

Bridport Town Council



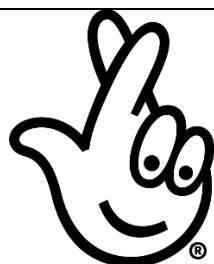
George Biles Project

Evaluation Report

January 2025



Bridport
Town Council



Made possible with

Heritage
Fund

Project Background

George Biles (b.1900 / d.1987) was a highly talented signwriter and pictorial painter who lived in Bridport throughout his life. In his work George depicts well-known Dorset countryside and historical events of the surrounding area. Only a few of his original artworks still survive in private art collections and there are also some murals and street signs on display in local premises. The craft of signwriting can be considered as a form of traditional folk art, producing work by eye, usually with little more equipment than paint and brushes. George Biles artwork, whilst little known, is of such a high standard and of captivating quality that it demands wider appreciation. For many years George did the signwriting for Palmers Brewery in Bridport. The Brewery still has some 200 pub signs, original artworks produced by George. The works are in various states of repair and are not available to local historians or the public.

Bridport Town Council received a National Lottery Heritage fund grant of £9,550 toward a local heritage project that will conserve and celebrate the artworks of George Biles. The George Biles Project is made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to:

- Digitise the collection of George Biles pictorial pub sign held by Palmers Brewery,
- Supported two workshops in signwriting for young people in Bridport and
- Put together public exhibitions of George Biles work across four venues in Bridport in the summer of 2024.

Project Delivery

Bridport Town Council working with local signwriter Jemma Thompson and Palmers Brewery

1) Digitising the collection of pictorial Pub Signs held by Palmers Brewery.

Palmers Brewery holds some 80+ pub signs in various states of disrepair in storage. Jemma Thompson working with Luke Makin, Palmers Brewery spent several days sifting through the stored pub signs to extract ones that could definitively be ascribed to George Biles. The surviving signs were in various stages of disrepair having spent many years outdoor, sometimes as many as 20/30 years!

Once selected Dave Penn, a local digital photographer, was able to take high quality images of the pub signs. Digital images of 60+ of the surviving pub signs produced by George Biles have now been recorded for posterity. Copies of the digital images are held by Bridport Town Council, Palmers brewery and Bridport Museum. The public can now access this unique collection of pictorial pub signs at Bridport Museum.

Whilst the pub signs were being explored Jemma was able to identify several examples that would be displayed as part of the public exhibition.



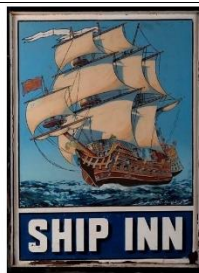
Dave Penn capturing pub signs



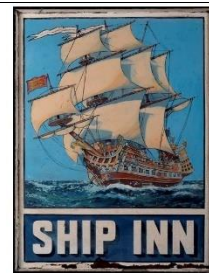
Cleaning signs ahead of digitising



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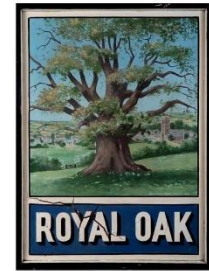
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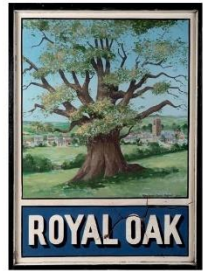
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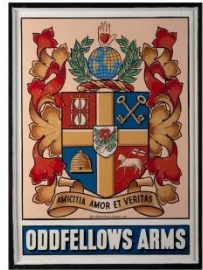
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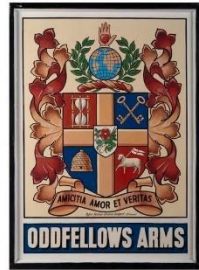
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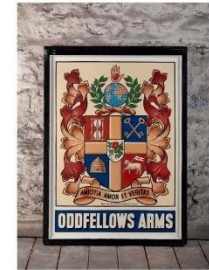
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Example of digitised images collected.

2) Signwriting Workshops

In April Jemma Thompson, a local signwriter, ran two x two day workshops for 6 students at each workshop. The signwriting sessions introduced people to the art and mechanics of signwriting and supported individuals to develop their own practice.



A Deep Dive **2**

into Beginners Signwriting
with Signwriter Jemma Thompson

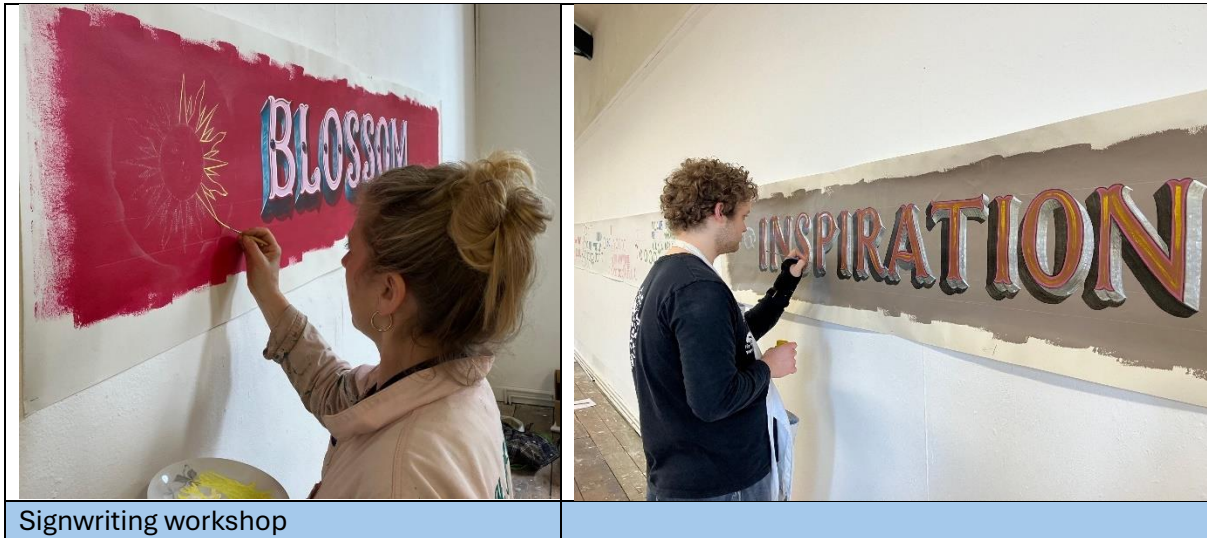
BRIDPORT ARTS CENTRE

30th & 31st May | 10am-1pm

**Over 16's, all materials inc.
6 places available (2 day workshop)
Book online at www.bridport-arts.com**

This workshop is part of the George Biles "King of Signwriters" project made possible with support from the Heritage Fund.





Signwriting workshop

3) George Biles Exhibition – August 2024

The centre piece and culmination for the George Biles project was a month-long exhibition of his works at 4 venues around Bridport. A massive thanks goes to Jemma Thompson who curated the exhibition and spent many hours sourcing material for display and designing and presenting exhibits in 3 of the 4 venues. The tireless support of the Town Council Outdoor Team also deserves mention for helping transport and set up the exhibition spaces.





Setting up the Exhibition in the British Legion Hall

Three main venues around Bridport exhibited works by George Biles between the 1st and 29th August 2024. The Lord Nelson pub also exhibited additional pub signs.

The exhibition was opened by Anne Rickard, Mayor of Bridport, at a reception attend by 80 invited guests. Palmers Brewery kindly provide refreshments for this event as part of their contribution. The Exhibitions proved extremely popular and attracted around 4000 visitors. Whilst entry to exhibitions was free, all three venues reported generous donations toward their participation in the project.



George signwriting outside British Legion Hall

And outside BAC

GEORGE BILES

King of Signwriters

EXHIBITION

1st - 29th AUGUST 2024

A major retrospective art exhibition celebrating the remarkable talents of Bridport's Master Sign Painter, George Biles (1900-1987)



- THE BRITISH LEGION HALL •
- BRIDPORT ARTS CENTRE •
- BRIDPORT MUSEUM •

See venues for details



With thanks to Bridport Town Council and The National Lottery Heritage Fund



Podcast

As part of the Project Bridport Town Council commissioned an interpretative podcast. The interview between local Storyteller Martin Maudsley and Ken Allen. Ken remembers George Biles and tells how he first met George and helped save his work for posterity.

A unique and special addition to the project;

<https://bridportandwestbay.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Ken-Allen-Interview-Final.mp3>

Budget

A grant of £9,950 was received from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Match funding was provided in cash and in kind support by Bridport Town Council and Palmers Brewery.

Expenditure	£
Professional Fees	6900
Event Costs (including £470 in kind)	1500
Digital Output	600
Publicity	1020
Total Expenditure	£10020
Income	£
Palmers Brewery	470
Heritage Lottery Grant	9550
Total	£10020