challenge. Many have benefited from long staff continuity, and their success is in good part due to the skills and experience of key managers. Rural touring in Wales has been managed by the same person since its inception, and retirement is not far off: transforming personal knowledge into organisational practice and memory is an enormous challenge, which, if not done well, will have a damaging impact on the service received by community groups and artists. Projects with a single member of staff are specially at risk, though organisational development is taken seriously, and schemes such as Applause (West Kent) and Spot On (Lancashire) show that these issues can be tackled. However, many rural touring schemes will need increased support to help them manage this process over coming years.





7 THE FUTURE



7 THE FUTURE



7.1 THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RURAL TOURING

This study has focused on two distinct, but connected pillars: art and community. It has reported evidence of the distinctive character of the events promoted through touring schemes, and of their impact on those involved, whether artists, promoters, audiences or others. The impact arises from the work's potential to change people, the connections between them, and the arts themselves. Rural touring schemes can bring about change in many ways, including:

- By creating new connections between people, organisations and cultures;
- By creating events with a powerful intellectual, emotional and artistic content;
- By supporting a range of community development processes; and
- By empowering people to make decisions and take action on their own behalf.

A word of clarification may be needed here, since people have been known to confuse the words 'can' and 'will' when looking at programme outcomes. There is nothing inevitable about the outcomes of arts initiatives. The general problems of replicating social interventions, not least on the basis of evaluations, have been well articulated (Pawson & Tilley 1997: 127ff.). The challenges of anticipating the outcomes of creative activity which, of its nature, is intentionally unpredictable, are at least as great. In considering the importance of rural touring to artistic and community development, it is essential to bear in mind that, because some outcomes can be linked to certain activities, it does not follow that the link can be simply reversed and the outcomes achieved by encouraging those activities.

Artistic vibrancy

There has been much focus over the past 20 years on the benefits of the arts to economic and social development, and rightly so, since these are important questions central to how culture functions in society. But the essential purpose of art, as of any other human discipline, is integral to itself. The purposes, values and resources of one discipline should not be subjugated to those of another. Arts practice has many incidental social and economic outcomes, but they are not the purpose of engaging in it. They may encourage those with other goals to take an interest in the arts, and enable partnership where there is a mutuality of purpose, as, for example, between art and education. But unless each side understands the unique value of their discipline, as well as the possibilities and limits of a shared space, such partnerships will be unbalanced and, in the long run, ineffective or worse. There is no point in art practice trying to do what other professions do already; there may be a point in equitable partnership which can lead to innovative forms of practice, respecting the values of each. There is also a point in understanding the impact of arts activity on society, and particularly on those most directly

involved: but that is not the same as trying to engineer that impact, an ethically questionable and practically unlikely aspiration.

Rural touring produces many social outcomes, especially in terms of social cohesion and community development, that are seen as beneficial by those involved. Because rural touring is always a partnership, the objectives of the partners vary: some are concerned with purely artistic matters, others are involved for social reasons, and others see the complementary potential of art and community development. But many things can foster community development, including faith groups, youth clubs, sport, work, school and so on. Activities as different as rugby training and harvest suppers contribute to social life as well as plays or concerts. That does not diminish the value of the arts in this respect, but it underlines the importance of clarifying what they alone contribute – the integral value of arts practice.

Art is a unique part of human experience, concerned with the expression of values and the creation of meaning; it is how people understand, define and re-make their beliefs and concepts of experience. Art's techniques, codes and disciplines, allow people to share their values and meanings, dreams and terrors, with others. Art is conceived, made and responded to through the intellectual, emotional and imaginative tools people have at their disposal and which help make them human. It is, in short, perhaps the most intense, self-conscious, powerful means we have for understanding ourselves: it is nothing we must do to live, and everything we need do to feel alive.

If it is even part of this, art is vital to people, in its own terms. People living in rural communities have the same right of access to art as anyone else, for itself. In interviews, promoters, artists and audience members referred constantly to the personal and social results of artistic experiences, in explaining why performances could be so important to them. The following story, told by a theatre performer, whilst representative only of itself, was also typical of how people see the arts having an effect on themselves and others:

'There was a boy in the audience who related very closely to one of the characters in the story, because his parents had split up and he had to live with his grandmother, and he felt undervalued, and nobody else around him was in the same situation, and I think he got teased because he did not have parents. And one of these characters also did not have any parents but had been looked after by a stepmother, and she did everything for him. And he related to this character so much, it just made him feel so strong. And in fact told his teachers about it, and they wrote me a letter to say how much this boy had benefited. And that is the whole point of theatre for me.'

The importance of this incident is that it illustrates how social outcomes are inseparable from artistic experiences. The child in question was not the focus of the performance, it was not directed at him, or intended to produce a planned effect. A moving theatrical experience, complete and valid in its own terms, allowed him to respond, or not, in complete liberty. It left him to work out for himself what meaning, if any, this had for him. It had value *because he made it have value*. In doing so, he engaged in a creative process of imagination, and that play became an important part of his own story. He might have made something comparable from other experiences, but they would not have had the symbolic or metaphorical character of this play; and they would not have allowed him to re-create the world in the same way.

This child's experience, of an artistic moment and its capacity to bring about social change, is one instance of a process repeated day in, day out, week after week, at performances in communities across the country. It is the heart of rural touring: homemade, and meaningful only because of that.

Community vibrancy

In its 2003 *State of the Countryside* report, the Countryside Agency followed the Rural White Paper in identifying community vibrancy as a key rural policy objective (CA 2003:17). It defined three measures in relation to this: community space, community engagement and community strength. The study has shown the contribution of rural touring to those measures:

- **Community space:** Rural touring helps to keep village halls and other community buildings in use for social and cultural events, raising financial resources, and improving facilities. It supports local events which connect village halls with other local facilities such as schools, pubs and churches.
- **Community engagement:** Rural touring brings people together, before, during and after events, in formal and informal situations. It can strengthen people's sense of belonging and commitment to their community, and foster local confidence. It contributes to social capital, and helps reduce isolation among poor or vulnerable people living in rural areas.
- **Community strength:** Rural touring helps village hall committees and other local organisations work together on events which raise funds and further their aims; it encourages people to volunteer, and contribute to the community. In some cases, it has the potential to drive substantial community development initiatives, leading to the establishment of new voluntary organisations.

The research shows that live performance by professional artists, far from being an optional extra in the lives of rural communities, is an important means for people to involve themselves directly in social life. It has intrinsic artistic value, but it is equally able to contribute to local development, quality of life and community vibrancy.

The value of rural touring schemes

'One of the most effective ways of organising community development, demonstrated by many CDF projects over the years, is establishing and resourcing a long-term, quasi-independent specialist local agency. Control should be shared between communities in the locality and public authorities but should be exercised at an arm's length, with practice guided by professional ethics.'

Community Development Foundation⁵⁹

The 25 year progress of rural touring is a case study of good community development practice. It began with the recognition of a problem: the difficulties faced by many people living in rural areas in participating in the artistic life which others take for granted. The response — in Wales from an arts association, in Lincolnshire and Hampshire, from local government — was not simple provision, but a developmental approach in which local communities were equal partners. The solution developed by these first initiatives has proved to be durable and replicable. Following their success, others established their own schemes. In keeping with a grass-

roots development, there have minor variations in the model, and incremental improvements, but the idea has not changed essentially since the early 1980s.⁶⁰

It has not changed, because like good community development practice, it works. Rather than observing a deficiency which the state must provide, or a demand for the market to supply, it sees rural communities as actors rich in human resources, and able to meet their own needs, when offered appropriate partnership support. The rural touring schemes act as specialist agencies, connecting local people, professional artists and companies, local and national government and public bodies like the Arts Council and the Countryside Agency. Control and accountability vary with structures adopted, but is always shared with the funding agencies as sponsors and local people.

The result has been efficient, economic and effective: it has also been equitable. It has greatly improved access to the arts in rural areas, and fostered local community development which, in some cases, has gone far beyond the promotion of live theatre and music. The growth of rural touring, in which national policy and finance has been responsive rather than directive, is evidence of that success.

7.2 UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS

Characteristics of success

The experience of rural touring schemes will be of interest to anyone concerned with social or arts development in rural areas, to say nothing of urban communities. But if policy-makers are to take the potential of the arts into account, or support their development, they must understand how the outcomes come about. As discussed above, potential and realisation are not the same thing. This section looks at reasons for the success of rural touring in England and Wales, setting out some key aspects on which that achievement is founded.

Partnership

Partnership has been invoked in rural policy since the 1980s, if not before, and it continues to be advocated as a cornerstone in this and other fields (Gallinat 2003:40). For that reason, it may have a somewhat shop-soiled look, especially since its practice does not always live up to the ideal; in particular, the inescapable inequalities of power are rarely acknowledged or taken into account. That said, well-managed, equitable partnerships are the cornerstone of rural touring. Without them, if rural touring could exist at all, it would have very little point.

Partnership connects funding bodies, touring schemes, artists, companies, agents, village hall committees, voluntary arts groups and others. It creates a web of trust on which rests the central connection – between artist and audience. Touring schemes often broker these partnerships, but links develop independently, so that promoters work directly with their local authority or with companies. Because rural touring depends on each partner's contribution, inequalities become much less significant: the council can pay the company, but only the local promoter can ensure there's an audience for them. A fair distribution of risks and rewards is the basis of the empowerment produced by effective rural touring.

Quality

Touring scheme managers, promoters and artists are unanimous in seeing quality as a goal and as the critical factor in success. Audiences feel, just as strongly, that the resulting shows are excellent. There is less unanimity about what quality is, or how it might be described, but people are confident they can recognise it. As far as performance goes, its foundation is technique. For most audiences, this instantly distinguishes professional from the amateur or semi-professional work they also see in the village hall. But it may also encompass ideas of originality and ambition, the sense of seeing something new, challenging or unexpected, (but not *sorecherché* that it begins to exclude). And quality has, or perhaps produces, magic: it creates experiences that change people and become part of their own, shared stories.

But quality extends beyond the performance. It characterises the relationship between promoters, scheme managers and artists, and the trust built as people perform their roles. It governs the administrative, financial and managerial systems they operate. It must guide how the show is marketed, how the audience is received and catered for, the preparation of the venue and every other little thing. Quality in all these areas cannot be commanded: it is fostered by setting high expectations and standards, and empowering people to act autonomously within agreements, stated or understood, which they have negotiated. The challenge for policy is to develop supportive frameworks which can foster such a commitment by reflecting equally high expectations and standards.

Diversity

The diversity of rural touring has arisen from its roots in local interests, so that, around a framework of values, a wide range of ideas and practice has grown. It reflects the diversity of the country and the communities served; Buckinghamshire is not Norfolk, one village is not the next. Since rural touring schemes grow from where they work, rather than as part of a national arts offer, they have a high degree of local ownership. Diversity allows for innovation, as schemes and their partners find ways of working to suit them. Artsreach has an extensive summer workshop programme, while Take Art! has developed an artist's residency model; Arts Alive has a strong film programme, while Black Country Touring is working with urban communities. Good ideas are shared between schemes, especially those with a strong regional identity. The development of the NRTF has enabled a much more effective sharing of practice, and fostered innovative projects, such as the Rural Voices of Kala Sangam.

Diversity extends the artistic offer, giving more artists and companies a chance to work in rural areas and ensuring that the best are picked up by other touring schemes. It encourages artistic experimentation and discovery, and supports local artists with a strong connection to audiences where they live. The richness of the work is illustrated by the 250 or more different companies promoted in the course of each year. This diversity has enabled new schemes, such as Worcestershire's, to begin by finding out how others are working, and adopting appropriate ideas. It empowers touring scheme managers, promoters and companies to be creative and entrepreneurial, responding to new opportunities without becoming opportunistic. Any policy response which encourages standardisation of artistic direction, processes, or even costs, between schemes will be a brake on innovation and development.

Stability

The development of arts organisations is closely linked to the personalities involved, and the smaller the organisation, the greater the impact they will have. This is certainly true of the rural touring schemes, many of which are run by a single person (albeit with management support) and which reflect the interests and values of their staff. It is also notable that many staff have been working in rural arts, and often in rural touring, for a long time. Compared to other small arts organisations, rural touring schemes benefit from a high level of staff continuity. The advantages of long-serving staff include the development of deep knowledge of the promoters and communities, as well as of small scale touring companies, experience of what works (and what does not) in village halls, and the trust between partners which is central to touring. Organisational memory, often hard to secure in small organisations, is strong in rural touring schemes.

There are dangers to this stability, but stagnation was not evident in our study: a healthy rivalry, and the demands of promoters, tend to militate against complacency. More serious, perhaps, is the vulnerability arising from dependence on the skills and experience of a small number of people. The policy challenge is to recognise the critical role of individuals; (and what has been said about touring scheme managers applies also to local authority arts development officers, company administrators and promoters themselves). Success is founded upon the personal input of many people, and that is all but impossible to plan for, though it is possible to create environments in which they can thrive.

Resources

Rural touring is not costly in relation to the total budgets of local government, development agencies or even Arts Councils. At present, the combined contribution of any of these partners amounts to less than half a million pounds annually, across England and Wales. But without those resources, the work could not happen, and the 40% of the financing contributed by users through ticket sales, and the voluntary input, would be lost. The availability of resources from different funds, particularly local government and the Arts Councils, has been essential to the development of the work because it has introduced a broader range of priorities.

It has also kept the financial burden of each partner to a minimum, and, while this has encouraged independence and innovation in the practice of rural touring schemes, the long-term viability of the work at current levels of support is questionable. One factor in its growth has been the willingness of existing funders to increase their support over time. The other has been the emergence of some new sources, like the National Lottery. Where rural touring has become a platform for more substantial community development, the availability of small grants for community groups has been critical. Villages like Terrington, Bergh Apton, Ashbottle, Welborne and others would not have developed so well without access to such funds. This also underlines the importance of making resources available to all those involved in the work: artists and companies, the rural touring schemes themselves, and the communities. There are many ways in which this can be done, but there must be small grant support, appropriate to people's capacity, to enable development of new initiatives. Such resources are essential if the energy, commitment and ideas of people who become involved in rural touring are to be translated into effective arts and community development.

7.3 BUILDING ON SUCCESS

To build or to consolidate

This study of rural touring has been conducted at an opportune moment. The consolidation of NRTF, the growth in the number of schemes and their work, and the renewed Arts Council commitment to touring and the wider arts interests of rural communities, among other things, made 2003 a good time to consider the lessons of 25 years' experience. It is also a good time for those involved to ask how they might, individually or collectively, take their work forward. In the short to medium term, there are at least two possible responses to recent success. The first is to consolidate what has been achieved, by strengthening existing organisations, dealing with current challenges, and continuing to fill gaps in the national map of provision. The second is to do that, and also to consider how the rural touring experience might be extended in areas and to communities it does not yet reach. Those involved will decide, but it may be useful to outline some key issues.

An optimum level of activity

The extent of rural touring varies widely. A well-established and supported scheme such as Lincolnshire's promotes over 200 performances a year; Buckinghamshire, in contrast, with far fewer resources, promotes about 30 shows a year, concentrated into an autumn season. Similar contrasts exist across the country, with promoters in some areas able to put on 3, 4 or 6 events during the year, while others are not sure they will have even a single performance. At this level of activity, promoters struggle to develop a relationship with an audience, or a programme which people look forward to; consequently, they sometimes feel the work would not really be missed if they stopped. This is not a reason for suspending rural promotions in such areas, but for increasing their frequency so that they can fulfil their potential for artistic and community development.

'There was one evening when they saw people that they'd never seen before, who they knew lived in the village but they never saw at any other event, and that was particularly exciting for them because they knew there was something in what they were doing that had filtered through and attracted people to come to see that particular show. I hear that story a lot, and it's usually where the promoter is taking quite a lot of work and is able to put on maybe as many as three or four shows a season – which is a lot – and so they are gradually building an audience, people are talking to each other in the community and people are saying, "You know, you missed a great night at the village hall, next time don't forget, you must come", and the promoter gets more confident, people in the community get more confident in the product, they get feedback which they [act on].'

Scheme manager

The case studies suggest that villages promoting 2 or 3 times a year integrate the shows into the local calendar. Performances begin to add value to one another, in terms of building and developing an audience, and in the more subtle sense of reflecting on one another. Infrequent shows do not produce sustainable benefits for social capital or community development. It is therefore desirable to offer promoters a programme with at least two or three performances a year, and to which other activities, such as workshops or artists' commissions, can be added.

There will be villages that prefer the annual event, and there is no reason to discontinue this: the promoter partnership is always valuable, and ideas may evolve. But those who support rural touring should see that lasting benefits depend on reaching a critical level of activity.

Extending the promoter network

Rural touring has made communities active partners in a programme of activity that depends on negotiation with artists, funders and the schemes themselves. What is seen, where and when, is the outcome of discussions which engage people creatively, and serve diverse needs. It has proved to be particularly suitable for rural communities, which often have relatively high levels of human, social and economic capital on which to draw. With limited resources, schemes have depended on connecting with people who are interested in their offer, and have the capacity to work with them. But there is potential to extend rural touring further, to communities which have not found it easy to respond within the existing model.

Touring schemes have shown that working with local promoters can be effective in rural and urban areas, and with common-interest groups, including disabled people and minority ethnic communities. In these cases, it may be necessary to adapt the model: for example Black Country Touring work with people, such as teachers, who act as promoters in the context of their professions. It may also be necessary to rethink whether, and, if so, how, the relationship with promoters might change over time. In Buckinghamshire, Theatre in Villages is financed by the four district councils; each has specific reasons for supporting rural touring, but they share an ambition to see local promoters develop their skills, with the help of subsidy, and then promote shows without subsidy; elsewhere, full-price shows are an additional offer. It is unwise to be rigid: the level of support needed by villages and promoters varies significantly, as does the value they can produce from the investment. Nonetheless, it may be that some of the stronger communities can be supported more lightly, in order to help poorer or otherwise disadvantaged communities to take part in rural touring at all.

Joint programming

There may also be scope for increasing co-operation between villages and promoting groups. Schemes do put much effort into bringing promoters together to share experiences, both in large meetings and more informally, and those involved value meeting to share experiences with like-minded people. So far, there has been little progress in connecting promoters, or encouraging the development of clusters which could provide greater support, continuity and flexibility than is possible in a single village. The experience of Act'Art, in Seine-et-Marne, shows that programming with village clusters can be beneficial in consolidating audiences and encouraging community co-operation. There are many political and social differences between France and England, as well as practical difficulties, such as co-ordinating the decision-making process of village hall committees, but the benefits may be worth the effort. More complex are the cultural questions, and the strong sense of village identity which sometimes militates against co-operation. This must be respected, but the amalgamation of some rural parishes, albeit for different reasons, suggests that such obstacles can be overcome.

Developing schools work

Although some schemes offer substantial workshop programmes, it is not yet common for such activities to be linked to rural touring. Yet there are good reasons for doing so, particularly as far as village schools are concerned. The natural concentration of arts organisations in towns means that urban schools usually have better access to cultural opportunities than rural ones. In England, the Arts Council's initiative to strengthen connections between artists and schools, Creative Partnerships, has not significantly altered this, despite initiatives in rural parts of Cornwall, Lancashire, Norfolk and elsewhere. The success of schools workshops such as those by Annapurna Dance in County Durham, or Goodson Mbewe in Somerset, indicates the value placed on these opportunities by pupils and staff. Rural touring schemes have the capacity to help ensure that village schools do not miss out.

All schools arts work needs careful planning, but there are some specific points in relation to rural touring, beginning with the suitability of the company to deliver workshops. Not all performers have the interest, aptitude or experience to do so, and some larger companies, recognising this, employ different artists as workshop leaders. Schools work is also easier to plan as part of a tour, since a company spending some days in an area is better able to take on day-time commitments. There are also issues for promoters, some of whom have no interest in extending their work or taking on further responsibilities; for them, the performance is the point. But many are keen to develop better links with the local school, and to encourage both children and parents to come to shows. Doing so effectively can build and extend audiences: Goodson Mbewe's performance in Chilcompton attracted different people from previous music performances because of his school work. If promoters do not have school age children, they can find it hard to connect with networks of parents. Here, the support of the rural touring scheme could make all the difference.

None of these obstacles is substantial, as the success of some schemes and promoters in developing schools work demonstrates; indeed, some junior schools have become successful promoters in their own right, and see rural touring as a valuable way of opening themselves to the wider community. There is potential to develop the value of rural touring and deepen its impact by increasing links with schools and offering children opportunities to work with artists. That does not mean that a performance is not enough: a good arts experience is always sufficient to itself. But it does suggest that, in the right places and with the right approach, some value might be added.

7.4 RURAL TOURING, ART AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

This report has shown that rural and community touring plays a valuable role in extending the quality of access to the arts, and in supporting social cohesion and local development. It also has other positive outcomes, from generating local economic activity, to professional development for artists. But these are not the primary reasons why people are prepared to work for relatively low pay, or voluntarily to make it happen. They do it because they love and enjoy the arts, and, perhaps, because of the kind of community they want to live in. They do it not from benevolence, but because they want to, because they enjoy the excitement, wonder and

pleasure it brings. If rural touring did not do that, few would get involved, no matter how much good it did for the arts or the community.

The positive outcomes are incidental to an activity which has the most compelling inherent value possible: that people like it. Those outcomes are not less important because they are incidental. On the contrary, many of them only occur because people are not trying to make them happen. It is not possible to give someone confidence: but they can get it from achieving something they care about. The best way to empty a village hall would be to tell people that it would be good for them to be there. In rural touring, as in most arts activity, the positive results emerge in the spaces where no-one is paying attention. Even apart from the dubious ethical basis of trying to change others, without their knowledge, through a recreational activity, the attempt is likely to fail.

This may be uncomfortable for policy-makers, given their output-oriented culture. But social goods cannot be commanded, only enabled: the very act of command stifles voluntary action and its outcomes. So what is an appropriate policy response, given that many of the outcomes linked to rural touring are also stated policy objectives of the Arts Council, the Countryside Agency, local authorities, government departments, charitable trusts and others? That is for others to decide, but attempting to engineer from above the outcomes reported here would be inconsistent with an understanding of those outcomes, and the processes by which they come about. Perhaps the wisest approach, in terms of extending the reach of the arts, and supporting rural community development, would be to focus on empowering those involved in touring to do better what they do well: to focus on helping people to connect.



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8 APPENDICES



APPENDICES

A THE NATIONAL RURAL TOURING FORUM IN 2003

The following were active members of the National Rural Touring Forum during the research period:

AIR in G - Arts in Rural Gloucestershire	Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury
Applause Rural Touring	Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells
Arts @ Large	Cherwell
Arts Alive	Shropshire and Herefordshire
Arts Away	Isle of Wight
Arts in Cambs on Tour	Cambridgeshire
Artsreach	Dorset
Black Country Touring	Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton
Carn To Cove	Cornwall
Centre Stage	Leicestershire and Rutland
Cheshire's Rural Arts Network	Cheshire
Creative Arts East	Norfolk
Elements Touring Scheme	Chester le Street, Derwentside, Easington, Sedgefield and Wear Valley,
Essex Community Touring Scheme	Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Colchester, Harlow, Maldon and Thurrock
Full House	West Oxfordshire
Highlights	North Pennines AONB
Hog the Limelight	Hampshire
Lincolnshire Rural & Community Touring	Lincolnshire
Live & Local	Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Solihull and Derbyshire
Night Out: Arts Council of Wales	Wales
Northamptonshire Arts Touring Agency	Northamptonshire
Post Horn Arts	Wiltshire
Razzle	South Gloucestershire
Rural Arts North Yorkshire: On Tour	North Yorkshire
Spot On - Lancashire Touring Network	Lancashire
Suffolk Coastal Arts Network	Suffolk Coast
Take Art!	Somerset
Theatre in the Villages	Buckinghamshire
Vale Rural Touring	Vale of White Horse
Village Ventures	Nottinghamshire
Village Voice	North Devon
Villages in Action	Mid Devon, East Devon and West Devon
West Cumbria Rural Touring Scheme	West Cumbria

Several other schemes were in development, including ArtERY (East Yorkshire), North East Lincolnshire Council, CHAMPLive (North Lincolnshire), City of York Council, AiR Richmondshire Arts Development Agency, Mid Sussex District Council and Worcestershire County Council. Schemes in Mid Bedfordshire and East London were under review.

B COMPANIES PERFORMING WITH NRTF IN 2002

As part of the contextual research, an analysis was made of the season brochures produced by 26 NRTF member schemes; other schemes were active in 2002, but it was not possible to obtain all the relevant publications, and Wales was not included since season brochures are not published. The schemes were: Applause, Arts Alive, Arts Away, Arts in Cambs on Tour, Arts at Large, Artsreach, Village Voice (Beaford Arts), Black Country Touring, Centre Stage Leicestershire, Cheshire's Rural Touring Network, Creative Arts East, Elements Touring, Essex On Tour, Full House, North Pennine Highlights, Hog the Limelight Hampshire, Live & Local, Razzle, Lincolnshire Rural and Community Touring Scheme, Rural Arts On Tour, Rural Arts Wiltshire, Spot On Lancashire, Take Art!, Village Ventures Nottinghamshire, Villages in Action and West Cumbria Rural Touring Scheme.

The review produced a detailed picture of the pattern of activity in rural touring schemes across England, during 2002. Inevitably, these categories are somewhat arbitrary, and some artists would fit in more than one. The concept of jazz, let alone world music, is contestable, and there might be equal debate about whether a particular theatre production is aimed at children specifically, or is simply suitable for all. However, they give some idea of the range of live performance that people living in rural areas see through rural touring schemes.

JAZZ, BLUES & POP

ABB
The Brasshoppers
Michael Jerome Browne
The Classic Buskers
Blue Bishops
Blues Move
Bluesy Susie
Sheena Davis Group
Denham & Graham
Downside
Gordon Giltrap
Bob Hall
Charlie Hearnshaw & Andrew Barrett
Heart of England Jazz Band
Howard Haigh
Eugene Hideaway Bridges
Into the Red
Mukka
Mike Piggott's Hot Club Trio
Brendan Power & Geoff Castle
Martin Speake & Colin Oxley
Oxford Classic Jazz
Ramsey & Vaan's Little Big Band
Soul Commotion
Swing Factory
Tam White
Virtuoso Jazz Trio
Willison, Whitehead & Jacobsen

WORLD MUSIC

AMAR (w. Helen Chadwick)

Baghdaddies
Barachois
Ira Bernstein & Riley Baugus
Black Umfolosi
Brekete
Kevin Brown & Moussa Kouyate
Caliche
Grand Union Orchestra
Dhani
East of Ealing
Eduardo Niebla
Flame Co. (Flamenco)
Flying Gorillas
Hoover the Dog
Irregardless
Joji Hirota Taiko Ensemble
Mala Bajo
Off The Rails
Project Brassens
Shavali & the Kotel Ensemble
Subitango
Szapora
Tashi Lhunpo Monks
Tango Siempre
Tziganarama
Gavin Woods & Stewart Death

CLASSICAL MUSIC

BSO Wind Ensemble
Stephen Buck & Daniel Grimwood
Camerata Brass
Chaconne
Clonter Opera Theatre

The Colingwood Ensemble
 Sarah Field & Maria King
 Fine Arts Brass Ensemble
 Chris Garrick Quartet
 Graffiti Classics
 Hatstand Opera
 Manchester Camerata
 John Mills
 Northern Sinfonia Wind Ensemble
 The Orbestra Ensemble
 Renaissance Alive
 The Ruskin Ensemble
 Sarveena
 Serenata Winds
 The Thalia Ensemble
 Trio Belle Epoque
 Tubulaté
 Nicki & Justin Woodward

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Pauline Cato & Tom McConville
 Coope, Boyes & Simpson
 Pete Coe
 Jenny Crook & Henry Sears
 Jimmy Crowley
 The English Acoustic Collective
 Hilary James & Simon Mayor
 Jiggerypipery
 Bill Jones
 Maire Ni Chathasaig & Chris Newman
 Case Neil Trio
 Red Shed
 Kathryn Roberts & Sean Lakeman
 Roots Quartet
 Leon Rosselson
 The Scorpion Band
 Spinach for Norman
 Striding Edge Ceilidh Band
 Kathryn Tickell & Karen Tweed
 Token Women
 Wren Trust

CABARET & OTHER MUSIC

The Carnival Band
 Celloman
 Cosmotheke (Bakelite Boys)
 Nick Crump
 Dazzling Digits
 King Villa
 Old Rope String Band
 Salisbury Umbrella
 Joe Scurfield
 The Ski Band
 Swervy World
 The Time of Their Lives Theatre Co

Three's Company
 Trisha Lewis
 Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

DANCE

ACE
 Act Dance
 Annapurna
 Assault Events
 Attik Dance
 Bimba Dance
 Blue Eyed Soul
 Drishti
 Jive 2000
 Jiving Lindy Hoppers
 Ludus Dance
 Motionhouse
 Nachda Sansaar
 RJC Dance
 State of Emergency
 Topiary Dance

THEATRE

Bath Theatre Royal
 Birmingham Repertory Theatre
 Blaize
 Box Clever
 Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
 Cartoon de Salvo
 The Cheeky Chappies
 Chennel Theatre
 The Common Players
 Cornish Theatre Collective
 Richard Derrington
 Empty Space
 Forest Forge Theatre Co
 Foursight Theatre Company
 Freehand Theatre
 Fuse Productions
 Highly Sprung
 Hijinx Theatre
 Hunt Roberts Theatre
 Impetus Theatre Co
 Indigo Brave Theatre
 Infinite Number of Monkeys
 Inner State Theatre Co
 Jack Drum Arts
 Kepow Theatre Co
 Kneehigh Theatre
 Live Theatre
 Looking Glass Theatre
 Loudmouth Theatre Co
 Guy Masterton Productions
 Mikron Theatre Company
 Ministry of Entertainment

Miracle Theatre
 Moneypenny Productions
 Msfits Theatre Co
 Murder Mon Cheri
 Naïve Theatre
 New Perspectives Theatre Co
 Nils Ling
 Northampton Theatres Community Touring
 NTC Touring Theatre
 Oddbodies
 Ophaboom
 Christopher Owen
 Oxford Touring Theatre Co.
 Pentabus Theatre Co
 Caroline Parker
 Proteus Theatre Co
 Quondam Theatre Co
 Red Ladder
 Shifting Sands Theatre Company
 Shoebox Theatre Co
 Spike Theatre Company
 Spymonkey
 Talia Theatre
 Tamar Productions
 Theatre Alibi
 Watermill Theatre
 Weird Sisters
 Wildcard Theatre Co
 Women & Theatre
 Works Well Productions
 Zygo Theatre

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Bill Brookman
 Booster Cushion
 Cardboard & String Theatre
 Cleveland Theatre Company
 Cornelius & Jones
 Crow Show
 Jack Drum Arts
 Magic Carpet Theatre
 Moby Duck
 Multi-Story Theatre
 Niladri
 Parachute Theatre Co
 Scat Theatre
 Storybox Theatre
 Tall Stories
 Tam Tam Theatre
 Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah
 Tiebreak Theatre

Toys in the Attic
 Tutti Frutti

PUPPETRY

Brog Puppets
 Clydebuilt Puppet Theatre
 Lempen Puppet Theatre
 Little Angel Theatre Co
 Obelon Art & Puppetry Co
 Piccolo Puppets
 Poppets Puppets
 Presto Puppets
 Puppetcraft

CIRCUS & STREET THEATRE

Circus Berzercus
 Grand Theatre of Lemmings

STORYTELLERS

Lenny Alsop
 Chris Bostock
 Duende
 Jane Flood & Martin Solomon
 Elizabeth Fost
 Barry Herbert
 Bob Jones
 Sid Kipper
 Kala Sangam
 Graham Langley & Katrice Horsley Storytelling
 Café
 Ben Osborne
 Tom Owen
 John Pilkington
 Ray Sargent
 Bonny Sartin
 Chris Smith
 Cat Weatherill
 Shep Wooley

COMEDY

Finetime Fonteyn
 The Funjabis
 Instant Wit
 Mervyn Stutter

WRITERS

Ian McMillan
 Alison Neil
 Tim Laycock

C THE RESEARCH

The research was commissioned by the National Rural Touring Forum, with funds from the Carnegie UK Trust, Arts Council England, the Countryside Agency and several local authorities in the areas where the case studies were conducted.

Research aim

The aim of the research project was 'to identify the social, cultural and economic outcomes of rural arts touring schemes, and what contribution they make to rural communities, by collecting national data on the character, extent and outputs of rural touring work; undertaking nine detailed case studies looking at the work of NRTF member organisations, to learn from a broad range of practice and experience; placing the findings in the wider context of research into the arts in rural areas and broader trends in rural community development; and presenting the findings as a report accessible to practitioners and policy makers concerned with the arts and rural affairs'.

The research

Nine case studies formed the heart of the research, eight in English regions, and one in Wales. All NRTF members were invited to propose part of their work as a case study, and about half responded with suggestions. A selection was made that included a case study in each region, and allowed for the widest range of contrasting situations. Some looked closely at the experience of a small number of villages, some considered issues relating to rural touring practice, such as the partnership with promoters, in a larger number of communities, and others considered broader issues such as access by disabled people or cultural diversity. The selected case studies were:

Region & county	Rural touring scheme	Villages and focus of case study
East Midlands: Lincolnshire	Artservice	Fulstow, Grainthorpe & Saltfleet: arts development in areas designated as 'remote rural'
North West: Cheshire	Cheshire's Rural Arts Network	Bollington, Congleton, Eccleston, Gawsworth, Lower Whitley and Malpas: disabled people's access
East: Norfolk	Creative Arts East	Bergh Apton & Welborne: visual arts touring
North: Cumbria & County Durham	Highlights	Lazonby, Mickleton and St John's Chapel: cultural diversity and rural touring
West Midlands: Staffordshire & Warwickshire	Live & Local	Alton, Brocton, Bulkington, Corley, Eathorpe, Elford, Lighthorne, Marchington, Mavesyn Ridware, Shuttington and Withybrook; the promoter's perspective
Yorkshire	On Tour	Terrington, Kettlesing, Kirby Malzeard, Riccall; community development and the arts
Wales	Night Out	Llanbedr, Denbigh, Deri, Penygraig; rural and community touring in Wales
South West: Somerset	Take Art!	Chilcompton, Batcombe (Ashbrittle, Dulverton, Brushford & Meare)
South: Buckinghamshire	Theatre in the Villages	Amersham Common, Bledlow Ridge, Cholesbury, Dorney, East and Botolph Claydon, Fawley, Gerrards Cross, Granborough, Great Kingshill, Hedgerley, Ley Hill, St Leonard's, Studley Green, Waddesdon, Wingrave; contrasts in urban proximity.

Table 10: Rural touring case studies

Case study research was conducted principally through semi-structured interviews and discussion groups, involving local promoters, their families and helpers; other village hall committee members and volunteers; audience members and other local residents. In different case studies, people with a professional interest in the community or the arts were also interviewed, including local government councillors and officers, teachers, arts professionals and so on; informal discussions were held with many of the artists performing or running workshops. Rural touring scheme staff were also interviewed. All quotations used in this report are from transcribed interviews and discussions, or from the responses to open questions in the audience survey described below. They are reproduced verbatim, though in a few cases grammatical errors, such as inconsistent tenses, have been silently corrected for clarity; other excisions or additions are placed in square brackets.

Contextual research

The case studies were contextualised with other research: a literature review, analysis of touring scheme programmes and review of documentary material provided by schemes, including unpublished records and survey results, the NRTF scheme audits since 2001, promoters' report forms, annual reports etc. Additional research trips were made to touring schemes and villages in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Kent, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire. A visit was made to Seine-et-Marne in France, where interviews were conducted with scheme staff, audiences and artists. Further telephone interviews were also conducted with promoters, arts officers, and with 10 performers and company administrators. An extensive audience survey was conducted: this is reported separately below. A planned survey of students and graduates of the Centre for Local Studies (CLS) at Cheltenham University, intended to provide an independent perspective on rural touring, was unsuccessful; exploratory work was done with the CLS, but, in the event, it was not possible to generate sufficient response and the study was discontinued.

Performances observed

During the course of the study, the following performances were observed:

Company	Show title or type	Place
Theatr Powys	<i>Hansel & Gretel</i>	Llanbedr, Powys
Kathryn Tickell & Karen Tweed	Traditional & Swedish music	Hoby, Leicestershire
Flicks in the sticks	<i>O Brother where art thou?</i>	Lowdham, Nottinghamshire
Annapurna Dance	<i>Namaste</i>	Lazonby, Cumbria
Annapurna Dance	<i>Namaste</i>	St John's Chapel, County Durham
Annapurna Dance	<i>Namaste</i>	Mickleton, County Durham
Goodson Mbewe	Zambian dance & music	Chilcompton, Somerset
The Bakelite Boys	<i>Singing the Century</i>	Saltfleet, Lincolnshire
Batinka	East European & Jewish music	Terrington, Yorkshire
Old Rope String Band	Folk music and comedy	Dove Holes, Derbyshire
New Perspectives	<i>Bowled a Googly</i>	Styrrup, Nottinghamshire
Creative Arts East	<i>In Print</i>	Welborne, Norfolk
	<i>Art & Craft Exhibition</i>	Grainthorpe, Lincolnshire
New Perspectives	<i>Last Train to Nibroc</i>	Styrrup, Nottinghamshire
Luke Daniels & Jonathan Preiss	Traditional & Brazilian music	Grainthorpe, Lincolnshire
Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain		West Bridgford, Notts.
Richard Derrington	<i>Shakespeare's Other Anne</i>	Headon-cum-Lound, Notts.
Fresco Theatre	<i>Baobabs don't grow here</i>	Batcombe, Somerset
Ray Sargent	<i>Two Victorian Tales</i>	Wingrave, Buckinghamshire
Forest Forge Theatre Company	<i>Raising the Roof</i>	Ley Hill, Buckinghamshire
Circus Berzercus	Children's Circus	Fulstow, Lincolnshire

NTC	<i>The Stars Look Down</i>	Lowdham, Nottinghamshire
All Souled Out	Soul tribute band	Riccall, Yorkshire
Sheena Davis Band	<i>Smile</i>	Kettlesing, Yorkshire
Brekete	Explosion	Lighthorne, Warwickshire
Storybox Theatre	<i>The Tin Soldier</i>	Welborne, Norfolk
Bergh Apton Community Arts	<i>The Solar System</i>	Bergh Apton, Norfolk
Cat Weatherill	<i>Ghost: whispers in the dark</i>	Stapleford, Nottinghamshire
Polly Howat	<i>Celestial Festival</i>	Bergh Apton, Norfolk
John Spiers, Jon Boden, Nancy Kerr & James Fagan		Calverton, Nottinghamshire
The Jiving Lindy Hoppers		Malpas, Cheshire
Théâtre de la Paillasse		La Ferté Gaucher, France
Hanby & Barrett	<i>Your village no longer exists</i>	Gamston, Nottinghamshire
The 18th Century Concert Orchestra		Waddenhoe, Northants
Mtiebi	Georgian Choir	Caunton, Nottinghamshire
Sid Kipper	<i>Christmas Cod-Pieces</i>	West Bridgford, Notts.
Theatr Bara Caws	<i>Dulce Domum</i>	Denbigh, Denbighshire
The Cheeky Chappies	<i>Treasure Island</i>	Shuttington, Warwickshire
Phillips Entertainment	<i>Aladdin</i>	Deri, Caerphilly
Ndere	Ugandan dance and music	Penygraig, Rhondda Cynon Taff
Dynion	Welsh contemporary dance	
Bill Jones	Traditional music	Bergh Apton
Cartoon de Salvo	<i>Meat & Two Veg</i>	Gunthorpe, Nottinghamshire
Baker's Fabulous Boys	Bluegrass music	Eccleston, Cheshire
The Homemade Orchestra	Jazz and classical fusion	Alvingham, Lincolnshire
Talia Theatre	<i>Chekhov Vaudevilles</i>	Brushford, Somerset
Niki McCretton	<i>Throw me a bone</i>	Meare, Somerset

Review meetings

For each case study, a 5,000-6,000 word discussion document was prepared, outlining the provisional findings, and circulated to those who had contributed to the research. A meeting was held in each region bringing together promoters, residents, funders, touring scheme staff, and others, to comment on and debate these findings. Nine of these events were held, and they provided valuable opportunities to test the preliminary findings against people's actual experience, and to further develop the researchers' thinking and knowledge of. Two day-long seminars were held to enable the research team to share and discuss interim conclusions.

The audience survey

The audience survey was distributed at shows in Ashbrittle, Batcombe, Bergh Apton, Calverton, Chilcompton, Constantine, Deri, Eathorpe, Eathorpe Lemmings, Eccleston, Fulstow, Grainthorpe, Headon-cum-Upton, Kettlesing, Lazonby, Ley Hill, Llanbedr, Mickleton, Penygraig, Portesham, Saltfleet, Shuttington, St John's Chapel, Terrington, Wadenhoe, Welborne and Wingrave. These shows represented a cross-section of rural touring work, including music (48%), theatre and storytelling (41%), dance (19%) and visual art (4%); 15% was specifically aimed at children, and 22% was culturally diverse work.

There was a combined audience of 2,296 people at these shows, 994 of whom completed and returned a survey form – an overall response rate of 43.3%; (within this figure, there were wide variations from place to place, ranging from 9% to 86%.) The audience survey therefore includes a substantial proportion of the audience, and gives a useful account of those attending village shows, and their opinions.

Men are under-represented in the sample: observation showed that they usually made up more than the third of those present evident from the survey. Perhaps they were more reluctant to fill in forms, or

stood back, like Ted Hughes' Moortown farmers, 'as if they were no such fools/To be caught interested in anything'.⁶¹ Certainly, between couples, it was often the woman who completed the form. Even so, at least 332 men and boys did contribute to the survey; others, of course, were involved in interviews and discussions, where there was no noticeable reluctance to express a view.

Some allowance must be made for a possible tendency towards generosity on the part of audiences, not least out of loyalty to a service they clearly value highly. Judging by the very similar views expressed in interviews, any bias in this direction reflects a genuine appreciation of the chance to see high quality work locally and at low cost. Recognising that it depends heavily on voluntary work, professional support and public funding, people were often keen to communicate their gratitude to those involved: promoters, touring scheme staff and local council. There was no significant difference between the qualitative judgements expressed in the survey, whether in quantifiable form or in written comments, and those of audience members in interviews or informal conversation, when people were not aware of the researcher's professional interest. While the precise percentages reported here should be viewed cautiously, they accurately reflect people's enthusiasm for the shows they experienced.

Although the survey followed the same basic form throughout, because it was used over the 12 months of case study research, opportunities were taken to add questions which had emerged from interviews: e.g. opinions of village change. Other questions, for example about the venue, were dropped to allow for such changes. Following a pilot phase in Cumbria and County Durham, minor changes were also made to some phrasing. Finally, in some villages, specific questions of direct relevance to local activities were sometimes included. Consequently, not all questions were asked of all respondents. The following tables report the main results of the audience survey, giving in each case the total number of respondents to each question, with the number of potential respondents in brackets below.

Opinions of the event

The survey began by asking people to assess the artistic experience on a 1 - 5 ranking.

What did you think of tonight's performance?							
Please circle the number that best reflects your view with 1 as worst and 5 as best.							
	1	2	3	4	5		Respondents
<i>Boring</i>	6	16	53	216	649	<i>Entertaining</i>	939 (994)
	0.6%	1.7%	5.6%	23%	69.1%		
<i>Poorly-performed</i>	1	10	24	149	751	<i>Well-performed</i>	935 (994)
	0.1%	1%	2.5%	16%	80.4%		
<i>Off-putting</i>	8	13	94	272	488	<i>Involving</i>	874 (994)
	0.9%	1.4%	10.8%	31.1%	55.8%		
<i>Un-ambitious</i>	4	5	67	157	345	<i>Ambitious</i>	577 (650)
	0.7%	0.9%	11.5%	27.2%	59.7%		
<i>Forgettable</i>	17	14	81	263	548	<i>Memorable</i>	922 (994)
	1.8%	1.5%	8.8%	28.5%	59.4%		

Table 11: People's opinions of the event (Audience Survey)

They were then asked to say how it compared with their expectations; in some cases, this followed a question about their initial expectations.

Was it better or worse than you expected?	Worse	The same	Better	Respondents
	19	207	705	931
	2%	22.2%	75.7%	(967)

Table 12: Comparison with people's expectations (Audience Survey)

This was followed by open questions in which people were asked to describe their impression of the performance, or to say what were its best and/or worst aspects.

Given the common expectation that arts experiences have an impact on people, respondents were then asked whether the experience had made them feel differently about anything. Those answering 'Yes' were asked to say what: 322 (97%) gave some explanation of how the event had changed their feelings.

Has it made you feel differently about anything?	No	Not sure	Yes	Respondents
	357	199	331	887
	40.2%	22.5%	37.3%	(994)

Table 13: Changes in people's feelings (Audience Survey)

Attendance at the arts

The survey also asked people about their attendance at the arts locally and elsewhere:

Have you seen professional arts elsewhere in the last 12 months?	No	Not sure	Yes	Respondents
	319	14	599	932
	34.2%	1.5%	64.3%	(967)

Table 14: People's attendance at the arts in the past year (Audience Survey)

People who answered 'Yes' were asked to say where: most had been to nearby market towns and cities, but a proportion had seen the arts in London and in other more distant places. There were some differences between those answering 'Yes' or 'No' to this question; for instance, those who had not seen the arts being much more likely to live in the village where the event was taking place.

	Regular arts attenders	Non-attenders
Live in the village	26%	41%
Disabled	3%	6%
Working	64%	55%
Retired	24%	32%

Table 15: Characteristics of arts attenders and non-attenders; (Audience Survey)

In some places, people were asked whether they had seen the arts in the village hall before; a little more than half had done so.

Have you seen the arts here in the last 12 months?	No	Not sure	Yes	Respondents
	161	6	199	366
	44%	1.6%	54.4%	(382)

Table 16: People's attendance at local arts events in the past year (Audience Survey)

People were also asked why they had decided to come to the show: 54% (541 respondents) gave reasons for attending; these results, like those of other open questions, are reflected in the body of the report.

Opinions of the venue

In the earlier stage of the study, the audience survey included questions about the village hall as a venue, and people's views of the 'customer care' aspects of the event:

How would you describe the event as a whole? Please circle the number that best reflects your view with 1 as worst and 5 as best.						
	1	2	3	4	5	Respondents
Unwelcoming	1	1	14	58	207	Friendly 280 (288)
	0.4%	0.4%	5%	20.5%	73.8%	
Uncomfortable	2	9	56	83	117	Comfortable 266 (288)
	0.8%	3.4%	21.1%	31%	43.8%	
Expensive	4	1	30	68	167	Value for money 269 (288)
	1.5%	0.4%	11.2%	25.1%	61.9%	
Disorganised	3	3	21	82	159	Well-organised 267 (288)
	1.1%	1.1%	7.9%	30.5%	59.4%	

Table 17: People's attendance at the arts in the past year (Audience Survey)

Village change

Later in the research period, a question about local change was added to the survey. The survey included this question at Ashbrittle, Batcombe, Bergh Apton, Calverton, Constantine, Eathorpe, Ecclestone, Fulstow, Grainthorpe, Headon-cum-Upton, Kettlesing, Ley Hill, Llanbedr, Portesham, Saltfleet, Shuttington, Wadenhoe and Wingrave.

Do you think the village has changed since you have lived here?	No	Not sure	Yes	Respondents
	42	25	147	214 (552)
	19.6%	11.7%	68.7%	
Median age of respondents	44 yrs	28 yrs	57 yrs	
Median length of residence	5 yrs	10 yrs	21 yrs	

Table 18: Views of village change (Audience Survey)

People who answered 'Yes' were asked to say in what ways; these views are reflected in the body of the report. A relatively high proportion of those who were asked did not answer the question (61%); almost all these did not live in the village.

The audience

The survey also included basic questions about the individuals responding, including age, sex, occupation and so on:

Are you...	Female	Male	Respondents
	614	332	946 (994)
	64.9%	35.1%	

Table 19: Sex of audience members (Audience Survey)

Are you...	Disabled	Not disabled	Respondents
	28	791	819 (994)
	3.4%	96.6%	

Table 20: Disability among audience members (Audience Survey)

People were also asked '*How would you describe your ethnic or cultural background?*', and a wide variety of responses were provided, as described in the body of the report: 242 people (24.3%) did not answer this question.

	<i>Working</i>	<i>Not working</i>	<i>Looking for work</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
Are you...	489	34	10	955 (994)
	51.3%	3.4%	1.0%	
	<i>Retired</i>	<i>Looking after family</i>	<i>Full-time education</i>	
	215	33	175	
	22.5%	3.3%	18.3%	

Table 21: Occupations of audience members (Audience Survey)

People were also asked: '*If you are working, what is your job, (or former job if retired)?*'. Their answers to this question provided the basis of the occupational analysis in Figure 6. They were also asked how they travelled to the show, and who, if anyone, they came with.

	<i>On foot</i>	<i>By car</i>	<i>By bus</i>	<i>By bike</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
Did you come...	179	723	69	6	977 (994)
	18.3%	74.0%	7.1%	0.6%	

Table 22: Mode of travel to the venue (Audience Survey)

	<i>Family</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Alone</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
Did you come with...	289	157	103	53	602 (613)
	48.0%	26.1%	17.1%	8.8%	

Table 23: Audience social groups (Audience Survey)

In addition to the open questions already mentioned, the survey form concluded by inviting people to '*add any other thoughts about touring arts performances like this one*', allowing half the sheet for people's comments. In all, 581 people (58.5%) took the opportunity to explain their views of rural touring further, often writing at length about its value to them.

The research team

The research was undertaken by a small team, co-ordinated by François Matarasso. Phyllida Shaw undertook case studies in the North West, West Midlands and Southern regions; Helen Denniston and Emma Martin undertook the North case study; and Anselma Gallinat, based at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR) at Glasgow University, undertook the literature review and some artist interviews; the remaining case studies and other research was undertaken by François Matarasso. Research into theatre touring in Scotland was undertaken independently by Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion at CCPR, and made available to this study as part of the background; a report on that work is published separately.

D ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research was commissioned by the National Rural Touring Forum, and has benefited from the generous cooperation of individual touring schemes and the NRTF office. It was financed by the Carnegie UK Trust and the Countryside Agency; individual case studies were supported by Arts Council England regional offices (East Midlands, North East, North West, South & South East, South West, West Midlands

and Yorkshire), the Arts Council of Wales' Strategy Unit, Cheshire County Council, East Lindsey District Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Mendip District Council, Norfolk County Council, Queens Hall Arts, Somerset County Council and Wycombe District Council. We would like to record our gratitude to all these bodies for their support, without which the research would not have been possible,

We are very grateful to the following people for their generous assistance with the research:

Promoters and supporters: Sue Green (Alton); David Stagg (Amersham Common); Avril Silk (Ashbrittle); Anne Page & Judy Stober (Batcombe); Roy Flowerdew, Frances Hubbard, Lorrie Lain-Rogers, John Ling, Pat Mlejnecky & Kevin Parfitt (Bergh Apton); John Reeves (Bledlow Ridge); Jose Spinks (Bollington); Susan Hawkins (Brocton); Mandy Eddy, Darrell and Janet Buckley, Fiona Wyatt and Brian Liggins (Bulkington); Sue and John Crawford (Calverton); Dawn Tilling (Castle Cary); Dawn Jackson & Max Miller (Chilcompton); Paddy and Windsor Thomas (Cholesbury); Paul Drage (Congleton); Tod Welch (Constantine); Dave Durant (Corley); Gaynor Morgan Rees (Denbigh); Dave Williams (Deri); Graham Easton (Dorney); Andrew Cherry (Doveholes); Jan Ross (Dulverton); Sue Burt & David French (Eathorpe); Susan Lefebvre (East and Botolph Claydon); Glyn Jones (Eccleston); Sue Watkins (Elford); Guy Andrews (Fawley); Nicola Pike (Fulstow); David Morten (Gawsworth); Gerry Hoare (Gerrards Cross); Peter Morris (Grainthorpe); Davina Thorogood, Granborough; Nicola and Nicholas Nisbet (Great Kingshill); Norman Coombs and Gladys Pratt (Hedgerley); Janet Lansdon (Headon-cum-Lound); Margaret Hardcastle (Kettlesing); Neil Fraser & Audrey Mackenzie (Kirby Malzeard); Sheila Fletcher (Lazonby); Penny Amis (Lighthorne); Jo Blackburn, Graham Blackburn, Alan Palmer & Deidre Trottman (Llanbedr); Caroline Hebblethwaite (Lower Whitley); Edel Rae & Sally Sharp (Malpas); Mike and Jill Williamson (Marchington); Jo Morris (Mavesyn Ridware); Stan Walinets (Mickleton); Margaret Jervis, Richard Morgan and Miranda Ballin (Penygraig); Carol Hewin (Riccall); Rebecca Dearden (Ruyton XI Towns); Liz Gill (St John's Chapel); Jonathan Bright and George Ogden (St Leonard's); Tricia Wilson, Geoffrey Wilson & Denis Long (Saltfleet); Kurt Kovach (Shuttington); Geoffrey Heat, Philippa Filbert and Sue Wilkins (Studley Green); Hilary Cartmel (Styrrup); Anita Barber, Gerry Bradshaw, Lesley Bradshaw, Shirley Drury, Janet Goodwill, Elaine Hubery, Gerard Naughton, Jane Naughton, Sally Smith & Elaine Taylor (Terrington); Andrew Langton (Waddesdon); Mike Webb & Fred Elson (Welborne); Sylvia and Ken Francis (Wingrave); and Melanie Hydon (Withybrook).

Rural touring scheme managers and staff: Sian Allen, Dawn Badland, Liz Bennet, Fiona Clayton, Amanda Glanville, Angie Green, Jane Griffiths, Steve Johnston, Cecilia Kean, Myriam Kybird, John Laidlaw, Frances Land, Ralph Lister, Ann McChesney, Carolyn Murray, Sarah Peterkin, Alice Porter, David Porter, John Prior, Jane Pugh, Sue Roberts, Sue Robinson, Ian Scott, Barbara Slack, Claire Smith, Nicky Stainton, Ellen Thorpe, Roger Werner and Alistair Winch.

Artists, administrators and company members: Mike Bettinson, Linda Brown, Rod Burnett, Chris Connaughton, Tim Daling, Finetime Fonteyn, Val Hill, George Hinchcliffe, Polly Howat, Gaynor Lougher, Felicity Jones, Fiona Knowles, Gaynor Rees-Morgan, Louise Richards, Robert Rickenberg, Annette Rolston, Emma Routledge, Stephen Smart, Gavin Stride, Mervyn Stutter, Chris Sugden, and Kirsty Young.

Other people concerned with rural touring: Judith Sefton (Access Unlimited); Paul Fournier and Geneviève Hollemaert (Act'Art) Alison Andrews, Michaela Butter, Jo Day, Peter Knott, Kate Ling & Sue Timothy (Arts Council England); John Prior and Ann Kellaway (Arts Council of Wales); Margaret Rooney (Caerphilly County Borough); Stephanie Thomas (Caradon District Council); Pierre-Marie Cuny (Conseil Général de Seine-et-Marne); Jennifer Lowe (Cornwall County Council); Steve Garrett (Cultural Con-

cerns); Carol Leithley (Cumbria County Council); Kat Fishwick (East Lindsey District Council); Irene Faith (Eden Arts); Carol Connelly (Forest-In-Teesdale School); Nicola Epps (Mendip District Council); Gail Ferrin (Festival of Many Cultures); David M. Lambert (Lincolnshire County Council); Carol Bell (Northern Rock Foundation); Louise Ingham (Powys County Council); Geoff Keys (Queens Hall Arts Centre); Angela Hayward (Rural Arts North Yorkshire); Neil Hillier (Selby District Council); Sue Isherwood (Somerset County Council); Rosie Cross (Teesdale District Council); Fiona McCardle (Wolsingham School); Alison Seabrooke (Regen Centre, Riccall); Roger Fox (Voluntary Arts Network); Stephen Wiper (Wear Valley District Council); Peter Harding (Welsh Assembly Government); Jayne Bradley (Wycombe District Council); Sibyl Burgess; Dick and Frances Carbutt; Keith Ewen; Gerda Fewster; Christine Foster; Robina Goodlad; John Goodwood, Laurie Howes; Bob Laking; Nick Jones; Cllr. Keith Morgan; Rose Morris; Alan Powell; Jack Powell; Margaret Powell, Madelaine Sutcliffe; Annie Thomas, Pat Tyson; Hewlen Wall, Cllr. Richard Wainwright and Gill Williams.

A large number of people were informally interviewed, or otherwise engaged in conversation about their views of rural touring at performances, exhibitions, workshops and on other occasions. By the nature of these encounters, it is not possible to thank them individually here, but we are grateful to the many audience members, residents, artists and other people who spoke to us informally about their experiences of the arts, and life, in villages. A final word of thanks to those whose contribution is not acknowledged here: we hope that you find yourselves represented in the report itself.

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NOTES

- ¹ Mamet (2001) pp.22-3.
- ² Jacobs (1984) p.119.
- ³ The study was undertaken in co-operation with the Centre for Research in Cultural Policy at Glasgow University, who researched and wrote the Literature Review, interviewed some artists and provided valuable background on rural touring in Scotland. They planned and conducted a parallel, but independent, historical study of theatre touring in Scotland since the early 1970s.
- ⁴ Cf. Stendhal *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Dumas *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, Balzac *Illusions Perdues*, Flaubert *L'éducation sentimentale*, Maupassant *Bel-Ami* etc.
- ⁵ *Murder in the Red Barn*, Tom Waits, Warner Chappell Music Ltd. 1992; films like *Psycho*, *Straw Dogs* and *The Wicker Man* among many exploit the town-dweller's fear of the countryside's primeval forces.
- ⁶ Matarasso 2001: 23-4
- ⁷ [www.e-consultation.net/ru/static/background.asp\[31/3/2004\]](http://www.e-consultation.net/ru/static/background.asp[31/3/2004])
- ⁸ [www.acre.org.uk/\[3/23/2004\]](http://www.acre.org.uk/[3/23/2004])
- ⁹ The extent to which this data accurately represents the massive number of casual workers, legal and illegal, involved in some areas is another question.
- ¹⁰ E. M. Forster, *Howard End*, London 1920 p. 355
- ¹¹ Euan McKenzie, a resident of Applecross peninsula in Scotland, speaking on 'Open Country', broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 21 February 2004. (www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/opencountry.shtml accessed 21/2/2004).
- ¹² In the East Midlands, internet use in rural areas grew so rapidly between 2002 and 2003 that 15% more of the rural population uses the Internet than the urban population; www.countryside.gov.uk/regions/eastMidlands/profile/economic.asp (4/4/2004)
- ¹³ Changes in reporting conventions between the 1988 and 1998 surveys may reflect more accurate reporting in the second survey (ACRE 1998:46).
- ¹⁴ www.ruralmedia.co.uk/www.littoral.org.uk/
- ¹⁵ www.prideofplace.org.uk/index.html
- ¹⁶ See Hamilton & Scullion (2004).
- ¹⁷ The number of schemes founded between 2000 and 2004 is likely to rise, as initiatives planned by York and Mid Sussex Councils begin; the following schemes are not included in this table, since it was not possible to identify starting dates: Arts in Rural Gloucestershire, Village Voice and East Thames Touring.
- ¹⁸ www.hogthelighthouse.co.uk/hosting.html (accessed 16/2/04)
- ¹⁹ In early 2004, there were about 95 companies and individuals on the website, including 30 companies in the drama section (including 6 Cymraeg, 4 in dance/physical theatre, 2 in music theatre, 6 in puppets, 9 in storytellers, 5 in variety/music hall, 18 in chamber music, 8 in folk/roots music, 5 in jazz, 3 in operatic concert, and 4 in popular song; there were also several agencies or organisations like TRAC, which act as gateways to a large number of artists.
- ²⁰ www.northpennines.org.uk/index.htm (accessed 25/2/04).
- ²¹ A generic artistic policy for an NRTF-style rural touring scheme may be found in King 2003, p.41.
- ²² www.nrtf.org.uk/
- ²³ Maitland (2002).
- ²⁴ In these areas other aspects of rural arts development is undertaken through other means: for example, in Wales, there are agencies supporting visual arts residencies, literature, dance and so on.
- ²⁵ In terms of numbers of performances in 2002/03, the seven English schemes which produced over 100 performances were Arts Alive (Herefordshire & Shropshire), Artsreach (Dorset), Take Art! (Somerset), Live & Local (Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Solihull and Warwickshire), Lincolnshire Rural and Community Touring Scheme, Villages in Action (Devon) and Village Ventures (Nottinghamshire).
- ²⁶ Artsreach produces an annual *Summer Supplement* detailing its 'creative holiday activities for young people all over Dorset'; in 2003, these included 40 children's workshops and 5 outdoor family shows.
- ²⁷ Based on information supplied to NRTF by 27 member schemes: since a number of, mostly smaller schemes, did not provide data for the survey, the actual number of promoting groups is certainly higher, probably by 200-300.
- ²⁸ Live & Local, *Promoter & Audience Research (2001-2002)*, unpublished.
- ²⁹ See Appendix B; Wales is not included in this survey because no season brochures are published.
- ³⁰ Based on audiences figures for 25 of 33 member schemes.

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- ³¹ Three shows had bigger audiences than this, but they were at a community college and the Regal Theatre in Minehead, venues with a bigger capacity.
- ³² The survey is described in more detail in the appendix.
- ³³ NRTF (2004).
- ³⁴ The increasing demand for street lighting was a cause of tension between incomers and established residents, among others, which was mentioned during the course of the research.
- ³⁵ Figures relating to income and expenditure in this section are based on data provided to NRTF by the following schemes: Applause, Arts Alive, Arts at Large, Arts Away, Arts in Cambs on Tour, Artsreach, Black Country Touring, Carn to Cove, Centre Stage Leicestershire, Cheshire's Rural Touring Network, Creative Arts East, Essex On Tour, Full House, Lincolnshire Rural and Community Touring Scheme, Live & Local, North Pennine Highlights, Razzle, Rural Arts On Tour, Rural Arts Wiltshire, Spot On Lancashire, Take Art!, Theatre in the Villages, Village Ventures Nottinghamshire, Villages in Action and West Cumbria Rural Touring Scheme. These figures therefore represent an incomplete account of public investment in rural touring, though most of the larger schemes are included. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £500, for ease of comprehension, and to avoid a misleading impression of absolute accuracy: because of the different financial, administrative and legal structures of touring schemes, it is impossible to capture this data completely.
- ³⁶ 5,849 volunteers working 20 hours per show at £4.50 is £526,410; between them, they promote an average of 1.925 shows each year, so the value of their annual labour is £1,013,339.
- ³⁷ Ruth Mackenzie, Chichester Festival Theatre, quoted in *The Independent* 20 May 2004; <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/theatre/features/story.jsp?story=522936> (22 May 2004).
- ³⁸ Interim revised estimates for England, 2001 Census: source Office of National Statistics.
- ³⁹ The fact that one village hall comedy show degenerated into a physical confrontation between the comedian and members of the audience may indicate the importance of choosing well.
- ⁴⁰ P. G. Wodehouse (1923) *The Inimitable Jeeves*, London, p.174.
- ⁴¹ ACRE (1999), p.23.
- ⁴² *The Independent*, 23 January 2004
- ⁴³ www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=447; (accessed 1/8/2004).
- ⁴⁴ Supplementary table on Welsh language skills: Census 2001, Key Statistics for Assembly Constituencies and Assembly Electoral Regions for the National Assembly for Wales, Office of National Statistics www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=67086Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=272; (accessed 1/8/2004).
- ⁴⁵ Dorothy Sayers, (1937) *Busman's Honeymoon*, London, p. 240.
- ⁴⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room' (1802).
- ⁴⁷ Williams (1983), p. 76
- ⁴⁸ Williams (1983), p. 75.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted in Simmons (1997), p. 21.
- ⁵⁰ Simmons (1997), p. 22.
- ⁵¹ [www.cdf.org.uk/html/whatis.html\[23/3/2004\]](http://www.cdf.org.uk/html/whatis.html[23/3/2004])
- ⁵² ACRE (1999) p.42; (italics added).
- ⁵³ In 2003/04 Take Art! promoted 102 subsidised and 33 unsubsidised performances; there was demand for further unsubsidised work from village promoters, but the team felt they could not administer any more work.
- ⁵⁴ www.btinternet.com/ggbradshaw/terringtonartsweb/index.html
- ⁵⁵ www.riccall.co.uk/
- ⁵⁶ The French Conseil Général is broadly equivalent to an English County Council; www.actart77.com/htm/fr/index.html
- ⁵⁷ Sennett (2003), p. 262.
- ⁵⁸ Attwood (2003) p.55ff.
- ⁵⁹ [www.cdf.org.uk/html/whatis.html\[23/3/2004\]](http://www.cdf.org.uk/html/whatis.html[23/3/2004])
- ⁶⁰ In different versions, it has also been developed in many other countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia among others.
- ⁶¹ Ted Hughes, 'The formal auctioneer', in *Moortown Diary* (1979), Faber, London.
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Made with the financial support of the Carnegie UK Trust, the Countryside Agency, Arts Council England, the Arts Council of Wales, Cheshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Somerset County Councils, East Lindsey, Mendip and Wycombe District Councils and Queens Hall Arts

