

The Event of The Thread

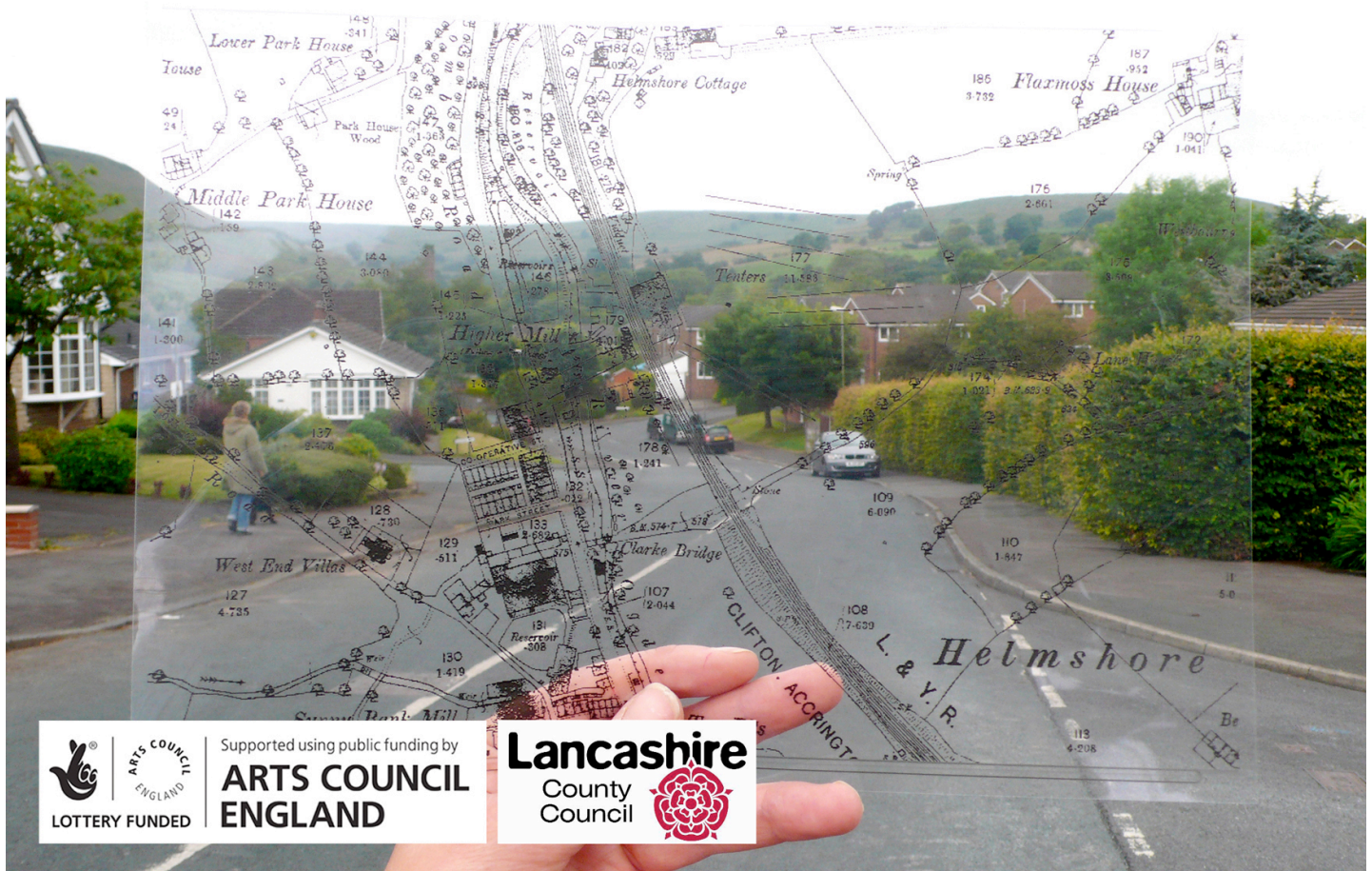
The Event of The Thread is a project developed by Manchester based artist Hannah Leighton-Boyce, alongside residents of Helmshore, Lancashire which will culminate in a live one-day sculptural installation on the site of the former tenter fields in September 2014. The project, which aims to explore the shifting relationships between people and place, has been commissioned by Helmshore Mills Textile Museum and funded by Arts Council England and Lancashire County Council. A book documenting the project will be launched alongside the screening of a short documentary about the installation at Helmshore Mills Textile Museum in November 2014.

'On the 28th September a thread of 3300 yards in length, or just under two miles, will be passed by residents back along the mapped lines of ten tenter frames which once stood on the land above Higher Mill in Helmshore, land which now houses the residents of Hyacinth Close, Narcissus Avenue and Anemone Drive. The thread, which has been spun in various locations in Helmshore from local wool, will be passed from hand to hand back along these 'Tenterlines', crossing over gardens and fences, weaving through houses, in and out of letterboxes, windows and doors, around lamp posts and across roads, joining the ten frames into one sculptural line and temporarily connecting different lives and times, people and place.'

Sited on the former tenter fields, the work draws on the areas former activity, its development as the mills closed, and the expression 'On Tenterhooks'. Like many mill towns, the making of cloth was once emblematic with Helmshore, and the decline of textile manufacture saw the area change and the industry become memorialised. Tenter frames, used to stretch cloth in early wool production, would at one time have been a regular sight in the fields above Helmshore Mill. Yet unlike the stone and cast iron structures that now stand as monuments to our industrial past, the less permanent but memorable scale of the tentered seams of cloth were removed from the landscape as the process became more industrialized. Although the tenter frames had a physical presence in the landscape, the tentering process was primarily a physical activity marked by collective rituals; the procession of people carrying the cloth from the mill to the field, stretching the lengths on to the tenterhooks to reshape and dry, and returning and carrying the cloth back down the hill; the memory of which is now recalled more through the figurative expression 'On Tenterhooks' or the naming of place.

In this work, the collective activity of passing the historical line in thread is done not to memorialise the past, but instead act as a departure whilst reflecting on the present, and how history is woven through our lives today, in memory and ritual. The sculptural line will cross time, public and private space. There will be no immediate visible trace of the installation after the event has happened but, where the thread passes though houses and gardens it will remain there within the resident's homes and the act of collaboratively making the work will change and mark the place and the people there, with a memory more present, personal and alive than a memorialized structure.

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