Riverside Park Project: The Bandstand and Historical Re-enactments

The idea

Build a series of bandstands in which historical re-enactments would be performed. This will be like those performed by the Men of the Tyne group and the Time Bandits. Both of these are local groups. The former focusses on musical productions of shipyard history and the latter is a team of historical costumed interpreters, who run school workshops and have also performed in famous landmarks across the North East.

By placing a seating area around the bandstand, walkers, cyclists and other people in the area who are passing by are encouraged to stay and listen to their history. It also becomes an attraction spot as an app could be released detailing who would be performing when. Whether it is a historical enactment group, school play, or local musicians who are simply using the space as a stage to perform their music, it becomes a space for the local public to engage with how they choose.

By placing food trucks in the surrounding area, it merges businesses pleasure gardens and education in a new leisure space which encourages recreation time outside of the home and away from videogames and phones. Local restaurants and cafes could rent food trucks in the area and this could also be a rotating schedule, so that the offerings in the space are never the same, month upon month.

Jevons wrote in 1883:

I have no wish to disparage Theatres, Art Galleries, Museums, Public Libraries, Science Lectures, and various other social institutions, the value and true uses of which I may perhaps attempt to estimate on some other occasions; but I am certain that music is the best means of popular recreation. It fills all the requirements. In the first place, it involves no bodily fatigue, since it can best be enjoyed sitting down. To inspect a picture gallery or a museum is always a tiring work, neither exercise nor repose; the standing or stooping posture, the twisting of the neck, and the straining of the eyes, tend to produce, after a few hours, a state approaching nervous and muscular exhaustion. This is not the way to recreate the wearied mechanic, or the overworked clerk or man of business. It may be a very improving occupation of time for those who are holiday-making, and can start in the morning with a good store of superior’s energy.

This is not to critique museums and traditional information related, but people need more variety in how they can access information, which will encourage more engagement with history. People have to choose to go to a museum but here we are putting on shows or playing history so that people absorb the information without necessarily reaching out for it and then they become interest and engaged with a want to learn more. The changing nature of the space encourages the audience to return.

This is quite a flexible idea as performances can be adapted and changed. For the purpose of this presentation, I would suggest recreating images, such as those in *Punch* magazine. However, this could go way beyond this idea to encompass other local histories.

The audience

The Victorian audience and the audience today are much alike – collectives of individuals who are in need of outdoor leisure spaces which can provide a fusion of history, recreation and culture

The space would be suitable for the general public, educational sectors and visitors to the area. Performers could be school children, professional re-enactment groups and even university students or musicians in the local area.

Wider implications

Throughout the pandemic, everyone has been affected. What continues to be impacted is the entertainment industry, namely artists, performers and musicians who are struggling despite the lifting of restrictions. This creates an opportunity for them to perform and will aid the local art community. It also creates jobs for those in construction who can build the bandstand, as well as opportunities for people in education to be involved in the performances.

Beyond that, it engages the general public in their history and also creates a leisure space, where people can sit, drink and eat whilst watching performance. These could occur at all hours of the day, weather dependant, and when performers are not there, the speakers in the bandstand could play the oral history interviews of more local history

It can also help local restaurants – like London’s Vinegar Yard, Broadgate Circle and Victoria Park Market, there has been increasing demand for food truck grub. This is better quality than fast food, with ore variety and options whilst also encouraging small brands as opposed to high-street chains. If this was to surround the performance area, people would be encouraged to sit and watch the shows for a longer period of time, whilst they consume food and drink.

Other ideas

Although the Victorians faced limitations by weather, I have other ideas which combat this and ensure that the space can have continues usage – oral history and ships moved to the Tyne and transformed into floating bookshops and cafes. This would be like Little Venice in London, which has floating cafes and bookshops on the canal.

Bordering the Tyne and in view of the bandstands, old ships form the shipyards could be placed in the water and turned into cafes. The walls could have framed images and murals which act as a timeline of the shipyards history and headphones could be placed inside with oral history interviews of people who experienced them. This could be done in conjunction with the Newcastle universities oral history department, who have students interviewing people such as Bryan Newman.