

Eastside Projects

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West Midlands Railway supports a Mystery Play for Chelmsley Wood

As part of a six-month residency in Chelmsley Wood, artist Chris Alton is co-producing a contemporary take on a 'Mystery Play' to be performed in Spring 2019. Alton will work with local residents to explore story telling through a series of creative writing, performance, set and costume making workshops from January-April 2019.

Alton's residency is the first part of *Link and Shift*, a new multi-year programme of Artists Residencies and Artists Walks in the public realm developed by Eastside Projects in partnership with West Midlands Railway.

A form of medieval theatre, 'Mystery Plays' were performed across multiple roaming stages known as 'pageant wagons' that were wheeled through a town. Historically they were made by, and for, the people of the town and so would celebrate the idiosyncrasies of the locality by referencing aspects of their setting, such as local landmarks, characters and concerns. Some of the earliest recorded 'Mystery Plays' were performed in Coventry, only twelve miles from modern day Chelmsley Wood, from 1392–1393.

Evolving from morality plays, 'Mystery Plays' took on more surreal and humorous subject matter, featuring commentary on contemporary life. Using the methodology of co-production, common to 'Mystery Plays' and more recent forms of community theatre, Alton's project will invite local residents with an interest in woodwork and making, sewing and textiles, set-design, drama or local history to create a play responding to their everyday experiences of living in Chelmsley Wood.

Fay Easton, head of Stakeholder and Community for West Midlands Railway said "This is an exciting and innovative project for West Midlands Railway to be supporting. Art has a unique way of bringing communities together. The Mystery Play for Chelmsley Wood provides opportunities for people with all sorts of talents and interests to get involved."

Alton wants the play to engage with Chelmsley Wood's existing local myths and make new ones, creating space for residents to be imaginative and encouraging conversation and collaboration. Whilst the performance of *A Mystery Play for Chelmsley Wood* will be a one-off event, he hopes it will be the start of a new local tradition, and evolve into an event, which could be staged year after year.

Local residents who have a vision for Chelmsley Wood's future, and would like to get involved in the project should email:

fb.me/AMysteryPlayforChelmsleyWood

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For further information on this release, call our press office on 03300 955150 or email press.office@wmtrains.co.uk

About Chris Alton

Chris Alton was born in 1991, in Croydon, UK. He lives and works between Croydon and Folkestone. Commissions and exhibitions include; *Bloomberg New Contemporaries*, Liverpool John Moore University (2018) & South London Gallery (2018-19); *Survey*, Jerwood Space, London (2018); *The Billboard*, Spit & Sawdust, Cardiff (2018); *Adam Speaks*, The National Trust, Croome, Worcestershire (2017); *You're Surrounded by Me*, Turf Projects, Croydon (2017); and *Under the Shade I Flourish*, xero, kline & coma, London (2016). He was a participant in Syllabus III (2017-18). For more information visit chrisalton.com

About Eastside Projects

Eastside Projects aims to create active audiences by generating opportunities for deep engagement where individuals have agency and are able to contribute and co-produce, rather than simply consume culture. Since 2008 they have brought world class art to Birmingham, activating the city as a centre for artistic production and building a constellation of practitioners who, with Eastside Projects, explore and expand the role of the artist in public life. They have received Arts Council England National Portfolio Funding, in partnership with Birmingham City University since 2008. Eastside Projects began working in Chelmsley Wood in 2017, through a partnership with community arts organisation B37 Project. For more information visit eastsideprojects.org

About Link & Shift

Link & Shift is a new offsite programme curated by Eastside Projects in partnership with West Midlands Trains running from 2018–2026. Built around a series of Artists' Residencies and Artist-Led Walks, the programme aims to develop high quality arts opportunities and experiences for people and places served by the West Midlands Trains routes.

About West Midlands Trains

West Midlands Trains operates both West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway services.

- **London Northwestern Railway** services operate between Liverpool and Birmingham, and on the West Coast mainline to and from London Euston.
- **West Midlands Railway** services operate to destinations across the West Midlands via Birmingham New Street.

For more information on these services visit westmidlandsrailway.co.uk or londonnorthwesternrailway.co.uk

The West Midlands Trains franchise started on 10 December 2017 and will run until 2025/26.

West Midlands Trains operates 1,300 services a day, manages 150 stations and provides over 70 million passenger journeys a year. Over the course of the franchise, West Midlands Trains will be investing £1 billion into the rail network to deliver new trains, improved routes and station upgrades. This will include 400 new train carriages across the network and space for an extra 85,000 passengers into Birmingham and London at peak times.

The franchise is a joint venture between Abellio (70.1% share) and East Japan Railway Company / Mitsui & Co., Ltd (29.9% share in a 50:50 split). Abellio is the international passenger transport subsidiary of the Dutch national railway company, Nederlandse Spoorwegen. In the UK, Abellio operates ScotRail and Greater Anglia train services, Merseyrail services in a joint venture with Serco and buses through Abellio London. For more information visit www.abellio.com

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