On the Origins of

# st.**BOTOLPH'S**

## LIBRARY–HACK–MAKER SPACE

*Envisioning the library of the future
– from the ground up*

common
**FUTURES**

ANNEMARIE NAYLOR | 2013

# ABOUT US

**Common Futures is a modest new venture working with the public, private and third sectors to explore and kick at the boundaries of the community ownership and management landscape. In the first instance, we are working with The Creative Coop to support:**

*Our Digital Community:* a DCLG-funded action research and learning programme to explore digital asset and enterprise development by/for communities working with 20 VCS organisations.

*Fibre Gar-Den, Digital Merthyr & Digital Lyme:* community-led telecommunications network initiatives sponsored by the Social Investment Business, Nominet Trust and the Adventure Capital Fund.

*Enterprising Libraries:* community managed library/hack/maker spaces in Essex and Devon with the Carnegie Trust and Arts Council England.

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# PROLOGUE

**In *Where Good Ideas Come From* [2010], Steven Johnson describes seven patterns of innovation: the adjacent possible, liquid networks, the slow hunch, serendipity, error, exaptation (a shift in the function of a trait during evolution) and platform building.**

Whether he's describing the limitations imposed upon our thinking by the sheer number and range of ideas we encounter over time, the dense and diverse social networks in our cities that lend speed and impetus to innovation, or the importance of trial, error and luck – his patterns resonate with us as we move to explain the origins of our 'library-hack-maker' space in St Botolph's, Colchester.

Johnson writes about each innovation pattern in relation to the work of Charles Darwin as he prepared to write his most famous work – On the Origin of Species. He also points to the importance of maintaining detailed and indexed notes when pioneering, because he recognises that disparate and diffuse discoveries are ordinarily made over a period of years before they can be 'assembled' in such a way as to render innovation possible.

We are not Charles Darwin. We have not stumbled upon a theory to rival 'evolution' (in fact, consider us 'unbelievers'). And, more recently, we have identified kindred initiatives where 'library-hack-maker spaces' are concerned – such that elements of what follows may no longer be considered 'innovative' in some quarters.

*Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who built a total of 2,509 Carnegie libraries between 1883 and 1929*

Nonetheless, it is important to explain why we are now doing what we are doing – how we are 'envisioning the library of the future from the ground up' – because government and key stakeholders like the Carnegie Trust are engaged in parallel activities, as the value of our public libraries is called into question against a backdrop of austerity and digital disruption, and we 'the users' would wish to become fully-fledged 'contributors' to our libraries going forward.

We have no indexed notes, so we have opted instead to co-produce short diary-style entries in retrospect, in an attempt to clarify our concept for broad-ranging audiences. This account of our thinking and doing process over a number of years is intended to serve as a first contribution to St Botolph's Give-Get Library: it is a first attempt at publishing 'warts and all' what some of the people in our community have learned, now know how to implement and are doing – something that will doubtless be subject to iteration over time.

# THE GERM OF AN IDEA

**Our story begins in Burnley, at the Old Colne Road Library, where I met volunteers from the Thursby Gardens Community Action Group (TGCAG) in May 2009.**

Their tale appeared familiar to me as they sought to take ownership of the former library building to offer a neutral and safe space for young as well as older people living in a multi-cultural community: http://tinyurl.com/nvh3whd but, there was the germ of something different.

Burnley was, at that time, BNP territory – a community divided. The former Labour Government had invested heavily in 'cohesion programmes' in the hopes of effecting some measure of change, but change can only come from within (not without) communities themselves, and those top-down programmes had changed very little. TGCAG representatives explained that they sought to provide a range of services which would *naturally* invite positive encounters between community elements at the local level founded upon common interests – whether opening up the space for young people to play popular computer games together for one night each week, or seeking dispensation from the local Imam for older women from a range of cultural backgrounds to meet and play bingo with one another over lunch.

Whilst we looked around, I noticed that elements of the former library remained – including the adaptive hardware blind people in the area depended upon (at the time) to access daily newspapers. I also spotted numerous games consoles and a space at the back with PCs and electronic components strewn across a bench.

*Old Colne Road Library, Burnley*

When I asked about the equipment in the building, the volunteers explained that they hoped to attract people into the space through play, fun and a sense of curiosity, before encouraging them to consider informal and formal learning opportunities. They told me of their plans to provide Literacy, Numeracy, English as a Second Language (ESOL), Computer Tuition, Preparing for Work and Arts and Crafts classes on site. Crucially, though, they explained that they sought to encourage people to go beyond 'play' and move towards 'tinkering' then learning in a light-touch manner – which, for some reason, reminded me of boys peering into the old car on bricks outside the youth club that I attended as a young person. They were already busy forging relationships with key stakeholders to facilitate extended learning pathways beyond the walls of the building, confident of their approach.

At the time I was concerned to understand how this voluntary group would sustain itself going forward, as dedicated 'cohesion funds' were drying up in the wake of the banking crash, and a quick trawl online does not point to an altogether happy ending to proceedings (although, I am unable to verify precisely what followed). I was preoccupied upon leaving Burnley but, for some reason, our encounter and discussion about play, technology and learning in libraries would stay with me over the months that followed...

# A PASSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS (STEM) – SO WHAT?

**I grew up in a household infused with a passion for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). My father was a chemist and was quick to take an interest in computers when they were first made available to the masses.**

My sister read physics, astronomy and mathematics, whereas I always wanted to build things, studied technology and thoroughly enjoyed work experience in the Department for Civil Engineering at the University of Sheffield, before turning my hand to web development in later years.

Now, it turns out my talents (such as they are) lie elsewhere or, at least, at something of a tangent. Despite this, I went on to work for a Regional Development Agency where a quarter of staff were employed to establish hi-tech enterprise hubs in the Eastern Region – ranging from the Hethel Engineering Centre to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. Meanwhile, another team was tasked with generating and/or attracting more workers with "STEM" skills to make good the capital investment in the planning.

As a result, I was pretty well-versed in the challenges facing the UK economy from the point of view of the STEM skills deficit as I turned my attention towards improving economic participation amongst excluded communities back in 2005. So, my ears pricked up when I found myself listening to speakers talk about STEM skills at a regeneration conference in June 2010, immersed as I was then working with communities eager to take ownership of land and buildings.

A Vice-Chancellor described the situation in the UK as akin to a distorted hour-glass with:

- *too few people benefiting from STEM skills overall;*

- *the majority of people with STEM skills geared towards academic research or apt only to establish micro-tech businesses before shipping downstream product-development activities overseas;*

- *too few of our many generic management graduates equipped with STEM knowledge and skills sufficient to render them interested in and/or capable of establishing scalable STEM businesses;*

- *the majority of people lacking appropriate routes to aspire to, then acquire, STEM skills in the first place; and*

- *women under-represented in relation to STEM subjects and jobs at every level.*

According to a recent report, the CBI believes that the situation is liable to get worse in future: **http://tinyurl.com/ldojqan**. Why is it, then, that no one appears particularly interested in creating pathways for excluded communities to either aspire to or acquire STEM skills in the face of an increasingly STEM reliant economy, I wondered. Is it that encouraging some people to aim for higher education is challenging enough, but involving STEM subjects is somehow a step too far?

Of course, regeneration professionals tend to seek quick and easy wins in narrow pursuit of economic growth, and complex skills acquisition does take time. However, if we aren't to consign some of our communities to deprivation long-term, surely we should be asking how to embed STEM skills right at the very heart of them, as part of a broader education and up-skilling agenda? If we did this, perhaps we wouldn't be faced now with growing inequality amongst our workforce: **http://tinyurl.com/pb5gdhh**. Where in communities can our young unemployed people go if they do seek to try out or retrain with STEM in mind after compulsory, further or, even, higher education?

At the time, I didn't have answers to those questions – but, I was spurred on by a weekend visit to the small mining village in which I grew up, which is still afflicted by industrial decline, its high street crowded with hair dressing and tanning salons.

A growing body of evidence points to the serious ramifications for communities that lack access to the internet: http://tinyurl.com/oz3utp7. But, here, I am not talking narrowly about 'digital exclusion', although that agenda is very important in its own right: http://tinyurl.com/knp8nfz. Instead, I mean to underline the poverty that increasingly afflicts our most deprived communities precisely because regeneration efforts are limited to attracting elements of the low-paying service sector to those places where employers cannot readily find employees with the STEM skills they seek. Of course, that is not to overlook the range of skills and professionals our diverse economy and communities require or, else, to fetishize STEM. Rather, it is to pose a question about how we move from a situation where low-skills regeneration is inevitable, towards one where communities themselves have 'options' about their future, especially if we accept that the global economy is set to remain on its current technology and knowledge-based trajectory.

It bothered me sufficiently to ask a colleague what, if anything, we might do to demonstrate the feasibility and impact of introducing STEM skills into the very heart of deprived communities: she was, unusually, a scientist by background preparing for retirement from the voluntary and community sector. Her advice, then, was to go with my gut instinct and simply start doing it. So, I resolved that I would do my utmost – and something appeared to present itself as a possible way forward. Someone else drew my attention to the cuts which would soon be made to library and information services right across the country and, for some reason, I thought "libraries, information, technology, learning, Burnley…STEM".

# ENTER COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

If 'necessity is the mother of invention', our journey began in earnest during 2010 – when, faced with a growing number of enquiries from councils and communities about the prospect of closures, we began to consider how public libraries might become 'enterprising' in community hands and sustain themselves as community enterprises.

**At the outset, we were faced with exploring:**

**1** **challenging spaces** – not immediately amenable to income generation by traditional community asset management standards (by virtue of their small size, inflexible configuration and lack of rentable components);

**2** **assets located in sparsely populated and/or deprived settings** – inhibited either by the prospect of low – or, else, low income – footfall – with negative implications for ambition, capacity and income generation;

**3** **transformation of a service without a business model** – we were asked to consider how public libraries might be supported to function in an entrepreneurial and self-sustaining manner when, in fact, the core business of such libraries involves offering a service that is provided (overwhelmingly) 'free at the point of use';

**4** **a service dependent upon an ICT infrastructure** – facilitating inter-library loans and, with that, access to all of the resources available to England's public libraries – critically important and yet deemed off-limits or 'technically challenging' for many early community library proponents; and

**5** **a national policy impetus to "envision the library of the future"** – juxtaposing the mainstay of community advocacy for preservation of (the recollection of) an existing (or, older) service model, at precisely the moment when entrepreneurship and innovation were manifestly required.

We make no judgement here about library authorities and their proposals for service transformation in challenging circumstances. Neither are we suggesting that communities have failed to develop enterprising and innovative approaches to library asset and service management in recent years. Nonetheless, we were called upon to offer support in the face of formative decisions taken by councils to involve communities in the management of library services in a manner which we considered at best challenging and at worst unsustainable. Moreover, whilst we endeavoured to introduce communities to innovative social business models – which ranged from library-cinemas through collaborative consumption hubs to surplus book-selling and computer refurbishment outlets – the mainstay of our work had us focused upon more traditional concerns pertaining to community engagement, governance, community asset transfer, volunteering and fundraising.

Working for Locality – **http://www.locality.org.uk/** – I contacted national organisations with a remit to support libraries to ask how we might 'contribute a verse'. We would go on to offer library authorities advice about community assets and social enterprise, before identifying those we would work with in-depth, eager to introduce our experience and that of our members to proceedings. Ultimately, we supported 65+ communities to engage in discussions about individual libraries with their local authority. We established an online platform to enable communications and peer networking amongst 200+ interested parties. We hosted a national event to share emergent practice attended by key ministers, and we undertook primary research for Arts Council England to map the evolution of the 'community library' phenomenon and develop some guiding principles for library authorities: **http://tinyurl.com/q7wfu3n**.
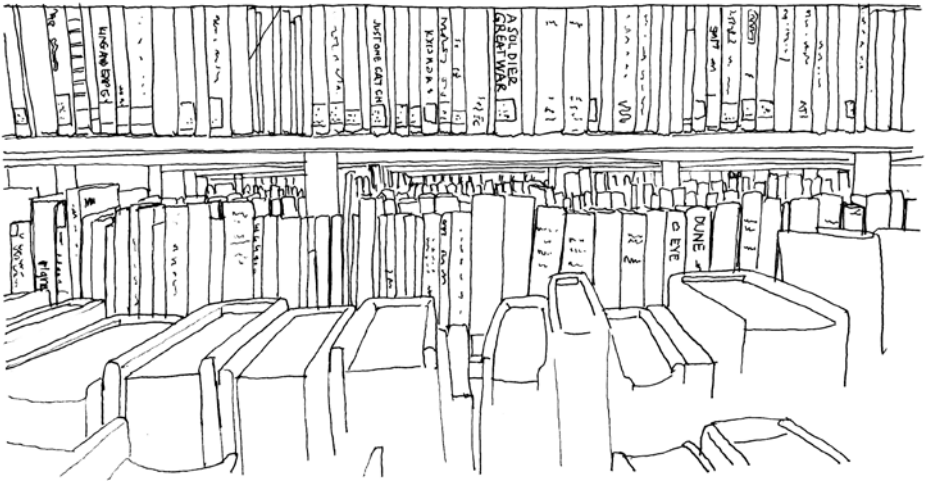
Today, our work continues, with forthcoming activity planned to support rural library authorities. There are now an estimated 400 community libraries in England – a shift from 1% reported by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in January 2011 to circa 10% in Autumn 2013. Only time will tell the extent to which the evolution of community libraries heralds the demise of the public library service as some campaigners maintain. I happen to disagree with this rather glum assessment on the basis of experience gained at the 'coal face', but concede that those challenges outlined above remain entirely pertinent today.

## The Importance of Disappointment (as motivation)

We resolved to overcome those challenges outlined above outwith our support offer at the local level and, on balance, that decision has impacted significantly the time it has taken to shape and prototype the high-level concept we started out with in practice – let alone convince significant stakeholders we have something potentially important to contribute to discussions about library service transformation.

Library professionals eschew sentimental recollections of childhood visits to public libraries, with their characteristic emphasis upon quiet spaces, books and reading – insistent that they have moved with the times and should be appreciated for what they are today. So, I will not dwell here upon having volunteered for many years in my school library, or having expended whole days and nights of my student life reading contentedly in academic libraries.

Neither will I reflect upon the enjoyment derived from working in chain as well as independent book shops in years gone by. Instead, I will simply say on an altogether personal note: I could not be more passionate about libraries in and of themselves and, yet, my local library is ultimately disappointing – not by virtue of its staff, facilities and the access to information it offers, but because I do not agree that the service has 'moved with the times' in most places such that it remains wholly relevant in and of itself, and still firmly believe that it could offer the increasingly digital community in which I live so much more than it does at present.

Others will have their own vision for libraries: I understand that mine flows from exploring the unique features and challenges facing branch libraries against a backdrop of austerity, and at a time when I had STEM 'on my mind'. However, in my view, libraries (once, very tangible bastions of information access) are increasingly akin to fast disappearing islands faced with digital climate change and, as such, we need to ask whether and how that situation might in fact be harnessed to positive effect. Simply stated, with the democratization of the means of production and reproduction, as well as the exponential growth in information as "data", I think we must explore what role libraries might meaningfully play in the 21st century where harnessing information for social and economic benefit is concerned. Hence, the vision for St Botolph's draws upon those parallel activities with which we became involved, and has been shaped by the array of people and ideas encountered in the intervening period.

# COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

**I don't recall when I finally 'got' Twitter – I only know that, when I did, it opened up myriad opportunities to learn about new things and meet a host of new people. The people it first introduced me to in the flesh listened to me enthuse about a range of ideas – including STEM and libraries.**

I would subsequently ask one to explore how STEM might be embedded in community libraries, and in such a way as to render them capable of generating an income. I would ask another to consider funding a pilot programme on the basis of the findings and faced with a growing number of calls for support from communities themselves. But, I went on to ask someone else altogether to explore the potential for STEM to benefit community organisations in the round.

The first, Indy Johar, explored the history of libraries, helped distil their 'essence', and worked with me to devise a high-level vision for a 'community knowledge trust' comprising tacit knowledge products *contributed* by library users – each of which would rely upon STEM skills to develop, publish and sell them online across a national network of kindred organisations; just imagine, a library part-comprised of its local contributors' homemade recipes and made available in the form of iTunes style downloads. The number of knowledge products and sales required to render the proposition viable or, even, value added for community libraries appeared daunting (to say the least!) and we opted to go our separate ways to try our hand at implementation in practical settings. Indy and colleagues went on to help establish the Library Lab and has, more recently, begun to experiment with the idea of creating an Open Institute: http://www.oi-london.org.uk/.

In marked contrast, I was struck by the idea that local knowledge might be captured and commodified – translated into an intangible asset as intellectual property – given my day-to-day focus on more traditional community assets. I also began to question whether online income generation could liberate fledgling community enterprises from the limitations of their tangible assets and/or physical location. In other words, might it be feasible for community enterprises to generate an income via the internet and, with that, redistribute wealth from more affluent or more populous communities to benefit their deprived or rural counterparts?

The second, a major funder, declined to help at the time. Nonetheless, our conversation led me to the realisation that social investors had still to take an active interest in capturing, curating and commodifying community knowledge and know-how (intellectual property and praxis) in the name of community enterprise. Why, I wondered, is this still regarded as the preserve of the private sector – apt only to be commodified with purely commercial ends in mind – despite the manifest importance of the knowledge economy? Do communities lack knowledge and know-how that might be deemed of real value to others? Are they unaware of what they have (and its potential value)? Is it that they are apt to simply give it away? Or, is it that they haven't considered whether or, indeed, how to *exploit* it in a manner consistent with their underlying ethos? In many respects, answers to these questions served to breath real life into what would follow – and, not least, because I refuse to accept that information is simply something to be collected by the VCS to satisfy funders/investors of its impact.

### The third person – enter: Marc De'ath – met me in one of his typically creative moods.

Somehow, it seems a long time ago with so much water under the bridge, because I simply could not imagine then the incredible journey we were about to embark upon, nor the deep friendship and mutual respect which continues to grow from the same. Together, we began talking about the potential for communities to harness local know-how and knowledge to engage in what we began to refer to as digital asset and enterprise development (if we're honest, without any real regard for how they might differ from their more traditional counterparts), and we resolved to establish a modest pilot programme to identify, capture and commodify the knowledge and know-how of community organisations rooted in particular locales.

*Marc De'ath, The Creative Coop*

In the first instance, we approached three community entrepreneurs with an interest in libraries and an enthusiasm for digital exploration in the hope of securing some kind of cross-over between the two strands of activity I sought to weave together. This resulted in Locality's Community Knowledge Transfer pilot – **http://tinyurl.com/q9cm82l** – and, although it failed to capture the imagination of communities newly engaged in the practicalities of library service delivery at the time, it did prove successful insofar as it pointed to real potential for existing community organisations to harness their knowledge and know-how in digital formats (as well as helping us to differentiate between what are properly digital enterprises as opposed to digital assets). It also highlighted some of the challenges inherent in supporting communities to engage with the digital agenda, and underlined the need for further practical investigation before reaching firm conclusions about the best way forward.

Happily, it served as the forerunner to Our Digital Community – **http://www.ourdigitalcommunity.org/** – a contemporary action research and learning programme to explore in more depth how such activities might be rendered investable in community hands. Importantly, though, it also informed some of the thinking which now underpins St Botolph's library-hack-maker space, with its emphasis upon *local knowledge and know-how*. In time, this has enabled us to reconceive of libraries as something other than a gateway to *all* of the resources available to library service users, and to explore instead the scope for individual libraries to become *unique* or geographically circumscribed community publishing platforms. But, I get ahead of myself…

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# CULTURAL QUARTERS, CREATIVE INDUSTRIES & THE OLD POLICE STATION (NEVER, EVER, GIVE UP)

**Marc heralds from a cultural and creative industries background. When we first met, he was managing Fifteen Queen Street – a co-working space linked to FirstSite in Colchester: http://www.15queenstreet.org/.**

Colchester's creative economy is overwhelmingly comprised of home-workers. As such, it is fragmented and its potential for growth under-exploited, despite it boasting the largest concentration of creative SMEs in Essex. Fifteen Queen Street was established in an area now peripheral to the town centre to change that, and continues to serve as a platform for collaborative working so that stakeholders can better understand, engage with and support broad-ranging creative SMEs in the area.

Back then, a range of partners were busy exploring how to take forward the regeneration of the 'cultural quarter' in the wake of the banking crash, the effects of which can quite literally be seen where the York stone paving ends outside FirstSite: http://www.firstsite.uk.net/. The Council, for its part, was grappling with prospective hotel developers and heritage skylines, the loss of a major department store deal, bus station re-location efforts, and stalled plans for a mixed-use housing and retail development. Others still were concerned that Colchester had already benefited from its fair share of arts-related funding.

*The Old Police Station Colchester*

Nonetheless, efforts to increase the supply of managed workspace for the creative industries in the area continued apace. So, in addition to opening out-of-town facilities such as Cuckoo Farm – **http://www.cuckoofarmstudios.org.uk/** – and the Buffalo Tank, stakeholders were also keen to transform the Old Police Station in the St Botolph's area into intermediary work and studio spaces, as something of a step-up facility from Fifteen Queen Street.

Marc invited me to talk to some of them about the potential for the initiative to be community-led, in the hope that the facility might eventually be owned and managed by local creatives themselves. There seemed to be a good fit with my work elsewhere, through which I'd encountered amazing organisations like Galeri in Caernarfon – **http://www.galericaernarfon.com/** – and, over time, we began to speculate about the potential to anchor Colchester's first community development trust in or around the Old Police Station initiative.; one day, I have no doubt, there will be a Colchester Community Development Trust – even if it is the very last thing we both do! Over the weeks and months that followed, we did our utmost to influence plans for the building. Unfortunately, in the end, we could not perceive a viable way forward without significant grant funds being made available. Neither, if we're honest, were we able to persuade key people (then) of the power of our community: **http://tinyurl.com/oxfktpn**.

So, today, progress continues to be made adjacent to our work – with news that some of the required funds have been secured by the Council and its partners to take forward refurbishment of the Old Police Station: **http://tinyurl.com/nazdv36**.

However, Marc had an intimate knowledge of Colchester's creative scene, was embedded as a business operating in St Botolph's, and remained stalwart in his belief that the community could do different – better – faster. He had grown to understand that community-led regeneration ought, rightly, to build upon the fine grain of a community and harness its existing assets – its history, its buildings, its people, their ambitions and their skills. He knew that St Botolph's had been subject to significant upheaval over time – in particular, when traffic measures carved it in two and divorced a substantial number of its residential dwellings from the East side of the town centre.

He also knew that it lacked coherence, a contemporary identity, and that the people living and working there needed a focus if they were to begin acting together to shape the way forward. Crucially, he understood that the creative scene in St Botolph's was still emerging at the time – implying a need for some kind of blended community anchor initiative.

Consequently, Marc began to scope out an alternative way forward in the wake of discussions about the Old Police Station, and an application for Portas pilot funding was submitted with the Council in Spring 2012: **http://tinyurl.com/ocwg9du**. This has since given rise to the St Botolph's History Archive – a multimedia foundation for uncovering and building the area's identity from the point of view of its occupants past and present – which represents a tentative first step towards collaborative working between local residents, businesses and creative incomers.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the community will come together to develop a vision for the regeneration of St Botolph's, stimulated by the activity of generating and reflecting upon its contents: **http://tinyurl.com/qhl7doo**. This notwithstanding, there was and is much more to work underway in St Botolph's today and, not least, because good ideas are found and lost then, with any luck, rediscovered in the course of worthwhile journeys – and, we were about to encounter something with the potential to take us back, or at least a side-ways step, towards STEM.

# THE RISE OF THE HACKER AND MAKER MOVEMENTS

**Nowadays, I take for granted that people know all about the rise of the 'hacker' and 'maker' movements over the past fifteen years.**

In reality, however, these terms pertain to worlds that precious few people, save enthusiasts, have had occasion to encounter – and, yet, there are so many potential synergies which might usefully be exploited by more traditional community enterprises that are minded to explore co-location, partnering and integration opportunities with them – not to mention digital asset and enterprise development.

Ordinarily, 'hacking' is understood as a computing term and refers to people who circumvent security systems, apply innovative customisations or combine disparate elements in the course of undertaking computer programming activities; hence, DARPA's recent interest in employing proponents: **http://tinyurl.com/lcvzxpd**. However, it also refers to people who "combine excellence, playfulness, cleverness and exploration", according to Wikipedia – which goes some way towards explaining our own rather broad definition of the term; hence, you will find activities that range from 'food' to 'place hacking' in St Botolph's.

Hack-spaces first emerged in Germany during the 1990s and there are nowadays more than a thousand located all over the world. In simple terms, they are informal computer clubs, but a growing number are more akin to organized computer labs and offer AV equipment, access to hardware and games consoles, as well as sometimes benefiting from tool and component libraries. They are most commonly operated on a not-for-private-profit basis and are sustained by an independent community paying membership fees (although there are also commercial hack-spaces and "TechShops" operating in the US today).

The majority retain their collectivist roots as well as their subversive undertones, and whilst they boast similarities and cross-over with the 'maker' movement, more often than not appeal to the 'digitally minded' as well as those with an interest in 'radical democracy' – http://tinyurl.com/mng572d. Hack-spaces function as centres for peer learning and knowledge sharing, provide a space for people to work on individual projects or collaborate to suit them, and ordinarily offer a range of social activities to help define and galvanise their respective memberships.

Making, by contrast, is more broadly related to the 'arts' and 'crafts' – definitions of which abound: see, for example, http://tinyurl.com/lpxzqge and http://tinyurl.com/82rsh78. As such, maker-spaces tend to function more akin to "community workshops" and give rise to artisan businesses, as compared with hack-spaces that operate on more of a 'digital edge'. Commercial maker-spaces have grown up in the US in the form of branded "FabLabs" and, again, DARPA has shown interest in investing in 1,000 maker-spaces in US schools: http://tinyurl.com/7hhyhta. Like independent hack-spaces, though, community-led maker-spaces encourage small group discussion, collaboration and participation. They are ordinarily project-based with an emphasis upon curiosity, inquiry, experimentation and play, but also encourage peer-to-peer learning, learning by doing and making – not by clicking. Ultimately, they are underpinned by a make-share-learn ethos. However, they are often more apt than their hack-space counterparts to facilitate skills development and incubate small businesses. Hence, hacking and making in St Botolph's are both integral to community-led regeneration activities today.

Some explanation of how both hacking and making found their way into the St Botolph's initiative is required here. Colchester benefits from being involved in the European Union's CURE programme and, as a result, Marc was invited to join two study trips during 2011-12 which would subsequently shape our thinking about St Botolph's. The first saw him visit the Temple Bar Cultural Trust in Dublin – http://www.templebar.ie/aboutus – which generates a surplus through property ownership and management so that it can contribute to cultural activities in the area in a self-sustaining manner. The second took him to Amsterdam where he encountered Beehives – http://www.beehives.nl/ – and the Waag Society – http://waag.org/nl.

Beehives identifies under-used spaces that are apt to be transformed into low-cost managed work and retail spaces, and serves as a platform for facilitating collaboration and cooperation between creative amateurs, start-ups and SMEs, with its emphasis upon the creation of a 'flowering place'. The Waag Society (Institute for Art, Science and Technology) is involved in a range of creative projects but is, in particular, responsible for hosting FabLab Amsterdam – **http://fablab.waag.org/content/about**.

Upon his return, Marc began to consider whether it might be feasible to introduce a hacker and maker space to St Botolph's and, with that, build upon the History Archive to kick-start community-led regeneration in earnest through creative skills and business development activities. I would subsequently go to the Netherlands and visit Beehives as well as FabLab Amersfoort – **http://www.fablabamersfoort.nl/nl** – to better understand how this might work in practice and, whilst there, I began to glimpse the potential to develop a new kind of space capable of facilitating STEM skills development at the very heart of communities in the medium-long term. Needless to say, the read-across to our work around libraries wasn't immediately apparent, but there were international developments underway which began to confirm our slow hunch about the scope for fit between the two, and which I will return to in due course.

We've since spent time with founders of the MakLab in Glasgow as well as Hackspace London to help us think about what would work well in St Botolph's. Marc decided early on that developing a generic one-size-fits-all proposition which could be scaled up or replicated elsewhere, complete with franchised branding, wasn't the right way to go. Instead, he wanted to establish something that continued to build upon the fine grain of St Botolph's, something responsive to local needs and demand from local creatives where the equipment offer of any hacker and maker space was concerned, and something which borrowed from the Amersfoort and London Hackspace communities' approach to collective purchase and shared hire of the same – in short, something unique which could, nonetheless, be scaled-out by and for other communities.

First and foremost, though, he needed to identify an appropriate space…

# MEANWHILE SPACES, HIDDEN KIOSKS & THE OLD WAITING ROOM

**The concept of 'meanwhile use' gained traction as a reaction to those 'pauses' in the development process which can blight areas in need of or undergoing physical regeneration – sometimes for months, sometimes for years – and which grew sharply right across the country in the wake of the banking crisis: http://www.meanwhile.org.uk/**

In short, the idea is to ask: what might we do 'in the meanwhile' – until such time as regeneration (re)commences in earnest – such that otherwise stranded spaces and places can be put to productive use, and some measure of social and economic value extracted.

Meanwhile uses have been applied to broad-ranging assets since 2010 – from car parks to derelict land and, most commonly, empty high street shops (albeit, these days they are more often the product of austerity and the UK's burgeoning internet economy, rather than representative of stalled regeneration efforts). In Colchester, for example, Slack Space was established to introduce art to empty retail units on a meanwhile basis, and a number of those units have been let commercially in their wake.

Early in 2012, Marc identified two 'hidden kiosks' integral to Colchester's former bus station waiting room in St Botolph's which had been boarded up awaiting demolition in keeping with the master-plan for the area – ideal from the point of view of developing meanwhile uses, since those plans were to all intents and purposes "on hold". Notably, he sought to go beyond the Slack Space model with its emphasis upon animation and move towards the provision of business prototyping and incubation space in direct response to the needs of local creatives.
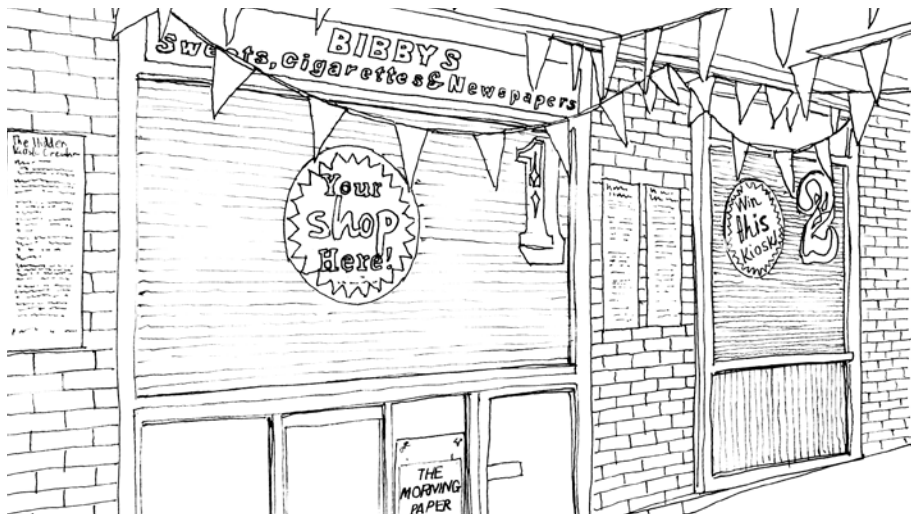
*The Hidden Kiosks, at the Old Bus Station, Colchester*

This resulted in the transformation of the hidden kiosks to offer creative business start-ups a space to 'try out' on the basis of short-term easy-in-easy-out leases. A number proved successful and went on to move into units elsewhere in the town, like the Bike Guru: **http://tinyurl.com/kvbujd8**. Crucially, though, they pointed to an alternative to the Old Police Station as an interim home for a creative community-led vehicle operating in St Botolph's. So, mindful of the need to maintain vitally important momentum, Marc began talking to prospective partners about the possibility of animating the Waiting Room in its entirety: **http://tinyurl.com/mzpcg7x**

Working with Colchester School of Art, he began to develop the idea of the Waiting Room in more depth: **http://tinyurl.com/mb6ba62**. In particular, the ethos underpinning the project began to emerge amid discussions about incorporation or adaptation of a Trade School – **http://tinyurl.com/n6saa3k**. The rest is, to some extent, recent history – with a meanwhile lease secured on behalf of the project by Colchester Institute in Summer 2013, and more than 150 volunteers signed up to co-produce components of the space as outlined: **http://www.st-botolphs.org/**. Nonetheless, it remains to explain how proposals for the Waiting Room in St Botolph's eventually came to incorporate a library – specifically, a Give-Get[1] library – lest we should forget where this story began (at least, for me).

[1] A term stolen, fondly and gratefully, from Locality's Hugh Rolo.

# COMMUNITY PUBLISHING & LIBRARY-HACK-MAKER SPACES

**In Spring 2012, I began to research international developments pertaining to libraries in a bid to understand what more/different we might do in the UK to help safeguard their future in community hands. In sub-Saharan Africa, NGOs were busy crowd-funding for low-cost digitally powered libraries: http://tinyurl.com/bhmvbsf.**

Meanwhile, the Chinese government announced its intention to invest in hundreds of new rural libraries: http://tinyurl.com/n2txtb6. Throughout the Western world, though, most library professionals as well as communities had in common that they were tied up arguing (even campaigning) against closure proposals or, else, establishing book swaps in modest community-led initiatives – as per the one on Bondi Beach – http://tinyurl.com/kp8u6hq – and the Reading Room in Rotterdam West – http://tinyurl.com/l628vjd. All the while, visitor and book-lending figures for public libraries in the UK stubbornly remained on a downward trend[2]. If I'm honest, I began to question whether libraries in fact constitute a particular type of institution properly belonging to a specific phase in a country's socio-economic development, such that Schumpeter might have had something to 'contribute' about their wholly natural and creative destruction.

[2] According to the regular Taking Part survey undertaken for Government, the proportion of adults using a public library in England has steadily declined from 48% (2005-6) to 39% (2011-12) – with the greatest decline witnessed amongst male library users (down to 30.2%).
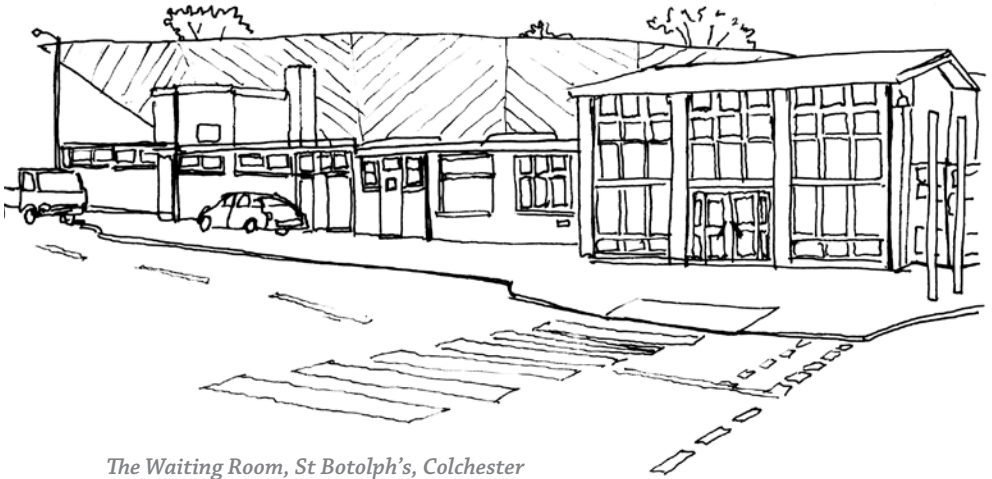
*The Waiting Room, St Botolph's, Colchester*

I was by no means the only one asking such questions. A spate of media coverage filtered through and pointed to a possible future for libraries in facilitating access to the digital commons – as in Washington DC **http://tinyurl.com/kzh5j2j**. Elsewhere, all the talk was of e-books and the provision of related services by libraries; for example, in Edinburgh **http://tinyurl.com/ko9f6o2** New York **http://tinyurl.com/certadu** and Bucharest **http://tinyurl.com/lw23ng3**. Small wonder, then, that Arts Council England was asking how libraries might be supported to become the hub of a community, making the most of digital technology and creative media, resilient and sustainable: **http://tinyurl.com/p9qcyk3** as well as investing in the library development initiative. But, how could traditional branch libraries in England ever hope to evolve along such lines – and all the more so in rural areas poorly served by mobile and broadband coverage? Indeed, the associated costs aside, our work had repeatedly underlined the limits to the digital ambitions of most communities we had been called upon to support; anecdotally, there is anxiety about this issue expressed by library and information professionals **http://tinyurl.com/lpks45t** but it is also a very real problem facing many such professionals themselves.

Fortuitously, a number of related ideas began to converge in my mind which helped clarify my thinking. First, I came across news of the co-location of hacker and maker spaces in libraries in the US – most notably, 4th Floor Chatt: **http://chattlibrary.org/4th-floor** – which appeared to confirm our thinking about the scope for fit between them.

There, the emphasis was upon active participation, manipulation and making in libraries enabled by a combination of space and technology, rather than relying upon a more passive approach to 'information consumption'. I wondered, though, whether the introduction of new technology in and of itself 'a library made', because it still seemed to me that co-location was a potentially far cry from more considered integration. Why not simply move to nurture closer ties between libraries, hacker and maker spaces, if synergy is the over-riding aim?

I also came across Mark Coker's article proposing that libraries should become community publishing portals: **http://tinyurl.com/mp5u2pn**; in short, he suggests that libraries might usefully support local writers to make use of technology and become publishers of their own e-books – a move encouraging community publishing which appeared, at least, to have some direct relevance to their widely accepted function. However, I questioned how a modest core user group comprising would-be authors could ever hope to generate sufficient income from their labours to contribute meaningfully to the sustainability of libraries – if, that is, their evolution is to be predicated on some form of entrepreneurship – and, all the more so in sparsely populated and/or deprived settings.

Then, I was invited to contribute to an event where we were encouraged to watch: "Sue Austin…deep sea diving, in a wheelchair" – **http://tinyurl.com/amu6ev2** and, with that, the penny finally dropped. Crucially, Austin liberates us from our attachment to a seemingly fixed (better, limited and limiting) concept – the wheelchair – such that we are able properly to ask the question: when is a library not a library but still a library? Without this, it seems to me, we are unable to dispense with our attachment to or perception of 'the library' as it is currently configured and truly envision it 'in the future'; although, I'm entirely mindful that others may wish to retain more than I've opted to dispense with, and will almost certainly see something different, correspondent to the perspective they adopt and the distance at which they stand.

The answer, for me, is: when 'the library' combines a *multimedia* repository beckoning playful and creative *contributions* from broad-ranging *local* users with a community *lending and publishing* platform, such that local knowledge and know-how is capable of being harnessed for both social and economic benefit in a truly interactive space that is rooted in a specific locale. In practice, that means a space where our community can learn about, how and do from, with and for one another. For example, a contributor might leave their memory of St Botolph's in the History Archive (whether a photograph, a diary or a sound file), whilst another might learn how to edit and remix sound files, and another still might integrate said file with a commercial mobile phone app or amateur film production: http://tinyurl.com/qhl7doo. Equally, someone from our community might be interested in understanding more about horticulture, while another might want to learn how to grow vegetables alongside a seasoned gardener or, even, opt to start or join our permaculture group: http://st-botolphs.org/blog/defeat-concrete.

In other words, we have come to believe that our community harbours a wealth of (sometimes tacit, sometimes expert) knowledge and know-how. As such, our library of the future – as envisioned from the ground up – will be as much concerned with what local users can give as well get from the Waiting Room in St Botolph's. This implies a space and/or platform that is capable of attracting, capturing, curating and sharing local knowledge and know-how for mutual benefit. It is in keeping with the contributory ethos that has always underpinned more academic and specialist libraries, but which ought now in my view to be (re)instated where public and/or community libraries are concerned. Crucially, it also has the potential to stimulate local enterprise outcomes where people move between borrowing, bartering, buying and/or ordering bespoke from members. We will proceed to explore what that might mean in practice over the months ahead, working in partnership with Essex Libraries and the many local people upon whose interest and enthusiasm the shape and success of our project is now predicated: http://www.st-botolphs.org/give-get-library.

# EPILOGUE

**We 'the users' are now 'contributors' to our own give-get library – to the library-hack-maker space that is the Waiting Room in St Botolph's, Colchester.**

We did not consciously set out upon a journey, cognisant of the many people and ideas we would encounter along the way, and neither have we (as yet) arrived at any kind of destination.

Only time will tell whether our vision can help others establish 'libraries as the hub of a community, making the most of digital technology and creative media, resilient and sustainable'. We are, for our part, determined to maintain an emphasis upon play, creativity, experimentation and prototyping with a view to exploring the 'art of the possible' when places, spaces and services are shaped by a community.

Doubtless, unforeseen considerations will impact our direction of travel, and things have a tendency to unfold in their own unique time. What matters above all else is that our community is taking its first tentative steps towards determining the shape of its own future.