



**BRIDGE  
STREET  
WILL BE**

## **BRIDGE STREET WILL BE**

*30 June - 04 July*

*(as part of the Abhainn Rí Festival 2015)*

An extraordinary theatre production taking over the street, playing out it's past present and future, with a community cast of 70 players.

## **BRIDGE STREET MAKE**

*(throughout June)*

Bridge Street was a place of production, with workshops reviving and highlighting the trades of our town centres and critically thinking about civic engagement and participative design.

**On Bridge Street, Time is standing still.  
But the clock is ticking and the future is coming...  
As the politics of time itself is debated,  
all the doorways of the past open up.  
You are the hero in the quest to save Bridge Street.  
A unique, choose-your-own-adventure, theatrical experience  
where the audience decide what the future of Bridge Street will be...**

Bridge Street is a street in our town. It's like a street in your town. In June 2015 an inclusive theatre and architecture project took over houses, shops, the street and our imaginations. The project sought to rediscover the possibilities of our town centres, through a collective re-imagining of Bridge Street in Callan, Co. Kilkenny as a public space with a civic future.

Across Ireland the lights are going out in our rural town centres. Bridge Street is a daring effort to look at ways to reignite the street from the ground up. We brought together some national and international leaders in architecture, art and theatre. Together they engaged with us and Bridge Street to create a series of events and investigations that addressed the space, the stories and the future legacy of our town.

This was an opportunity to be a part of a looking anew at our town centres. A chance to be the flagship of a change that needs to happen in most of our towns. A chance to stop and explore, to listen and to make; Bridge Street will be a platform for everyone to participate. From June 26th through till July 4th an extraordinary theatre production took over the street, playing out it's past present and future. In the weeks leading up to the run of performances, Bridge Street was a place of production, with workshops in furniture making, concrete letter casting, sign-painting, woodwork, stone carving and black-smithing. This project was tailor-made from OUR towns past, present and innovative future. We will be the architects of this response.

*Who are we? We are the concerned citizen, the homeowner on the outskirts of town, the child who walks to school, the family who drive through, the painter, the teacher, the dog walker, the artists, the cyclist, the banker, the shopper, the builder, the person who went to school here, the knitter, the wheelchair user, the pub customer, the nun, the visitor, the estate agent, the chef, the farmer, the dentist, the carpenter, the visitor; we are Bridge Street, you are Bridge Street.*

*Lets see what we can do together.*

Producer: *Trasna Productions in association with Equinox Theatre Company, Asylum Productions, Forecast, Fennelly's & Studio Weave.*

Time frame: *November 2014 - June 2014*

The Team: *Produced by Trasna productions  
Research & Devised by Equinox Theatre Company  
Producer - Medb Lambert  
Executive Producer – Anja Terpstra  
Director - Donal Gallagher  
Writer - John Morton  
Assistant Director - Hannah McCormick  
Costume Designer- Lisa Zagone  
Sound - Cormac O'Connor  
Civic Engagement Design- Studio Weave  
Civic Engagement Producer - Etaoin Holahan  
Civic Engagement Research & Dev. - Rosie Lynch*

Engagement: *Residents on the street: 20 people  
Workshop participants : 60 people  
Theatre actors and crew : 80 people  
Audience members : 800 people  
Overall Festival audience : 4700 people*

Funders: *Arts Council Arts Participation Project Award, Kilkenny Arts Office, KLP*



**Months of experimentation lengthy rehearsals and local voluntary initiative culminated in an extraordinary public spectacle that saw an entire street transformed into a stage and unoccupied buildings restored to life. Audiences were taken on a wondrous journey into the town's past and offered some off beat visions of the future in this zany, occasionally moving but always hugely entertaining production."**

*Kilkenny Reporter (published 08/07/2015)*

### Introduction

In June 2014, as part of the annual Abhainn Ri Festival, an inclusive theatre and architecture project took over Upper Bridge Street in Callan resulting in a promenade theatre production and architectural response. Bridge Street represents one quarter of the four streets that make up the cross which forms Callan town centre and retains a host of traditional structures and features. However many of the buildings on this street have fallen derelict. The narrow nature of the street also presents problems to both traffic and pedestrians, and to the residents of the street. The Bridge Street Project was a response to this neglected street and the complications and opportunities it now presents to the town.

### The Development of the project

As part of the Abhainn Ri Festival in 2014 Equinox Theatre, an inclusive theatre company based at KCAT Art and Study Centre Callan, initiated The Bridge Street Project. They identified the street as not fit for purpose, particularly for people with disability or mobility issues. Opening a café they traded stories of Bridge Street for tea and coffee. They gathered the stories, identified the collaborators and developed the theatre piece with writer John Morton and director Donal Gallagher. Many of the Equinox Theatre members acted in Bridge Street Will Be and took part in workshops and technical assistance. This ground up approach was consistent throughout the development of the project. Simultaneously Forecast ( a research project devised by Rosie Lynch and Hollie Kearns) invited Studio Weave to consider a small project to highlight the street during the festival, and begin civic awareness of the street through urban planning workshops with 6th Class students from Bunscoil Macauley Rice. This led to a street party *Children at Play*, which was the finale of the Abhainn Ri Festival that year. With over 300 attending, Bridge Street's potential as a public space was established.

### In Response

Having established Bridge Street as a street both in need and with the potential for urban regeneration, The Bridge Street Project was established as a collaboration of Forecast and Equinox's research, funded through an Arts Council Arts Participation Project Award and a Kilkenny County Council Arts Act Grant. Under the umbrella of Trasna Productions there would be two strands to

the project. The architectural strand would lead the process of addressing the regeneration of the outside space as well as the ground-up community workshops. The theatre strand would lead the performance based civic engagement and engaging with the internal spaces of the street.

### The Design

London based architects Studio Weave were commissioned to propose a design for the physical transformation of the street. The response was a design to paint the exteriors of the buildings on Upper Bridge Street. This proposal aimed to celebrate the conversation that the two sides of the street have been having over the years. As all the people who have lived and worked in Bridge Street over the years have affected each other, so the buildings along this narrow street have influenced each other: they bear the traces of countless iterative transformations, large and small. This proposal to imprint each façade onto its opposite tied in with the narratives in the theatre script: of different times and places coexisting, and of cycles of change and transformation.

### The first steps to residents engagement.

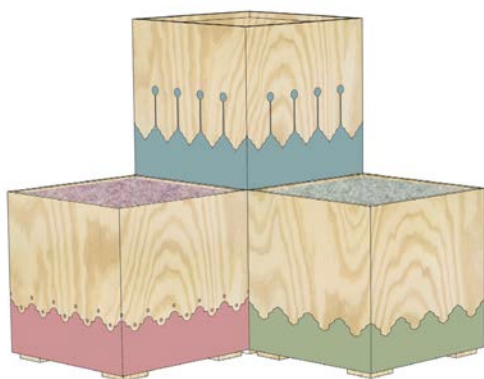
The development of both the theatre strand and the architectural planning were up to this point designed with flexibility. Residents of Upper Bridge Street were presented with a proposal for the full realisation of the project, but there was a sliding scale of individual involvement or commitment. All residents were in support, however some only committed to the exterior design (within that, the design could be minimized to suit the resident), others gave full access to both exterior and interior. This sliding scale approach was key to avoiding objections.

### Street Closures

Street closures were implemented to facilitate the painting of the street, the rehearsal process and the performance schedule. Although the street closures were the main source of disruption to the wider community of Callan, it was this disruption that brought about community engagement from community members whom otherwise may not have engaged.

### Bridge Street MAKE

Bridge Street MAKE was led by architect Rosie Hervey of Studio Weave. Targeted at teenagers but open to all, the outcome was a collection of stools to be used as outdoor furniture for future public events. They have since been used for Children at Play in the 2015 Abhainn Ri Festival. In total 60 participants





participated in Bridge Street Paint and Bridge Street Make. The public furniture made as part of the project was designed as a collection of individual light weight cubes to give them flexibility. The form of the stools allowed them to be arranged in multiple configurations and enabled users to personalise their arrangement to suit their needs. The stools acted as seating and infrastructure for the Bridge Street theatre performance but their design means they can be stacked and stored easily allowing them to be retained as a community resource, providing infrastructure for future public realm activities in the town. Further workshops based in stone carving, concrete lettering, wood carving and iron mongering reflected the rich tradition of ornate shop facades still evident in Callan today. We are interested in the how this processes can be replicated in other towns experiencing similar dereliction and loss of economic and social activity.

### Bridge Street Paint



The colour pallet was inspired by existing colours within the town. This approach meant that the paint work would continue to make sense after the play was over and would be able to meaningfully remain in place, providing a legacy to the project. The majority of the paint was donated to the project from Crown Paints, and local suppliers The Callan Co- Op. Led by Etaoin Holahan and supported by volunteers from the local and headed by a master painter, community workshops ran daily for 4 weeks. To minimize disruption to traffic the workshops were scheduled 2pm to 8pm, road closures were scheduled from 4pm, this allowed for locals to observe the progression of the work in passing and would also facilitate a public space in the evenings. Young people in particular took advantage of this reclaimed space, using it to socialise or play hurling. The ambition for the architectural strand of this project was to provide a physical and infrastructural legacy for the community and town, to compliment the more ephemeral nature of the theatre strand of the project.

### The Cast

With the exception of the actors from Equinox, the cast was made up of community actors, mostly from Callan with a number of professional actors in pivotal roles. Throughout the casting process finding actors locally was given priority. Flyers and posters were distribute, and open auditions were held. From a public perspective, this promoted and expanded civic engagement prior to the realisation of the project.

### The Script

The script continued developing as the rehearsals continued, in some cases this was a necessary response to the structure of the buildings and the street itself. In other cases it was in response to the actors' personal accounts. The stories were local and many were based on characters that some of the older generation were familiar with. As these stories developed and as the rehearsals continued on the street these

### The Rehearsal Process

As soon as possible and where possible, rehearsals were held on the street, not only did this encourage the actors to engage with the space, but it would draw attention from passers by. Quickly the street became a place to stop for conversation. Using a community cast was vital to this process, where street closure stories began to permeate back into the community, in turn, bringing the street back into the local foreground.

### The Buildings

This for many was the first opportunity to see inside buildings that had been a functioning part of the town's past. For younger generations it was an opportunity to see a part of the town that had simply been a passage from one side of the town to the other. Many people, local participants in particular, expressed a realisation of what the street had become, previously having dismissed it had now become a part of their everyday life in Callan once more.

### The Performance

The performance was an immersive theatre piece and the audience were allowed to freely wander through the street and the open buildings, rediscovering these hidden spaces at the heart of the town.

The performances ran for five nights and by the second show was sold out. In total over 800 people attended. The celebratory nature of the script and the performance, coupled with the achievement of the physical transformation of the street, created an atmosphere of collective ownership of the public space. To date feedback has been of an observatory or verbal manner. There has been great pride that the newspapers, and local and national tv stations have been to visit, and praised the project and the initiative of the people of Callan.





## Understanding Place

*Bridge Street Upper is a narrow, gently curved street, that slopes down from a bridge over the King's River, to the main crossroad in Callan. Flanked by three story buildings which seem taller due to the narrow width of the street this a medieval street has a human scale, and seems quiet unsuitable for two lanes of traffic. For many years, this street was the main route between Cork and Dublin for people in this area. The heavy traffic between the 1950s and 1990s meant that Upper Bridge Street remained unchanged during this time. Having previously been the central commercial hub of the town the increase in traffic from the 1950's did take its toll. At one point Bridge St was the commercial hub of Callan with two bakeries, four pubs and groceries, two drapers, a funeral home and more. From the 1980s businesses began to relocate to the wider Green Street and Bridge Street remained vibrant for a few more years before falling largely into dereliction in the 2000's. When Callan's bypass was built, industrious entrepreneurs began to quickly change the street, and before conservation orders could be issued a portion of the streets facades were lost and replaced by new apartment buildings. The ground floor of these buildings were not finished and are still sealed with boarding today. The facades of other buildings on the street remain intact, however some of these buildings were gutted to make way for a new design that was never built.*



# SCENES





# WHO WE ARE

**TRASNA PRODUCTIONS** developed out of the arena of creative players emerging from Callan over the last ten years. With KCAT as a catalyst for inclusive arts education, the arts in Callan have seen many highlights. From The Big River parade with Macnas (Galway) through the streets (2006); to Asylum Production's moving and memorable site specific theatre work Six by Sundown at Callan Workhouse (2009); to the extraordinary architectural interventions and training curated by Commonage (2010-14), the town is a fertile ground for exciting emerging work and cross collaborations between art-forms. At the heart of what we do is to foster inclusion and innovation. Trasna Productions' aim is to facilitate innovative, inclusive collaborative arts projects that involve multiple stakeholders.

**EQUINOX THEATRE COMPANY** started in 2008 as part of KCAT Art & Study Centre. It has grown into a bold, brilliant, beautiful and brave ensemble. Artists with learning disabilities and other disadvantages work in collaboration with other professional theatre practitioners to create work that challenges and delights both its makers and its audience.

**ASYLUM PRODUCTIONS** is a collaborative affiliation of theatre artists dedicated to the development and presentation of new work: through both new writing and the development of new forms of theatre. Our work always has a social dimension: exploring the human experience in contemporary society through diverse forms of story-telling. Since our foundation in 1998, we have presented a number of critically acclaimed productions of new and contemporary works, touring nationally and internationally.

**STUDIO WEAVE** is an award-winning London-based architecture practice set up in 2006. The practice balances a joyful, open-minded approach with technical precision to create a diverse body of work in the UK and beyond. From the characteristics that make somewhere unique, to the particular skills of a master craftsman; the studio aims to harness the strengths of a project and its team to create something distinctive and of exceptional quality. Studio Weave's work has been acknowledged by a number of awards including three RIBA awards where Ecology of Colour won South East Building of the Year and the Architectural Review's International Emerging Architecture Awards.

**FENNELLY'S** is a multi disciplinary hub operating out of a unique premises on Bridge Street Lower. Devised and curated by Etaoin Holahan, the activities at Fennelly's explore hospitality and kindness through an engaging and experimental programme of installations, interventions, screenings, spoken word, culinary adventures, theatre, live music and conversations. Fennelly's is a flagship project seeking a new way to think about social spaces in our rural town centres. Fennelly's is a critical part of the future of Bridge Street.

**FORECAST** took place in County Kilkenny in 2014 through a series of participative workshops that looked anew at the future of our rural towns. Looking towards the future of our county, with environmental, social and economic changes, Forecast asks - how do we want our rural towns to develop? Forecast co-curator Rosie Lynch is further developing active research into Callan's town centre through the Civic Engagement and Architecture Strand of The Bridge Street project. Forecast builds on 5 years of innovative architectural research projects in Callan - Commonage (2010 -14) and more recently Workhouse Assembly and Nimble Spaces.

**FUNDED THROUGH AN ARTS COUNCIL ARTS PARTICIPATION PROJECT AWARD,  
A KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL ARTS ACT GRANT  
AND KILKENNY LEADER PARTNERSHIP**





A TRASNA  
PRODUCTIONS  
REPORT

*Text prepared by:*  
**Rosie Lynch, Hannah  
McCormick, Rosie  
Hervey**

*Photos by:*  
**Brian Cregan, Irene  
Fechau, Neil O'Drisceoil,  
Rosie Hervey**