

Zoe Newman's Canterbury Tales



The Last Supper

Following on from my report entitled 'DKG member takes 30 gap years!' back in 2012, here are my story and storytelling activities to date.

I received the Canterbury Award in 2012, which helped me towards topping up my Open University degree to honours with a module on one of my long standing passions of Children's Literature, as well as help towards a laptop computer.

Since then things have not gone totally as planned!! Some storytelling strands, which began very strongly in two school settings, including sessions planned for 60 children, which actually turned into sessions of 90 plus children in Plymouth's Central Library, have now ceased. This was due mainly to staffing changes. Others which seemingly fizzled out at one point are now beginning to pick up again. These had involved working with the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD) and their Bridge of Stories Project with women and their pre-school children from the refugee and asylum seeking community. As well as these, there were monthly storytelling evenings at the Cultural Café of the University of Plymouth, a storytelling showcase event in the Storytelling Tent we'd constructed with the refugee and asylum seekers for Inter Faith week at Plymouth University and a community outdoor event in July 2012 in the centrally located Drakes Place Gardens. Following this, a period of time elapsed without funding for Bridge of Stories but we continued to meet regularly and practise our storytelling skills under the title 'Simply Storytelling'.

From autumn 2014 to spring 2015 a second project has attracted further funding, which I am again part of. This project includes workshops and storytelling sessions led by International storytellers David Heathfield, Abimbola Aloe, and Ana Lines and outreach storytelling sessions in schools, parks and at the Christian Storytelling Festival at Buckfast Abbey, Devon.

New storytelling strands have also emerged. I have become an 'Open the Book' storyteller with a group from differing Christian backgrounds including Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal and we take assembly in two schools dramatizing bible stories as part of the national 'Open the Book' scheme. I am also a founder member of a small community arts group, Dramatic Results! Group, who collect and re-present stories in all sorts of formats including dramatic, traditional storytelling, dramatized story reading, and other formats. At the moment we are concentrating on inter-active heritage walks. Two of our members, including myself, are trained walks leaders. In our heritage walks we retell oral history stories that we have collected from books and residents in the local area. We take part in Plymouth's Heritage month in May, having taken part every year since its inception in 2013. Alongside of our heritage walks we are investigating the possibility of apps and a documentary. By this we hope to utilise some of the existing IT/AV skills of members updating some and training beginners by attending community video training days.

We are also pursuing with a local councillor the possibility of organising a 'Friends' of the local park. This park itself has many stories attached to it, including Beaumont House which held meetings of the Reform group that

campaigns for electoral reform especially that prospective MPs should not have to be naval candidates as was the case in the mid-nineteenth century, but could be civilians. As the local area has street names of politicians one suggestion has been to include boards in the park re-telling some of these stories.

A fourth strand of activity for me has been to attend the three day training with the Reader Organisation to qualify to become one of their shared reading facilitators delivering 'Get into Reading' groups, which are sometimes referred to as 'creative bibliotherapy'. This is a national charitable social enterprise seeking to connect people to great literature through the shared reading of prose and poetry. The particular group I'm working with is especially geared towards those with dementia and their carers.

Finally, I have discovered level 0 at the library of Plymouth University! This is a wonderful find. Plymouth residents are able to access this library for research and level 0 has a wealth of material on storytelling, oral history and telling a story through illustration as in children's picture books. So, I very often find myself spending several hours wallowing in level 0 these days, attending a bricks and mortar university at last!!

Zoe Newman

Canterbury Award Recipient, 2012 Beta Chapter