

perthi kov

'REMEMBER'

Until The Day Break

A “How To” manual for small-scale outdoor story walks

Written and edited by the Perthi Kov Team

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Getting Started

Where did we get the idea for 'Until the Day Break'?

Our inspiration came from a Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Sally was on holiday with family and was taken on a tour of the Historic Oakland Cemetery, an event that happens every October. Small groups were taken to visit the graves of interesting people from Atlanta and at each place, the character, in appropriate dress and with minimal props, told their story. Sally imagined a similar event taking place in our local Churchyard, the beautiful St Euny in Redruth. When she returned home, she talked to her neighbour Sue, and the rest is history!

Growing the Perthi Kov Community.

Perthi Kov (Cornish for remember) was formed from the start as a community group, bringing together the skills and passions of local people of all ages to create a memorable event. The initial stages of the project involved a mix of professional theatre-makers, writers, and musicians talking about the creative possibilities of immersive theatre walks with representatives of St. Euny church, who would host and nurture the project. Out of these initial discussions, a 'core group' emerged who would shape and guide the project from start to finish. This group comprised Cath Cullen, Sue Hill, Margaret Johnson, Sally Smith, and Tamsin Spargo. Together we represented the various strands of the project, from research and writing, to directing, volunteer coordination, administration, and finance. Although this small 'core group' drove the project, we also had a wider group who met regularly to share ideas and develop the project. This group included our musical director Claire Ingleheart, who leads the Ingleheart Singers Hilary Coleman, who leads the Red River Singers as both choirs would be at the heart of the events. This group also included our production manager Mia Page-Waite and many others involved in different stages of our work from actors to prop-makers. Some had a paid role, others were volunteers, but what we all had in common was a passionate commitment to the project. A warning note: we met quite often! In the six months running up to the event, the core and larger groups met regularly, eventually on alternate weeks and more frequently as needed. Diary juggling for busy people was a challenge! We used Doodle.

Calling out.

We knew that “Until the Day Break” would only be a success if it grew out of the passion of everyone involved, especially the local people who would perform - as actors or as singers - or as production makers- creating costumes, props, safeguarding children, running the box office etc.. Getting the word out about what we were doing was crucial and ensuring that everyone who responded was

welcomed into the Perthi Kov community, and valued as an equal member of the team, was our priority.

Use your contacts.

The core group decided early on to invite two respected and popular, but contrasting, local community choirs to take part. Music would be a defining dimension of “Until the Day Break” and the members of these choirs were both valued performers and ambassadors for our project. Although initially they worked with their choir leaders to rehearse their songs, while we researched and wrote, our stories they spread the word and helped us to make contact with other community members as we widened our call for volunteers in different roles.

The power of technology: using social media.

The real pleasures of our project sprang from meeting each other and talking (often over tea and cake), but just as we needed to use email to keep in touch, so we also found that using social media helped us to spread the word. We set up a public Facebook page that enabled us to publicise events like our memory-gathering cafés and to allow people to find out what we were doing. It also helped to sustain our growing Perthi Kov community as we worked, sometimes in groups, and eventually all together, to create “Until the Day Break”. Later on we used our Facebook page and Twitter to publicise the event, so it's worth finding out early on who in your group is happy to use, or learn to use, social media and make sure they have extra cake.

Research

Pleasures and pitfalls.

Where did you start? How did you find out about her? Where did you find his story? One of the joys of this project was starting with an inscription on a gravestone and discovering a life. Another was listening to someone talk about a relative, recently lost or distantly recalled through family, and tracing that person through time. This section suggests some ways of researching the people who will be at the heart of your story and the history of the local community that will inform your event. It's not a traditional 'how to do historical research' guide, as you can find plenty of those online or in your local library. Instead we suggest ways of working that we found particularly useful for this project, examples of how different types of research enabled or enriched our storytelling, and a few gentle warnings about getting lost in the archive.

Inspirations.

Where did we start? In one place- the churchyard- but with different perspectives. Some of us were already fascinated by local history, some curious about people, some drawn to a beautiful or broken monument. Informed by our individual passions and interests, learning in conversation with each other, we walked through the graves. We read names and inscriptions, traced illegible words with our finger tips, and felt the past begin to come to life. Perhaps it's too fanciful to say that we felt the breath of the past as we paused at each grave, but we were certainly inspired. Some graves immediately intrigued us: soldiers from the Napoleonic era, a man buried with two wives, a mother buried with her soldier son. Some simply moved us: grave after grave revealed young women who died in their twenties; a memorial to still-born babies; a broken monument to a young man killed on the railroad. We made notes, we took photographs, and we started to research.

Sources and resources.

People: you will spend a lot of time alone with your nose in a book or a historic record, but don't forget that any researcher's greatest resource is other people. Archivists and librarians may be busy, and charged with protecting their material, but can give a polite, enthusiastic researcher wonderful help. When we described our project and asked for guidance, we were helped in so many ways- shown useful books and records, offered tours of archives, introduced to helpful people.

Perthi Kov built a great network of knowledgeable people, including many professional history 'specialists'. We asked an eminent local historian to walk us through the graveyard and give us his insights, which he did with enthusiasm.

That was a tremendous help, so do seek out your own local history society or historians. There's no guarantee they will help (and we weren't greeted with open arms by everyone), but at the very least you will have introduced your project and you may recruit some great researchers. Above all we sought out, and listened to, local people.

Memory Gathering: we held memory-gathering tea parties to which we invited anyone who had memories to share of people buried in the churchyard. Over free tea and cake, we listened to stories, took notes and, with permission, recorded some people talking about their memories. Several of our key 'characters' came from these sessions and building relationships with their family members as we researched their lives and created their stories was especially rewarding. We also learned that it was important to be clear and honest about the scope and nature of the project. While it was intended to honour and celebrate everyone in the churchyard, we could not feature everyone we researched (see Writing) and we ensured that everyone who shared stories or information about someone felt valued and included, even if their family member was not a 'featured' character. We saw these events as part of the project, not just as research, and many people who came to talk joined us and participated in the final production, whether or not we featured their relative.

Some researchers also met individuals with memories or stories to tell one-to-one, to allow more time, or to fit in with their availability.

We bought, and occasionally used hand-held audio-recorders (Zoom recorders are easy to use, but others are available). In most cases, we just took written notes but a recording can be useful when you want a longer conversation with someone. Where possible, we shared plans for finished stories with family members, not for 'approval', as we were clear that our 'characters' were inspired by what we found out rather than facsimiles of real people, but so that we all felt happy going forward.

Social Media: We created a Facebook page for Perthi Kov early on in our research process. It was a great way of keeping in contact with the wider, and widening, group of people who were working in different ways to make the project happen: the core team, researchers, choir members, and supporters. We were able to use this to put out calls for information and publicise memory-gathering events. We also set up a Twitter account, which we could use in a similar way. Once we were ready to sell tickets, Facebook and Twitter, were very useful as our local radio interviewers were able to share our posts.

Genealogical resources: when all you have are dates on a gravestone, your best first step may be to look for records of death, then birth, and this may take you to marriage, to a spouse (or two!), then children, and soon you have a family,

different locations and addresses that open up stories of migration or changing fortunes. Church and parish records may be held in your local library but if you are working on a churchyard project, do talk with the Churchwardens as some churches still hold their own burial, baptism and marriage record as well as maps of who is buried where. This is helpful when you are trying to locate someone buried in an unmarked grave. Some military records can be accessed online, especially if you are researching an official 'war grave'. Today genealogical records, and associated material, are readily available online. Some organisations offer free access, but a majority offer access by paid-subscription. Do check to see what your local library or records office offers and see if anyone in the group already subscribes to any online resources. You may need to balance time and cost in this part of your research. If you have plenty of time, you can find what you need without spending money, but if time is tight, you may decide that a subscription that gives you speedy access to all the births, marriages and deaths you want is worthwhile.

Newspapers: your area will have a library or museum that holds historic newspapers (including very early titles), usually on microfilm or in digital form. These are a wonderful source of information about individuals but also about the world in which they lived. You may find news items about your characters, including obituaries (an easy starting point with the death date on the gravestone). You will also get a sense of the period, through the stories and even advertisements that offer a glimpse of the world in which your characters lived. The researcher/writer of one “Until the Day Break” character found dramatic news stories about a character as well as revealing glimpses into his day-to-day world. Don't be daunted by the equipment: once you've been shown how to use a microfilm reader you will be whizzing through the decades. You may also find online newspaper archives.

Records Office/Archives: once you have some names, and perhaps occupations or affiliations for your 'characters', you can search for the records of relevant businesses or organisations. We spent productive hours in our county records office examining the records of local churches, railway maps, wills and so much more. These are 'primary sources', documents from the past rather than about it, and you will need to follow instructions and guidance on how to handle the material. The archives can be busy places, so it's worth making contact in advance to enable the staff to help you. You won't always find the information you want, but the material you find can be wonderful. Recruiting papers for the Napoleonic-era army regiments in which two of our 'characters' served gave us not only facts but the tone of address that would be used by the writer to comic effect in the final piece. Here, if you are lucky, you may also get your first glimpse of what your 'character' looked like, if there are photographic collections. Your county Records Office team will probably be your best first resource and will usually suggest more specialised archives once they know your needs.

Oral or film archives: does your area have an archive of sound or film recordings of local history and local lives, or a local memory project? These can be a great source of information and inspiration. Your own 'characters' may not feature but you may learn how they might have sounded, or dressed. Listening to local dialect captured on a film archive informed the writing, and performance, of one “Until the Day Break” character, a little miner's son who would have used local words.

Timeline: It's a good idea to create a timeline of events (great and small) during the years you are covering. Check local-history publications first to see if one already exists in the form of 'annals'. If not, create a shared file where researchers can add dates and events as they discover them. We started with a timeline produced by more-experienced researchers and then created a chart that allowed us to map the lives of each 'character' against it. This could be used by every writer to link their 'characters' to what was happening locally, nationally, or internationally in their era. In “Until the Day Break”, a writer who had not done the research for her piece was able to use the timeline to connect cholera outbreaks in the town to the story of a local soldier; a passing reference in one sentence gave poignancy and depth without weighing down the scene with too much detail.

Pitfalls.

Be warned: research can be addictive! Uncovering a story, fact by fact, is rather like detective work and it's important to know which 'leads' to follow and when to stop. Individual researchers may become so fascinated by their 'character' that they want to know everything about them, but, for the purposes of the project, the goal is to find the material for his or her story. It's likely that a great deal of material uncovered will not be used directly in the final stories or scenes for performance. Some material won't be relevant but even when it is, the writers will need to be careful about how much research they allow to 'show' in their scripts. Too much detail, too many facts, dates and information weigh a story down, prevent it from 'taking off' as a creative encounter with the past. Bad historical writing is like seeing all the workings in a mathematical sum: it may interest a few specialists but it won't move or enchant. Your event will be experienced by the audience not marked. Researchers who aren't 'creative' writers may find setting aside the product of their hours of work frustrating but there are ways of avoiding waste and disappointment. We agreed, early in our research process, that we would find ways of saving and presenting (in exhibition, articles, and our website) some of the research findings that would not fit in, or serve, our story walks.

Is this the real story?

The research journey is never direct. Changing priorities and surprise discoveries will demand new exploration. The end story, when written, may be very different to the one imagined at the start of the research process, and initial ideas may have to be set aside. In “Until the Day Break”, a researcher/writer was drawn to a man buried with two wives and hoped she might find material for a comic story about 'three in a grave'. What her research uncovered was a tragic tale of deaths in a local industry and this became the focus of the story, interwoven with material on the two wives. The comedy we 'lost' was found in another story and so we were able to both capture the most powerful aspect of the individual story and keep the variety and balance of the production.

Research, in the archives or through conversation, is the foundation of the stories you will tell, can help you costume your cast, and choose your music. It is important to honour the past by checking your facts and gathering your material. But turning that research into stories requires selection, creativity, and some tough decisions.

Sources.

These are some of the key sources that we used. Most are, for obvious reasons, Cornish, but equivalents can be found in most locations. We used:

The Cornish Studies Library (Redruth) for historical newspapers, printed sources and histories.

The Cornwall Records Office (currently Truro, relocating with the Cornish Studies Library to Kresen Kernow, Redruth in 2018), for primary documents and archives. Cornish Memory, cornishmemory.com, for photographs and recordings.

Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro.

Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry Museum (Bodmin).

Local historians and historical associations. We had a guided walk with Redruth's foremost local historian, Michael Tangye, and found his work and that of other local historians invaluable.

Online censuses - many are available for free access- to trace family connections, addresses, etc..

www.freemd.org.uk- for some birth, marriage and death indexes.

Church records - some have been lodged with the Records Office but others may be held by the individual church.

Online genealogy websites like ancestry.com, rootsweb.com, findmypast.co.uk.

These are usually paid-for by subscription but sometimes have free access periods. You can also check with your local library for any sources available through them.

Writing

'If we want to meet the dead looking alive we turn to art' (Hilary Mantel, Reith Lectures, BBC Radio 4, 2017).

So, you have umpteen files of fascinating facts (and quite a few more mundane details) about your chosen 'characters'. You probably also have a 'feel' for at least some of them: a sense of what sort of person they were under the skin, at heart. It's possible you've found yourself identifying with a character, feeling empathy with their situation, or even disliking them. If you're a traditional historical researcher you may feel a little uncomfortable about that. You may believe that all we can access is information and that even that isn't always to be believed. Whatever your own inclination, you face the challenge of bringing your 'character' to life and that will require stepping out of the territory of historical research and into the terrain of creative writing. The man, woman, or child you have researched had a real life of which you have learned something as you researched, but to live again for the audience, they must have a second, different life. Writing for this type of project also involves making decisions, and reaching compromises, with other members of the team, especially the director/s and performers.

Writing individual 'characters'.

We started by discussing (in a group of researchers, writers, and key 'artistic leads') the characters to whom we had been drawn and about whom we felt we had enough material from our research to create stories. Then we agreed who would write each story. Even at this early stage, we thought about how they might work together: did we have an interesting mix in terms of age, gender, topic, and (perhaps most important) mood? Inevitably researchers/writers are drawn to individuals because of the drama, poignancy, or interest of their story, but they have to work together as a whole immersive theatre experience. Too many sad stories of early death may dishearten and dismay, so where are the tales of passion, of adventure, of life lived to the full? But, if in doubt, we agreed to write. We had, for example, two young men who died in industrial accidents; both had terrific stories and enough material to help a writer bring them to life. They were both assigned to writers and although, in the final decision about which combination would work best for the production, neither was a main 'character', one became a guide and his story was read on BBC Radio Cornwall, and the other's story was included in our exhibition. If you agree that nothing will be wasted, you can make difficult decisions easier.

Some points to bear in mind:

- **Make it live!** The most powerful pieces focus on one event, or episode, in a life rather than telling a 'this then this' account of everything someone did. We wanted our audience to experience the inhabitants' worlds briefly rather than listening to a list of events. Some researchers may be tempted to include all the fascinating facts they found, but it's easy to weigh down a story with too much information. Let your research inform your writing and trust that it will. Some of our writers read through their research, or the notes that had been given to them, then set them aside to write their first draft. You are writing about people who must live in our present so don't trap them in history.
- **Think about form.** Will your 'character' talk directly to the audience? That may work if they are a story-telling type, someone who can't wait to tell. Or perhaps, like two sisters in “Until the Day Break” they are oblivious of the strangers, reading a letter from a friend that allows the audience to eavesdrop on a lost world. Are they alone or, like our Napoleonic soldiers, are they talking together, about their business and mistaking the audience for likely recruits? Form will matter both in individual scenes and in the overall production. The right form for the right 'character' must come first, but your final set of pieces will be far more effective if you have a variety of forms and styles as well as characters. If you are using music, you will need to think about how the script will connect with it. This may involve discussions at an early stage between writer, director, and musical director/composer/musician.
- **Leave room for the audience.** Don't explain too much. Hints and suggestions are so much more enticing than explanations. In “Until the Day Break” we didn't explain that Benny George's sister hanged him. Instead he recalled the softness of her silk scarf against his neck and that 'afterwards they said the revival had turned her head'. It was enough to suggest the terrible drama at the heart of his story without making it explicit. Your guide can always give a little more information to the audience as they move on to the next 'scene' but a little mystery involves the audience.
- **Show don't tell.** This is a commonplace in creative writing but it's worth remembering. You will have plenty of facts and details about your 'character' but if you tell the audience too much, they will lose interest or feel they're being told. You will have performers to interpret and bring to life the character you have created and your script should give them the opportunity to become rather than describe.
- **Can you smell the violets?** Remember to use the senses in your piece to bring the world of the 'character' to life. Does she delight in the smell of the violets her lover gives her? Is he still hearing the clamour of the mine? Sight can be a dominant sense in writing, as it often is in life, but for your theatre

walks to be immersive you need to engage as many of your audience's senses as you can.

- **She did what?** Your 'character' doesn't know what happens, how the story ends. In “Until the Day Break”, Benny George hopes at the end of his story that one day the sister who killed him may join him and their siblings and be happy. The writer left it to the guide to tell the audience that she was, indeed, buried in the same graveyard many years later. This allowed the scene to be played out without breaking the mood.

Writing for the 'Guide Characters'.

One of the distinctive and special aspects of “Until the Day Break” was that we used 'real people' from the churchyard as the guides who accompanied audience groups to meet the other characters at their gravesides. The research and writing that enabled us to create our guides was as important as the work on the 'residents' they visited. In each case, we needed to give the actor a story/biography that they could absorb and call on to either directly share with their audience group or to inform their own performance. In some cases we had already researched and written stories but decided that, for reasons of overall balance or mood, these characters would not be featured at the graveside. So we had ready-made scripts to give our guides. In other cases we shared research notes so that the performers had material to help them 'get into character'. The guides also had to read the scripts for all the characters they would meet as they accompanied the audience on the walks. This ensured that they knew about the changing mood as they moved from character to character and could gently prepare their audience groups. We also asked the guides to be responsible in a small number of character-encounters for sharing information with the audience group after the scene. Two examples may show how that worked. One of our characters had talked with joy and sadness about her courtship, marriage, and widowhood. Her grave reveals that she was buried with her son who died just weeks before her during the First World War. We decided that this sad fact was better shared by the guide after the character had finished speaking. In another scene, a little boy who was murdered by his sister ends the scene by looking forward to the day they may be reunited. Here, we asked the guide to tell the audience that his sister was eventually buried in the same graveyard and they were reunited. In both cases this use of a 'postscript' enabled the graveside characters to stay within their 'moment' and the guides could share these twists-in-the-tale or last words as they moved on to the next encounter.

On a practical level, to produce these guide scripts, our 'Writing Wrangler' provided the guides with special versions of each character script that included suggested wording for the postscript as well as notes on their own character.

Can we cast this? Yes we can!

While you're researching, it's best to think about whether or not you will be able to find someone to play your character. This matters most, obviously, if your character is unusual in some way. Will you be able to find a performer who can play the role? There are usually more female volunteers than male and community performers may have many talents but don't assume you will find someone who can play the right age/class/regional accent. You will also need to think carefully about child characters. We found some wonderful stories and decided that we really wanted to tell them. In one case, where a tragic story needed to be told by a little boy, we knew that there were two talented boys who each play the part well and could share the role to avoid being overloaded by multiple performances. Another story was told in a little scene involving several children who each had only a few lines. You will read elsewhere in this manual about the challenges and special requirements of working with children. Child characters have a wonderful quality and it's lovely to have people of all ages involved but don't underestimate the work you will need to do.

Sometimes even an apparently straightforward role can be hard to fill. We found ourselves initially without a male actor suitable for one part and the writer, who was also directing, rewrote the role for the man's wife. The scene was different but equally effective. Eventually we did find a suitable male actor, so we could revert to the regional plan. Be prepared for casting challenges and flexible in meeting them.

Editing.

Writers will edit their own work as they progress from first draft to the final version. However many drafts you write, by hand, or on a computer, do save each draft if you can. Sometimes you may cut a phrase, sentence, or section because it didn't seem to work but it may come back into play as the production develops. If you still have the original version, nothing has been lost. Editing will also take place through discussion with a director, and with performers, who may find, as they bring the script to life, that some parts could work better if changed. Professional authors have these discussions, and reach agreement, with their publishing house' editors, and writers for this type of performance must work with the other creators of the theatre walks. A key stage will be working out the timings of each scene, within an overall production timeframe, when cuts may be needed. Once we had our selection of scripts, we needed to see how long each theatre walk would take. So the core group walked slowly around our chosen route reading each script in turn and timed each scene and each phase of the walk. We used a timer on a mobile 'phone so you don't need any special equipment!

It's not always easy to cut writing you've lovingly (or determinedly) produced, but there's no room for possessiveness. We had pieces of quite different length, and worked out that the production needed them to be roughly equivalent for

practical reasons. Some writers edited their own scripts to time, while others were happy for the 'Writing Wrangler' (See below) to make suggestions. In every case the scenes were tighter and tauter. Less is usually more.

A Warning Note!

Writers like snails are easily crushed. They can also retreat into their shells when they feel threatened. Neither is good for your production! Although your writers will be using facts and findings from research about real people, they will be creating characters, and, like those characters, they will have their own personalities, styles, and feelings about the writing process. We had a mix of professional, experienced writers and one or two new to this form. Sharing one's writing, especially for the first time, is always challenging: it's exciting to discover what someone else thinks but there's always the possibility they won't 'get it' or like it. An experienced writer may be used to learning from of all sorts of feedback, and knowing when to accept a suggested change, or when to politely defend a choice; newer writers may feel disheartened, especially if feedback is negative or insensitively expressed. We quickly established a few simple ground rules that we'd recommend.

If you're sharing draft work in a group, agree on someone to be an informal Chair/group coordinator (We had a 'Writing Wrangler', who had overall responsibility for the scripts, from first draft to editing). This person can intervene if discussion of someone's draft work becomes too negative and reframe it in a way that's useful rather than dispiriting. No matter how confident the writer, it's better to hear 'The way your character describes plunging into the ocean is really effective but I wonder if it's stronger without the second paragraph?' than 'That bit about diving goes on too long'. It's particularly important to ensure that group discussions don't become inadvertently overwhelming: several people may agree that someone's used language that's a bit too archaic, but when everyone pitches in to make the same point, it can be disheartening. Most writers will absorb feedback and go away and work on a draft and you want them to do so happily. Basically, be thoughtful. We've all seen babies who could curdle milk but we find something nice to say to their parents, without lying. If you're giving feedback, 'yet' may be your most helpful word: if a writer is told something isn't quite working yet, the implication is that it's in process and can come right.

Casting and Rehearsing

Casting Calls.

Once we had researched and written our 'characters', our graveyard resident and guides, we were keen to find our cast and to invite anyone who was interested to come and find out about the project. So we hired a local hall for a Sunday afternoon, advertised with posters, on Facebook, bought tea and biscuits and crossed our fingers! We were delighted when the room filled with people of all ages who all started chatting over tea. After a brief introduction, and reading of a couple of our character scripts, we all launched into an informal theatre workshop. This included light-hearted exercises that both put everyone at their ease and allowed us to see different qualities that people might bring to a role. After more tea, we asked everyone to read one of the character scripts we thought might suit them. We made it clear that we wouldn't be making definite decisions that day, but just wanted people to 'try on' a character.

We had already decided that, as the event would include numerous walks, we would try to cast at least two people in each role, and we made it clear that everyone could have a part to play. We had over twenty characters in the graveside scenes and ten guides (five characters leading audience groups and five characters accompanying them). This meant people weren't competing to be cast, which was essential in creating a happy, and inclusive, team. As it turned out, to our delight, several people took to their assigned characters as if they had been written for them. In one or two cases we didn't feel there was a person of quite the right age or type to play a character, so the search went on, but this first workshop gave us many key performers. We contacted everyone individually with details of who they would play.

A Sense of Place.

Our second workshop took place at St. Euny, where actors met choir members and their directors. This was the first time that some people had visited our venue, so while we all joined in some singing exercises that helped to draw us together, we each spent time getting a feel of the churchyard both for us and for our characters. Immersing ourselves in this special space was vital if we were to create a special experience for our audience.

To pay or not to pay? That is (possibly) the question.

Perthi Kov started, and ended, as a community group and project. We were fortunate in gaining enough funding to create jobs for theatre and arts professionals and our decisions on casting were informed by a commitment we made to provide paid work as well as community involvement. We decided that

we would cast our key graveside characters from the community and that professional actors would be cast as the characters who lead audience groups around the churchyard in each performance. This decision was informed by the fact that the 'guides' had to take responsibility for timing their walks, interacting 'in character' with the audience group, and dealing with anything that happened en route. It would, of course, be possible to ask volunteers to take on this role, but it is one that requires not only acting skills but also the ability to move along a group that has become rather-too-fascinated by a scene, to ensure nobody trips on a tree root, and to do it all in character. We also asked some of our professional actors, who had relevant experience, to direct individual graveside scenes.

Rehearsing Individual Characters.

Eventually, our rehearsals would involve everybody, as we brought together actors and choirs to create the theatre walks. In the earlier stages, we worked on individual scenes at times, and in places, to suit the people involved. This was a gentle start for newer performers and it was also practical as arrangements could be made more easily. Some of us met, and rehearsed, in the churchyard at the spot where the final performance would take place, but others chose to rehearse at someone's home or another venue. Rehearsing in the churchyard was particularly helpful as it allowed actors and director to absorb the sense of place and try out their voice in the open air. We wanted a relaxed, naturalistic style of performance, to emphasise the intimacy of the encounters between the living and the dead. So while we needed to ensure that all our performers were audible, we also wanted to ensure that even the comic elements of our residents' personalities were believable.

Full-cast rehearsals.

It's not easy to arrange many full-cast rehearsals for a project that involves many community volunteers. So you need to make the most of a few full-cast rehearsals. If, like us, you are using characters to guide the audience from scene to scene at regular intervals, you will need to try out the timings and check that the sound or action from one part of the event doesn't detract from another. We needed, for example, to be sure that the quiet scene of Benny George, the little boy killed by his sister, wasn't interrupted by the joyful singing and accordion playing of the 'Dust Girls' scene. So, a couple of weeks before the production opened, we ran a full-cast workshop where individual scenes were rehearsed and the songs were sung, while the guides' director walked through and checked on timings and possible problems. This meant that by the time we reached our two final rehearsals- tech and dress- we had eliminated any such problems and could focus on fine-tuning. Here are a few pointers to things we found invaluable for our final rehearsal and event stages:

- Have a weather-proof space, with a loo, and, ideally, hot-drink-making facilities for everyone (call it a Green Room if you like!) and make sure it's attended so that people can leave their bags etc. It's easy to become so caught up in the rehearsals or event that you forget everyday things like security.
- We found it best to store main costumes and props at the venue so that nobody accidentally left something at home. Can you find space for this?
- Everything takes longer than you think so leave more time for rehearsals.
- What's your Plan B if a cast member is ill? It can happen and if you know what you will do, you won't need to panic.
- You can't have too much cake!

Our separate **Production Checklist** explains many of the practical and technical aspects of staging outdoor theatre walks that you should bear in mind when planning your event. We had to deal with potential trip hazards like tree roots, prepare for soggy, slippery paths in poor weather (we were 'on' come sun or rain), ensure we had licensed chaperones for children, volunteers to keep everyone safe on the roads on our site, and emergency first-aiders in place. These are vital aspects of any public event and all takes time to organise, so do use the checklist.

Finally...

“Until the Day Break” was a joyful, and at times scary, ride! We made things up as we went along, we shared ideas, and learned from each other and from all our different experiences in theatre and in life. We hope that this guide has given you some helpful ideas, and a few gentle warnings, so that you can create your own unique event. In return, please do us one small favour: let us know when it's happening so we can come along!

Good luck from all the Perthi Kov team!

Production Checklist

Preparing to Produce

Read all of the research and information you are given when embarking on making the plans for production. Get to know the script or story, know your team, and the values of the company. Then you will be in a position to know exactly what your team are looking for when it comes to the production aspects.

Create the Production Schedule

Your creative team (director, designer, musical director) will have an idea of a timescale so that you can start to put a schedule together. This schedule will include meetings, site visits and preparation, rehearsals, performances and the fit-up and get-out.

At this stage you should have an idea of your audience size, number of shows and what your event will be. Now is a good time to start looking into insurance and events licensing – the earlier you get those essential bits of admin out of the way, the better. (Find more information on licensing small-scale events here: <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/advice-and-benefits/licences-and-street-trading/alcohol-and-entertainment-licence/licensing-act-2003/temporary-event-notice/>)

Firm up the Budget

The team you are working with will also know what their budget looks like - how much income they have managed to raise, how much they expect to make on selling tickets. Between a rough initial budget and your schedule, you can start to cost the project. Team days, participant numbers for catering and costume, technical equipment, the set and makes/props. It is ok to change your budget as you go. If half way through you realise that tea and biscuits are costing you twice as much as you expected, then reallocate that money from another area that has underspent – just make sure you make a note of what you've changed or save a new version. This will help when having to justify to colleagues or funders why your estimated figures don't exactly match the actual figures.

Recruit your Team

Having a reliable and enthusiastic production team makes the days go a lot quicker. If you need to recruit Stage Managers, Runners or any other back-stage show role, make sure that they're people you know will support you and the running of the show with a good level of experience in what they do. If you have

a small enough production that you can cover most of these roles yourself, rope an extra pair of hands in just in case. You never know when disaster could strike: you could be mid-show when Dmitri loses his hat, with an audience approaching in two scenes time whilst you're stuck in a bush waiting to cue the choir, and a radio call comes in for a missing character on the other side of the site.

Get help.

Site Safety

Once you have your schedule and your budget, it's time to make things happen. Working in outdoor theatre (especially in Cornwall) the weather is more often than not against you. It's never too early to start thinking about site preparation and safety. Sometimes that means finding an alternative route for your promenade show, and sometimes that means throwing woodchip on every inch of performance area an hour before show start.

Risk Assessments and other Paperwork

An initial site risk assessment should be completed before any work begins, and measures taken to reduce those risks enough to make it a safe working environment whilst creating your production. A separate risk assessment should be in place for any off-site working, for example rehearsals in the local village hall on a rainy day. Another risk assessment for any working at height or lone working and another for the show itself and any special effects, technical equipment, set and the performance movement itself. Yes – there's a lot of paperwork to do.

Don't forget about your licensing...

If you've cast children, make sure you're clear on whether or not you need a Child Performance License and chaperones. This is really important – having written permission from parents/guardians on travel arrangements and medical information is imperative. (Find more information on children in entertainment here: <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools-and-colleges/education-welfare/children-in-entertainment/>)

Another important piece of paperwork you should draw up early on in the process are contracts for anyone that you are employing. There are plenty of sources that can give you a contract of employment template and give you guidelines for terms and conditions as well as information on employment law. For theatre practitioners, ITC is always a good starting point (<https://www.itc-arts.org>).

Participation and Hospitality

For Perthi Kov, participation work is absolutely fundamental to what we do. “Until The Day Break” was for the local community as well as made and performed with the local community. With over 150 volunteer participants, ranging from researchers to road stewards, this piece had a breath of new life in it every night. Tea parties and local information sessions are great ways to meet potential participants, and where you choose to advertise them has a massive impact on who turns up. For a community based theatre-piece like ours, get a flyer up in every shop in the high street, pass the info on to the local am-drams and always leave a pile of flyers in the chippy...

A total cast and crew of 200 people may sound amazing for such a small-scale production but this makes participant admin and care the forefront of everything that you do. Participants and volunteers give up their time to get involved with your project entirely for free and need to be loved and nurtured for doing so. Taking the time to get to know each volunteer by name (when the tea party name badges come off), a hot cup of tea and a pasty after rehearsals in a rainy field, a glass of fizz and a thank you card at the end of a successful project are little gestures that go a long way. Which brings us on to catering – catering can be expensive and is best organised as far in advance as possible. If you’re lucky like us, the nice gentleman in your local bakery might do you a deal, but don’t count on it when making your budget. Participants’ families will certainly want to come and see the show, but you probably won’t be able to give them free tickets. It’s good to programme a free preview or two; this will allow you to test out your performance (especially important if your audience is on the move) and enables you to offer free tickets to families and friends.

Marketing

Marketing your event takes a lot of work. You have to sell it to the target audience and finding the best medium may not always be easy. For our project, knowing that our target audience was the local community, flyers, posters, social media and a BBC Radio Cornwall plug was enough to send our ticket sales through the roof. With strong networking connections to companies like Eden and WildWorks, we managed to blag a spot in their newsletters which really helped.

Setting the Scene

Whilst rehearsals are full tilt with directors and actors, the production team will be busy making set, gathering props, any technical kit that you may need and putting all of these in place to ensure a beautiful and smooth running show. Throughout rehearsals the Wardrobe Mistress may steal cast away for fittings, or

schedule a whole day dedicated to the cause with time slots, as we did. For “Until The Day Break” the natural surroundings of the church yards were scenery enough for our stories, but if you have large set and scenery pieces make sure these are reliably built and in place early enough to rehearse with – the same applies for tricky or fiddly prop work.

Lights and Sound

Technical kit can take a long time to plan and prep and can be very expensive to hire or purchase. For “Until the Day Break” we worked with natural light and acoustic sound, our only technical intervention was battery safety lighting and a Minirig speaker in a tree providing the echo of a story as the audience left the site at the end of the performance. On larger scale productions your team may consist of a Lighting Designer, Associate Lighting Designer and at least two Lighting Technicians/Operators. The same can be mirrored for the Sound team, Projection Team and Video teams. It takes a lot of talented and technically minded crew to get your special effects up and running and make sure that light isn’t in your eye when doing your solo. Give the crew enough time to prepare all the kit, especially if lots of hires are involved and plan a technical rehearsal the gives you time to do a scene by scene technical plot, a cue-to-cue and a full technical run through before the dress rehearsal. Technical kit can be very temperamental...

Looking after your audience outdoors

Be aware that your audience might be picking their way over uncertain ground, may take a wrong turning, might need the loo. To look after them you will need to recruit and brief stewards, equip them with torches and radios if necessary, and make them clearly visible (this doesn’t have to be hi-vis jackets, a bright sash or armband will do). Make sure that your stewards know where the fire extinguishers and the first aid facilities/personnel are located and the radio procedure in case of emergency.

If you would like more information on our project or our manual has sparked some queries, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with a member of our team. Our contact details can be found on our website.