



THE  
**ARTS**  
IN  
**SLOUGH**

Celebrating  
Communities,  
Culture and  
Creativity

# **The Arts in Slough**

**Celebrating Communities, Culture and Creativity**

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# Introduction

In Slough, a few metres away from the Future Works building, there is a VIVA Slough mural with the quotation: it is not what you look at that matters, it is what you see. I believe we can apply these words when we look at the town of Slough.

Imagine two children playing outside find a stick. One claims it is a magic wand, the other says it is a mighty sword; though they are looking at the same object, what they see is completely different. You could consider this the work of a child's wonder and imagination but think of optical illusions, or the way we perceive colour. The sentiment still rings true – it is simply a matter of perspective.



The mural invites us to look deeper and think harder about the way we look at the world around us, specifically the town surrounding it. This book exists for a similar purpose. You will find interviews with those working in Slough's art and culture sector such as VIVA Slough about how they got their start, what they offer the community, and perhaps most importantly, what the town and the arts mean to them.

It is important to note that the individuals and groups featured in this book are by no means an exhaustive list of the creativity and expertise found in this town. It is, in fact, the opposite. Slough has countless talent from hobbyists to professional practitioners, and many of them fall under the listed artforms. We hope the interviews encourage you to explore what is available outside of these pages.

The hope is that readers come away with a different perspective of Slough, a more positive one, than when they first picked up this book. Whether it be recognising the town's creative and cultural opportunities, or the efforts of our voluntary art organisations and cultural providers – I hope something sticks with you.

**Shanique Miller**

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# Dance

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# Amina Khayyam

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

Critically acclaimed and award-winning **Amina Khayyam Dance Company (AKDC)** uses the South Asian dance, Kathak, as its core narrative. The company has performed over 160 shows and toured both nationally and internationally. Adding theatre, live art, and technology, they strive to make relevant and engaging work through a process of collaboration, participation and exploration.

Their founder Amina Khayyam chatted about collaborating with ZooNation, the significance Slough has on their work, and the power of storytelling.



## What led to you founding AKDC?

My dance form, Kathak, is essentially a storytelling form and is traditionally rooted in the Indian sub-continent culture with its mythological and religious stories. However, these stories have become tired and irrelevant to the modern aesthetic and sensitivities. Furthermore, South Asian dance can also be seen as exotic with its overwhelming decor and flamboyant costumes and jewellery – making the performance a recital of how beautiful the dancer is, as opposed to the dance as an engaging and educating experience. So, after being a practitioner in that world, I became disillusioned and restless. I wanted to move away from that. I wanted to create dance that was relevant today...with the support of The Artta through Zeroculture (a development producer) I set up my own company in the late noughties.

## Why did you want to focus on the marginalised female voice?

It is who I am and where I come from. I grew up in a family and culture with no artistic engagement and I was prohibited from learning dance by my parents. I had to sneak out to attend Kathak classes. I grew up with women who had no say in their communities or society nor in their own families – men controlled their lives. They were not only marginalised from larger societal engagement but from within their own communities. And the women had a lot of stories to tell. As a storyteller, I want

**“Slough’s diversity is a huge attraction and inspiration, not only culturally but also socially and economically.”**

to and can use my stage to do that. These women play a pivotal part in my work. A major part of AKDC is the workshop activity in communities and women’s groups, where we deliver creative expression sessions. Here, they share their lives, aspirations, and stories, the process of which empowers them. Their output progresses to become part of our productions.

## You have a production working with ZooNation, Ghosts Ships. Why is collaboration so important to you?

This is the first time we are collaborating on a production with other producers/ companies and were invited to do so. It is not how we generally work – however in all our productions, there is always a high degree of collaboration between all the creatives: music arrangers & composers, dramaturgs, lighting set designers, and of course, the women. But Ghost Ships was an exciting project we couldn’t say no to.

It is a dark history of a place that contributed to the rise of the British Empire. Slavery and Indian rule saw multiple manufactured famines, such as the 1943 Bengal famine resulting in around three million people starving to death. The colonial legacy is very much part of our lives today and still impacts us all. With the recent riots on our streets, as a South Asian company, it became more urgent for us to tell these stories so our nation can acknowledge and understand what makes up Britain today.

## Why did you want to base your company in Slough?

Before we moved to Slough, we were nomadic as we are essentially a touring company, but most of our residency work is primarily situated in the South East region – Luton, Woking, Crawley, or Gravesend, and it involved communities from Slough. On advice from the Arts Council, Slough became the right choice with its easy reach and opportunities. And our development producers also had good connections with Slough’s locals.

**How does Slough shape your work, and how does your work shape Slough?**

Slough's diversity is a huge attraction and inspiration, not only culturally but also socially and economically. That is informing us to add new layers and approaches to our work. For instance, later this year, we will be developing our Bibi Rukiya Performance Forum into a cabaret format, and in 2026, we are developing a large-scale outdoor site-specific project called Abundance.

**What is your proudest achievement to date?**

Recently we were at The Place with our last production BIRD and had chunks of our community of women, who we had been working with, in the audience. For many of them it was the first time entering a professional theatre space. That is what makes the company proud, to be able to bring our targeted women to see and experience high quality art in spaces such as The Place, Birmingham Hippodrome, Southbank etc.

**Why do you believe the Arts are so important?**

We are part of the Arts sector that has the power to be transformative. Our work has evidenced people to think, change their mindset, be entertained and challenged, engage their perspectives, enjoy, cry, weep and most importantly contribute significantly to their well-being.

**What do you wish outsiders knew about Slough?**

Slough has immense talents (as seen at the recent Slough's Got Talent!) and is a place where communities come together to make things flourish. Slough has a higher percentage of younger population demographics, which makes it a vibrant and progressive place to live in. And it has AKDC!

To find out more about AKDC please visit:  
[www.aminakhayyamdance.co.uk/about](http://www.aminakhayyamdance.co.uk/about)



**“Our work has evidenced people to think, change their mindset, be entertained and challenged, engage their perspectives, enjoy, cry, weep and most importantly contribute significantly to their well-being.”**



# George Kirkham

Every student should have a teacher like George Kirkham. One of the founders of **Creative Academy**, his passion for helping young people is evident. And thanks to his own bloody mindedness (his words, not mine), he lets nothing stand in his way when supporting them in achieving their dreams. The school offers degrees in dance, giving an affordable alternative to university or vocational dance training.

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams



## How would you describe Creative Academy and its mission?

Creative Academy is a not-for-profit organisation that is a unique partnership between Slough Borough Council and The University of West London. It's the only local authority in the country that runs a degree and our overarching methodology, or mission if you like, is to be a creative industry development organisation. So, working with local young people in the Arts, specifically dance. Over the 21 years we've been running, we've supported most of the arts organisations in Slough, whether that's through funding, information, advice, or guidance. As we grew, we sort of honed our purpose down to dance. Originally we wanted to deliver 3 degrees including film and music, but dance is strangely a lot cheaper! All you need is a stereo and a room. But basically, our mission is to get young people into creative industry employment.

## You mentioned the Academy has been going for 20 years. How did it come to be based in Slough?

I'm Slough born and bred, and I got a job at a place called Slough Young People's Centre as a Fundraising, Marketing and Promotions Officer – what the hell that meant, I don't know! (Laughs) Being a dancer, I said I would only work there if they let me run free dance classes for young people, and they said yes. I'm bloody minded as a person so what I want, I'll sort of go out and smash through brick walls to get. So I created a job for myself which was Dance Development and Sexual Health Worker. Which is the most random job in the world! (Laughs)

## I was going to say...

But it was the two things I was really interested in! Anyway, I became the face of the Young People's Centre and there was a big urban regeneration happening in the town centre. The Chief Exec of Slough Borough Council seconded me to the Heart of Slough programme, which was the capital

**“I was the face of the Young People's Centre and as a person I'm quite out there.”**

programme and basically, I became her blue-eyed boy. Because I was the face of the Young People's Centre and as a person I'm quite out there, they basically said as long as I brought in the funds, I could do what I want. We put in a bid for £7.5 million to look at creative industry training in Slough, got the money, and did a whole range of programmes around film, music, and dance, and getting young people into employment in those areas.

We had to have a dissemination project from that and originally, we were looking at setting up a creative university in Slough but as it went along, the startup costs for film and music were outrageous, so we started with dance [and we just kept growing and flourishing]. We've been fortunate because a lot of senior and influential people supported what we were doing. We tick a lot of boxes for the council because we have really good graduate employment statistics. We've got a lot of activities going on in our building and we give the council money for the building. So, we also tick some boxes about engaging with local young people.

## Do you have a statistic for students placed in employment after graduation?

Up until COVID we were 100% graduated employment. The national average in performance is 3% so we're way above that! The average for schools in the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre is 84% and during COVID, we thought it was going to destroy our statistics but we actually met the average. Last year I think our statistics were up to 94%, so we are slowly creeping back up.



**That brings me onto my next question: what have your students gone on to achieve since graduating?**

I don't know if you know Love Island?

**(Laughs) Yes, I have heard of it.**

Tasha Ghouri is one of our graduates. She's been in *Strictly Come Dancing*. She's probably the most famous graduate to leave Creative Academy. She featured in The Independent's list of the most influential women in 2025. She's done exceptionally well; she's the first deaf ASOS model with a cochlear implant. She said in interviews Creative Academy supported her in realising it's something she should be proud of, and now she calls it her superpower. We've also got Alex Dallimore who is in the Moulin Rouge. Then we've got Joshua Bass Pilmore who choreographed for Rina Sawayama, Bebe Rexha and worked with Claire from Steps. Then you have MJ McGibbon, a graduate that worked with Kesha and Rick Astley to name a few been on *X Factor* and *The Brits*. Georgia Bradshaw was in *Dreamgirls* and hasn't stopped working in the West End since she graduated. But also, we've got a lot of young people who have gone on to teach.

Molly and Elysia have graduated, and they run our Studio School [Prodigy Dance Studios] and Molly is about to start an FE College in Slough for Performing Arts. Every cruise ship you see in the world probably has someone from Creative Academy on it. All our graduates go on to be teachers, choreographers, or performers. And we've just started a Musical Theatre degree which we're hoping will mimic the success of the dance degree.



**What are the class sizes here?**

It's about 15 in a class. We want to keep our dance sizes small, because what's happening in the industry is a lot of colleges are just taking hundreds of students. But you get the intimacy and level of support you need at a vocational school.

**What's your proudest achievement so far?**

Running Creative Academy and having the tenacity to develop something when people told me I couldn't. Every young person I've worked with, a tiny fraction of what they achieve, and I'm not taking responsibility for everything they achieve, but a tiny fraction is because I've supported them. I've been the person to say, 'Yes, you can do that.' So that's probably my proudest moment; the fact that I've helped a lot of young people over the last 25 years to achieve their goals. I was lucky, I had a family who allowed me to be who I was. I came out in the 80s, in a Catholic school, during Section 28 – it wasn't easy but my family just allowed me to be me. I never had someone say, 'No, don't do that!' I've always felt loved and supported by the people that are close to me. I don't think every young person is as lucky as that. My parents allowed me to develop myself as a person, so I've shared a bit of what they gave me.

**You've spoken about your bloody mindedness and fighting to get stuff done. What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome for Creative Academy to be what it is now?**

Being a gay man in local authority. Especially in the 90s, it was difficult because I'm out [and proud]. I had a woman who worked in the Youth Service, who worked with young people and I was still a young person – I was only 26. She said to my manager, 'Should such an openly gay person be working with young people?' The irony was she said that to a lesbian (Laughs) There were a lot of men in the local authority who haven't liked me because I don't fit the grey suit, do what I'm told. And I am quite belligerent; if I wanna do something, I don't care who I upset to get it.

If someone says no to me, I'll go out of my way to go 'Screw you, I'll show you that I can get that'.

**Why do you think the Arts are so important?**

I think the Arts are important because they change people's lives. As a child I didn't feel normal and I didn't feel like I fitted anywhere. When I was 11, you've got someone like Madonna singing Like a Virgin, and I suddenly had an artist that I could go, 'Oh my God, I'm not abnormal! There is someone in the world like me'. The Arts give people a place to find themselves. It's also a bloody good career development opportunity - I've had a fantastic career! Alright, I'm not a multi-millionaire but I'm really happy in my workplace. It gives people confidence. It gives people a purpose. I think it changes culture.

Arts changes the world, and I think it makes the cultural background of a country and a people. The Arts is a universal language. I don't have to speak the same language as someone else to understand their dance. I don't have to speak the same language as someone, but I can look at their painting and see how they feel. It's that universality that brings us all together.

**What type of future do you see for the Arts and culture in Slough?**

I think it will continue to grow. The good thing about Slough is that most people in Slough want to work together. Most people, despite their differences, are quite happy to put their differences aside for the greater good of the town. I don't think people see that outside the town. Look at my business partner, Jag, and I. He's a straight body builder, Asian man from Slough and when he first met me, he hadn't met anyone who was gay. He wore a pink tie and a D&G suit to the interview because his sister said it would impress me (Laughs) But we work really well together; I couldn't achieve anything without him. What happens in Slough is generally people want to support each other.



I want Dom, and SWIPE, and Together as One, and EMPOWORD – I want them to do well. Their successes doesn't diminish my successes and I think in Slough, lots of organisations recognise that.

**Lastly, if someone has never been to Slough before, where do you think they should visit to get a sense of the town?**

Not the town center! (Laughs) I would have said years ago the town centre. I think possibly Upton Court Park when there's a festival on. Because you will see lots of different people together, lots of different organisations, in the same space. You will see the backdrop of Windsor and the grandeur of Windsor Castle and the history it's staked in. And you will see that Slough isn't just an industrial town. Slough has more green spaces than Windsor, it's just that people don't realise that. I think Upton Court Park really does show from one side the industrialness of Slough, the historic wealth of Windsor, but if there is a festival going on, you can see the diversity within the communities.

To find about more about Creative Academy visit: [www.creativeacademy.ac.uk](http://www.creativeacademy.ac.uk)



# Molly Southall

Molly Southall has an obvious passion for dance. A graduate of Creative Academy, she formed **Prodigy Dance Studio** with fellow graduate Elysia Westwood in 2020. The school offers dance training in fully equipped studios for 3-year-olds to 18-year-olds. But their USP is their commitment to keeping the price affordable.

But whilst the cost is low, everything else is high quality, as they seek to prepare their students for a career in the Performing Arts. She took some time out to talk COVID, the West End, and why academia isn't for everyone.

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams



## Why did you want to set up the studio in Slough?

I trained as a dancer here and I actually delivered classes here on the council's behalf. They were extremely affordable, about £2 per class, and they were dance classes for young people in Slough. We did that for about 2 years and then for whatever reason that offer was taken away and they wanted to stop those classes. So, I was offered the opportunity to take up those classes myself. I've always wanted to have my own school, and it just seemed like a prime opportunity to try and maintain what we had created for those young people but also to provide them with the skills and opportunities to take it further if they wished.

## What is the mission of Prodigy Dance Studio?

Our mission and our core is simple – to provide high-quality dance training at an extremely affordable price. At the baseline, that's what we do. A lot of clubs for young people are more casual and especially when they're brought to people of lower incomes they tend to be, not always, but they do tend to be more casual in their delivery, or they don't necessarily do exams, or aren't as structured as your typical dance school would be. So when we started Prodigy, the process was that we would take high quality, quite intense training that would usually come at quite a high-cost value and be able to provide that to young people who wouldn't be able to afford it otherwise. Not everyone at our school comes from a low-income background, but the point is the people who do, are able to attend with us.

**“Our mission and our core is simple – to provide high-quality dance training at an extremely affordable price.”**

## How has the studio had to evolve and develop over the years?

We launched, really unfortunately, in March 2020. Literally about 8 days before COVID broke and everything shut down. We had quite a difficult start, so we actually came back April of 2021 with 2 students. We'd lost the 45 that we had for a variety of reasons and so we started off very, very, small with 2 classes a week. We've now got 3 branches: one in Slough, a branch in Sunbury and a branch in Staines. We have upwards of 20 classes a week and we've got about 90 – 100 students. We do shows every 18 months, which is something we can now provide, and our students can now take exams with us.

So just everything about it has grown in volume, in class size, it's grown in staff, and the opportunities that have come from it. We are still a little bit of a hidden gem because there are hundreds of dance schools and there are some dance schools around here that have been around since the 70s and 80s and are very registered names. When you're competing with that, and people don't necessarily know what you're about and why you're slightly different, it can be quite tricky...We've made relationships with places like Active Slough and Resource Productions and been able to get our name out and help a lot more children.

## So what does Prodigy offer that's different from some of the more established studios?

Our price point. In our Slough branch, our classes have never gone up in price. We've managed to keep our prices at £4 per session since we launched in April 2021. The typical price point for Performing Arts classes in this area can be anywhere between £6.50 and £10 depending on what you do. So we are significantly lower. We don't upcharge on our uniforms – we don't make any profit. So our price point separates us from anyone else. In most organisations you have to pay for the term before the term starts. For our parents, we tell them the fees in August and come up with a payment plan for each parent, and they have until December to get that paid.

**I think your commitment to making classes financially accessible is brilliant. Then it's just about the talent.**

As far as we're concerned, whatever situation a child has been brought into, is not that child's fault, so you shouldn't have to lose out on opportunities. But for us, the price point of classes is more than necessary, it's also the exposure to the industry. So many of these children would never be able to afford, or have the opportunity, to go to the West End and watch showcases.

That's part of the bliss of having Creative Academy close by. George is very kind and offers us free tickets to take the children to performances, so they see a lot of dance. We host a lot of workshops, so we are able to bring West End professionals in and deliver workshops and we also take them to big dance conferences and events that they never would have had the exposure to. In turn, lots of kids who probably think dance isn't for them, can now think it's viable.

**Since you started the school, what has been your proudest achievement?**

Ooooo, I've never thought about it really! We did a charity fundraiser when someone close to my business partner Elysia's family had passed away from cancer. All of our kids came and performed, and we did a big raffle and theatre night. We managed to raise about £2,600 for the local hospice that had supported her family friend and that was the most phenomenal evening. The pure support and generosity of the people that came was one of the best nights we've ever put on. The theatre only had space for 100 people, but we ended up doing another show because it was so popular. Raising that amount of money for such a small event and being able to donate that to a local hospice was probably one of the proudest moments. But actually, just seeing kids progressing and doing well in exams and smiling on stage every week, kids who I know otherwise would not be in that situation, will always be the highlight of my week. It will never get boring.



**Why do you think the Arts are important?**

Where can I start! I have a high respect for academia, I've done a Master's, and I have a lot of respect for any field that is academic. But it just is not for everyone...and there needs to be another option. There's a reason that both sides of our brain are different and as humans we deserve enjoyment. On a basic level, we deserve to do things that we enjoy. Inherently, music, art, reading, and dancing brings people joy on its most basic level...It's also important for young people to see there are so many options. In schools, it can be pushed that your academics are important [but the Arts] gives them another option. So they might be failing in their Maths GCSEs... but they have skills elsewhere and they can recognise that.

To find out more about Prodigy Dance Studio visit: [www.prodigydancestudios.com](http://www.prodigydancestudios.com)



**“Inherently music, art, reading, and dancing brings people joy on its most basic level.”**



# Nikita Thakrar

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

Nikita Thakrar set up **Dance Nikita Company** (DNC) in 2005, teaching classical Indian dance. In 2011 the DNC Dance & Yoga studio was formed, and she has been a cultural staple in Slough ever since. She's won countless awards and had several nominations, including winning the Woman Who Achieves award, which is a national recognition for her dedication to promoting Indian dance, wellbeing, and personal development.

She sat down to talk about why she set up the company, the role Slough plays in her work and why she loves the local Tesco.



## Why did you form DNC?

I was about 18 years old when I decided that I wanted to go into dance seriously, and at that time, about 20 years ago, there weren't that many dance schools in the UK and only one or two in Slough and they were teaching at weekends only. I had such a passion for dance that I wanted to dance every day! So, I decided to go to India and train intensively. When I came back, I decided that this was my dream, to set up a dance school where there would be classes available every day.

## How would you describe the mission of your work?

Our slogan is to educate and empower the next generation through Indian dance. Really, what that means is to teach and impart knowledge, but also to empower them with life skills. What's important to me is that they start at 4 years old, finish at 18 and go to university. When they leave, they are not only excellent technical and expressive dancers, but they also have life skills.

## Why is your work important?

It's so important being an ethnic minority to have a space where young people can come to, and they can be themselves. When I was growing up as a British Indian young girl, I felt like I had an identity crisis. I didn't know who I was – was I British? Was I Indian? I'd go to school and wear one hat then come home and wear another hat. What I'm trying to do is to teach these children you don't need to wear any hats; you are just you and that's okay.

## Why did you set up DNC in Slough?

Slough is such a culturally diverse community. I was born and brought up here and it's home to me. I felt there was a gap in the market and there wasn't anyone who was teaching the

way I wanted to teach and so it fell into place. I didn't really choose Slough – it chose me.

## How does Slough shape your work, and how does your work shape Slough?

In Slough, everybody is welcome, which is a very rare thing...The fact that it is so culturally diverse shapes the way we run the school. We don't just have Indian pupils; we have pupils of all nationalities.

## Why do you think the Arts are important?

The Arts are a bridge to understanding who you are in life. It's so important to use art as an expression. When I had an identity crisis what saved me was my dancing...Whether you're a spectator or an artist, the Arts transport you to a different world.

## What's your proudest achievement so far?

I have so many over the last 20 years since I've been running DNC. I've won awards, had national recognition, been in the press and media. But my greatest achievement is having the same students who started with me 20 years ago still with me today.

## Where in Slough do you think every visitor should see and why?

Tesco – it's the heart of Slough! Any tourist that comes we need to take them there...It's a great centre point of the community and there's everything in there – there's food, a cafe, clothes. They sell everything!

To find out more about DNC visit:  
[www.dncstudio.com](http://www.dncstudio.com)



**“Whether you're a spectator or an artist,  
the Arts transport you to a different world.”**

# Libraries & Literature

# Alison Beer

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

It's clear to see that **Alison Beer** loves books, reading, and stories. It's been highlighted by her career, working as a Libraries Outreach Officer at Hillingdon Borough Council before becoming the Programme Coordinator at Book Trust.

She is now working for Slough Borough Council where she's sharing her love of books with a brand-new audience.



**Your official title is Principal Libraries Outreach Officer (Children and Young People). Can you explain what your role entails?**

It is both Outreach and Children and Young People. Outreach is going out, trying to reach people that maybe don't normally come to us and sell them the benefits of why they should come and use us, but I also collect feedback about potentially why they don't come. I'm building a new audience but also the existing audience might not know about all the things that we do offer. They might be surprised about our online resources, our activities, and some of the things we've done like virtual reality, for example. I'm trying to make sure everyone in Slough is aware of the service we offer and is using it to its full potential.

**What does an average day look like for you?**

There isn't an average day! I'm also Book Start Coordinator, which is a programme of free book packs for pre-school children, so I distribute those across Slough. I could be going to a nursery, doing some staff training, or doing a risk assessment. Or it could range from admin, to doing a presentation, to running an activity, to updating the website! It's an incredibly varied role.

**What are some of the benefits of reading for children and young people?**

Absolutely enormous! It ranges from the developmental benefits – communication and speech to language development. If parents share books with children there is bonding and attachment, family connectedness. It's building empathy, increasing vocabulary, and a wider vocabulary helps people express themselves. You get less frustrated if you can express yourself clearly. There's escapism, fun, enjoyment! For adults it relieves stress and helps you feel understood because you can find yourself reflected in a book...and it's something you can do for free!



**With attitudes towards reading changing, how has your work had to evolve and develop over the years?**

In a landscape where books are competing with other forms of entertainment, we offer books in other formats such as online books or audio books. We have offered immersive storytelling which is virtual reality or augmented reality where we worked with the BBC and Royal Holloway University. But there is still an appetite for stories, just maybe in a slightly different format.

**How do you think the libraries reflect and respond to local need?**

Slough has one of the youngest populations in the country. This is reflected in library usage, with around 70% of all resources borrowed across all sites being from the Children's library. The Curve, in particular, is visited by large numbers of young people, both to study and as a place of choice to meet and hang out after school or college. The Bookstart scheme, coordinated in Slough, offers free book packs to all babies, and also to low-income families and children with additional needs aged 0-5 to encourage a love for books from the earliest age. The library service also welcomes and supports new arrivals to Slough. They offer book stock in the languages most widely spoken in the community and the Bookstart programme offers children's books in over 30 languages.

Libraries are well-placed to support residents during the cost-of-living crisis. There is no cost to become a member or visit our buildings and we have a programme of free activities. Residents can use free Wi-Fi and PCs, charge their devices and spend as long as they like relaxing or studying in comfortable surroundings.

**You've previously worked for Book Trust and Hillingdon council. Why did you want to continue your work in Slough?**

I know Slough from my childhood. I live in Hayes, and Slough was the go-to place when I was a child. To get on the train to Slough was quite a big deal and quite exciting! Hayes and Slough are not dissimilar, they are very multicultural and diverse communities. Hillingdon is a much bigger authority, so I felt I could make more of an impact in Slough.

**The Curve is clearly structured to be a multi-purpose venue focusing on cultural activity. Why do you think it was so important for the Arts to be incorporated in the library's development?**

Libraries are neutral, non-judgmental, welcoming and accessible spaces, visited by all ages, making them ideal locations to host arts and cultural opportunities that can reach the whole community. Incorporating the arts into libraries celebrates and connects all the different artistic forms and establishes a cultural space that inspires and enables creativity and spreads the message that the Arts are for everyone.



**What type of future do you see for Arts & Culture in Slough?**

The Cultural Strategy was just produced and reflects that Slough is quite a dynamic place for arts and culture. Compared to where I live in Hayes, I think there is so much more going on, it's just a matter of making people aware of it. There is so much talent and different arts formats and a willingness to come together. The will is there, the talent is there. It just needs to be coordinated and taken out to a wider audience. Slough is well placed to be a great cultural centre. It has so many advantages and so much potential. The future is bright - really bright and very exciting!

**“Slough is well placed to be a great cultural centre. It has so many advantages and so much potential. The future is bright - really bright and very exciting!”**

**“Slough has one of the youngest populations in the country. This is reflected in library usage, with around 70% of all resources borrowed across all sites being from the Children's library.”**

**What's your fondest memory of working in Slough?**

I think it's engaging with our readers and our young readers and seeing how I have made a difference. I had one young reader who came to me and wanted to read the Classics which really made my day! Another time I was talking about reading in an assembly saying you could enjoy yourself and escape into another world and one little lad said, 'If I've been told off and I'm feeling really upset, I can just read a book and get into another world?' He'd never thought about that before. I really appreciate those little moments.



**What do you wish everyone knew about Slough?**

There's a great sense of community and there is so much going on to support that wider community. People have a sense of 'us', not 'I'.

To find out more about libraries in Slough please visit: [www.slough.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.slough.gov.uk/libraries)



# Desree

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

The poet **Desree** is the definition of multi-talented. Her credits span from being the Poet in Residence at Glastonbury, co-writer of the Off-West End award-winning play *Crowed*, and workshop facilitator in schools, youth groups, prisons, and offices.

Her warm and infectious personality, combined with her commitment to community, immediately endears you; she's the kind of woman you could spend hours talking to. She talks about why being a poet is stressful, slightly off metaphors, and a few of her hometown role models.



**First of all, how did you know you were a poet?**

(Laughs) I didn't really and even now I still struggle with it. I've always written things down and used words. When I finished uni, I took up an unpaid internship at a theatre and a job as an Online Grocery Shopper at Sainsbury's. I would start at 4 am, finish at 11 am, then go work at the theatre in London at 12 noon, come home at 11 pm, and start that process again.

During that time, I was losing my creativity so I decided to put on an open mic night in Slough and I funded the whole thing myself. One of the acts dropped out and my mum said 'Why don't you read that thing you read me earlier?' Someone said 'That's such a great poem!' and I thought, 'I suppose it is a poem.' From then on, I started finding gigs and performing. But the idea of being a poet was a bit stressful; it still is now. If people ask me what I do, sometimes I say I'm a poet for the shock factor, but then I'll say 'but I also produce and write plays, and I also blah, blah, blah'.

**I'm curious, what was the creativity you were losing before poetry?**

I was writing a lot; plays, songs, stories – everything. When I was younger, I thought I wanted to be a rapper (Laughs) That's what I thought I was doing but I was too shy. I love grime and rap music, and I felt that if I wasn't doing what they were doing, then I was just going to stop (Laughs) But I kept writing.

**So how would you describe your poetry?**

It's unapologetic. It's direct. It's funny but also honest.

**Do you have a mission?**

In all my artistry, and in all my work, my mission is to be in and with, and champion, and nurture, and spotlight, community. I live in London and have done since 2016, but a lot of my work is in Slough and will continue to be in Slough because that's the community I grew my artistry and it's so important for me to acknowledge that and give back! I was around people who championed young people, people who had a voice or something to say and just needed the space to do that. I stand on the backs of giants because they feed into their community. So that's my mission as an artist – feed into the community.

**This theme of community seems to be a defining factor for the town. How do you think your community has shaped you?**

I'm second generation and a lot of my friends and the people I grew up with are first or second generation. Their grandparents came here and created what they wanted to see. One of my best friends' Nan is Lydia Simmons, who was the first black Mayor in England. I could have a drink at Lydia Simmons' house, and I don't take that for granted! I saw somebody say today that 'to lose an elder is to lose a library.' I think that's the community that Slough has. It's seeped into people who have come, built and created before. We're just trying to carry the torch.

**“In all my artistry, and in all my work, my mission is to be in and with, and champion, and nurture, and spotlight, community.”**

**As well as being a poet, you also work as a facilitator. What do you most enjoy about your facilitation work?**

When people say they're not poets or they're shy when they come into my sessions. But by the end of it, I might be able to get them to read or write a poem. Being able to validate people and let them know that what you're doing is a poem, but also that their voice matters! Nobody makes the rules - if you call it a poem, it's a poem. This is what I love most about poetry and the spoken word, it's the accessibility. I've worked in prisons, PRUs, community groups, and kids with SEND. I've been able to do it all because poetry is so accessible.

**You've touched on it a little bit already, but how does Slough shape your work?**

Okay, this is going to be such an off metaphor. Y'know when kids stand against the wall every year to get their height recorded?

**Yeah....?**

Slough for me is the wall. Slough is the measure, and every time I'm able to go back into spaces or work with new people, or people that I've known, not only am I able to see my growth, but I can see the growth of the community I'm in. Everything feels like it's growing. And to have this wall and see Lydia Simmons and Earl Herbert and Christina Brooks Abraham on there, it shows me how tall I want to get.

**What is your proudest achievement to date?**

It's like a macro and micro. I was Poet in Residence at Glastonbury, I performed at the Royal Albert Hall, I've shared stages with some amazing artists. But I've also been able to get a group of 14 - 16-year-old boys in a YOT in Swindon to write a poem. I got them to respect my craft and my art, and got them to write! I've been in PRUs where kids have thrown chairs at the ceiling and then sat down and written a poem with me. I feel like these are my greatest accomplishments. Being able to see the impact you can make on the people that society tells you cannot be impacted.

**Why do you think the Arts are important?**

Because it's a complete expression. What is asked of you is to be yourself. Maths doesn't ask you to be yourself, it asks questions with definite answers (Laughs) Art is the way people communicate as their best selves. It's not just for wellbeing but it also feeds into every single other part of your life. How you communicate with others, how you enjoy yourself, the type of person you are. There is so much that the Arts contributes to.

To find out more about Desree visit:  
[www.iamdesree.co.uk/about](http://www.iamdesree.co.uk/about)



**“I think that’s the community that Slough has. It’s seeped into people who have come, built, and created before.”**



# Music

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# Spencer Lowe

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

Spencer Lowe is the founder of **Beat Routes**, a Youth Arts charity working with young people from 11 to 25 years old. They run a series of arts programmes during term time which includes music, visual arts, mindfulness, and even a choir. A graphic designer turned workshop leader turned CEO, he reflects on how it all began.



## How would you describe Beat Routes to someone who knows nothing about the charity?

We're a creative collective of young people who have a grassroots, DIY approach that really celebrates authenticity. Our projects are shaped by modern subcultures, and we embrace the energy of new movements, styles, and technologies but we also really respect heritage. On paper, we're an arts charity for young people, but we're different in how we've become a collective of adults and young people.

When we started back in 2004, I was working in record shops, and I'd share my knowledge of music with the young people. But then they would be teaching me about music too, so it became an exchange of creative knowledge. We have quite a unique approach because our young people get really tailored support and time with different people and tutors learning and supporting each other.

## How did you create the name?

We used to be based in Slough Young People's Centre and I was throwing names around with the staff. One of my friends Tina said 'What about beetroots?' Then I started to look at the way it could be spelt, and it really made sense. I was working in record shops in Soho and I would bring vinyls to the young people, who would be getting really inspired by not just the music, but by the sleeves and the artwork...So the whole idea became about the essence, or the beat – it's that creative inspiration which can then lead off in all these different routes.



## Why did you start Beat Routes in the first place?

I was employed by the council to run workshops at Slough Young People's Centre, in Graphic Design and Visual Arts. Then they realised I could DJ, so I started to also do DJ workshops. But the young people wouldn't leave at the end of the sessions, and we would just hang out and listen to music. A lot of the equipment wasn't being looked after and I'd often start the workshops, and nothing would be working. Someone suggested I apply for funding and set up my own group, and that's how it started.

## Why was it important to you to set up Beat Routes in Slough?

I was born in Slough, just up the road in Taplow. When I started working at the Young People's Centre, I really liked the people and the community, and I became passionate about Slough. People often talk down about the town and they still do. So, it's significant to me because of my roots and my love for the community.

**“The Arts connect with young people like nothing else can. Especially music. It is such a powerful force.”**



**How does Slough shape your work, and how does your work shape Slough?**

That's a great question! Slough shapes the work in terms of the culture. There is such a mix of cultures, and I've learnt so much from all the different people I've met. That's what I really love - learning something new all the time. We shape Slough because we've brought things to Slough that people are quite surprised by. We bring a much more eclectic range of arts than perhaps Slough has been used to. We've had jazz musicians, legendary house producers, grime MCs, and an artist called Mad Professor who's a reggae/dub legend. People wouldn't necessarily expect that to happen in Slough. We bring more eclectic arts to the community.

**Why do you think the Arts are important?**

That is such a massive question...I could go on for about an hour! The Arts connect with young people like nothing else can. Especially music. It is such a powerful force. The Arts are so important on so many levels. It can ignite something in a young person and completely change their life. It's essential.

**What is your favourite thing about Slough?**

Slough has a certain energy like nowhere else. My favourite thing is the people.

To find out more about Beat Routes visit: [www.beatroutesc.co.uk](http://www.beatroutesc.co.uk)



# Rebecca Richardson

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

**Slough Music Service** is a non-profit funded by the government, supported by Slough Borough Council, to enhance the musical experience of children and young people across the borough.

They offer tailored services to meet the needs of young musicians and work closely with schools to deliver an integrated programme of vocal and instrumental tuition.

Through their passion for music, they want to inspire and empower, creating opportunities and enjoyment for all. The head of the service, Rebecca Richardson, took some time to tell us all about it.



## **How did you become involved in Slough Music Service?**

Being a young person from Slough, born and bred, music has always been a part of my life, through Church or attending youth clubs. Up until 2019, I didn't actually know that Slough had a music service. I met the head of the service when I had started a community choir, and it evolved to her thinking I would make a good community projects coordinator. And now I'm running the service.

## **So she was right then?**

(Laughs) Yeah, she was right, bless her.

## **Why was it important to have this service in Slough?**

It's been going on for 40 years, but I believe that because the managers didn't come from Slough, they didn't understand how to access the young people. Because I live in Slough and have been raised in Slough, I know the area and it helped me communicate with young people, gain feedback, and really do a meaningful needs analysis to see exactly what they need and want to see in Slough... That's why we're successful now.

## **So has there been a change in the success of the project thanks to your integration into the community?**

I believe so. More young people feel like the music service is accessible and that they have a voice. They can suggest things or ask for things and take part in the opportunities that we put forward.

## **Do you often collaborate with other local art organisations?**

Yes, we do. People like Jamie Green from SWIPE Music. We are more Berkshire wide in terms of our reach with other organisations, but what we always have is an open-door policy. We invite organisations to come and talk to us, and based on their needs, what it is they'd like us to help or collaborate with. The outcome always has to be to increase participation amongst our young people.

## **Do these other organisations deliver the services under the Slough Music Service?**

It has been like that, but everyone has their own sort of mission and sometimes that doesn't align with what we're doing. But we always make sure we are part of the [Slough Arts] Forum; we know [other music organisations] who are in Slough like Dionysus Ensemble, Beat Routes – we work very closely with Beat Routes. When there's opportunities to collaborate, we do.

## **What moment / achievement are you most proud of?**

We recently put on a show in June, and it was very daunting because it was at the Reading Hexagon. We managed to get 500 children from Slough over there to sing and we also had our youth orchestra. We put on an hour's show for the parents, and we had more people come than expected. That's helped us understand that young people in Slough do want to perform, they want the big stage, and they want all the accolades.

So, it's about making sure we put that in place again for this year. That's one of my biggest achievements. Getting an orchestra up and running in Slough [is also an achievement]. I have so many big visions to create an urban orchestra. We've just started a project with a rapper and we're going to make a rap school, so young people can learn how to rap. I want them to articulate themselves and learn they have the power; they don't have to follow what's already out there they can create their own and we can work with them alongside the orchestra to produce an urban orchestra.

## **Why do you think the Arts are important?**

Because they help young people with expression. They help people, even adults as well, just to express themselves. The Arts have helped me to be the woman I am today. It's helped me to be confident, it's helped me to just go for things, it's helped me to think creatively. So, I believe that the Arts help other people to do the same.



**What would you say makes Slough special?**

The people within and the history it has. Obviously, we know about William Herschel and the Trading Estate, and that we created the bins! (Laughs) But people within it, the diverse community, have made Slough the beautiful place it is. Slough gets too much bad press, but when people actually come and visit, and they come and work with people they change their opinions of Slough which is great. It's the people – we're good people!

**What was the last piece of art that really touched you?**

Touched me? I'm quite a hard nut – I don't cry, girl! (Laughs) There's a few things. These performance opportunities that we've given young people over the last academic year. Be it just recitals at St Mary's Church, or the Christmas Carol concert we do at Eton Chapel. All of these opportunities have amalgamated into such a keen thirst for wanting the Arts and young people coming to us. That moves me.

In the Music Service, we don't think about money. It's not a money-making scheme that we're trying to do. We're not trying to sell music in that way. We want young people to be inspired, and we really look at our mission statement and try to live it to the best of our ability. I'll get to a moment when I am moved, but right now the movement is moving me (Laughs) That sounds very profound!

To find out more about Slough Music Service visit: [www.sloughmusicservice.co.uk](http://www.sloughmusicservice.co.uk)



**“The Arts have helped me to be the woman I am today. It's helped me to be confident, it's helped me to just go for things, it's helped me to think creatively. So, I believe that the Arts help other people to do the same.”**

# Stevoss (Stephen Ambrose)

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

Stephen Ambrose, known to many as **Stevoss**, has over 25 years of experience as a DJ and Music Producer. For him, music is the gift that keeps on giving – one he intends to pass on through his work. Stevoss is the Director of Voss Arts Media, an Arts and Media company, and the founder of Love Music Hate Violence, a community group built on the prevention of anti-knife crime, racism, and bullying among other issues that affect young people. He spoke with us about his own experiences, his faith and the transformative effect of music.



## Why did you start Love Music Hate Violence?

I come from a protective environment and growing up, all I knew was going to church, love, kindness, and treating people with respect. However, in the past, my family were quite notorious; my grandfather was a boxer, and my dad and uncle were jack the lads. When my father was stabbed in a racist altercation, my family found faith not long after and their lives turned around for the better. At the age of 5, I experienced my first bit of racism and me being who I am, I didn't take any of it – I would use my fists! A lot of people would shy away from it but I would stand up to it, so that got me in trouble.

As I've become an adult and turned my life around, it has given me a desire to try and support other young people with similar experiences to mine. I've always had a heart for the youth, so I channeled my energy into trying to steer them away from the same mistakes as me and my friends. I have always been a musician, and my faith was very helpful in steering me away from the madness I was experiencing in my teens.

## Is that why music was your vehicle to combat youth crime?

I was raised in a Christian family around musical instruments and every instrument was in my house. From the age of 3, I picked up the piano and at the age of 12, I started to play in a worship band at another church. Music distracted me from the circle of friends I was with [who would have otherwise got me into more trouble]. At 11 I got introduced to Jungle music by my cousin, Shaun, and that was it – I was hooked.

**“The Arts enable you to be creative collectively and it gives you a chance to express yourself. Then, once you've created that art, it gives you that sense of joy.”**

## Do you take the same approach with the young people you work with now?

### Distracting them with music?

I use music as a tool to be able to engage with them. I run a media production company and within that company I have an Events & DJ agency arm, so the DJ bookings come through that. As I'm training the kids, I'm giving them opportunities to also work. I'm mentoring and developing them to get them to a stage where they're able to go out there and earn money from their art.

## That's a great model. Rather than just spending their spare time with you, you are helping them generate an income.

We have to look at children right now. They're yearning for money and looking at all sorts of ways to make it. I've spoken to kids who are trading crypto and they're smashing it. But then you have other kids who haven't got that skills set, wouldn't know where to start, but they have seen other people doing certain illegal things and they think they can make a good bit of money. What I'm showing our young people is if you're interested in the Arts and creativity, look at what I'm doing and what I've achieved despite the challenges, and I'll support you if you put your heart and mind to it.

**And do you feel like your work is a calling from God?**

I believe so, absolutely. There is still work for me to do personally, on myself, but I believe that it's definitely in line with making a difference. It stems from a lot from 'Love thy neighbour'.

**What has been your proudest moment since starting Love Music Hate Violence?**

Being invited onto BBC One. They heard what was going on and wanted to feature me on a daytime documentary. [The BBC] came down and filmed at Britwell Youth Centre and I got to speak to them about what my vision is and what I'm trying to accomplish. That was one of my proudest moments. I was also in Idris Elba's music video, *Knives Down* recently. That was a proud moment. Most recently, the Thames Valley Police Crime Commissioner awarded us £5,000 to work with schools. Those are three proud moments since setting up and I'm sure there are going to be many, many more as things grow and progress.

**Why are the Arts so important?**

It's really important to have fun. Sometimes people are just stuck on their phone, gaming, or just stuck in their rooms. The Arts enable you to be creative collectively and it gives you a chance to express yourself. Then, once you've created that art, it gives you that sense of joy. I find it rewarding when I've been in the studio and created a song or made a piece of work - I wanna show it off to the world! [The Arts also] help with wellbeing and mental health - it supports all of that.

To find out more about Stevoss and Love Music Hate Violence follow them on Instagram:

[www.instagram.com/lmhvofficial](http://www.instagram.com/lmhvofficial)  
[www.instagram.com/stevossofficial](http://www.instagram.com/stevossofficial)



# Ray Siddique

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

As the town's local station, **Asian Star Radio** has had a place in the cars, homes and hearts of Slough locals since its inception in 2007. Known for playing Bollywood and Bhangra, the 24-hour community station has earned national recognition, winning awards such as Best Regional Radio Station of The Year in 2014 for quality broadcasting. Managing director Ray Siddique spoke with us about how it all began and how he shows no signs of stopping.



## How were you first introduced to radio?

My background in radio goes back many, many years. My passion for getting into radio started when I kicked off my DJ career after college. Like most of today's seasoned broadcasters, I got into broadcasting without a license (also known as pirate radio). I was working at Slough Observer newspaper as a music columnist, and I was one of their field sales managers, selling advertising but my interest was in radio. It didn't matter what music was playing, my pirate radio experience confirmed that this is what I wanted to do.

From the newspaper, I jumped into the local station, a pop station called Star 106.6 FM. It was difficult to get into broadcasting in those days, so I ended up working in sales. From there, my persistence to have a live show eventually led to me getting one 8 months into the job. That's where it all happened. From one show a week, it grew to two nights and then five nights. From there, my radio career took off. I got headhunted by the BBC, went to the Midlands to work at Pebble Mill for three years, and then came back to London to work in commercial radio.

## What influenced you to start Asian Star?

I've always been a local resident of Slough, born and bred, so I wanted to do something here where it all began. That's how the inception of Asian Star came about. The programme I presented at Star FM was called Asian Star, so I decided to name the station after it. I set this up, won the license from Ofcom back in 2007 and the rest is history.

We've trained so many volunteers who have gone onto other mainstream platforms. I know some have gone onto Sky, some have gone onto the BBC – all of them used Asian Star as a springboard to get their careers off the ground. If you like, we are a professional outfit to help people become broadcasters of the future.

## Why did you decide to be a community station, rather than commercial?

I wanted to give back to the community. Having worked in commercial stations, there were things of great interest to listeners that were overlooked because, maybe, due to budgeting the company was unable to pay for the airtime. I felt like this was a real letdown because when you have listeners, apart from the entertainment side, they want to know about information. They want to hear real-life stories from other listeners, and this is some of the stuff that gets overlooked unless you're paying for a campaign or being sponsored.

With community, I feel like you can get so much more out of it. There's some vital interviews and topics that can be broadcast, and for me, it wasn't about the money. It was to bring great and interesting programmes for people to listen to. We've formed so many partnerships with different organisations over the years, working at a grassroots level which is what the station's about. Because of that, we work with so many wonderful organisations and people such as Macmillan Cancer and Thames Hospice giving us an opportunity to help more people.

**“I've always been a local resident of Slough, born and bred, so I wanted to do something here where it all began.”**

### Why do you think the work Asian Star does is important?

I'll give you an example. During COVID, Asian Star was a lifeline for a lot of people. Everybody working in broadcasting was called a key worker, so we worked through lockdown. Asian Star was broadcasting important messages on behalf of the government. We were giving out advice and helping people with mental health problems. We have people who'll write to us and say, 'Without this station, I don't know what we would do.' So, it's important that we do this work; not only helping the elderly, the ill or whoever else, but bringing communities together. We also help local businesses, new start-ups, and we run events – and that's why I think it's important. If something like our station didn't exist, all the people in this catchment wouldn't have any of these services because local government is unable to fund such projects.

### I wanted to ask about the Slough Mela – what was the decision behind starting that up and what was the reaction you got from the community?

I never had a vision of setting up a Mela festival, ever, until 2000 when I saw a mela being advertised. A mela is a South-Asian word for a festival or fair, where people meet for enjoyment. Having attended a mela previously, I decided to organise one myself at Upton Court Park – making the most of my events management experience, my contacts and with thanks to sponsors, I managed to get some key players involved.

I put on lots of musical acts which was the main focus of the day. The first year we saw in excess of 5,000 people turn up, which was a real eye opener for everybody. As the years went by, we got more sponsors and bigger acts and diversified the Mela to appeal to all residents. We even had Polish and Caribbean DJs from Capital Radio. At its peak in 2005, we saw up to 30,000 visitors in a day travelling from as far afield as Wales

and Manchester, making it a great way of promoting Slough and local business. The Mela soon attracted mainstream hubs like an interview with The Guardian, live BBC broadcasts, as well as a feature on ITV News at 6. Despite no funding from Slough Borough Council, the support from our sponsors enabled the event to be free to attend. Sadly, in 2014, the Mela was discontinued due to escalating police and council costs. Due to the success of the Mela, they thought we were making huge profits, but we weren't.

The combined charges from Thames Valley Police and the Council before the event were so astronomical, it became a non-viable business decision. It was sad because we'd put so much time into the event. Positive feedback that we continue to get from our listeners makes me want to resurrect the Slough Mela but we have met some hurdles from local authority.

### How has Asian Star adapted over the years as media changes?

It's a good question because when the station came around, we were the only choice for local businesses to advertise. Suddenly, social media and local billboarding came into the mix which really affected our revenue. We did lose some clients but after a couple of years, some have come back to us or done as we suggested – come to us and have their social media as well. Now we try and sell in a different way.



**“The future is certainly bright and I think, within the next decade, the artistic side of Slough is definitely going to shine through.”**

### People tend to say radio is dead. I'm sure you disagree but have you found a change in the way people interact with radio?

I would say the younger generation say that. I think the generation from the 70s, 80s and 90s love radio so it's not completely dead. Radio stations have had to evolve; Asian Star has its own app where people can listen to us worldwide. Lots of mainstream stations are pushing for people to listen via their app because they know people are always engaged with their mobile phones. People can listen to us on Alexa-enabled devices – people can say 'Listen to Asian Star Radio' to Alexa. So, we've had to adapt that way, making ourselves available on other platforms.

### What do you see for the future of Arts in Slough?

The future of Arts in Slough is looking great. A lot of the work that's happening behind the scenes as we speak will be instrumental to Slough, Arts-wise, in the next ten years. From the unveiling of [The Curve] mural, buskers, the Museum – the future is certainly bright and I think, within the next decade, the artistic side of Slough is definitely going to shine through.

To learn more about Asian Star Radio and its shows, visit their website: [asianstarradio.co.uk](http://asianstarradio.co.uk)



# Jamie Green

Interviewed and written  
by Karla Williams

Slough West Indian People's Enterprise, commonly known as **SWIPE**, runs innovative and award-winning projects for Slough and the wider community. A registered charity since 1999, they have a commitment to helping young people at risk of exclusion develop their potential through music, the Arts, sport, or community service. CEO Jamie Green spoke with us to talk music, missions and movies.



## How would you describe SWIPE and its mission?

We've diversified from our original mission quite a lot. As an Arts and Heritage organisation, we try and make music accessible to all. Over the years we've done various different projects: we taught musical instruments for free, we've nurtured bands and mentored people, even given people instruments when they can't afford them. In fact, when people are learning with us, we tend to give them an instrument, because what's the point of teaching someone how to play the guitar if they haven't got one at home to rehearse on? We try and create a vibrant music scene in Slough.

There isn't one at the moment because the pandemic killed everything off! (Laughs) So we've been working in the background to try and re-start the youth music scene. But what we're finding is there are no young bands at the moment, because during the pandemic kids weren't getting together and forming bands. The only type of bands we're seeing are the ones that were formed in schools, which are very different from the ones that might form independently. We're looking at how we can re-generate [bands] and working on a project that will be getting bands together out of term time. It's about getting all the young people who are learning instruments into the same building a couple of times in the summer and the winter and just trying to get them to form bands.

## How was SWIPE started?

SWIPE was started by its founders 27 years ago. They were all gentlemen from the Caribbean – SWIPE stands for Slough West Indian People's Enterprise. The guys wanted to ensure that young African-Caribbean boys weren't getting into trouble. They wanted to do some mentoring type projects and one of their projects was a steel band. They taught some young guys how to play steel pan music. They then went out into the community playing steel pans and of course the rest of the community wanted

to join in. Suddenly SWIPE was working with the whole community rather than just the Afro-Caribbean community and we just expanded on that. One of the main things behind it has been to combat racism as well. Rather than being Slough West Indian Peoples Enterprise just working with West Indian people, that would mean we're working independently and therefore we're not actually mixing. But what we want to do is make sure that everybody is mixing. All cultures are coming into contact with each other, celebrating each other, and working together.

## How did you become involved with SWIPE?

My history has always been in sports. I fell ill in 2000 with ME, which is also known as chronic fatigue syndrome and I was told I couldn't exercise, so that really threw me off my game because that was all I ever did. I spent about 4 years not really getting off the sofa or doing much much due to the illness, but during that time I was weighing up what I could do. I looked back at what I used to do when I was younger and I came back to music. I spent 4 years learning as much as I could about recording, engineering and all that stuff. When I got well around 2005, I went out and started doing it, setting up jam nights in pubs and stuff like that. SWIPE wanted to run a large event at what was the West Wing Arts Centre, and they were told to ask me to do it. So, I did and it kind of rolled on from there forming more projects on top of each other.

**“The young people who we've worked with and have learnt their instrument and are still enjoying it.”**

**What role did Slough have in the setting up of the organisation 27 years ago?**

Young African and Caribbean boys were getting into trouble and the guys from SWIPE wanted to stop that from happening. They wanted to mentor them and give them something they could do instead. So, like I said, it started off as a mentoring project and then the steel bands came into it. All the kids played in the steel band and then suddenly it became about the music.

**So, it was responding to the need in Slough at the time?**

Yes.

**Do you often work with other local Art organisations?**

All the time, even organisations that aren't arts organisations. For example, Langley Carnival asks us if we can come down, bring the PA and maybe even the steel band and some other bands. Because of the pandemic, we're not getting asked to do those things quite as much, so we're not working with the bands we used to before.

**What's your proudest achievement to date?**

The young people who we've worked with and have learnt their instrument and are still enjoying it. Some of those have been successful, some of those have been on Eurovision, some of those have played at Glastonbury, and some have been playing their own music in a pub when they want to.

Whatever they're doing, as long as they've achieved what they want to achieve...those are the big achievements that make me proud of what I do.

**Why do you think the Arts are so important?**

The Arts are a great leveler. I can put a 70-year-old man and a 17-year-old man in a room together with 2 instruments and they will start playing together. They will enjoy it and it doesn't matter that there is 50 years between them. It's a leveler for all communities, because if your community has a different style of music to another community, then it's really nice to compare and see what is different and how things work.

**Lastly, where in Slough do you think everyone should visit?**

I'm at the Jubilee River, so I'm obviously going to say the Jubilee River! And I'm going to quote the wonderful line from the film *Little English*, where the heroine says, 'I never knew Slough could be so beautiful' after going to the Jubilee River. It is this amazing piece of water that is between a motorway and dual carriageway, and you wouldn't know it. The moment you get on the water itself, you can't hear the cars or anything like that. It's just this amazing place.

To find out more about SWIPE visit: [www.swipemusic.com](http://www.swipemusic.com)



**“The Arts are a great leveler. I can put a 70-year old man and a 17-year old man in a room with 2 instruments and they will start playing together.”**



# Visual Arts

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# Sbba Siddique

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

**Knit Your Socks Off** is a dedicated group who knit and crochet for charity. Over the past nine years, they have supported various facilities across Slough including Wexham Park Hospital, Thames Hospice, Slough Refugee Support and the Royal British Legion, as well as charities nationally and internationally. Founded by Sbba Siddique, the group run projects on a monthly basis, such as the Innocence Big Knit. Here's how you can join their legion of woolly warriors.



## What was the inspiration behind Knit Your Socks Off?

It started very accidentally. I knitted a pair of pink chemo socks for my friend, Samina, who had breast cancer at the time. Sometimes patients can't regulate their body temperature during chemo, so she'd wear them when she was cold and she'd tell me, 'Everyone is talking about your socks!' So, I made 10 or 20 pairs for her to take to the chemo unit. Samina and I then had a conversation about helping more people, so we set up a Facebook group and put a callout to the community – and the community responded! We set ourselves a target to donate 100 socks and we ended up making 250. I love knitting. I started when I became pregnant with my son; I haven't dropped the knitting and crotchet needles since. For me, it was so wonderful that someone was getting joy from something I had handmade for them so if more people were going to benefit, the more the merrier.

**The group has a significant following. It currently has 2,800 members worldwide including Cyprus, Australia, and the US. Why do you think people are so eager to get involved?**

It's a simple premise. It's a craft that people enjoy. You're able to create something and express your creativity, knowing it's going to benefit someone else as well. Three years ago, I received an ovarian cancer diagnosis, and the group then made me a pair of

chemo socks. So I've been on the receiving end of things we've made and it's a beautiful act of kindness. The generosity doesn't just extend from the group's volunteers. There are people who don't knit or crochet but support in other ways like donating wool.

## Have you seen an uptake in younger people picking up knitting and crochet?

Definitely. In recent times, we've seen famous people like Olympic swimmer Tom Daley, knitting in the stands of the Paris Olympics, and Taylor Swift wearing a crotchet dress and inspiring people to make their own, so it's become quite cool. Young people are also more self-aware about taking care of their mental health as well as their physical. Knitting and crochet focuses you – it's called the new yoga – and I think young people realise its benefits. It's a quick, easy and cheap way to express creativity through design, colour, patterns etc.

**I personally tried to take up knitting. I was using my grandma's knitting needles but I just wasn't getting it. Always dropping a stitch!**

The thing is it takes about 2-3 weeks to get the hand-eye coordination. We're used to pens and things but not two needles, so you just need to stick with it. During COVID, I decided to learn crotchet and it was so messy, but I persevered. It was weeks of blood, sweat and tears but now I love crochet so much, I hardly knit!



**What is your proudest achievement so far?**

I think, for me, it's bringing together different cross-sections of the community. Slough is such a diverse place and Knit Your Socks Off truly represents that. I have people from every faith, background, and ethnicity and I think that reflects Slough as a community. It's also the relationships we have with the other communities and charity organisations.

In the last year alone, we've supported 30 different organisations and businesses and made around 9500 items. We are able to connect with so many people – whether that's the general public, the volunteers, or other voluntary organisations. We've been shortlisted for the King's Award of Voluntary Service and that, for us, is a huge recognition of the work we've been doing. What tops all of that though is the love we get from the community – Frimley Park are so grateful.

**Why do you think the Arts and expressing your creativity is so important?**

It's vital. We work because we have bills to pay, but it's just as important to feed your soul: the Arts do that. The Arts are an outlet. It's an opportunity to be your authentic self and derive some passion from something you love doing. The cost-of-living crisis has heightened things for many people and in order to have some mental relaxation, you need something positive to channel that into and that's what the Arts offers. Anything that gives you the ability to nourish your soul is so important.

To find out more about Knit Your Socks Off visit their Facebook Group:  
[www.facebook.com/groups/955718884486782](https://www.facebook.com/groups/955718884486782)



**“The Arts are an outlet. It’s an opportunity to be your authentic self and derive some passion from something you love doing.”**

# Jay Younes

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

Jay Younes has spent years working in technology. The Slough resident was a former apps designer for Nokia and Motorola, and now the immersive producer at **Salt Hill VR**, the ultimate VR (virtual reality) arcade with dozens of virtual reality games. Their state-of-the-art arcade uses the latest technology to deliver an immersive and realistic gaming experience for all, but it can be used for more than just fun and games.



## Can you explain what it is that you do?

I've been working in the VR and AR space for a while now, from working as an immersive producer for Story Trails, a multi-award winning project by Story Futures at Royal Holloway, to now focusing on producing content and apps using VR & AR technology.

## How long have you been involved in this line of work and how did you get started?

I've been working within the VR space for 12 years. I used to make mobile phone apps for Nokia and the developments of mobile phone technology transitioned over to augmented reality at first. Then, when VR headsets came out, there were lots of synergies to transition over.

## What were you doing with Nokia?

I helped produce mobile phone games quite early, starting from 2002. Before that, in the 90s, I worked in mobile tech sales. Around the 2000s, I realised phones were developing rapidly - the processes and hardware, and with internet connection and 3G coming out, I started learning about app development. I designed around 49 mobile apps for Nokia, Motorola and other phone companies at the time.

## Can you talk about Salt Hill VR and what encouraged you to branch out?

I'd been working in the [VR] space for a while. In the HOME Slough unit in the High Street, we had a pop-up arcade and prior to that, I had one in the Trading Estate which was focused on enterprise app development. The opportunity to be based in Salt Hill Activity Centre came up, a much larger space and facility, so we thought it was a good time to set up Salt Hill VR.

## Just in case people aren't familiar with tech, can you explain what VR and digital reality is?

With virtual reality, you usually have a headset that completely changes your environment. With augmented reality, it's all about a digital

layer on top of the real world. So, most of the augmented reality is used on mobile phones or tablets but it's transitioning to smart glasses as well, whereas virtual reality immerses you in that world.

## Why did you decide to set up in Slough?

I've grown up in Slough. Been here for 45 years now, so it's quite nice to share that technology and be based locally, especially on the educational side of things with Slough Youth services and schools. The other side where I see a real opportunity within Slough is the Trading Estate and the data centres. It's a brilliant location to be placed in because the next phase of virtual reality will be immersive cloud computing, where you'll be able to stream high-quality VR content from data centres. So being based in Slough, strategically, you have super low latency in connecting to the data centres and creating some amazing VR applications.

## What is a data centre?

A lot of the facilities and servers that organisations used to have in-house are now hosted within a data centre. So, a lot of banking, internet traffic, as well as mobile networks, shopping sites - they're all based in these servers within a data server. Slough is on track to be the second largest data hub in the world. A significant portion of the UK's internet traffic passes through Slough's data centres so anytime we send a text message, a Facebook message, do online banking, it all needs to pass through a local internet server before reaching the wider internet.

## So, we're at the heart of connection?

Slough is in a unique position, with the Trading Estate and a lot of the factories that used to be based there. It's got its own power plant, water facilities, and planning permissions, so it's a really interesting place for data centre companies to base themselves there. Now we've reached that critical mass where it's the go-to place for international organisations to have a data centre.

**“I’ve grown up in Slough. Been here for 45 years now, so it’s quite nice to share that technology and be based locally, especially on the educational side of things.”**

**What do you think Slough residents can gain from VR and immersing themselves in technology?**

As well as the opportunity to play some really cool games, it’s a great digital skillset to have. A few years back, I used to work with Langley College where we set up a VR course to teach those skills. I think the advantage of young people learning about this skill now is that it’s really important for companies, who are all starting to look at this technology. Skills like networking or other programming languages, there might be people with 10 or 20 years’ worth of experience.

Because it’s so new, IT gives a real opportunity for young people to grasp this technology and provide real value to organisations who are just starting to step into it. We’ve also done so much work within care homes and care settings pre-COVID and people always think ‘VR is great for young people’ but the technology transfers well in those settings, helping to tackle loneliness and transport them to different environments. The oldest person I’ve seen use VR is 93 – you always think it’s for kids but it’s for a much broader age group.

**As we’re talking about technology, and this being the future of technology, what type of future do you see for the Arts and culture?**

We’ve collaborated with all sorts of art forms and that’s what VR lends itself to. We have apps where you can draw in a 3D space; we’re doing a project with The University of Reading in Cookham where you can step into history and feel like you’re on an Anglo-Saxon dig site with a VR headset.

Another quite popular one we’ve been working with a few organisations is around music. There’s a programme called Tribe XR DJ School which puts DJ decks in front of you and you can mix, load up your own tracks and stream on YouTube, Twitch, and other platforms like that. It enables you to collaborate with different types of art for an extension of people’s existing work. It kind of lends itself to accessibility. You’d need a VR headset which would cost a few 100 pounds, whereas the same DJ decks would cost a few thousand and then to plug them in, set them up etc. I don’t think it’s a replacement; I think it’s an extension to those capabilities.

**What’s your fondest memory of working in Slough?**

I think the knowledge transfer we did with the young people at Langley College where we took them along to meet some of our corporate clients like Mars Confectionary, seeing those young people confidently explain and share that knowledge transfer with senior engineers at Mars. That was super cool to see where some of those young people were struggling with their Maths and English, but they were able to pick up this technology, confidently learn about it, and then share that knowledge in a commercial setting.

**What do you want people to know about Slough?**

I think it’s a great mix of people. There are some challenges, but overall, I feel it has a great sense of community and collaboration and opportunities.

**What’s one place in Slough you’d recommend people visit and why?**

The cycle trail along Jubilee Riverside. It’s an amazing piece of countryside and it’s accessible. It’s an amazing ride all the way through to Maidenhead and Taplow.

To find out more about Salt Hill VR please visit: [www.salthillvr.com](http://www.salthillvr.com)



**“I think it’s a great mix of people, lots of opportunity.”**



# Vineet Vih

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

**Vineet Vih** is on a mission to change popular perceptions of Slough. Not only is he busy revamping Slough's communal spaces, but he is also working on physical fitness, learning, and creative projects that he is confident will lead to its economic development and communal wellbeing. The proof of his work can be seen all around the town so we spoke to him about his plans to change Slough, one mural at a time.



**Can you describe Viva Slough for someone who's never heard of it before?**

Viva Slough's mission is to make Slough healthier and happier. It's a community organisation set up to help those who live in Slough with three distinct programmes. Employability – helping people aged 25 and up find meaningful employment or voluntary work. Health and Wellbeing - improving the health of those at risk of diabetes, heart disease etc. with physical health activities, and encouraging communities to come together to combat mental health issues.

Arts and Culture - this includes anything to do with creativity and it's centred in helping young upcoming artists find meaningful work. One of the flagship programmes within that, Artscape, is designed to introduce public art to Slough. We've spent the last two or three years trying to beautify Slough, finding rundown places and putting up public art using a community of local artists. All these programmes are part of an initiative I'm running: Reimagine Slough. It's directed towards changing the negative perceptions of the borough. The aim is that, over time, we can change people's perceptions of Slough as a good place to live.



**You have a five-year plan for Reimagine Slough. At the end, what three keywords do you want people to feel?**

That Slough is a beautiful place to live, work and play. I want people to be curious about Slough, for their general perception to change.



**What led you to create Viva Slough in the first place?**

COVID came and I saw an advertisement for volunteers to help vulnerable people with their shopping. I put out a Facebook post about it and surprisingly, within two hours, 90 people signed up. So I started a voluntary group to help people with the basics but with 90 people, there wasn't enough work so I started looking for opportunities. The NHS was looking for scrubs so I had a whole team on that, people making face masks, and then Slough Homeless Our Concern (SHOC) said they're providing the basic food essentials to the homeless, but these were very boring – they asked what we could do.

So the team decided to make treats for them – cakes and scones – and distribute them to the homeless. That made me realise the power of volunteering and how it should be used once COVID was finished. We had a celebration picnic and invited the High Sheriff of Berkshire. She asked me, 'What are you going to do next?' and suggested that unemployment was going to be an issue moving forward and gave me £20,000 to start working on it.

**“The aim is that, over time, we can change people's perceptions of Slough as a good place to live.”**



**Considering that you've created a whole programme for Arts & Culture, why do you think the Arts are important?**

I've been involved with the Arts all my life. I have no artistic talent – can't sing, can't draw, can't paint – but I admire people who can do those things. Throughout my life, I've organised music festivals, dance festivals, because I like the idea of helping those with talent and I feel like they get a raw deal. Art has a lot of mental health benefits. Colour changes your mood entirely and most people don't realise it but it's unconscious. I think it contributes a lot to making people happy, especially if a place has a lot of negativity. It can help in more subtle ways than giving them £100.

**How has Slough shaped your work, and how does your work shape Slough?**

Everything you do as a community organisation has to be driven by what the community needs. Every project we started originated with a realisation for the need, so everything is driven by people in Slough. I'm on a mission to change the way people feel and create a sense of pride. So, I hope that whatever I'm doing is changing the way they think about the place and how they think about themselves.



**One of your murals has the quote: 'It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.' What do you see when you look at Slough?**

I moved to Slough in 2018 and every time I told someone where I had moved to, they'd ask 'Why?' So, I quickly shifted my stance and said I lived in Burnham and suddenly their eyes lit up! The way they looked at me when they thought I lived in Burnham made me realise the power that branding has on our perception. I see a lot of potential [in Slough]. I seldom see the negative parts of it. The funny thing is, I live on the border of Burnham and Slough. On the right of my house, I have Burnham: neat and clean, but it doesn't have the vibrancy. If I turn left [to Slough], the variety of people you meet and the buzz that you get is completely different. There's a lot of potential and creativity, that I think we need to harness.

**What has the feedback been from people who've completed your programmes?**

One of the things we do as part of the Employability programme is English Language classes for people who are not confident with English. After attending, they all come out and they're very confident – you can see a visible change – and when they actually get a job? Everyone is so thrilled, thanking the whole team. All the artists when they get a mention in the press get quite thrilled. We get a lot of recognition for what we do. We're doing case studies for a 1 million-step programme where people who never used to walk have made it their regular habit. They see the change in their physical fitness levels. They're very measurable outcomes that you can see.

**What's your proudest achievement so far?**

I'd say getting a community of stakeholders and interested parties together to collectively contribute to the upkeep of Slough has been my greatest achievement. We meet quarterly to discuss how we can improve Slough; the same people attend each time and many of them have been contributing money to all the work we've been doing.

**Where's one place in Slough you'd recommend people visit and why?**

There's a lot of hidden assets that people don't know about. Arbour Park Stadium is a gem – there's so many sport-related activities that people can benefit from.

To find out more about Viva Slough please visit: [www.vivaslough.org](http://www.vivaslough.org)



**“Everything you do as a community organisation has to be driven by what the community needs.”**



# Eva Antao

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

**Antz Kidz** was established as an after-school club in January 2018 after a local childcare provider relocated at short notice. The founder, Eva Antao, has over 25 years' worth of experience working in the public sector and being a champion for various charities and community projects in both England and Portugal. She has a passion for extra-curricular activities that bring out the best in children and is focused on children reaching their full potential through artistic activities.



## What is the mission of Antz Kidz?

We're about creativity and inspiring children, getting the best out of them through creative and artistic means. We are a childcare provider and that's how our journey started. But we have now evolved from being a breakfast and afterschool club to developing a more holistic approach to the family set-up where we work with families to support a range of needs including support for children with additional needs. Just as the HAF (Holiday and Food) programmes are key to us and the community and what we're delivering, we are also working with Slough Museum, delivering stuff we've done previously in the Curve and doing things in the High Street. We focus on things that are engaging and where parents can actively participate as well.

## Is there a theme for this HAF?

Yeah, there is a theme. The Olympics has been a big thing during 2024 obviously. Also, we've replicated some of those activities for our families during the family camps because people didn't have the opportunities to go, or they've seen it on our social media and they've liked it, so we've tried to incorporate that. So, we try to look for opportunities where we can use things we've previously done as well as new things along the way.

## And what's the importance of achieving your work within Slough?

I was born in this town. I got my first job in this town. I got my second job in this town, and I am a great believer in working at a grassroots level and supporting communities. It's my hometown so I just feel it's important to be on home turf. That's the way my life has led me. I never shy away from the fact that I'm from Slough. There's nothing to be ashamed of.

## How did you get into setting up Antz Kidz?

I come from a family of creatives. My grandparents, my father, were all involved in the creative sector. My grandmother was a seamstress, my grandfather was a tailor, my dad was a 3D artist as well in his spare time, and 3D work is my passion too. It's something that I've always had. It's a gift, it's a talent and it's wonderful to be able to use your gifts and talents for the greater good. And that's what I'm doing. Not everyone can go out there and do what they love and I'm one of those people that has that good fortune.

## What do you think makes yours different from other kids clubs?

We've always tried to be representative of the community in terms of the workforce that supports us. We have mature people on the team and younger people on the team with different life skills and experiences, people from different nationalities. We want to show children it doesn't matter what age you are, there's always someone out there. It might be that someone doesn't have a grandfather, but we've got someone who can represent that senior carer role for them. It's so people can actually identify with society and that's what we're good at.

**“We want to show children it doesn't matter what age you are, there's always someone out there.”**

Furthermore, at Antz Kidz, we have historically provided food to families in need. We did it prior to, and during, the pandemic and we continue to do that. We work with different types of agencies including Slough Children First, dealing with direct referrals but there's also a number of families that contact us directly as well. It's all about quality and putting the child first, making sure the child's happy and engaged. We're fortunate to say that most of our children don't want to leave. Their parents come and they don't want to leave – I think it's a blessing and proof of a job well done when a child doesn't want to leave us at the end of the session.

### **What impact have you had on Slough's community?**

I think we've been blessed enough to have forged some really lovely contacts over the years. It'll be seven years in January and the recognition we have got, primarily from parents but also the children themselves, speaks volumes. A lot of it is word of mouth which is great. It's a safe place. We're very transparent and the children feel safe here. They feel comfortable and we build lasting relationship with parents. I feel that what we offer, we offer from the heart. What we have found is that spending a little time to learn what a child's challenges are has been really good for us, and it's been really good for the children.

When parents come to us, they come with their own share of worries and sometimes they just need someone to listen to their plight and that's what we do. It's more than just doing activities. We're involved in the children's lives – there are relationships there, there's the trust and there's friendship that grows and builds security for the children.

### **I did see that Marcus Rashford gave you a retweet.**

He did. That was off the back of Bex (Rebecca Richardson) actually. Which was funny because Bex came along to do

something and she tweeted about Antz Kidz and then he retweeted that, which was nice. But I'm not very big on celebrities, they don't faze me at all.

### **What would you say is your proudest achievement?**

I think I know my worth and the value of the team, and the amount of effort and commitment we put into it. So our goal is always that a child leaves happy and content. If that's the case, then that's a job well done.

### **So you're proud every day?**

I wouldn't be doing 16-17-hour days [if I wasn't]!

### **Slough is always changing and developing - how have you seen your organisation change over the years?**

We started as an afterschool club and expanded to being a breakfast club. We did that for a while and then we continued to be an afterschool club. We've got our own minibus now. But what we've changed is the work that we're doing to support families, as opposed to children after school. That involves the weekends, it might involve the half term.

That's when parents can come together and join in activities with their children. It also involves the holidays where children can get dropped off when parents have other commitments so we're trying to meet the needs of different families. Some parents want to stay with their children – they don't just want to drop their kids off, they want to undertake activities with them and we have managed to accommodate that request.

**“I never shy away from the fact that I'm from Slough. There's nothing to be ashamed of.”**

### **Do you ever work with local schools?**

Yeah, we have done. We give food out to different schools like St. Anthony's. We've also given food to families that have been sent to us from Slough Children's First. So during that time with Marcus Rashford, we gave out free groceries. A whole week's supply of food for families. We are linked up with St. Mary's Farnham Royal and we are on the Slough Arts Forum so we know of the work that other groups are doing. We've got Artful Hub too, which is a spin-off of Antz Kidz for adults. We've done a piece for Slough Music Service recently – a commission where we upcycled a piano.

### **You also have a partnership with Slough Museum. How does that work?**

We are in collaboration with them. It was an underutilised space but also we're talking about families who wouldn't have known where the museum was, because of its location [so it was mutually beneficial.] For example, we have our Mini People's Gallery showcasing the work of the family art camp, which we ran over the course of four days. We had a resident artist come in during the May half-term so families could come in with their children, and they created the giant flower garden. They made a 3D model relating to Thunderbirds which is suspended from the ceiling right now, and they also did potato people. So they were invited to come back and have their work showcased. Parents were invited to the Museum and there was a big party to celebrate what we did.



**“So our goal is always that a child leaves happy and content. If that's the case, then that's a job well done.”**

### **My last question is a bit left field – has there been a piece of art that has moved you recently?**

That's an interesting question! There's a lot of creativity around. I'm inspired by what the children do here, in terms of their artistic ability – during the HAF programme, the children created some really wonderful things – but there isn't one particular piece of work. I see lots of different artworks that inspire me, and I like lots of different things. During my trip to Paris, I got to see lots of artworks from amazing artists and that proved inspirational to my work here in Slough.

To find out more about Eva and Antz Kidz please visit: [www.antzkidz.co.uk](http://www.antzkidz.co.uk)



# Museums & Heritage

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# Richard Emerson

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

**Richard Emerson** has a real passion for Slough's history. From William Herschel to Charles Dickens, he's a wealth of knowledge when it comes to the people who have lived in and shaped Slough. A former freelance writer and editor, he is now a member of Saint Laurence Church, where he gave a tour of the grounds as we spoke about Slough's past and present.



## What is your role at Saint Laurence?

Well, I don't have a job title. I suppose the only job title I have is Assistant Verger who maintains the church, but that's an unofficial title. I suppose I've become a kind-of archivist. I'm quite interested in the history so that's the other side I do here. I try to find out as much as I can about the Church, the people who are buried here, or connected with it.

## So you're from Slough – born and raised?

Yes, I was born and raised in Upton Lee. I went to local schools then I worked on the local paper, Slough Express, for 17 years before I went freelance. I lived in Cippenham for 30-odd years and then I moved back here, and I now live just down the road from the Church.

## Can you tell me about the Slough Arts Festival?

This goes back to the 60s, maybe 70s, when there was also a Slough Arts Group which was created by Vincent Evans, the art teacher at Slough Grammar. When he came to Slough as an art teacher, he was also a tutor at Slough College and he encouraged a lot of people. He set up the Slough Arts Society and he must've been involved in the Slough Arts Festival as well just because of the type of person he was but I haven't found an exact connection. But for a long time, we had quite a strong arts connection in Slough and I really think it needs to be revived.

## Do you think the Arts in Slough is not as communal as it was?

[The Arts are] not promoted the way they it should be. The Arts exist here but are not centralised or promoted or talked about. Things are going on and it would be nice if there was some central thing that people could log onto or pick up a leaflet and say 'Oh, that's interesting. I'll go along to that group.' Because I think we lack a centralised database of all these art groups. We also need to get them in touch with each other so they know what else is happening.

## So, you think the Arts are important?

Absolutely. At the [Herschel] workshops we did, the young people who came along were encouraged to draw their own interpretation of things like comets. It's important, it all helps you to broaden your view of the world and make connections.

## Can you tell me about some of the famous artists who have a connection to Slough?

We had a husband-and-wife artist duo called Edward and Henrietta Ward who lived in Upton Park and they're buried in the churchyard. Henrietta Ward is the most interesting of the two. She lived in the Victorian period, and she was a pioneer for female artists. As a woman, Henrietta couldn't be a member of the Royal Academy like her husband was, nor could she study there. They didn't take female students, but they did do lectures which the public could go along to. She started going along to those but not long after, members of the Royal Academy said they didn't want women coming along to the lectures either.

They organised a vote, but Henrietta had a lot of friends at the Academy who vetoed the move. Charles Dickens also lived in Slough for a while. He left his wife, and he had a mistress who lived in Church Street. He was a very secretive man. He kept diaries which he'd burn at the end of each year, but he lost one on a tour of New York that was discovered years after he died.

**“It's important, it all helps you to broaden your view of the world and make connections.”**

It had tiny handwriting with lots of coded messages in it that were decoded, and they found that it plots all his movements around here. He used to come to Slough from London but when he left, he walked through Upton Park and into Eton, over the bridge and left from Windsor riverside, presumably to muddy the waters in case he was being followed.

**Tell me more about the impact of Slough in history and how that has impacted audiences today.**

2022 was the 200th anniversary of William Herschel's death that we commemorated with an exhibition here and various talks and other events. It was only intended to be a very local thing for Slough – we didn't broadcast it very widely. But we got a German astronomer who flew over especially because he heard about it and was a great admirer. If Slough was in America, in the Midwest somewhere, there'd be a Herschel Library. There'd be a big statue to him and all the schools would've been taught all about him as part of the curriculum. But we just don't seem to promote the things that we're good at in this town.

**As Slough undergoes changes, have you found the church has had to change and develop?**

We've had to develop for environmental issues. We have a gas boiler here and we have looked at other options like heat pumps and solar panels. Now we have a grant that should allow us to convert to wall-mounted and overhead infrared heaters. If all goes to plan, we will be the first carbon-neutral church in the diocese. Not bad for a nearly thousand-year old building! Yoga meets here and other groups that reflect the interests of the area, which changes over time. Although it's an old church, it always has to reflect the time and what people are concerned with.

We've looked at creating wildlife spaces in the churchyard, keeping it unmowed to allow wildflowers to grow. There was actually a deer in the carpark as I walked up so they actually feel quite comfortable here. We're bordering Herschel Park and Upton Court Park and a very large open space near Eton College. So we contribute to the wider open area by having insect-friendly plants and it's a nice quiet place where animals can roam. We're reflecting what's going on and trying to be a part of the local community.

**Do you collaborate with local art organisations?**

We have staged concerts here. The Herschel Stars have performed here and when we held the [William Herschel] exhibition, they were here. We have had some collaboration with Slough Museum but it's more me collaborating with Slough Museum than the church. But I'm hoping to do more things in the future that links it together. The local history groups from Slough U3A come here and the Herschel Astronomical Society meet here. We try to be a community hub for as many organisations as we can. It would be nice to do more but it's also a church and everything has to fit round that, but we'd like to do more things in the future.

**Where would you recommend that an outsider visits in Slough?**

Here, of course, and the Slough Museum – you'll find out a lot at both. I'd certainly take them to Upton Park and tell them about the famous people who've lived there and see Herschel Park themselves. We used to do a Herschel tour from here, walking around places that were connected to the Herschels. One of the entrances to Upton Park, off Windsor Road, has a big mural of the goddess Diana but nobody ever sees it unless you look up!

**“We're reflecting what's going on and trying to be a part of the local community.”**

**Lastly, is there anything you think people should know about Slough?**

I would just say take an interest in finding out about Slough. The old Debenhams building in the High Street, for example, has some quite nice notices dotted about, telling you about the people who lived here. Famous entertainers, famous sports stars and facts about Slough, which I hadn't noticed before. I think that sort of thing should be encouraged. I think we should have an information centre in Slough, where people can come along, find out what's here, and find out the historical connections. Ideally, we should promote Slough more and no longer be apologising for Slough.

To find out more about Saint Laurence Church please visit: [www.saint-laurence.com](http://www.saint-laurence.com)



**“Ideally, we should promote Slough more and no longer be apologising for Slough.”**

# Jenny Blay

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

**Jenny Blay** is an advocate of curiosity. As the head of Museum Learning at Arbib Education Trust, she is responsible for stoking students' interest with exhibitions and collections that deepen their understanding of the world around them. Ultimately, the goal is to challenge students' critical thinking skills and in an age of misinformation, this is more necessary than ever.



**You're clearly very passionate about museum learning – at school, you were known as the museum learning lady!**

I like the lady term (Laughs) It always makes me laugh, like am I the lady? I'm the head of museum learning but it's just one of those things, isn't it, that happens to you. But yes, I've been doing it since 2011 and one of the things about it is it's changed a lot. We started out as one academy and now we've got three which has been fascinating to watch.

**How did you become involved in museum learning and the Trust?**

I got the role in 2011 and from memory, the Trust opened in 2009. At that point, I worked for a government agency called the MLA Council (Museums, Libraries and Archives). First, I worked in their London region where I went round schools in some of the target boroughs south of the Thames and talked to teachers to see what they wanted. [I did] some student consultations with primary through to secondary school and linked them up with local museums.

Around those times, and still a bit today, you had big museums that thought outreach was yonder, but they forgot that London is also a region, and attracting the services on your doorstep can be as difficult as attracting them from further away. So, my role was to build relationships and strategically develop content that really supported what those schools were looking for and facilitate access. [The agency] was eventually closed under the Conservative government and folded into the Arts Council so I was transferred over, thinking 'What am I

going to do now?' I felt like my remit had been getting other people to do things (Laughs)– actually, that's still what I'm doing now–but working with different people, rather than being sighted in a community. So, when the role came up, that was something that really appealed. Also, I'd been a champion for SEND in my previous organisation so I would set up training so people could go 'What's Makaton? How do you find out about it or what's the best practise if you're visually impaired?' I was interested in Langley Academy for its hearing resource bureau and was keen to see what it looks like from a school's perspective in mainstream education.

**You've mentioned before that you view museum learning and heritage as connected. What do you mean by that?**

I'm really interested in the definition of heritage because heritage has so many different definitions. For example, in the museum world, heritage means a physical building or historic site like Stonehenge or the Tower of London. You framed it as being your identity, and your culture, where you come from, and that's another [definition]. Like the cultural things you inherit is your heritage. Museums, for me, often do relate to heritage like who you are, where you came from.

So, I think that's why I make the link between the two. In my mind, museum learning is not the same as heritage because it's just a tool. We don't teach it [but] it helps teachers teach. Your teachers might've said 'This is a museum learning lesson' but they were still teaching you English, Maths, whatever. When we teach history, the things we're actually teaching are skills.

**"I'm really interested in the definition of heritage because heritage has so many different definitions."**

It's the critical thinking skills that come with the discipline of history that's often being taught in a history lesson. You're teaching comparison, the understanding of causation, or a nuanced understanding of what's the most important thing. If there's an event, what's the most important outcome? What had the biggest legacy? How do we evaluate that? So, we're trying to encourage children and young people to analyse critically, not to just accept something. We want them to gather information, synthesize it and then present their case to us.

**Regarding the Arts, do you have an example of how the Trust applies its museum learning?**

I think it's twofold. Using museum learning as a creative inspiration – drawing inspiration from something. That might be seeing an object like a vase then saying 'Okay, I'm going to do this' and being inspired to make your own version. We do a piece for GCSE Drama where Year 10 have to create their own piece. The teacher at the time said they were not doing very well because the students were finding it hard to get outside their own heads. They weren't looking around enough for inspiration and as a result, their end piece was quite narrow. When you go on a creative journey, it's good to start broad and look at different things before narrowing it down.

Another way is introducing students to the professionalism of the creative process, to help them think 'I could do that'. We borrow objects from different places then we'll flag who's made it so the students think about the breadth of the Arts, bringing things to them. We borrowed a Grayson Perry vase last year – that was pretty cool – and I think it would be very difficult to get young people en masse to the Tate Modern to see it. But everyone was able to appreciate that piece because we had it in our space and that's a really exciting thing. The English Department has changed how they plan the Year 12 curriculum because of that intersection between poetry and ceramics.

**How has the Trust had to develop?**

The Trust responded to the murder of George Floyd in a significant way. There was a big review of policies – staffing and recruitment policies – which sounds really boring but it's people's lives. We worked with The ASE (Association of Science Education) to lead work around diversity in the curriculum. Probably most evident to the students was rethinking the house system. The houses were previously a mythical woman or dead, European men which isn't a bad thing, but what were they representing? So, we ran a big student consultation piece and because of my work with the CEP (Cultural Education Partnership), I suggested we use people of significance in their fields, connected to The Academy, Langley, or Slough and that was the basis for the selection.

I felt like someone should be representing the Arts because previously, it was very strongly science. We got some recommendations from students and staff then narrowed it down to ten people, which was put to a vote. So, now we have Pravesh Kumar, Lydia Simmons, Paul Nash etc. It's a nice opportunity to talk about race and Slough, the first black mayor and her experience of coming to this country. We've also had an exhibition about gay rights, which was student voice-led. Our last exhibition was about Afro hair which was teacher-voice led. So, we introduce topics or facets of the world they can't access through the curriculum.

To find out more about the Arbib Education Trust please visit:  
[www.arbibeducationtrust.org](http://www.arbibeducationtrust.org)



**“When you go on a creative journey, it's good to start broad and look at different things before narrowing it down.”**

# Anna Jones

Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

Anna Jones has been the Programme Manager of Museums Partnership Reading, a National Portfolio Organisation, for the past few years but make no mistake – she’s no stranger to the cultural sector. She has been directing the Windsor Theatre Guild for three years, worked with Reading Museum for five, and facilitated art workshops and events across the country, all while developing her own creative practice as a ‘maker’ of art and literature. In short, she’s a jack of all trades.



## According to your LinkedIn, you hold positions at three museums – Slough, Reading and the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL)

My LinkedIn profile may not be as up to date as it should be! (Laughs) I suppose that’s one thing to say – I’m a person who’s worn, and does wear, a lot of different hats. That’s probably why it’s a part time job keeping my LinkedIn up to date! But I do work in the museum sector. At the moment, my work is part of the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) in Reading called Museums Partnership Reading, a partnership between Reading Museum and the MERL. Like Resource, I’ve been in Slough for nearly 25 years, so I’ve done all sorts of different things, across the town and beyond.

## How did you become involved in your work?

I was really lucky to get my first job at the National Theatre on the Southbank. I worked in their costume and props department back in the early mid-90s. I moved to Slough around 2002 and just...wanted to stay here! Raised my two kids and the theatre thing tailed off a little bit, but when they were a little bit older, I got back into producing festivals and outdoor events. I did a lot of work in London and the South East, producing large scale events and theatre.

That’s when the passion of making theatre turned into creative producer and event management work. The reason I ended up in the museum sector was through my writing. When I was starting to think about my practise, I was looking back to history and using reference points a lot of the time, particularly women’s history – those untold stories that a variety of people don’t get to tell. I really wanted to know more about history and heritage so then I started working at the Ashmolean, and Museum of Natural History, in Oxford. So, it’s a whole shift and variety of different things that led me here.

## How did you discover your passion for theatre and your personal art practices?

It’s a good question! I’ve always loved going to the theatre and I’m fortunate enough that my parents took me. My father was a dancer so it was a natural thing for him to take us, given his background. [Theatre is] what I studied at university, like a million years ago (Laughs) but more the production side of things: costume, props, directing – those sorts of things.

## You were also part of Creative Junction.

### How did you come to be part of that?

It was brilliant to be part of Creative Junction. Originally, the team was delivering another Arts Council programme in Slough to liven the school curriculum and encourage students to think in a different way through art. When Arts Council decided the project was coming to a close, they gave me and my-then co-director, Jessica Jhundoo, the grace to become our own organisation.

We became a community interest company and did a lot of engagement work, particularly in Slough for twelve years, but also working in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and London as well. Jessica and I then became mums and started going in different directions to follow different threads. She wanted to be closer to home in Bracknell but still be connected to running an organisation, whereas I was going down the artist practitioner route, so we decided to wrap up. She is now the Chief Exec of the Corn Exchange in Newbury, which is brilliant and I’m still here, doing my arts practise and museum stuff.

**“The reason I ended up in the museum sector was through my writing.”**

**In 2023, the Museum Partnership programme was extended to Slough. What does the delivery of the programme look like here, and what opportunities / benefits does it bring to the town?**

[Slough] was a priority place in the Arts Council and they knew we'd been working in partnership with organisations across Reading [so] they asked us to consider working in Slough, alongside the local museum and other organisations in the town, to engage more people in Slough. Like they have with Resource, with Art Classes [Group], they wanted to invest in Slough communities [...] make sure that people in Slough are getting the opportunities that people get in Reading, or Oxford, or London. One of the pieces I'm doing is Station Jim, the taxidermy dog that lives on Platform 5 at Slough train station. In partnership with Rebecca Richardson at Slough Music Service and her soul choir, Slough Writers Group, and GWR (Great Western Railway), we created a

pop-up performance about Station Jim and his history outside the station. Queen Victoria was one of the characters [because] she took her first train ride from Slough Station [and] we've been working with GWR to get him looked after so he can live there for another 100 plus years. Another piece of work has been with Slough libraries.

We wove elements of Slough history into the summer reading challenge, so young people who took part were also attending drop-in sessions to learn about William James Herschel, the first person to recognise that fingerprints were unique to the individual and their permanence across time. We created fingerprint art, thinking in a small but a significant way about Slough's history. Slough isn't a new town or a town that's got no culture or history. It's just about unpicking it and sharing it more. Both the museums in Reading have a strong and continuing programme of work with Reading Refugee Service and that introduced me to the Chair



**“There’s something about arts and culture that I think people feel really strongly about. We’re going to try and build on from that.”**



at Slough Refugee Support. Since then, I've been supporting their Everyone Welcome event they've started with Slough Borough Council. It signposts people to different services like jobs, housing – the essential things. Again, there were elements of looking at the history and heritage of Slough. We'd been loaned an exhibition from the Barbados Museum, of all places, around the enigma of arrival and Windrush: people coming to Reading and the surrounding areas like Slough.

This extended into a Reading theatre company called Rank and File, made up of people with lived experience of newly arriving in this country, performing an amazing piece here for Refugee Week with the help of Norden Farm, who do the programming at the Curve.

There's something about arts and culture that I think people feel really strongly about. We're going to try and build on from that, and I'm working with Slough partners to make the Curve become a Library of Sanctuary. I really like shouting positively about the town. You do get that slight nose turn at living in Slough. Significant people in the past have said Slough is a cultural desert and to hear that about the place that you live, the place you have raised your children, you feel a bit crushed by it. So, I'm choosing to turn those words on their head.

**What does heritage mean to you?**

In a funny way, it links back to that love of theatre. The idea of storytelling being something we've done together for millennia; gathering around a fire, passing down stories and wisdom from our elders. Heritage strongly connects to that, I think. The idea of wanting to preserve and honour the past but celebrate it in a way that's contemporary. It's about keeping stories alive – learning and exploring what it is to be human, really.

To find out more about please visit: [www.readingmuseum.org.uk/museums-partnership-reading](http://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/museums-partnership-reading)



# Slough Museum

Slough Museum first opened its doors in 1986, founded by locals who sought to sustain and celebrate the town's legacy. Since then, the independent museum has been kept alive by committed community members and organisations, and the eagerness of its volunteers such as Hannah Ellams, Jaye Isherwood and Milan Govedarica.

**Hannah** joined the museum sector when she was 15 after reading a book about jobs in Black Country Museum and now sits as the Museum's Chair. **Jaye** is a Slough-born historian with a knack for industrial history and she's not only a board trustee but the museum's collector. **Milan** is the trusted Museum Manager, responsible for audience engagement and community outreach. All three of them contemplate Slough's past and what it might teach us about the future.



Interviewed and written  
by Shanique Miller

## Hannah, what drew you to Slough Museum?

**H:** I was a [Museum] Director, and I was looking for peers because when you're at a small regional museum with a staff structure where you're at the top, you don't have anyone to talk to. I saw an advert to become a Slough Museum Trustee so I applied. I went to the first meeting, and it was really good. At the next meeting, both the Chair and the Deputy Chair resigned and we had a museum mentor at the time who said 'You run a museum as a Director. I'm sure you could run this one as well.' And I was like, 'Well, no. But I'll do it for three months' and here I am, ten years later!

## How do you each define heritage?

**H:** I think it's quite complex. I'm currently working on a response for the MK50 plan in Milton Keynes about heritage and a lot of the heritage within that are buildings, places. I work a lot in cultural heritage and the links between heritage and bringing people together. When I think about Slough, I think about the heritage of the place, the journey that the place has gone on, but heritage is everything. I think we're making heritage [now]. I think it's sharing our past, our identity, our memories, to show that all of us have contributed to the heritage of a place.

**J:** It's a way of connecting people to history. It's preserving and sharing objects, items and information that connect people to the history of the country and their environments. That can be in all sorts of ways: stories, items...even buildings.

**M:** I'd define it as the knowledge, traditions and physical items that describe a collective culture – collective [meaning] being in a particular space.

## What do you think we could learn from heritage and the past of Slough?

**J:** One of the huge things, for me, about Slough is they talk about immigrants coming to Slough but Slough was formed from immigration. Throughout its whole history people have come from other places for work, particularly because of the Trading Estate. In the 1930s it was the Welsh miners and later on, it was the Polish communities, and then we had Windrush. Slough has been an amazing melting pot of cultures, and I think it's one of the things that makes Slough unique. No one can really say they're native to Slough.

**M:** In some ways, you can say [from our history] that miracles are possible. What at one point was mainly agricultural land with some bits of manufacturing had practically turned into this fantastic hub of industrial progress overnight in the early 20s. This happened at a time when the rest of the world was languishing in the Great Depression. People are blasé about Slough but if you scratch the surface, you find great stories of success.

## I think that encompasses what I'm trying to show with this book – Slough can be something. There's potential here.

**M:** When I was working at HOME Slough, people from the Creative People and Places network would ask about Slough and I was relatively new – I moved here in 2016 – but I saw it like 19th century New York. That might be an overblown comparison, but I saw it like a mass of people, coming from across the world, with skills and knowledge. And this didn't start yesterday. It's not only about modern migration but all those working-class people who arrived between the World Wars too.

**“When I think about Slough, I think about the heritage of the place, the journey that the place has gone on, but heritage is everything.”**

**On your website, it says your exhibitions ‘tell the story of Slough as a place of pioneers and innovators’. What type of contributions have been linked back here?**

**H:** That’s more of a Jaye question, but I’m sure it’s in SEGRO’s vision and the Council’s vision to support pioneers and innovators. We’ve had it in for a long time, but I like the fact that our stakeholders share that vision.

**J:** Slough has a plethora of entrepreneurs that saw Slough for its potential. Even before the Trading Estate, you had Elliman’s Embrocation making products here. James Horlick who set up base here donated Salt Hill Park to Slough to give back to the community. In a similar vein, you’ve got Noel Mobbs who was the Chairman of the Slough Trading Estate Limited (now SEGRO) and he created the Slough Community Centre and the Slough Health Service. So, you’ve got real philanthropists who were looking after the culture and helping to develop it as well.

**M:** If you look at texts from the late 18th century, early 19th century, any European of standing in the scientific community couldn’t come to England without visiting Slough. It was a place of pilgrimage because William Herschel was such a superstar back in the day. I mention this because [Herschel] brought a lot of different people to work with him and it was likely the start of this high-scale activity Jaye mentioned.



**Jaye, I heard you bought an ambulance for the museum with your own money. Can you explain how that came about?**

**J:** (Laughs) Well, someone in Yorkshire approached us about an ambulance related to Slough and asked if we were interested. As soon as I saw the picture, I immediately knew what vehicle it was because there’s a photograph of it hanging up in the Museum! The ambulance was built for the Slough Industrial Health Service, the one created by Noel Mobbs.

I tried to raise money to save the ambulance but it didn’t go so well, so I thought why not see if it’s worth the money he was asking for? I took a trip up to North Yorkshire, looked at it and that was my big mistake. I fell in love with it! Fantastically, it still has all the medical equipment in the back and a mannequin I call Mavis. What’s interesting is the attention it gets from people who aren’t from Slough. It’s weird how Slough has so much significance to other people in different ways.

**M:** Can I add something more about the attention we get? We’ve had people come as far as Australia to come see our Thunderbirds cabinets. I had people travelling from Bristol or Cardiff, not knowing if we’re open, and finding me here by chance.

**The museum has undergone a lot of change over the years, as has Slough. Why do you think it’s managed to stay open?**

**H:** [The museum] started out as ‘Slough should have this because there’s so much change happening that it needs to be saved, otherwise it’ll all be lost’. At one point, the Council was really helping to support it. The passion of the volunteers that I’ve met over the years – it’s those people who get involved and believe if someone’s not looking after it then it’s lost forever. It’s the willpower of people over the last 40 years who fight each time.



I should add that since February 2020, SEGRO have been key to supporting us. They’re the reason we’re still here. For the two to three years before that, it was very much The Curve supporting us, with Alison from Libraries and Jackie, the Curve Development Manager. Arts Council and the National Lottery have also contributed large amounts.

**M:** It lies in the enthusiasm of the board. I think Hannah is very modest because, when she’s done with 20 odd jobs as a consultant, in the evening she’s writing bids to keep us afloat. There’s lots of people who won’t let this ship sink.

I had an interesting conversation with the Interim Manager of Economic Development and I asked if it was possible to think about the future of Slough without a museum – a collective treasure of knowledge. Who else is going to look after items? Who else is going to tell these stories? What’s the collective vision for the future?

**J:** I’ll give you an example. SEGRO hired me as their historian and when I was searching for research materials, I found the Slough Museum archive in a container at Langley College with no one monitoring it. I was really worried, so I campaigned to SEGRO and thankfully, they gave us a location on the Trading Estate just for the archive and a building on Buckingham Avenue to have an open-display area. So, I think it’s a passion of knowing the value of the collection and the stories behind them.

**“Heritage work is about educating people – once people get a tour of the museum, they leave with a completely different picture of the place they live.”**

**What ways do you think arts and heritage can create a better future for Slough?**

**M:** Arts and creativity are inseparable from human nature; expressing your creativity is well-documented as having wellbeing and medical benefits. Each creative partner who runs an activity here exposes us to new audiences and volunteers – that’s how the process starts. It might not produce top notch artists immediately, but it encourages more people to engage with positive, productive activities outside of work or schooling. Heritage work is about educating people – once people get a tour of the museum, they leave with a completely different picture of the place they live. Encountering those achievements provides a sense of pride and helps community cohesion; people like being part of something bigger than themselves.

To find out more about please visit:  
[www.sloughmuseum.co.uk](http://www.sloughmuseum.co.uk)



# Conclusion

I am as proud of this book as I am of my hometown, and I hope our interviewees have inspired you to embrace your own creativity, whether it be joining a local group or activity, starting your own career in arts and culture, or researching the legacy and history of our vibrant town. You can enjoy it in your day-to-day as well – sing out loud, try a new dinner recipe, take another route home for a change of scenery. Stay open to new experiences and stay connected with the community. You never know what you might find.

I want to thank all the interviewees for their time and contribution. Both their wisdom and insight were incredibly invaluable, as is their passion and enthusiasm for Slough and self-expression. To everyone who worked on this project, I am indebted to you for not only your skills but your patience as well.

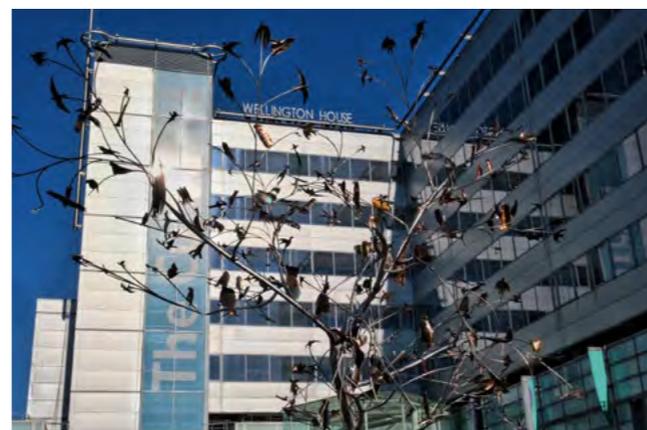
When you grow familiar with a certain environment, your brain starts to take for granted its surroundings, so I want to leave you with this final section: images of the town from those who live in it, presenting the everyday in snapshots to offer a fresh perspective of our town, our home.

**Shanique Miller**

Pictures of the  
area taken by  
Slough residents

# The Town

# Mike Swift

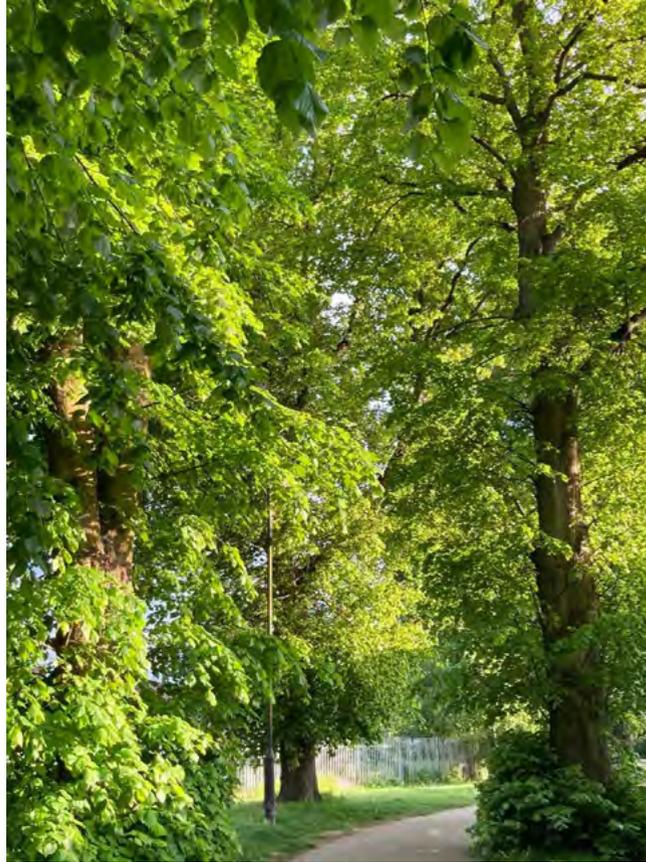


**Grace  
Derriman**



**Slough Bus Station**

# Muntaha Ahmed



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| 08 | Terry Payman     | 37 | Matt Flemming     | 63 | Jay Younes            |
| 10 | Stuart Walton    | 38 | Terry Payman      | 64 | Mike Swift            |
| 11 | Terry Payman     | 40 | Albert Richardson | 65 | Jho (Johana Plazas)   |
| 12 | Creative Academy | 42 | Voss Arts Media   | 66 | Mike Swift            |
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| 15 | Hettie Pearson   | 46 | Asian Star Radio  | 68 | Karen Colebeck        |
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| 25 | Andrea Percivali | 49 | Mike Swift        | 74 | Richard Emerson       |
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| 27 | Andrea Percivali | 53 | Terry Payman      | 78 | Arbib                 |
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| 35 | Amon Dsane       | 57 | Sbba Siddique     | 85 | Anna Jones            |
| 36 | Amon Dsane       | 58 | Sbba Siddique     |    |                       |
| 36 | Matt Flemming    | 59 | Sbba Siddique     |    |                       |

This book, from a creative perspective, answers the question:

**What is there to do in Slough?**

*The Arts in Slough* celebrates the art and culture offered in Slough, an undervalued sector in an overlooked town. Each section of the book explores a different form of creativity and curiosity from dance to libraries, literature to music, visual arts to museums. Learn about creative practitioners and cultural providers who work in the town whilst admiring photographs of the arts in action.



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