Larkin Exhibition

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Philip Larkin Society

**Background**

In 2017, Hull will be UK City of Culture. The City's bid featured Larkin's long and intimate connection with a place that, over the space of 30 years, became 'his proper ground'. The accompanying video, 'This City belongs to everyone', began and ended with Larkin's words.

The proposed exhibition is intended to represent the major event during 2017 to celebrate the life and works of one of the twentieth century's great literary figures, the poet's presence in the city and the inspiration he drew from Hull. The exhibition itself would be both entertaining and serious, reflecting Larkin’s temperament.  It would be aimed at all age groups, would be populist in appeal and would hope to make those who come feel that they knew Larkin better as a man, as a poet and as a librarian. They would go away feeling surprised.

At its heart will be the riches held in the Hull History Centre, the archives and artefacts of Larkin's life, brought together for the first time in a world-class curation. The unique Larkin archives held in the History Centre consist of his workbooks, his correspondence, his library, his record collection and hundreds of his own photographs. The artefacts, which belong to the Philip Larkin Society, are wonderfully evocative of a complex personal and professional life.

The University of Hull, the Hull History Centre and the Philip Larkin Society have agreed a unique partnership, bringing together archives, artefacts and academic expertise to produce the first major Larkin exhibition curated and designed to the highest standard. It is a project that has the full backing of the City of Culture Company, the body responsible for the whole of the 2017 programme.

The plan is for the exhibition to run for possibly four/five months (May-September 2017) in the Exhibition Hall of the newly refurbished Brynmor Jones Library on the University campus. The exhibition will be stimulus and backdrop for a whole series of events focusing on poetry and the written word, encouraging creativity and participation by all ages.

**Curation**

The ambition is to engage with Nick Cave as a pre-eminent cultural figure with a recognised admiration for Larkin’s works in an open discussion on whether he would be prepared to inspire the curation of the exhibition. At one level, it might be a matter of his choosing a dozen artefacts from the Society’s collection of Larkinalia, crafting from the choice a particular vision of the man and his poetry. The experts in the Larkin Society and the Hull History Centre would help Nick to select any archival material (letters, manuscripts, photographs, records) to support the vision.  But the engagement could go beyond that and it would be surprising if Nick didn’t have a very individual take on what such an exhibition could look like. If the exhibition ended up as ‘Nick Cave on Philip Larkin’, the partners in the enterprise would be happy! As long as the initial impulse is based on an interpretation of the archives and artefacts.

The whole project is to be supported by a Project Director and an Exhibition Designer. Funding has been made available by the University of Hull/City of Culture partnership. An Arts Council England application is to be submitted in July. Currently the total budget (excluding important in-kind contributions) is about £100,000.

There are digitised photographs of nearly all the Larkinalia which could be made available to Nick, together with a Master Inventory. There are catalogue entries for the archival material but these can be quite generalised (‘Letters to his family’), so not quite so useful at a distance.

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