

# **BREAKING GROUND**

## **Football and archaeology – a winning combination for artistic engagement**

An Arts Council England funded project developed in partnership with the National Football Museum Manchester

**Neville Gabie – Alan Ward – Jason Wood**



### **Goal-line Archaeology**

In November 2013 the first ever archaeological excavation of a football goalmouth and goalpost took place on the historic Bradford Park Avenue football ground, witnessed by people of all ages reoccupying the former terraces.

The huge interest generated by that tiny intervention, the wealth of history associated with this particular football club, the uniqueness of the ground having been designed by Archibald Leitch and its relative intactness, its location in an area of significant cultural diversity, relatively disenfranchised from the arts, provide a perfect opportunity to develop a high quality arts project around a subject with popular appeal.

With this in mind, artist Neville Gabie, photographer and graphic designer Alan Ward and sports historian and archaeologist Jason Wood, are planning to return to Bradford to develop the project during the summer of 2015. A week of onsite activity will involve excavations of other parts of the former football ground and stands, examining

historical artifacts in peoples own collections, demonstrations of geophysical surveying and artistic interventions to mark and celebrate the history and context of the football club. We propose doing this in collaboration with local people and schools and through public workshops and other events involving people of all ages. Our ultimate intention is to develop a multifaceted arts project with a genuine focus on public engagement, pairing several artists working in different media with community groups, social historians and archaeologists to reveal and promote the significance of the place.



### The Site

Park Avenue football ground, home to Bradford Park Avenue AFC since 1907, hosted its last league game 44 years ago. Voted out of the league in 1970 the club abandoned its ground to nature. A canopy of trees now stand on the terraces where crowds in excess of 30,000 regularly stood to watch top flight football. In its day, Park Avenue was a significant sporting venue for rugby, cricket as well as football. It was a landmark in stadium design including an unusual main stand – the first double-decker by the renowned architect Archibald Leitch – which also served the adjoining cricket ground. The crumbling, overgrown remains, which now more resemble an ancient





ruin than a football ground, are a physical reminder of a forgotten social and sporting history, yet they represent an important facet of Bradford life and an opportunity to recapture and celebrate a unique aspect of British sporting heritage. After the club's demise, Bradford Council removed the stands, but the terraces on two sides, most of the pitch, walls and entrances, are intact. The aerial view of the football and cricket ground was taken in 1966.



### The People

In November 2013, with just a couple of days notice, numerous members of the community came to see what we were doing and were very keen to help. The age range varied from people in their 80s to children as young as eight. Most had stories to tell. Several scrambled through the 'forest terraces' recounting games they had seen and relocating where they used to stand. Many others from the surrounding housing estate came, fascinated by the archaeology and keen to try themselves. In 2015, we want to build much closer working links with local community groups, schools, housing associations, the Council and Bradford based artists. We see potential to engage everyone from different age, gender and ethnic backgrounds with the history on their doorstep interpreted using art in its various forms.



## Archaeology – Social History – and Art

The site provides a unique opportunity to do further archaeological surveys and excavations.

Already in the small scale intervention, we found numerous objects which gave an insight into the history of the time. But the archaeology is to some extent a 'device'. Our objective is to explore and reinterpret an understanding of 'place' through art.



○How did people get to and from the ground and how have those routes changed without the weekly footfall? How could an artist think about mapping, and the movement of people and their impact?

○How could an artist work with geophysical surveyors to think about what lies

beneath the surface of the ground?

- When the ground was built it was on the edge of town on a country estate. It is now in an area of social housing and the population has radically changed from white working class to predominately Asian. How does an artist explore those social and economic shifts?
- What does the football ground mean to the people who remember it? What are their stories and how can an artist/musician/writer begin to capture and reinterpret that material?
- And what does the ground mean to those who have no memory of it?
- What archival material exists in photographic form and how could that be used as a trigger for re-engaging with the contemporary landscape?
- What songs, traditions, football kits, colours are associated with Bradford Park Ave FC and how might they be used?
- The current physical context of the ground is extraordinary. In what ways could an artist use/perform/engage with the ground and terraces as they are?
- How could an artist work with an archaeologist to explore the physical process of 'unearthing'? How could that be used as a metaphor?
- The test dig already revealed a significant amount of objects. How could an artist use and interpret these?

The week long onsite activity is intended to allow the space for a creative dialogue between artists, archaeologists, historians, local residents and fans. We are very keen for all to be involved.



A fans personal photograph of himself standing beside the goalpost after the final match played at Bradford Park Avenue. This is the goal-mouth and goalpost that was excavated in November 2013 – the gentleman concerned brought the photograph once he saw what we were doing.

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