

**LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME  
SEGMENTS POETRY WORKSHOP**

**APRIL 2021 : SHOES**

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Here is a transcript of the workshop with the activities and images. Scroll down and you will have the information I gave during the session at your fingertips. You might like to grab a cuppa!

**EXERCISE ONE: Warm-up writing exercise– I Want To Show You This Place**

Look at the poem *Scene* by Sara-Jane Arbury (below). Starting with the line 'I want to show you this place...' write a piece/poem as if you are taking someone to a special place. It can be a remembered place, or a beautiful place, someone's home, a room, a landmark. Something might happen or has happened there and you are showing us the place for the first time. Work through your senses - what can you see, hear, touch, taste and smell in this place? How do you feel when you are there? What are you doing there? Are you in this place for a reason? Think about the story *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, when Scrooge is being taken to different places and scenes by the ghosts.

**SCENE**

I want to show you this place  
where the rivers meet

and a fallen trunk lies on its side –  
a seat for us, let's sit down.

You can cross the bridge to reach  
the other bank if you want,

but me? I'll stay here  
and wait for the tide to turn.

It won't be long now. This river  
is serviced by the sea,

the current will soon set its course  
for my purpose.

When the time comes  
I will scatter.

A glance upstream,  
and you spy two swans

heart-shaped in the distance.  
Unaware they have almost

completed the picture.  
*Sara-Jane Arbury*

**EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this exercise is SHOES**



Make notes on your thoughts, feelings, memories, anything you find interesting that are evoked by the items and your associations with the theme in general.

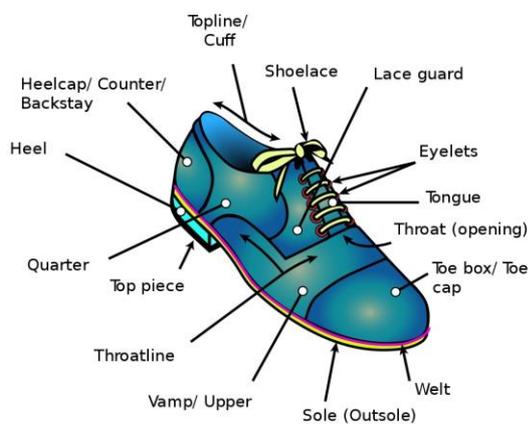
Some of the items we will be looking at are housed in the Butcher Row House Museum in Ledbury (left). The Museum holds a small collection of shoes and we will be using these as an inspiration for writing.

### Introduction

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoe>

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/fascinating-history-footwear>

<https://www.lifhack.org/articles/lifestyle/10-facts-about-the-history-shoes.html>



LEFT: Diagram of a shoe

A shoe is an item of footwear intended to protect and comfort the human foot. Shoes are also used as an item of decoration and fashion. The design of shoes has varied enormously through time and from culture to culture, with appearance originally being tied to function. Though the human foot is adapted to varied terrain and climate conditions, it is still vulnerable to environmental hazards such as sharp rocks and temperature extremes, which shoes protect against. Some shoes are worn as safety equipment, such as steel-soled boots which are required on construction sites.

Additionally, fashion has often dictated many design elements, such as whether shoes have very high heels or flat ones. Contemporary footwear varies widely in style, complexity and cost. Basic sandals may consist of only a thin sole and simple strap and be sold for a low cost. High fashion shoes made by famous designers may be made of expensive materials, use complex construction and sell for hundreds or even thousands of dollars a pair. Some shoes are designed for specific purposes, such as boots designed specifically for mountaineering or skiing, while others have more



generalised usage such as sneakers which have transformed from a special purpose sport shoe into a general use shoe.

Clockwise L-R: Oldest leather shoes 3500BC, Roman sandals, C5thBC Esparto sandals, C15th Dutch patters, 1800 cloth-topped shoes

## Antiquity

The earliest known shoes are sagebrush bark sandals dating from approximately 7000 or 8000 BC, found in the Fort Rock Cave in the US state of Oregon in 1938.

PICTURE (above): The oldest known leather shoe, found in Armenia

The world's oldest leather shoe, made from a single piece of cowhide laced with a leather cord along seams at the front and back, was found in Armenia and is believed to date to 3500 BC.

It is thought that shoes may have been used long before this, but because the materials used were highly perishable, it is difficult to find evidence of the earliest footwear. By studying the bones of the smaller toes (as opposed to the big toe), it was observed that their thickness decreased approximately 40,000 to 26,000 years ago. This led archaeologists to deduce that wearing shoes resulted in less bone growth, resulting in shorter, thinner toes. These earliest designs were very simple in design, often mere 'foot bags' of leather to protect the feet from rocks, debris, and cold.

Many early natives in North America wore a similar type of footwear, known as the moccasin. These were tight-fitting, soft-soled shoes typically made out of leather or bison hides. Many moccasins were also decorated with various beads and other adornments. Moccasins were not designed to be waterproof, and in wet weather and warm summer months, most Native Americans went barefoot.

As civilizations began to develop, thong sandals (the precursors of the modern flip-flop) were worn. This practice dates back to pictures of them in ancient Egyptian murals from 4000 BC. One pair found in Europe was made of papyrus leaves and dated to be approximately 1,500 years old. The Masai of Africa made them out of rawhide. In India they were made from wood. In China and Japan, rice straw was used. The leaves of the sisal plant were used to make twine for sandals in South America while the natives of Mexico used the Yucca plant.

While thong sandals were commonly worn, many people in ancient times saw little need for footwear, and most of the time preferred being barefoot. The ancient Greeks largely viewed footwear as self-indulgent, unaesthetic and unnecessary. Shoes were primarily worn in the theatre, as a means of increasing stature, and many preferred to go barefoot. Athletes in the Ancient Olympic Games participated barefoot—and naked. Even the gods and heroes were primarily depicted barefoot and Alexander the Great conquered his vast empire with barefoot armies.

PICTURE (above): Roman shoes: a man's, a woman's and a child's shoe from Bar Hill Roman Fort, Scotland

The Romans, who eventually conquered the Greeks and adopted many aspects of their culture, did not adopt the Greek perception of footwear and clothing. Roman clothing was seen as a sign of power, and footwear was seen as a necessity of living in a civilized world, although slaves and paupers usually went barefoot. Shoes for soldiers had riveted insoles to extend the life of the leather, increase comfortability, and provide better traction. The design of these shoes also designated the rank of the officers. The more intricate the insignia and the higher up the boot went on the leg, the higher the rank of the soldier.

Starting around 4 BC, the Greeks began wearing symbolic footwear. These were heavily decorated to clearly indicate the status of the wearer. Young women betrothed or newly married wore pure white shoes. Because of the cost to lighten leather, shoes of a paler shade were a symbol of wealth in the upper class. Often, the soles would be carved with a message so it would imprint on the ground. Cobblers became a notable profession around this time, with Greek shoemakers becoming famed in the Roman empire.

PICTURE (above): Esparto sandals from the 6th or 5th millennium BC found in Spain

A common casual shoe in the Pyrenees during the Middle Ages was the espadrille. This is a sandal with braided jute soles and a fabric upper portion, and often includes fabric laces that tie around the ankle. The term is French and comes from the esparto grass.

Many medieval shoes were made using the turnshoe method of construction, in which the upper was turned flesh side out, and was lasted onto the sole and joined to the edge by a seam. The shoe was then turned inside-out so that the grain was outside. Some shoes were developed with toggled flaps or drawstrings to tighten the leather around the foot for a better fit. Surviving medieval turnshoes often fit the foot closely, with the right and left shoe being mirror images.

PICTURE (above): Dutch pattens, c.1465, excavated in Belgium

By the 15th century, pattens became popular with both men and women in Europe. These are commonly seen as the predecessor of the modern high-heeled shoe. During the 16th century, royalty, such as Catherine de Medici or Mary I of England, started wearing high-heeled shoes to make them look taller or larger than life. By 1580, even men wore them, and a person with authority or wealth was often referred to as “well-heeled”. In 17th century France, heels were exclusively worn by aristocrats. Louis XIV of France was 5 feet 5 inches tall. Due to his short stature, he made high-heeled shoes popular and mandatory for men, but outlawed anybody from wearing red high heels except for himself and his royal court.

PICTURE (above): During the early 1800s, cloth-topped shoes made an appearance

### Industrial era

Shoemaking became more commercialised in the mid-18th century, as it expanded as a cottage industry. Large warehouses began to stock footwear, made by many small manufacturers from the area. Until the 19th century, shoemaking was a traditional handicraft, but by the century's end, the process had been almost completely mechanised, with production occurring in large factories. Despite the obvious economic gains of mass production, the factory system produced shoes without the individual differentiation that the traditional shoemaker could provide.



PICTURE , above left, A shoemaker in the Georgian era, from The Book of English Trades, 1821

The first steps towards mechanisation were taken during the Napoleonic Wars by the engineer, Marc Brunel. He developed machinery for the mass-production of boots for the soldiers of the British Army. However, when the war ended in 1815, manual labour became much cheaper, and the demand for military equipment subsided. The time of the Crimean War stimulated a renewed interest in methods of mechanisation and mass-production. A shoemaker in Leicester, Tomas Crick, patented the design for a riveting machine in 1853. A shoe stitching machine was invented by the American Lyman Blake in 1856 and perfected by 1864. By the 1890s, the process of mechanisation was largely complete.

PICTURE above centre: By the late 19th century, the shoemaking industry had migrated to the factory and was increasingly mechanised. Pictured, B. F. Spinney & Co. factory in Lynn, Massachusetts, 1872

PICTURE above lower centre: Victorian Lady's Boot made by C. Owen & Son, 20 Commercial Street, Hereford - held at The Butchers Row House Museum, Ledbury

Since the mid-20th century, advances in rubber, plastics, synthetic cloth, and industrial adhesives have allowed manufacturers to create shoes that stray considerably from traditional crafting techniques. Leather, which had been the primary material in earlier styles, has remained standard in expensive dress shoes, but athletic shoes often have little or no real leather. Soles, which were once laboriously hand-stitched on, are now more often machine stitched or simply glued on. Many of these newer materials, such as rubber and plastics, have made shoes less biodegradable. It is estimated that most mass-produced shoes require 1000 years to degrade in a landfill.

### Culture and Folklore

As an integral part of human culture and civilization, shoes have found their way into our culture, folklore, and art. A popular 18th-century nursery rhyme is *There was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*. This story tells about an old woman living in a shoe with a lot of children.

Shoes also play an important role in the fairy tale *Cinderella*, and in the movie adaptation of the children's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a pair of red ruby slippers play a key role in the plot.

PICTURE above, lower right corner: The Ruby Slippers worn by Judy Garland in *The Wizard Of Oz*

The most expensive pair of shoes sold for \$660,000 US Dollars. They were the Ruby Slippers, worn by Judy Garland in the film version, *The Wizard of Oz*. The ruby slippers were sold at an auction on June 2, 2000.

In the Book of Exodus in The Bible, Moses is instructed to remove his shoes before approaching the burning bush: Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy ground (Exodus 3:5)

PICTURE above, right corner: In Canada, protesters threw shoes at a poster of George Bush in front of the US consulate in Montreal during a protest against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

PICTURE below, top left corner: American President George W. Bush ducking a thrown shoe, while Prime Minister of Iraq Nouri al-Maliki attempts to catch it

In Arab culture, showing the sole of one's shoe is considered an insult, and to throw a shoe and hit someone with it is considered an even greater insult. Shoes are considered to be dirty as they frequently touch the ground, and are associated with the lowest part of the body—the foot. As such, shoes are forbidden in mosques, and it is also considered unmannerly to cross the legs and display the soles of one's shoes during conversation. This insult was demonstrated in Iraq, first when Saddam Hussein's statue was toppled in 2003, Iraqis gathered around it and struck the statue with their shoes. In 2008, US President George W. Bush had a shoe thrown at him by a journalist as a statement against the war in Iraq.



PICTURE above, centre left: Buzz Aldrin standing on the moon, 1969; Neil Armstrong is reflected in his visor

“One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind” is the famous quote by Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon. The boots that he wore when he took the first steps on the moon are now floating in space somewhere. His boots were discarded before coming back to Earth for fear of contamination.

PICTURE above, top right two pictures: Jeison Orlando Rodríguez Hernández of Venezuela having a shoe-fitting with Georg Wessel

<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2018/6/customised-shoes-made-for-man-with-the-largest-feet-after-they-grow-even-bigger>

The current record for the world’s largest feet is held by 22-year-old Jeison Orlando Rodríguez Hernández of Venezuela. His feet measure in at 40.55 cm (1ft 3.3”), which puts him at a whopping UK size 25, US size 26. Georg Wessel, a German custom shoemaker, has helped outfit Hernández with shoes.

PICTURE above, lower left corner: Robert Wadlow with his father

<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/records/hall-of-fame/robert-wadlow-tallest-man-ever>

While Hernández holds the record for largest feet among the living, the record for the biggest feet ever goes to Robert Wadlow, who wore a UK size 36 (US size 37 AA) shoe. His feet measured 18.5 inches each - 1ft 6.5". The American-born Wadlow was 8 feet 11" and lived from 1918 to 1940.

PICTURE above, lower centre: Robert Wadlow's shoe compared to a UK Size 11 (US Size 12) shoe

### Types

There are a wide variety of different types of shoes. Most types of shoes are designed for specific activities. For example, boots are typically designed for work or heavy outdoor use. Athletic shoes are designed for particular sports such as running, walking, or other sports. Some shoes are designed to be worn at more formal occasions, and others are designed for casual wear. There are also a wide variety of shoes designed for different types of dancing. Other animals, such as dogs and horses, may also wear special shoes to protect their feet as well.

PICTURE above, centre right: A pair of men's rainbow coloured 1970s platform shoes

Depending on the activity for which they are designed, some types of footwear may fit into multiple categories. For example, cowboy boots are considered boots, but may also be worn in more formal occasions and used as dress shoes. Hiking boots incorporate many of the protective features of boots, but also provide the extra flexibility and comfort of many athletic shoes. Flip-flops are considered casual footwear, but have also been worn in formal occasions, such as visits to the White House.

Remaining pictures above: Various high-heeled shoes

High-heeled footwear is footwear that raises the heels, typically 2 inches (5 cm) or more above the toes, commonly worn by women for formal occasions or social outings. Variants include kitten heels, stiletto heels and wedge heels (with a wedge-shaped sole rather than a heel post). Slingbacks are shoes which are secured by a strap behind the heel, rather than over the top of the foot.

### Concealed Shoes

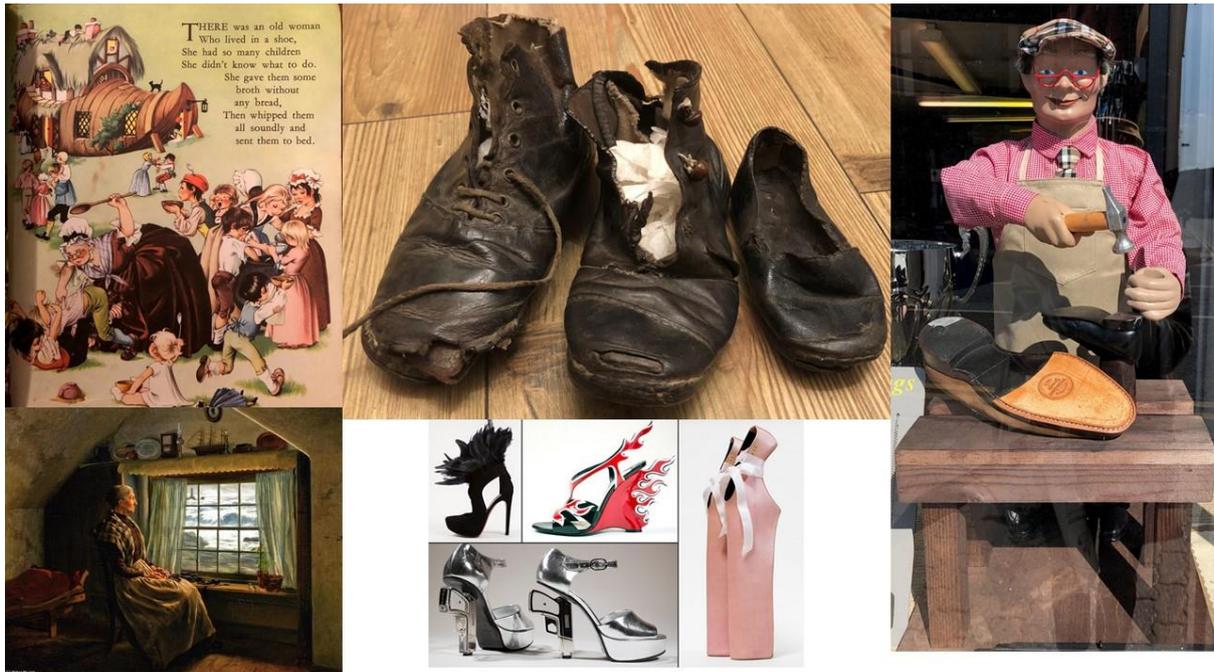
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concealed\\_shoes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concealed_shoes)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-41507752>

Concealed shoes hidden in the fabric of a building have been discovered in many European countries, as well as in other parts of the world, since at least the early modern period. Independent researcher, Brian Hoggard, has observed that the locations in which these shoes are typically found – in chimneys, under floors, above ceilings, around doors and windows, in the roof – suggest that some may have been concealed as magical charms to protect the occupants of the building against evil influences such as demons, ghosts and witches. Others may have been intended to bestow fertility on a female member of the household, or been an offering to a household deity.

Concealed shoes have been found in many types of building, including country houses, public houses, a Benedictine monastery and a Baptist church. The earliest yet reported was discovered behind the choir stalls in Winchester Cathedral, which were installed in 1308.

Northampton Museum maintains a Concealed Shoe Index, which by 2012 contained 1900 reports of discoveries, mostly from Britain and almost half from the 19th century. The overwhelming majority have been worn, and many have been repaired. Most finds are of single shoes, about half of them belonging to children. The custom appears to have died out some time during the 20th century.



PICTURE Above, centre: Three shoes found in the Council Offices, Church Lane, Ledbury during their refurbishment in 1988 - held at The Butchers Row House Museum, Ledbury

It was a common custom to hide objects such as written charms, dried cats, horse skulls and witch bottles in the structure of a building, but concealed shoes are by far the most common items discovered. Hoggard has observed that the locations in which these shoes are found suggest that at least some were concealed as magical charms to protect the occupants of the building against evil influences.

The most common place of concealment is the chimney, fireplace or hearth, followed by under the floor or above the ceiling, and almost as many concealed in the roof. Shoes have also been found around doors and windows, under the stairs, and among the foundations.

Most of the concealed shoes found to date are made of leather, but wooden clogs and rubber galoshes have also been reported, among others. The overwhelming majority (almost 98 per cent) have been worn, and many show signs of repair. All ages are represented in the shoe sizes, from babies to adults, but there is little difference in the ratio of adult male to female shoes. Most finds are of single shoes, but some pairs have also been discovered. About half of the shoes so far discovered belonged to children.

Several theories have been advanced to account for the incorporation of shoes into the fabric of a building, one of which is that they served as some kind of fertility charm. There is a long-standing connection between shoes and fertility, perhaps exemplified by the nursery rhyme, *There was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*, and the custom of casting a shoe after a bride as she leaves for her honeymoon or attaching shoes to the departing couple's car. Archaeologist, Ralph Merrifield, has observed that in the English county of Lancashire women who wished to conceive might try on the shoes of a woman who had just given birth, a custom known as smickling.

Another theory, and the one favoured by most scholars, argues that shoes were concealed to protect against evil influences such as demons, ghosts, witches, and familiars. Witches were believed to be attracted by the human scent of a shoe, and after entering one found themselves trapped, as they were unable to reverse.

Archaeologist and architectural historian, M. Chris Manning, has proposed that the immurement of shoes, garments, and other objects may be related to the belief in a household deity or helpful spirit found throughout northern Europe from Ireland to western Russia. According to Manning, Schorne's use of a shoe to capture or repel a troublesome spirit may have called upon an existing belief in the power of shoes and other garments to attract, repel, or "lay" such spirits. The brownie and hob, domestic fairies found in England and Scotland, could be driven off by a gift of clothing.

Professor Malcolm Gaskill says that shoes had probably been left as a decoy to lure "witches" away from the home. "In the early modern period, people also believed in demons, ghosts, elves, goblins - but witches were the most frightening because they were in human form," he said. Worst still, they were "usually someone living close by - your neighbour". The solution, he explained, was everyone protected their homes against evil by hiding the shoes - like an early form of home insurance. His "best guess" for why shoes were chosen is they mould to shape, so might be considered "imprinted" with the "character and essence" of the wearer.

The data confirms many of the reported shoes - nearly 900 of them - were children's, though it is unclear why. Was it that children were considered to have purer spirits, or, because so many children died, to ward off dangers? There are two theories offered by The Butchers Row House Museum about the three children's shoes found in the Council Offices, Church Lane, Ledbury during their refurbishment in 1988:

1. That a worn-out shoe was handed in for a new pair under the Poor Law system.
2. That, in accordance with an old custom, the shoe of a dead child was walled into the fabric of the house to keep the spirit of the child on the premises.

PICTURE above, top right: An automaton named "Roy" at C. Westbury Shoe Repairs, Ledbury

Now look at the following poems:

PICTURE above, top left corner: *There Was An Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe* - Anonymous  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There\\_was\\_an\\_Old\\_Woman\\_Who\\_Lived\\_in\\_a\\_Shoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There_was_an_Old_Woman_Who_Lived_in_a_Shoe)

Albert Jack, in his book *Pop Goes The Weasel: The Secret Meanings Of Nursery Rhymes*, has proposed a political origin for this rhyme. George II was nicknamed the "old woman", because it was widely believed that his wife, Queen Caroline was the real power behind the throne. According to this explanation, the "children" are the Members of Parliament (MPs) that George was unable to control, the "whip" refers to the political office of that name – the MP whose role is to ensure that members of his party vote according to the party line – and the "bed" is the House of Commons, which MPs were required to attend daily. The phrase "gave them some broth without any bread" may refer to George's extreme unwillingness to spend money or use resources. in the wake of the South Sea Bubble of 1721, and his attempts to restore his own and the country's finances.

*Hannah Binding Shoes* - Lucy Larcom (1826-1893)

<https://www.bartleby.com/102/163.html>

Lucy Larcom (1824 – 1893) was an American teacher, poet, and author.

PICTURE above, lower left corner: *Hannah's At The Window Binding Shoes* (1898) - William Trego

*Well-Heeled* - Julie O'Callaghan

<https://julieocallaghan.net/poems/well-heeled/>

Born in Chicago in 1954, Julie O'Callaghan has lived in Ireland since 1974. Her latest collection, *Magnum Mysterium*, was published by Bloodaxe Books in 2020.

### EXERCISE THREE: Shoe Poetry

Write a poem/piece inspired by the theme and/or the history we've explored. Here are some suggestions for ways into the writing:

Write a personification poem from the point of view of a shoe. Write your poem imagining the shoe is 'alive' and has the same attributes as a human being. What would it say? Think about its function, where it is situated, what it senses of the world around it etc. Memories? What does it think/dream about? Where has it been? Where would it like to go?

Write a poem inspired by the theme that evokes a personal memory for you, maybe involving another person or a personal story.

Write a poem inspired by a specific shoe or story we have looked at today. Think about your emotional response to it and why you felt that way.

Use a form we've looked at in the example poems eg: a rhyming poem with the pattern AABB like *There Was An Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe* / a ballad style poem with a repeated line or refrain that emotionally tells a story in 8 line verses like *Hannah Binding Shoes* / a conversational style poem that features someone else speaking in it like *Well-Heeled*

And, of course, you may write a poem about the theme in your own way and in your own style!

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The Festival is grateful to Butcher Row House Museum, Ledbury, and Arts Council England New Lottery Project Grants

**"This workshop was only made possible thanks to public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England"**



Supported using public funding by  
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