

Alone together: the social life of benches

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Alone Together
the Social Life of Benches <http://the-bench-project.weebly.com/film>

AHRC Connected Communities Call
Addressing the Challenges of Disconnection, Division and Exclusion
Innovation Grant · January–November 2015

The Un-Sociable Bench, and other urban micro-territories of encounter and intimidation

Project partners

PI · Dr Clare Rishbeth · Lecturer in Landscape Architecture · University of Sheffield
CI · Esther Johnson · Professor of Film and Media Arts · Sheffield Hallam University
CI · Ben Rogaly · Professor of Human Geography · University of Sussex

Community group leaders and fieldworkers

Radhika Bynon ·
The Young Foundation
Dr Jasber Singh ·
Greenwich Inclusion Project
Diana Coman ·
Sutton fieldworker
Samprada Mukhia ·
Woolwich fieldworker



The Bench Project · Research Aims

- *To test how making a film can tell detailed and nuanced stories about encounters, exclusion and wellbeing in outdoor spaces*
- To record the ways in which different people use, and think about how they use, benches and other small places of outdoor gathering,
- To explore how the interactions between users of benches may be sociable or may cause problems,
- To find out how spending time outside is good for people, and,
- To understand ways in which public spaces and seating areas are controlled



**On a day such as this, while roaming around this park,
If you see a thousand faces then it is good for you.
My ancestors used to say that.**

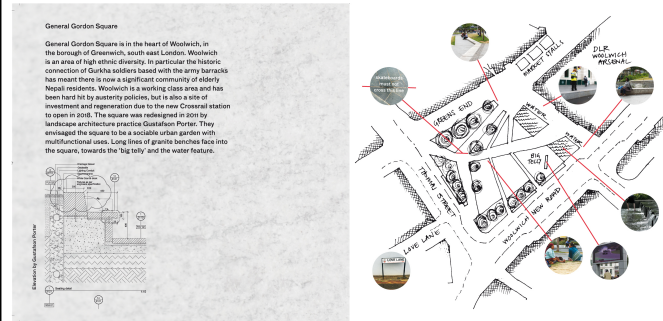
– Chali Kumari, General Gordon Square, Woolwich



Alone Together
the Social Life of Benches

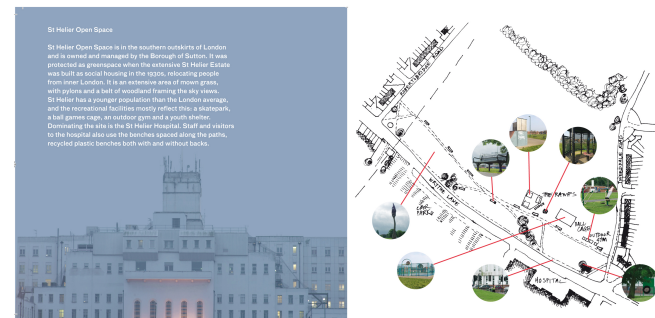
RESEARCH PROCESS

Location 1 · General Gordon Square, Woolwich



Spread from *Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches* DVD booklet, BP028 2015

Location 2 · St Helier Open Space, Sutton



Spread from *Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches* DVD booklet, BP028 2015

Fieldwork in both Locations · People flux throughout the day and night



Spread from *Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches* DVD booklet, BP028 2015



Interviews with a wide range of visitors to the two locations

Repeat visits and interviewing

**General Gordon Square
Westminster**

Al Ulani, Tayi Sana Rana, Chai Kumar Thang, Roy Green, Michael Grant, Phil Collins

**St Helier Open Space
Barton**

Terry Jones, Joy Mills, Peggy Ransford, David Wadsworth, Phil Collins

Spread from *Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches* DVD booklet, BP028 2015



See Contributor
Hear Contributor
· Image and Sound
are non-synch



Focus on Sound Design

The making of Alone Together

Alone Together, the Social Life of Benches uses the medium of documentary film in order to illustrate the thoughts and memories of frequent users of two public spaces in London: General Gordon Square, Woolwich and St Helier Open Space, Sutton.

The action takes place around the micro-space of the humble bench. The emotional and experiential capacity of film is used to highlight the sense of being in open public spaces, and how the design and layout of such spaces affect their visitors. In addition the film allows us to survey the different uses to which these spaces are put, and measures the rhythm and flow of visitors as it changes from day to night.

Repeated field type were made to both locations in order to observe life in them, and to meet potential film participants. Contributors were invited to talk about how they use the respective spaces, how frequently they visit, how the space makes them feel, and what they think about while there. Contributors were given the opportunity to view the film mid-edit and thereby engage in the filmmaking process, and an end-of-project screening was held at each location.

The film acts like a stranger who joins you on a bench to 'watch the world go by' and break the ice by starting a conversation with their fellow bench user.

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Mid-edit review sessions

This took place in each location – Sutton and Woolwich. An online link to the rough edit was also available in case contributors preferred this viewing option.

Sutton viewing

Film Grade

