

## **Thinking Through the Creative Hub in Peripheral Places: A Long-View of the Dartington Hall Experiment in Rural Reconstruction Through Creativity**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter considers the creative infrastructure and social relationships that can be witnessed in peripheral locations, through the lens of a creative hub. The chapter will aim to historicise the apparent recent rise of hubs by locating the argument around the creative infrastructure of Dartington Hall, located on a rural estate in Devon, UK, founded in 1926, and still in existence. Dartington Hall enables an exploration of the ways in which a creative rural hub can become a focal point for the broader rural creative community, which in turn reaches out through sets of national and international connections. As a nexus it is also a place which generates a network spinning out into the surrounding regional countryside, creating new spatial social formations that serve the regional creative infrastructure.

The history of Dartington Hall and the rise and fall of activities within the estate, raises the question of how the 'spin-out' promise of hubs can be sustained. Dartington offers a way of understanding the importance of key infrastructure in peripheral areas as a generative device, however, this chapter offers a cautionary tale in this respect. Throughout its history as a creative arts hub Dartington Hall has been something of an experiment which has often struggled to achieve financial sustainability, creating risk for the surrounding community facing the loss of key infrastructure. The chapter will highlight the long lasting effect on the broader regional community when rural centres like Dartington are successful, and the what happens when change occurs that runs counter to the expectations of the stakeholder audience.

Dartington Hall Trust which manages the estate, will celebrate its centenary in 2026, however it is currently in the process of working through what the contemporary incarnation of the estate should be. Indeed, the finances of the Trust are such that developing a sustainable model is critical for its survival to 2026. In light of financial pressures, the Trustees of Dartington Hall have had to dramatically reposition the work

of the Trust over the last 20 years, with significant criticism from the creative community it evolved to support and work with. After period of highly negative feeling, the current management team of Dartington Hall have returned to the roots of the ethos of the estate that it was founded on, and have started a process of long term change. To appreciate the current day activity, a long view of Dartington Hall is presented in this chapter, aiming to introduce readers to some of the key threads, recognising that the enormity of the history of creativity at Dartington Hall is a much larger story (see for example, Bonham-Carter and Curry, 1970; Young, 1982)

### **Situating rural creative hubs**

Creative hubs are commonly associated with city locations, and one of the key aims of this chapter is to locate this key creative form within a rural context. This contributes to the growing body of work that locates rural creativity, and seeks to explore the more marginal spaces of creativity beyond the creative cities agenda (Gibson et al. 2010). In the same way as creativity has been seen as a key constituent of urban growth in recent decades, rural development policy has seen the creativity consistently represented, hoping that it will transform derelict buildings and rural market towns, offering opportunities for creative production and consumption (see Luckman et al. 2009, Bell and Jayne, 2010, Harvey et al. 2012). Of course, there is a long history to the presence of creativity within the countryside, however the current desire for creativity to underpin economic growth has placed rural creativity in a new policy agenda (Harvey et al. 2011).

For people living and trying to make a living through creativity in rural spaces, the availability of creative infrastructure and its sustainability is a key question (see Luckman, 2012). Where will one access creative business advice? Sell one's work? Gain access to inspiring content? Find like-minded people? Locate a mentor? Find people to share materials or expertise? Although creative practitioners may have purposefully chosen a rural location, access to professional services and kindred spirits is often still a necessity (Thomas and Jakob, forthcoming). In these contexts, the different spatial forms of creative infrastructure are key whether a network, hub or cluster. Accessing such places requires the right combination of transport, affordability, format of space and location (Thomas et al. 2013). In marginal places, getting this combination right for the population it is intended to serve is a challenge. In addition, the finances of maintaining capital investment mean that rural hubs are difficult maintain, requiring a careful balance of a portfolio that raises income, while providing services to stakeholders. Often underpinned by public or philanthropic investment, these hubs often need to balance their commercial trading arm with their

charitable or social purposes. There is not always the same dynamism within rural areas as found in city areas, in terms of the density of provision for creative infrastructure or the ready access to these creative spaces. The loss of these spaces, presents a rupture to those it has served, perhaps not to be filled again. As such, the importance of rural creative infrastructure can be magnified in rural settings, and the desire to hold onto hard won investment or sustain organisations that serve their stakeholders can be keenly felt.

This chapter places these debates in the context of a longer history of rural creativity that emanated from the work of Dartington Hall through the 20<sup>th</sup> century to present. This is a creative hub that has faced a local, regional, national and international community, a respected space of avant guard creative production, and a site where many of the most famous creative practitioners of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have visited. The research on which this chapter is drawn stems from an interest in the development of rural creative networks and their place in the contemporary creative economy and an analysis of regional craft ecologies. The chapter draws on original archive research within the Dartington Hall archives around the creative policy context linked to Dartington Hall, interviews with contemporary practitioners working within Dartington, and interviews with key stakeholders currently directing Dartington's next strategic plan. Part of the broader research of which this is part examines the regional craft ecology of South West Britain, and as such the work of Dartington Hall has been followed through ethnographic participant observation.

### **Establishing a centre for a 'many sided life'**

Dartington Hall is situated within a large agricultural estate on the outskirts of the market town of Totnes, on the banks of the River Dart, in the Devonshire rural countryside of South West Britain. The estate dates to the medieval period complete with Great Hall and dwellings located around substantial courtyard. This forms the heart of Dartington Hall today, surrounded by landscapes gardens leading to the estate farm, deer park, and woodland. The story of Dartington as creative hub starts in 1926, when Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst, purchased the dilapidated estate. The devastation of the 1<sup>st</sup> world war on rural landed estates was well entrenched by this stage, with the loss of male labourers in the conflicts, and then the effects of the depression on the production capacity on outmoded forms of agricultural production. Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, bought the property, funded through Dorothy's wealth, and established their 'experiment in rural reconstruction' (Rural Industries Bureau, Summer 1935:p.22), establishing the Dartington Hall Trust to oversee the management of the enterprise in 1932.

Dorothy gave a Founders day speech in 1967 and reflected on the underlying philosophy that guided their activities:

‘there was an absolutely clear concept in Leonard’s mind from the very start. He wanted to create here, in the countryside, a centre, where a many sided life, could find expression. Where living and learning could flourish together. Where there could be a balance, between all the practical things that were being done on the land, and the activities of the mind and the spirit which should be carried out together’. (Elmhirst, 1967)

Another fundamental element of this ethos was the desire ‘that we must live with beauty’ and that Dartington Hall should be ‘a centre where human values would be respected’ (*ibid.*). Although Dorothy talks of this being Leonard’s idea, this was certainly a shared project, which saw the combining of practical work on the land, creative expression in all activities, education and learning throughout one’s life, and a deep responsibility for others.

The establishment of this centre on the Dartington Hall estate, which could support this ‘many sided life’, started with pace in the mid 1920’s. Leonard drew on his contacts from Cornell University, and started farming the estate drawing on modern farming theory, aiming to move the estate from their cycle of decline to productivity. At the same time, Dorothy drew together her contacts from teacher training colleges in New York and established what would become the signature of Dartington, progressive creative education (Elmhirst, 1967). Invitations to artists from America to join them in these early days resulted in the establishment of artists’ studios, and the daily round of arts recreation in the evenings after the practical work of the day was completed. This placed music, performance and visual arts at the heart of the Dartington experiment. The creative life of Dartington was taken out into rural villages around the estate through performances and classes, and the local community brought into the estate, through work, opportunities for learning, amateur activity in theatre, orchestras and a choir, and as members of the audience in performances. Dorothy reminded her audience of these early years:

‘We had a school right over there in the east wing for our children. We had in the evening recreation in the form of the arts right from the first year. ... We all sang twice a week, we had play readings in our dining room. We had this delightful double life, the practical work every day and the arts. That is the pattern of Dartington that has continued all these years.’ (Elmhirst, 1967).

The scale of ambition of Leonard and Dorothy's vision has to be recognised. Within a decade of setting up the estate the 'practical' work of the estate was far reaching: the rebuilding of the medieval courtyard dwellings, including a great hall which could be used as a concert venue, the commissioning of modern architect designed houses; the development of a working sawmill, textile mill, wood workshops, a pottery, an expanding school, arts classes and workshops being given by practitioners who flowed through the estate (see Bonham-Carter and Curry, 1970). The rather extraordinary history of Dartington is one which sees the estate becoming a home to a density of creative practitioners, working within the estate, and a continuous arrival and departure of practitioners coming to stay at the Hall for varying lengths of time, contributing in rich ways to the creative spirit of the centre. Indeed, the humanity of the Elmhirst's experiment resulted in Dartington becoming a place of retreat for refugee artists from Europe in the 1930's and a home for those displaced through the Second World War: 'We had Michael Chekhov founding the Chekhov theatre studio, we had Hans Oppenheim who was going to found the School of Opera here, and he did put on one opera towards the end of the 30's.' (Elmhirst, 1967).

The financial resources of the Elmhirst's meant that they sought out well qualified people to set up the experiments and resourced them well, particularly in the first decade of the experiment. One such person was Angus Lister, a weaver from Scotland, who worked for a number of years at the Dartington Textile Mill sharing his knowledge and expertise (Bovey Handloom Weavers, n.d.). More widely known is the celebrated potter Bernard Leach, who was encouraged to set up a studio at Dartington at Leonard and Dorothy's behest. Attracting these eminent practitioners to Dartington established its quality, but also created an atmosphere that attracted others to visit, and settle in the area. It is also here where the regional spill overs are to be found. Angus Lister later set up his own workshop in a nearby town of Bovey Tracy which exists to this day. When Bernard Leach departed, Marianne de Trey arrived who would work the pottery until her death over 60 years later (Whiting, 2016). This pottery enabled other potteries to thrive in the area, such as the Lotus Pottery which gained from the availability of potters attracted by the employment opportunities at Dartington (personal correspondence with Elizabeth Skipwith, co-founder of Lotus Pottery with her husband Michael in 1957).

The focus of this experiment in rural reconstruction, led to Dartington Hall becoming associated with rural policy innovation, around architecture and housing design, farming and cultural policy. By the mid 1930s Dartington Hall had offered a member of staff to support the work of the Rural Industries Bureau's activities in support of rural

craft workers (see Dartington Hall archives, Rex Gardner Reports, C/RIB/1/C, Devon Heritage Centre). Later in the war time period, Dartington would play an active role in the development of art policy which predated the establishment of the Arts Council (Upchurch, 2013). Some of the creative policy work undertaken by Dartington focused on the wider creative infrastructure of the region specifically in relation to supporting rural craft practitioners. Activities undertaken in the 1930's including mapping and understanding the experiences of rural craft practitioners, and strategizing the best way to support the development of their livelihoods (Gardner, 1934). The seeds of this activity led to the development of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen in the post war period. This is a rural networking membership organisation for designer makers which continues to thrive to this day (Thomas, 2018). Many of the founder members of the Guild were living and working in Dartington (including Marianne De Trey, and Bernard Forrester, see below), and Dartington continued to be critical to the success of the network in the future decades as one member recalled:

'we used to have an AGM and seminar at Dartington, it was a weekend and you could book a room and stay and they had really top class speakers, so that was always sort of April, that was lovely, I loved that, you could stay there and have a nice meal and talk to all these people, interesting talks.' (Janet Wingate, interviewed, 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2013)

The spirit of Dartington Hall was founded on the development of a centre which would support the production and consumption of creative life worlds, in an atmosphere where people were cared for and inspired. This should not be taken with rosy coloured spectacles, as of course, this was a form of 'benevolent paternalism' with the will of two people channelling the passion and commitment of many people, supported with considerable financial resources, which became stretched very thin over time, resulting in financial insecurity for some (see Thomas, 2018).

### **Nurturing the creative life of Devon**

A feature of contemporary creative hubs are relationships with educational providers, often higher education, to provide access to a creative talent pipeline, and also the infrastructure and opportunities of innovation and incubation that emerge from industry / higher education interactions (see for example, Dovey et al. 2016). The antecedents of this can be witnessed at Dartington, education was woven through the operation of the estate, but formalised through the establishment of primary, secondary and higher education schools on the estate, as well as a Sumer School of Music, an adult education centre and through courses and training in studios and workshops.

The ethos of the schools of the Dartington Estate followed the principles set out by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst: a progressive, art-led education which was co-education, with a non-violent, humanistic ethos that placed each child at the centre of their learning (see Kidel,1990). The Dartington Hall schools became noted for the creative education they offered, and the nurturing of free, independent children. The Schools are built within the Estate, with leading architects employed to create a unique school environment at the time, well equipped with workshops and studio spaces to support the broad creative curriculum (Cox, 1950).

Devon based potter and member of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen, Phil Deburlet recalls her childhood education at Dartington, and the environment that enabled the students to explore creative practices:

“I was sent to boarding school when I was 9 because my parents had been to the sort of boarding schools where they were beaten and starved they chose a sort of what they thought was a humane boarding school, which was Dartington. Dartington had workshops, it had woodwork shop, art rooms and a pottery... and we could use them in the evenings and we were encouraged to just make things ... I just quickly found it was a strangely comforting place to be in the pottery workshop, so I began really quite young... the pottery teacher was Bernie Forrester who was just delightful. I think I probably went into the pottery there because he was quiet and calm, and one day I watched him throw a jug, he just sat at the wheel with a lump of clay and he made, in about two minutes, he made this jug, and it was like watching a conjuring trick really. I must have been maybe 13 then and I just remember thinking ‘I want to do that’. Which is an odd thing to want to do, you know, it was quite messy... the seed must have been sown then and I did do quite a lot at school. It wasn’t until I was about 24, 23, that I took it up again.” (Phil Deburlet, interviewed 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2013)

This moment was transformative for Philippa, her own professional work now includes her own practice as a professional potter, and the development of creative educational programming and outreach for the Devon Guild of Craftsmen. Bernard Forrester left his creative mark on generations of students at Dartington, and his own route into teaching was a product of the Dartington Hall experiment. He had come to Dartington with Bernard Leach when they set up the pottery, but over time he preferred spending time teaching as the schools developed on the Estate (Dartington Hall, n.d.(a))

The Dartington Hall education programmes and the interactions were part of the creative infrastructure that contributed to the reputation and creative vibrancy of

Dartington Hall. The annual Summer School of Music brought the world's creative talent to the region, year after year from 1947 (Dartington Hall, n.d.(b)). As a field configuring event, this placed Dartington on an international stage as a site of creative innovation in music, and the place where aspiring and professional musician and established composers and conductors would spend time and work together. This pulse of energy, was underpinned by the regular educational activity on the estate. The commitment to further and higher education was cemented through the development of the 1934 Dartington Hall Arts Department which launched the Dartington College of Arts in 1962 . The College was noted for its 'radical and inventive approaches to arts pedagogy, embracing practice-based research praxis, and early innovation around interdisciplinary and prioritising context as a core factor and 'material' in art-making processes.' (Dartington Hall, n.d. (c)). In its heyday, these educational institutions generated activities that fed the regional, national, and international creative worlds.

### **Walking in the Valley**

Speaking on Foundation Day, 1967, Dorothy Elmhirst addressed the friends and companions who had shared in the development of Dartington since the early days. She reminded them: 'You have walked with us in the valley, and you have stood with us on the hill. You have seen both the shadowy darker times that you have shared with us, and the moments of inspiration and joy on the hills.'. Although Dorothy reflected at that stage that the journey of Dartington had not been easy, the challenges that the Hall would face in the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would have been identified by Dorothy as a period of time, when they walked in the valley.

Leonard and Dorothy's vision of connecting arts and education started to unfold in the mid1980's as a tragic death of a pupil and poor publicity around hedonistic and unruly student behaviour resulted in the closure of Dartington Hall School. The Dartington College of Art continued to exist, maintaining the presence of education on the Estate, however, the college faced significant financial difficulties. During these this time the practice and research led environment continued to serve the regional creative networks. The regional cultural agency 'Culture South West' regularly reported the research activities happening at the College in its newsletter 'Finding the Dots'. Projects included 'Fieldwork: community based arts practice in rural areas' funded by the AHRC and commissioned research exploring 'Higher Education Continued Professional Development provision for arts and design practitioners' funded by Higher Education Funding Council for England, Arts Council England and Design

Council Joint Working Group (Culture South West, 2004a). Such projects emerged from the Centre for Creative Enterprise & Participation at Dartington College of Arts reflecting the ongoing interests within Dartington around the development of Arts policy (Culture South West, 2004b).

The eventual demise of the College of Art within the Dartington estate can be tracked in the pages of 'Finding the Dots', this time through the publication announcement in 2007 of a piece of consultancy research undertaken by the Burns Owen Partnership Ltd, titled 'Initial Assessment of the Economic Impact of the Proposed Relocation of Dartington College of Arts.' (Culture South West, 2007). In summary the report looked at the economic impact of the colleges relocation to three different sites, to the nearby town of Torbay, University College Falmouth or University of Plymouth. The assessment also addressed the wider review of Dartington's sphere of operations including 'the potential for other economically significant replacement activity on the site [Dartington College of Art].' . This report, with the scoping of future partners and models to find a sustainable future for the College, as released following the press release on 13 July 2007 that 'Dartington College of Arts and University College Falmouth agree to merger' with the students and staff of Dartington being relocated from 2010 to a new proposed built site, with the aim of creating, in the words of the Principal of Dartington College of Arts: 'a unique University for the Arts in the South West and safeguarding Dartington's sustainable future in the region, while respecting its ethos and values' (University College Falmouth, 2007).

Although the departure of Dartington College of Arts from Dartington reflected broader shifts in higher education provision in the UK, the depth of feeling within the arts community of the closure of Dartington within the estate is still keenly felt. In discussion with the current Executive Director (Arts) the upsetting legacy of this period of change for current stakeholders was acknowledged (interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018). From this time, stakeholders felt that the Dartington Hall Trust had abandoned its principles sold out to commercial interests. These feelings intensified as people noted the increasing importance of the Estate income arising from the hire through weddings, conference and other forms of venue hire. For local people, and those associated with the College, witnessing this change was deeply felt. The current management team recognise this: 'to feel like that has gone, is incredibly painful to people, and the fact they weren't consulted and that they felt it was just a done deal, that things happened behind closed doors, and then they became, quite rightly so, suspicious of motive' (*ibid.*).

### **Climbing the hill: managing change**

Dorothy Elmhirst was keenly aware of the challenge of change. When she looked back at the development of Dartington, and reflected on the way in which organisations change over time and the challenge that faced Dartington in the future, she was keenly aware of the difficulties of maintaining the ethos of a place, within a growth agenda:

“The thing that always strikes me as a kind of miracle as I look back, is the way in which Dartington has met the challenge of the moment, how Dartington has adjusted to change, a very difficult thing to do. It has done that, it has met the challenges of change, and yet at the same time, has retained its central identity. That seems to me very remarkable.... Well now this present period... I think a very promising time, it is a time of challenge too, and I think we can beat it, but we must be careful and thoughtful, and see that nothing of the essential Dartington is sacrificed. You see the challenge today, is the challenge of expansion, go on growing bigger, and bigger, and bigger, as you grow bigger you grow more complex, and there is always the danger of losing the contact with the individual which is one of the human values that I mentioned at the start. And it is absolutely essential for the inner life, the real life.” (Elmhirst, 1967).

The current management team (at time of writing) recognise that the Trusts decisions in the years running up to the relocation of the Arts College and the commercialisation of the estate ran counter to the ethos of Dartington that Dorothy evoked. Indeed, , acknowledged that the decisions were painful for community. It is recognised that management strategies were linked to the ‘corporatisation of Dartington as a money maker’ and the speed of the change was ‘quick and brutal’, excluding people from the estate who had been used to integrating access to the property within their daily practices. The sudden change of direction towards a corporate identity and a change in spirit where local people felt ‘outpaced and not valued... made them feel furious’, and their effect had a lasting legacy with staff acknowledging ‘there are still people now locally who won’t come here’. For the creative and local community, the loss was also felt around the absence of the ‘kind of artistic identity and creative risk taking, playful identity of the college, and also having young people here, people who are at the start of experiment and adventure’ (Executive Director Arts, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018).

Dorothy Elmhirst’s reflections on how to nurture change within a growth agenda appear prophetic in light of the fast way in which the local community became alienated from this creative space. She also recognised the challenge of developing and managing a complex portfolio organisation whilst keeping human values at the

centre. The idea of an 'essential Dartington' which is in 'contact with the individual' is one which the current senior executive staff management team have returned to. Led by CEO Rhodri Samuel (appointed in 2015) the team have returned to the ethos of the founders of Dartington and are starting a long process of reshaping the management of the Trust. This has involved listening and understanding the ethos of Dartington, as the Director of Arts explains: 'and being inspired by its history and its heritage but the biggest thing that we've been doing ever since we came here... is really trying to listen to people about their feelings about Dartington and about their stories about Dartington, and very sensitively hold those and shape Dartington to move forward.' (Executive Director, Arts, interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018).

Listening involved the management team utilising an Open Space participatory approach to create participant led discussion events to address the questions 'What can Dartington Be?' and 'How can Dartington Be?'. Four Open Space events were organised by an independent arts organisation, Kaleider, with Seth Honnor, a skilled Open Space facilitator holding the space (see Dartington Hall, n.d.[d]). It might not usually be important to note who facilitated these events, but in this instance, this was a critical decision which signalled the understanding of the new management about the importance of the community to Dartington. Seth Honnor's father, print maker Michael Honnor has worked and led the print making studio at Dartington for over 40 years. Michael's own Father, lived locally to Dartington, and was another founder member of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen. The sensitivities the Dartington management team wanted to open up, were well known to Seth, and part of the skill of facilitating this space, was allowing the potential for pain, anger, frustration, alongside optimism, excitement to be accepted and valued in the open space meetings.

At each Open Space event, Seth, supported by the team at Kaleider, enabled the participants to set the agenda at the start of the day by crowdsourcing discussion topics. Each was programmed, and then allowed to happen. Each conversation recorded by the person who suggested the topic, and shared through an online news board which was made public (ethnography, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2016). The topics brought forward by participants included 'How to revive the crafts on the estate', 'Dartington is our's! Lets reclaim it', and 'How can Dartington Fund all of these ideas?' (Dartington Hall n.d. [d]). Given the recent history of alienation and rapid change experienced by members of the community, the decision to create an Open Space was a brave one on behalf of the management team. It signalled a clear step change and a promise of active listening. The experience of these events has stayed with members of the management team: 'it humbled me actually... raw feedback comes at you.... People

were crying and shouting, and wanted answers as to what they saw as the last decade being a fairly negative part of the grand history of Dartington, and for us not to have answers.. But just listen, and let people be heard, and I think it stripped away any sense of ego one potentially had.’ (Executive Director Arts, interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018). This was not an easy process for those staff members, but one overriding feeling that emerged through this process was a feeling of being ‘Bolstered by people’s love and support for the place and the desire to see it work’ (*ibid.*)

## **Conclusion**

The challenge remains for the Director, management team and Trustees of Dartington Hall to ‘make the place sustainable for the future’(*ibid.*). It is noticeable that the current management team has invested time and energy thinking about the way in which the original intention of the founders is pertinent to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Talking with the Arts Director, their awareness of the guiding principles of the Elmhirst is clear: ‘When Dorothy Elmhirst talks at the end of her life about the purpose [of Dartington].. She talks about a space where you could live in beauty everyday... were the arts whether central to all human completeness and this kind of right that everybody has for this many sided concept, which is what we’ve picked upon as a contemporary group of people.’ (*ibid.*)

This ethos has led to discussions around the rebalancing of the Dartington Hall Trust which manages the trading company and charity: ‘I think that really the fundamental change has been for the trustees to be reminded about what the charitable purpose of the trust is... to plough that money into good works and that means spending it. There’s a really clear business case to value your charitable activity, and help tell your story’ (*ibid.*). The ‘dark days’ of the last decade of the Trust are identified by the dominance of the commercial side of Dartington (shops, accommodation, food and drink, wedding and conference venue hire). Rather than see the trading arm as the ‘hungry, greedy capitalist side’ of the organisation, the team want to tell a more compelling story, that focuses on the connection between the trading arm and the work that the income then does: ‘buying a pot here funds the creation of new work, funds our sustainability and ecology, funds our projects around social justice and inclusion and our learning objectives, we really want to aim to be this mixed, self-sustaining economy.’ It is hoped that the refocusing, and investment in the activities of the charity, will make ‘the trading side a little but more palatable to local people’ (*ibid.*).

This chapter has focused in large part on the social relations and ethos of practice that flow through the physical infrastructure of the estate. The people who gravitated towards Dartington have cemented this place as a creative centre, first invited by the

Elmhirst's, and then those who came to study, work, or attend who were inspired by the creative programming and spirit that evolved as the decades progressed. Although creative production has always happened on the estate, the 'dark days' saw this decline and Dartington moved more towards being a venue for consumption. The next phase of the new management teams plan is to rebalance the production side and to 'think about how we support some of those artists to create work here, and how we combine a hub for creative to happen. Not just the final product, but the process.' (*Ibid*).

The re-focusing on the local community in recent years is a significant recognition that 'your local community are your biggest ally, there's nothing more powerful in a venue is under threat, than having the people who are around you gather round you and say 'We won't let it happen.' (*ibid*). They are also part of the broader Dartington community who have been inspired by and learnt on the estate through generations. This creates an audience which is ready for the programming that is inspired by the ethos of Dartington, fuelled by a spirit that aims to 'respond to big issues of the day and help us feel less helpless', internationally driven, and also a sense of unusual, extraordinary experiences that you won't otherwise experience in Devon' (*ibid*). The legacy of approaching 100 years of Dartington programming is that 'the audiences for contemporary work are strong here, and that is a legacy of the college, and I think people in Totes and the surrounding areas are incredibly culturally aware' (*ibid*). For those who are programming, this type of audience means that they 'can take some risk' and continue the experimental creative energy that has defined Dartington (*ibid*).

Dartington Hall is an unusual example of what a creative hub looks like in a rural community, but also a familiar one for those looking to creative hubs as a force for regeneration. Approaching 100 years of activity, Dartington Hall started its life as a dilapidated estate at a time of global financial crisis. Capital investment combined with an ethos that sought to generate a 'many sided life' created a mixed portfolio of activity of the estate that brought internationally renowned creative recognition to this peripheral outpost. This 'experiment in rural reconstruction' had a strong ethos behind it looking for balance and beauty, inspired by learning, valuing practical work, and fuelled by the care for one's fellow human, wherever they might be in the world. The history and experience of Dartington reminds us of the promise of creative hubs, the way that bringing people together around a common purpose, generates energy and change. It is also however full of reminders of the challenges of growth and sustaining a vision over the years. Without the substantial underlying capital that Dorothy Elmhirst brought and the subsequent management of the investments by the Dartington Hall Trustees, Dartington would certainly not be present to see in its centenary. However,

the future of this centre still hangs in the balance, a new management team, is on the job working out how to 'become this kind of cauldron of activity which may have far reaching national and global influence' and a place where 'alchemy happens' (Executive Director (Arts), interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018).

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