

Living Heritage: *Translating the Street*, the sewing awl and the cobbler's anvil



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Birkenhead
Curator of *Translating the Street*,
2016/2019

369 Borough Road in 2016

Frank Cavanagh Shoe Repair



Translating the Street (2016/2019)

Curated by Brigitte Jurack ,
Alternator studio, Birkenhead.
Supported by Arts Council
England.

Three International Artist's
Micro Residencies, placing
artists within small businesses
and local community facilities in
the 'Oxton Road corridor' on
which Alternator studios is
located .

367-375 Borough Road , Birkenhead





Left: app. 1920: electric trams(green transport)
local shops, cycles, pedestrians



Right: 2019: 4 lane road, busses, no
bikes, hardly any pedestrians, no
shops, but new, family friendly
mosque

369

Frank Cavanagh



Frank Cavanagh approx. 86 years old in his shop. He became a cobbler at the age of 15 , and worked in and owned the shop on 669 Borough Road for more than 60 years.

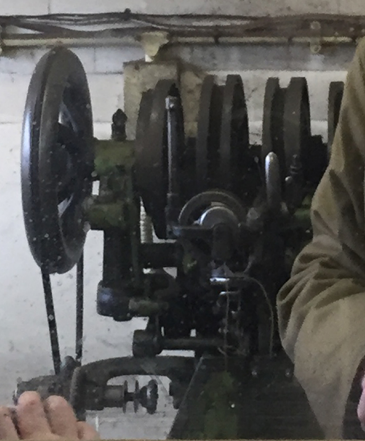
Jeff Young



Scouse-speaking UK playwright Jeff Young visited Frank Cavanagh every week over a two-month period. The host, an 86-year-old cobbler, remained silent during the first few visits but eventually began to talk about 70 years of experience as a cobbler in Birkenhead.

Following this extended period of not too easy visits, Young developed

A552 HEX, A SPELL AGAINST THE DUAL CARRIAGE WAY.





Jeff Young performing together with Martin Heslop (sound) A552HEX



TRANSLATING THE STREET

Alternator Studio presents

**Jeff Young
Harold Offeh
Haleh Jamali**

**Saturday
2016
5 March**

**Oxton Rd
Birkenhead
10.30am-5pm**
nearest station Birkenhead Central



Artists presenting new works produced during micro-residencies with Alternator Studio, All Nations 4 Hair, K&N and Frank Cavanagh Shoe Repairs, translating the stories of Oxton Road.



ALTERNATOR STUDIO
BALLS ROAD EAST

Find us on Facebook under
Alternator Studio and Project Space

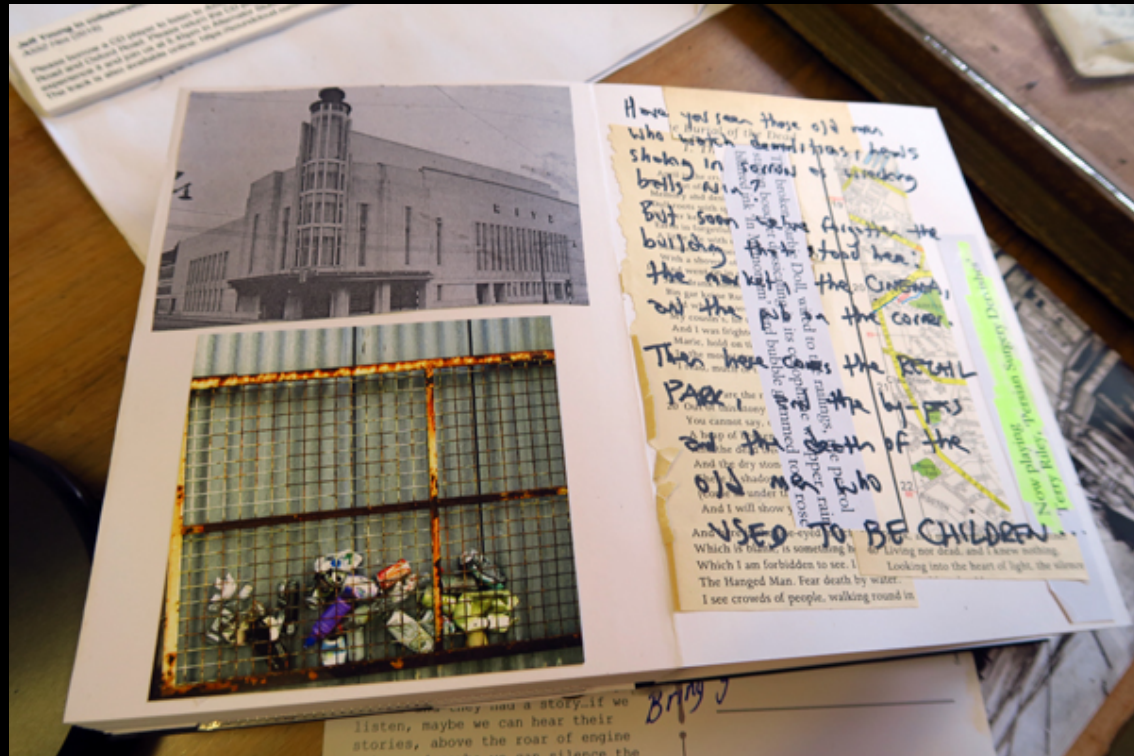
Switch to video



Animation to
A552Hex
produced by
artist Alan Dunn

Legacy of Living Heritage: *Translating the Street*, the sewing awl and the cobbler's anvil

A552 Hex overlays post-world war local road planning and destruction of working class culture with the unique voice of Frank Cavanagh and his memories of the people and shoes that danced, walked and had to be repaired.



Legacy of Living Heritage: *Translating the Street*, the sewing awl and the cobbler's anvil

Commissioned work was first performed in Alternator Studio, but has toured to Liverpool and Newcastle. The more mobile art work allows for local and non-local distribution .

A552 HEX- (2016) performed at Metal, Liverpool, with IMMIX Ensemble (15/9/16)

<http://www.metalculture.com/event/immix-ensemble-present-invisible-trains-by-jeff-young-paul-mcghee/>

And ProtoHome, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (15/7/2016)

<http://alandunn67.co.uk/superblock.html>

BBC Radio Merseyside: "I bet you've driven past his shop a million times, down Borough Road. A fixture of the area for over sixty years, the story of 86-year old Frank's life and career is now being told as part of the *Translating the Street* project that explores local culture and identity. Jeff Young – there's nostalgia, but it's also showing there's still life here, despite the best attempts to kill this road you've got people like Frank. Every other shop along here is derelict, but Frank ... is still here."

BBC Radio Merseyside feature on *Translating the Street* including interviews with Jeff Young and Frank Cavanagh (5.3.2016).

<https://soundcloud.com/alan-dunn/frank-cavanagh-radio-merseyside-interview-and-jeff-young-martin-heslop-a552hex>

Legacy:
listen to the whisper of those who live (d)and
work (ed) here, *translate* and *celebrate*



Alternator Studio , 57-59 Balls Road East

Translating the street hosts
and artists

2016 :
Frank Cavanagh+ Jeff Young
K&K Fesh Veg and Fruit +
Haleh Jamali
All Nations 4 Hair + Harold
Offeh

2019:
Kit stop shop + Chris
Dobrowolski
HIVE Youth Zone +Casey Orr
Central Library and K+K :
Kwong Lee



Living Heritage - Translating the street - the sewing awl and cobbler's anvil

Brigitte Jurack

I commence this talk with some difficulties in the act of translation of three words: heritage, monument and Heimat.

Heritage translates into German as *Erbe* (in-heritance) which includes personal and national inheritance, something passed on from one generation to the next. *Monument* translates into the beautiful word construct: Denkmal which include the word think (denken) and sign (mal). *Heimat* has no clear translation but often the words 'home' and 'homeland' are used but not fully cover the territory which encompasses geography, personal and societal history, food, music, smells, dialect, home.

For me, now a resident in the UK for exactly 30 years, the project, that underpins this presentation provocatively called **Living Heritage, Translating the street- the cobbler's awe and anvil**, is in itself **an act of negotiating identity** in the place in which I have a very beautiful studio and where I live. Please note, I am not using the word *Heimat*, nor *heritage* or *monument* yet.

In 2012 I fell in love with a building and bought it as a studio. The catch? It is in Birkenhead. Shortly after setting up, I discovered the delights on my doorstep which is Oxton Road and Borough Road: a cobbler of undefinable age in a shop which looked totally shut, a flamboyant Iranian fruit and veg grocer, charity shops, international food stores, including a polish shop where I can satisfy my German cravings, a hard ware shop, model shop and a pet shop with a speaking parrot. Everything in the same sad state of disrepair you find in Middlesbrough, Redcar, Pontefract, Bolton, Rochdale and all the other 'left behind' places in the UK. Mark Steels BBC radio 4 Comedy show says it all...

Not a native speaker (Scouse or at least a Liverpool lilt), I am out of place in Birkenhead but at home in my studio and the international shops on Oxton Road.

The cobbler, behind his counter, with moulding woodchip wall paper, ancient looking anvils and fading peg-board, with dust covered shoes in the shelves dating back to the 70ties, reminded me of 'Heimat'. Not only the trilogy of written and directed by Edgar Reitz and published in 1984, 1993 and 2013 but also of what Heimat is for me. Reitz's films show life in Germany from the 1840s to 2000 through the eyes of a family from the [Hunsrück](#) area of the [Rhineland](#). A kind backwater small town with no distinguished features. Not the capital, nor the beating heart of industry, just kind of 'boring normal'. Unlike the sugarcoating of the genre of 'Heimatfilme' Reitz sets the family's personal and domestic life against the backdrop of wider social and political events in a long historical narrative.

And here in 2011, when opening the door to Frank Cavanagh's shoe repair a little bell above the door rung, and the slight musty –gluey smell welcomed you. From behind a wall high screen Frank would appear, write a note by hand, attach it to the handed over shoe and said 'come back in a week' or 'these shoes are not worth repairing'. If only this man could talk..... I kept thinking. How long had he been in the same place, sandwiched between two derelict, boarded up buildings, next to the 1930's grand Birkenhead Central Library with its Wilfrid Owen Stained Glass Windows? Despite getting all my shoes repaired, I was in no position to 'unlock' this proud crafts and tradesman of more than half a century, and yet, I knew with a sense of urgency, that somebody had to meet, listen and talk with Frank Cavanagh's before it was going to be too late. Here was a man, who embodied *Heimat*: lived local life, a proud trades and crafts man who was clearly settled in this local. A man embodying a **specific heritage**. How could I go about capturing and celebrating this? Should I have called upon the custodians of oral history? The collectors of the everyday?

The trouble was, Frank, unlike his fellow cobbler Apelles of Cos (4th century BC) did not want to talk in all his modesty, and also did not think that anybody would want to listen. I needed a translator, somebody with a local accent and an eye and ear for the long view. Somebody who could acknowledge the modest pride of the cobbler being in the same place and the same job for all his life and who could translate and frame this personal life against the backdrop of social and political events. I needed a portraitist, but perhaps not a painter. However, there is great story about the Greek painter Apelles of Cos and a cobbler, which has been kept alive though the well used German proverb *Schuster bleib bei deinen Leisten*. Apelles of Cos (4th century BC) was engaged in undercover audience evaluation of his new painting. Hiding behind a pillar, he listened to his cobbler commenting on the poor rendering of the shoes in his painting. Apelles agrees with these remarks made after all by an expert in shoes and goes about adjusting his painting accordingly. The following day, the cobbler returns and objects to the rendering of the legs and drapery. At this point Apelles jumps out from behind the pillar and shouts, that he cobbler should stay with his wooden shoe forms (Leisten) rather than speaking about something he knows nothing about. Today, the proverb *Schuster bleib bei deinen Leisten* is used in the context of those who boost and talk and interfere in something they have no knowledge or experience about.

As such, Frank Cavanagh's was a cobbler through and through, a grounded expert in shoes and all things leather and a 'normal life in Birkenhead'. Not a war hero or veteran, not a man of letters, music or the arts, not a grandee of the town hall in short not somebody worth a *monument* or a *statue*. Neither was I a portrait artist, shoe fixer or a local to Birkenhead. Thus, I needed a translator, or better, quite a few, artists who would be able to help translate this place and its *multiple inheritances (its lived heritage)* for me and for others, in the hope, that this place (Birkenhead) eventually will become *Heimat*. I felt the need for creating monuments (Denkmaler), but not in stone, bronze or steel, but in words, sounds, films and images. Light in weight, but perhaps heavy in other ways and more mobile.