



## Footprints Theatre Company Working in the Outdoor Environment

### Paula Baker, Artistic Director, talks to gardensandpeople



Footprints Theatre Company works indoors and outdoors, but it is the landscape environment that attracts founder and artistic director. Paula Baker, the most. The company involves both adults and children in exploring the environment through touch, sight, and smell to create dramatic art pieces and performances to show what has been discovered. The participants collect foliage and interesting natural pieces of wood or stone, to inspire a story.

Paula works with associate artists Nicola Werenowska, Emma Martin and Vicki Weitz to use movement and voice in the work. Recently, working for the Essex Wildlife Trust, families were invited into a church wildlife garden to explore the space and make an imaginative work from it.

Sometimes the workshops are an end in themselves, at other times, the work results in a performance such as that at All Saint's churchyard in Little Cornard, Suffolk. Year Eleven drama students worked on developing dramatic performances using sound, touch, natural light changes and their perception of different environments within the churchyard.

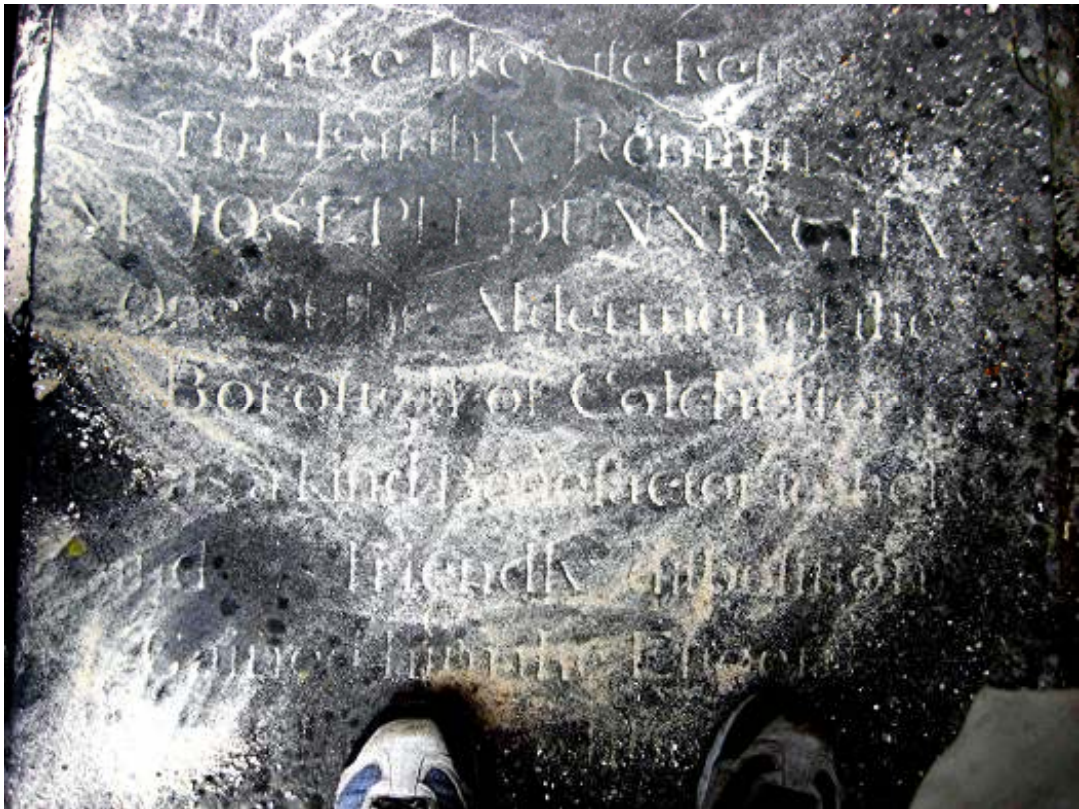
*Looking at the church yard  
through the building*



Paula's philosophy is "Any Place is a stage". She aims to work with people to "engage in the issue of environment, place and identity using the medium of theatre, this includes drama, dance, sound and visual art, with the aim of finding ways to articulate and animate the space". The team prepares by visiting the site first then "we develop an initial workshop for participants that enhances their senses to the environment they are working with in different ways. This will then develop into 'sharings' of those responses through different art forms"



*Palimpsest – sand on stone reveals something lost long ago, a transitory moment exposed.*



**Footprints** worked with a group of Gifted and Talented Middle school pupils to explore and outdoor environment on their school premises. Children were given a map to use to explore the area which involved them in responding to different sensations and noting their responses in different parts of the garden. They were encouraged to use all of their senses in a variety of different ways through the guidance of members of Footprints, participants were then encouraged to develop their responses into promenade performances using the natural space.



**Noak Hill** was a project developed with Essex Wildlife Trust for families. The families explored the site at Noak Hill which is a churchyard and wildlife garden. They were first asked to walk around the site with their eyes closed, a partner gently leading them.

*Wind chime of memories made by families at Noak Hill reflecting on their day.*



*A self portrait by a family and their friends at Noak Hill*



The families then created hand prints in chalk on the pathway sharing their responses. A collection of colours was made and families were then asked to choose a space they particularly liked, or meant something to them, and create a personal portrait using the environment and any found objects. A group of young teenagers who had been responsible for the maintenance of the wildlife garden chose a willow bower that they had planted and shaped, they used found natural objects to create a large smile from pebbles facing outwards to watchers, they also used found objects to decorate the bower. When they shared their work they placed themselves in the middle of the bower and explained that it was like a home to them and they felt safe and happy in this place.

**Footprints**, 'take nothing but memories. leave nothing but footprints', is really working with the mind and the imagination. Unlike visual artists such as Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long, their work leaves the environment as they found it: perhaps less a few leaves or cones. Their work is to engage the participants in an aspect of the environment – the creative aspect – as well as the education aspect of being outside.

**Footprints Theatre Company** was founded in March 2008 and have worked for :

**The Essex Wildlife Trust**  
**Colchester Slack Space**  
**Uplands Middle School**  
**Martin Reed at The Ancient Lights, Chelmsford**  
**Great Cornard Upper School**  
**Lion Walk Church**  
**I Scream Sunday**  
**Friars Grove Infant School**



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